

***RICHARD
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An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in South Africa, with a prominent mountain range in the background. The mountains are illuminated by the warm light of sunset, showing distinct horizontal rock layers. The town is densely packed with buildings, and the foreground shows a rocky coastline with waves crashing against the shore. The sky is a clear, pale blue with a few wispy clouds.

***THE DOP
DOCTOR***

Richard Dehan

The Dop Doctor

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Upon a day near the end of August, one long, brilliant South African winter, when the old Vierkleur waved over the Transvaal, and what is now the Orange River Colony was the Orange Free State, with the Dutch canton still showing on the staff-head corner of its tribarred flag, two large, heavily-laden waggons rolled over the grass-veld, only now thinking about changing from yellow into green. Many years previously the wheels of the old voortrekkers had passed that way, bringing from Cape Colony, with the household gods, goods and chattels, language and customs of the Dutch, the slips of the pomegranate and peach and orange trees, whose abundant blossoming dressed the orchards of the farms tucked away here and there in the lap of the veld, with bridal white and pink, and hung their girdling pomegranate hedges with stars of ruby red. But days and days, and nights and nights of billowing, spreading, lonely sky-arched veld intervened between each homestead.

The flat-topped bills were draped and folded in the opal haze of distance; the sky was perfect turquoise; the rounded kopjes shone like pink topaz, unclothed as yet with the young pale green bush. To the south there was a veld fire leaping and dancing, with swirling columns of white smoke edged with flame. But it was many miles away, and the north-west wind blew strongly, driving some puffs of gold cloud before it. Perhaps there would be rain ere long. There had been rain already in the foremost waggon, not from the clouds, but from human eyes.

The broad wheels crashed on, rolling over the yellow grass and the dry bushes. Lizards and other creeping creatures scuttled across their wide tracks. The patient oxen toiled under the yoke, their dappled nostrils widespread, their great dewy eyes strained and dim with weariness. They dumbly wondered why they must labour in the daytime when all night long they had travelled without rest. The glorious sunrise had flamed in crimson and gold behind the eastern ranges full five hours before. They were weary to death, and no dorp or farm was yet in sight. The Cape boys who tramped, each leading a fore-ox by the green reim bound about the creature's wide horns, had no energy left even to swear at their beasts.

The Boer driver was wearied like the ox-team and the Cape boys. His bestial face was drawn, and his eyes were red-rimmed for lack of sleep. The long whip, with the fourteen-foot stock and the lash of twenty-three feet, had not smacked for a long time; the sjambok had not been used upon the long-suffering wheelers. Huddled up in his ill-fitting clothes of tan cord, he sat on the waggon-box and slept, his head nodding, his elbows on his knees. He was dreaming of the bad Cape brandy that had been in the bottle, and would be, with luck, again, when the waggon reached a tavern or a store.

A Kaffir drove the second waggon. It held stores and goods in bales, and some trunks and other baggage belonging to the Englishman, for you would have set down the tall, thin, high-featured, reddish-bearded, soft-speaking man who owned the waggons as English, even though he had called himself by a Dutch name. The child of three

years was his. And his had been the dead body of the woman lying on the waggon-bed, covered with a new white sheet, with a stillborn boy baby lying on her breast.

For this the man who had loved and taken her, and made her his, had wept such bitter, scalding tears. For this his dead love, with Love's blighted bud of fruit upon her bosom, had given up her world, her friends, her family—her husband, first and last of all. They had played the straight game, and gone away openly together, to the immense scandal of Society that is so willing to wink at things done cleverly under the rose. They were to be married the instant the injured husband obtained his decree absolute. The State sanctioned the re-marriage of the divorced if the Churches did not. Their church should thenceforwards be the State. But there was no *decree nisi* even, the injured husband possessing a legal heir by a previously-deceased wife. Besides, in a cold way it gave him pleasure to think of that purpose foiled. He soon knew that his wife's lover had sold his commission in the Army, and he learned, later, through a communication forwarded through a London firm of solicitors, that although he had chosen to ignore a certain appointment offered upon the opposite side of the Channel, the other man would merely consider it deferred until a suitable opportunity should occur. Meanwhile the writer was travelling in South Africa, not alone.

Never to be alone again, she had promised him that not quite four years ago. And to-day he sat on a box beside the waggon-bed where she lay dead with her dead boy, and the only thing left to him that had the dear living fragrance and

sweet warmth of her slept smiling on his knees—their daughter.

The long fine beard that he had grown swept the soft flushed cheek of the little creature, and mingled with her yellow curls. Within the last few hours—hours packed with the anguish of a lifetime for him—there were sprinklings of white upon his high temples, where the hair had grown thin under the pressure of the Hussar's furred busby, the khaki-covered helmet of foreign service, or the forage-cap, before these had given place to the Colonial smasher of felt, and the silky reddish-brown beard had in it wide, ragged streaks of grey. He had worshipped the woman who had given up all for him; they had lived only for, and in one another during four wonderful years. Hardly a passing twinge of regret, never a scorpion-sting of remorse, spoiled their union.

But they never stayed long in any town or even in any village. Some sound or shape from the old unforgotten world beyond the barrier, some English voice that had the indefinable tone and accent of high breeding, some figure of Englishman or Englishwoman whose rough, careless clothing had the unmistakable cut of Bond Street, some face recognised under the grey felt or the white Panama, would spur them to the desire of leaving it behind them. Then the valises would be repacked, the oxen would be hastily inspanned, and their owners would start again upon that never-ending journey in search of something that the woman was to be the first to find.

At last, when the sun was high and the worn-out beasts were almost sinking, a group of low buildings came in sight a few miles away beyond a kloof edged with a few poplar-

like trees and the kameelthorn. A square, one-storey house of corrugated iron, with a mud-walled hovel or two near it, had a sprawling painted board across its front, signifying that the place was the Free State Hotel. Behind it were an orchard and some fields under rude cultivation, and a quarter of a mile to the north were the native kraals.

At the sight the Boer shook himself fully awake, and sent the long lash cracking over the thin, sweat-drenched backs of the ox-team. They laboured with desperation at the yoke, and the waggon rumbled on.

The Englishman, hidden with his sorrow under the canvas waggon-tilt, roused himself at the accelerated motion. He rose, and, holding the sleeping child upon one arm, pushed back the front flap and looked out. He spoke to the taciturn driver, who shook his head. How did he, Smoots Beste, know whether a minister of the Church of England, or even a Dutch predikant, was to be found at the place beyond? All he hoped for was that he would be able to buy there tobacco and brandy cheap, and sleep drunken, to wake and drink again.

The waggon halted on the brink of the kloof. Little birds of gay and brilliant plumage, blue and crimson and emerald-green, rose in flocks from the bush and grasses that clothed the sides of the coomb; the hollows were full of the tree-fern; the grass had little white and purple flowers in it. At the valley-bottom a little stream, that would be a river after the first rains, wimpled over sandstone boulders, the barbel rose at flies. There was a drift lower down. It was all the goaded, worn-out oxen could do to stay the huge creaking waggons down the steep bank, and drag them over the

river-bed of sand and boulders, through the muddied, churned-up water that they were dying for, yet not allowed to taste, and toil with them up the farther side.

The Englishman was not cruel. He was usually humane and merciful to man and beast, but just now he was deaf and blind. Beside him there was her corpse, beyond him was her grave, beyond that....

Both he and she, in that world that lay beyond the barrier had observed the outward forms of Christianity. They had first met in the Park, one May morning, after a church parade. They sat on a couple of green-painted chairs while Society, conscious of the ever-present newspaper-reporter, paraded past them in plumage as gorgeous as that of the gay-coloured birds that flocked among the tree-fern or rose in frightened clouds as the waggons crashed by. And they discussed—together with the chances of the runners entered for the second Spring Meeting at Newmarket, and the merits of the problem play, and the newest farcical comedy—the Immortality of the Soul.

She wore a brown velvet gown and an ostrich-feather boa in delicate shades of cream and brown, and a cavalier hat with sweeping white plumes. Her hair was the colour of autumn leaves, or a squirrel's back in the sunshine, and she had grey eyes and piquant, irregular features, ears like shells, and a delicate, softly-tinted skin undefiled by cosmetics. She thought it wicked to doubt that one waked up again after dying, Somewhere—a vague Somewhere, with all the nice people of one's set about one. He said that Agnosticism and all that kind of thing was bad form. Men who had religion made the best soldiers. Like the

Presbyterian Highlanders of the Black Watch and the "Royal Irish" Catholics—but, of course, she knew that. And she said yes, she knew; meeting his admiring eyes with her own, that were so grey and sweet and friendly, the little gloved hand that held the ivory and gold-bound Church Service lying in her lap. He longed to take that little white, delicate hand. Later on he took it, and a little later the heart that throbbed in its pulses, and the frail, beautiful body out of which the something that had been she had gone with a brief gasping struggle and a long shuddering sigh....

He kept the beloved husk and shell of her steady on the waggon-bed with one arm thrown over it, and held the awakened, fretting child against his breast with the other, as the sinking oxen floundered up the farther side of the kloof. Amidst the shouting and cursing of the native voor-loopers and the Boer and Kaffir drivers, the rain of blows on tortured, struggling bodies, and the creaking of the teak-built waggon-frames, he only heard her weakly asking to be buried properly in some churchyard, or cemetery, with a clergyman to read the Service for the Dead.

Before his field-glass showed him the sprawling hotel-sign he had hoped that the buildings in sight might prove to mask the outskirts of a native village with an English missionary station, or a Dutch settlement important enough to own a corrugated iron Dopper church and an oak-scrub-hedged or boulder-dyked graveyard, in charge of a pastor whose loathing of the Briton should yield to the mollifying of poured-out gold.

But Fate had brought him to this lonely veld tavern. He watched it growing into ugly, sordid shape as the waggon

drew nearer. To this horrible place, miscalled the Free State Hotel—a mere jumble of corrugated-iron buildings, wattle and mud-walled stables for horses, and a barbed-wire waggon-enclosure—he had brought his beloved at the end of their last journey together. He shuddered at the thought.

The waggons were halted and outspanned before the tavern. The drivers went in to get drink, and Bough, the man who sold it, leaving the women to serve them, came forth. He ordinarily gave himself out as an Afrikander. You see in him a whiskered, dark-complexioned, good-looking man of twenty-six, but looking older, whose regard was either insolent or cringing, according to circumstances, and whose smile was an evil leer. The owner of the waggons stood waiting near the closed-up foremost one, the yellow-haired child on his arm. He looked keenly at the landlord, Bough, and the man's hand went involuntarily up in the salute, to its owner's secret rage. Did he want every English officer to recognise him as an old deserter from the Cape Mounted Police? Not he—and yet the cursed habit stuck. But he looked the stranger squarely in the face with that frank look that masked such depth of guile, and greeted him with the simple manner that concealed so much, and the English officer lifted his left hand, as though it raised a sword, and began to talk. Presently Bough called someone, and a smart, slatternly young woman came out and carried the child, who leaned away from her rouged face, resisting, into the house.

The English traveller would take no refreshment. He needed nothing but to know of a graveyard and men to dig a grave, and a minister or priest to read the Burial Service.

He would pay all that was asked. He learned that the nearest village-town might be reached in three days' trek across the veld, and that the landlord did not know whether it had a pastor or not.

Three days' trek! He waved the twinkling-eyed, curious landlord back, and went up into the foremost waggon, drawing the canvas close. He faced the truth in there, and realized with a throe of mortal anguish that the burial must be soon—very soon. To prison what remained of her in a hastily knocked-together coffin, and drag it over the veld, looking for some plot of consecrated earth to put it in, was desecration, horror. He would bury her, and fetch the minister or clergyman or priest to read prayers. Later, if it cost him all he had, the spot should be consecrated for Christian burial. He came forth from the waggon and held parley with the landlord of the tavern. There was a wire-fenced patch of sandy red earth a hundred yards from the house, a patch wherein the white woman who was mistress at the tavern had tried to grow a few common English flower-seeds out of a gaily-covered packet left by a drummer who had passed that way. She had grown tired of the trouble of watering and tending them, so that some of them had withered, and the lean fowls had flown over the fence and scratched the rest up.

That patch of sandy earth brought a handsome price, paid down in good English sovereigns—the coinage that is welcome in every corner of the earth, save among the scattered islands of the Aleutian Archipelago, where gin, tobacco, and coffee are more willingly taken in exchange for goods or souls.

The Englishman was business-like. He fetched pen and ink and paper out of that jealously closed-up waggon, drew up the deed of sale, and had it witnessed by the Boer driver and the white woman at the hotel.

He had made up his mind. He would bury her, since it must be, and then fetch the clergyman. Knowing him on the road, or returning to the fulfilment of his promise, she would not mind lying there unblessed and waiting for six lonely days and nights. He whispered in her deaf ears how it was going to be, and that she could not doubt him. He swore—not dreaming how soon he should keep one vow—to visit the grave often, often, with his child and hers, and to lie there beside her when kind Death should call him too.

Then he left her for a moment, and sent for the Kaffir driver and the Boer to come, and, with him, dig her grave....

But Smoots Beste was already in hog-paradise, lying grunting on a bench in the bar, and the Kaffir had gone to the kraals with the Cape boys. The English officer looked at the rowdy landlord and the loafing men about the tavern, and made up his mind. No hands other than his own should prepare a last bed for her, his dearest.

So, all through the remainder of the long day, streaming and drenched with perspiration, which the cold wind dried upon him, he wrought at a grave for her with spade and pick.

It should be deep, because of the wild-cat and the hungry Kaffir dogs. It should be wide, to leave room for him. The ground was hard, with boulders of ironstone embedded in it. What did that matter? All the day through, and all through the night of wind-driven mists and faint moonlight, he

wrought like a giant possessed, whilst his child, lulled with the condensed milk and water, in which biscuits had been sopped, lay sleeping in the tavern upon a little iron bed.

He had had the waggon brought close up to the wired enclosure. All the time he worked he kept a watch upon it. Did claws scrape the wide wheels or scurrying feet patter across the shadows, he left off work until the voracious creatures of the night were driven away.

The pale dawn came, and the east showed a lake of yellow.... When the great South African sun rose and flooded the veld with miraculous liquid ambers and flaming, melted rubies, the deep, wide grave at last was done.

He climbed out of it by the waggon ladder, struggling under the weight of the last great basketful of stones and sandy earth. He dumped that down by the graveside, and went to the waggon and removed all stains of toil, and then set about making the last toilette of the beautiful woman who had so loved that everything that touched her should be pure, and dainty, and sweet.

He had dressed her silken, plentiful, squirrel-brown hair many times, for the sheer love of its loveliness. With what care he now combed and brushed and arranged the perfumed locks! He laid reverent kisses on the sealed eyelids that his own hands had closed for ever; he whispered words of passionate love, vows of undying gratitude and remembrance, in the shell-like ears. He bathed with fresh water and reclad in fragrant linen the exquisite body, upon which faint discolouring patches already heralded the inevitable end. When he had done, he

swathed her in a sheet, and fetched a bolt of new white canvas from the store-waggon, and lined the grave with that.

And then he placed a narrow mattress in it, and freshly covered pillows, and brought her from the waggon, and to the grave, and carried her down the light wooden ladder, and laid her in her last earthly home, with a kiss from the lips that had never been her husband's. It was so cruel to think of that. It was so hard to cover up the cold, sweet face again, but he did it, and lapped the sheet over her and brought the canvas down. Remained now to fill in her grave and fetch the man whose mouth should speak over it the words that are of God.

But first—fill in the grave.

The cold sweat drenched him at the thought of heaping back those tons of earth and stone above her, crushing with a frightful weight of inert matter the bodily beauty that he adored. He felt as though her soul hovered about him, wailing to him not to be so cruel, tugging at his garments with imploring, impalpable hands.

The thing must be done, though, before the sordid life stirred again under the roof of the tavern, before the vulgar faces, with their greedy, prying eyes, should be there to snigger and spy.

He loaded a great basket with fine gravelly sand, and carried it down and laid it on her by handfuls. What were his livid, parched lips muttering? Over and over, only this:

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust ..."

Soon the white swathed-up form was hidden with the sandy gravel. That was a terrible pang. It wrenched the first

groan from him, but he worked on.

More and more of the sandy gravel, but for precaution the stones must lie above. Should the voracious creatures of the night come, they must find the treasure in impregnable security. That thought helped him to lay in the first, and the second, and then greater and greater stones. He was spent and breathless, but still he laboured. He tottered, and at times the tavern and the veld, and the waggons on it, and the flat-topped distant mountains that merged in the horizon, swung round him in a wild, mad dance. Then the warm salt taste of blood was in his mouth, and he gasped and panted, but he never rested until the grave was filled in.

Then he built up over it an oblong cairn of the ironstone boulders, made a rude temporary cross out of a spare waggon-pole, working quite methodically with saw and hammer and nails, and set it up, under the curious eyes he hated so, and wedged it fast and sure. Then he knelt down stiffly, and made, with rusty, long unpractised fingers, the sacred sign upon his face and breast. He heard her still, asking him in that nearly extinguished voice of hers, to pray for her.

"Dicky!..."

Ah! the tragedy of the foolish little nickname, faltered by stiffening lips upon the bed of death!

"Catholics pray for the souls of dead people, don't they? Pray for mine by-and-by. It will comfort me to know you are praying, darling, even if God is too angry with us to hear!"

He held her to his bursting heart, groaning.

"If He is angry, it cannot be with you. The sin was mine—all mine. He must know!"

Later she awakened from a troubled sleep to murmur:

"Richard, I dreamed of Bridget-Mary. She was all in black, but there was white linen about her face and neck, and it was dabbled dreadfully with blood." The weak, slight body shuddered in his embrace. "She said our wickedness had brought her death, but that she would plead for us in Heaven."

"She is not dead, my beloved; I heard of her before we left Cape Colony. She has taken the veil. She is well, and will be happy in her religion, as those good women always are."

"I was not one of those good women, Richard——"

He strained her to him in silence. She panted presently:

"You might have been happy—with her—if I had never come between you!"

He found some words to tell her that these things were meant to be. From the beginning ...

"Was it meant that I should die on these wild, wide, desolate plains, and leave you, Richard?"

He cried out frantically that he would die too, and follow her. Her dying whisper fluttered at his lips:

"You cannot! Think!—the child!"

He had forgotten the child, and now, with a great stabbing pang, remembered it. She asked for it, and he brought it, and she tried to kiss it; and even in that Death foiled her, and her head fell back and her eyes rolled up, and she died.

He remembered all this as he tried to say the prayer, without which she could not have borne to have him leave

her.

The curious, mocking faces crowded at the tavern door to see him praying—a strange, haggard scarecrow kneeling there in the face of day.

But he was not the kind of scarecrow they would have dared to jeer at openly. Too rich, with all that money in the valise in the locked-up waggon-chest; too strong, with that sharp hunting-knife, the Winchester repeating-rifle, and the revolver he carried at his hip.

"Our Father Who art in Heaven...."

He knew, the man who repeated the words, that there was no One beyond the burning blue vault of ether Who heard ... and yet, for her sake, supposing, after all, some great Unseen Ear listened, was listening even now....

"Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come...."

And if it came, should those have any part in it who had lived together unwed in open sin?

"Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven...."

The words stuck in his dried throat. Be done, that Will that left him desolate and laid her away, a still fair, fast-corrupting thing, under the red earth and the great ironstone boulders!

"Give us this day our daily bread...."

Her love, her presence, her voice, her touch, had been the daily bread of life to him, her fellow-sinner. Oh, how many base, sordid, loveless marriages had not that illicit bond of theirs put to shame! And yet as a boy he had learned the Seventh Commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Had she not believed all along that the price of such sweet sinning must be paid, if not in this life,

then in the life hereafter, and could it—could it be that her soul was even now writhing in fires unquenchable, whither he, who would have gladly died in torment to save her from outrage or death, had thrust her?

"Forgive us our trespasses...."

O Man of Sorrows, pitying Son of Mary, before Whom the Scribes and Pharisees brought the woman taken in adultery, forgive her, pardon her! If a soul must writhe in those eternal fires they preach of, in justice let it be mine! Thou Who didst pity that woman of old time, standing white and shameful in the midst of the evil, jeering crowd, with the wicked fingers pointing at her, say to this other woman, lifting up Thyself before her terrified, desperate soul, confronted with the awful mystery that lies behind the Veil....

"Neither do I condemn thee...."

And do with me what Thou wilt!

The ragged, wild-eyed man who had been kneeling rigid and immovable before the wooden symbol reared upon the new-raised cairn of boulders swayed a little. His head fell forward heavily upon his breast. His eyes closed in spite of his desperate effort to shake off the deadly, sickening collapse of will and brain and body that was mastering him. He fell sideways, and lay in a heap upon the ground.



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They went to him, and took up and carried him into the tavern, and laid him down upon a frowzy bed in the room

where the child lay upon the iron-framed cot.

He lay there groaning in the fierce clutches of rheumatic fever. They tended him in a rude way. A valise and an iron-bound leather lady's trunk had been brought from the waggon by his orders, and set in the room where he was in his sight. These contained her clothes and jewels, and he guarded them jealously even in delirium. About his wasted body was buckled a heavy money-belt. Bough could feel that when he helped the woman of the tavern to lift the patient. He winked to her pleasantly across the bed. But the time was not ripe yet. They must wait awhile. The English traveller was not always delirious. There were intervals of consciousness, and though he seemed at death's door, who knew? That strong purpose of his might even yet lift him from the soiled and comfortless bed, and send him on the trek again. Meanwhile the oxen were hired out to work for a farmer fifty miles away. That was called sending them to graze and gain strength for more work; and there was the keep of two Cape boys, and the Kaffir and the Boer driver, and the cost of nursing and sick man's diet, and the care of the child. A heavy bill of charges was mounting up against the English traveller. Much of what the belt contained would honestly be Bough's.

There was no doctor and no medicine save the few drugs the sick man had carried, as all travellers do. The milk for which he asked for himself and the child, which was procured from the native cattle-kraals for a tikkie a pint, and for which Bough charged at the price of champagne, kept him alive. Broth or eggs he sickened at and turned from, and, indeed, the one was greasy and salt, the others of

appalling mustiness. He would regularly swallow the tabloids of quinine or lithia, and fall back on the hard, coarse pillow, exhausted by the mere effort of unscrewing the nickel-cap of the little phial, and tell himself that he was getting stronger. Sometimes he really was so, and then the child sat on his wide hollow chest, and played with the beard that was now all grey and unkempt and matted, until some word in her baby prattle, some look of wondering inquiry in the innocent eyes, golden-hazel and black-lashed, like his own, that were almost too beautiful to be a man's, people used to say, like the weak, passionate, gentle mouth under the heavy moustache, would bring back all the anguish of his loss, and waken anew that torturing voice that accused him of being false to his compact with the dead. Then he would call, and send the child away, borne in the arms of the Hottentot chambermaid to breathe the fresh air upon the veld. And, left alone, he would draw up the rough sheets over his head, with gaunt clutching fingers, and weep, though sometimes no tears came to moisten his haggard, staring eyes.

One night, while the flat gold hunting-watch ticked above his head in the little embroidered chamois-leather pouch dead hands had worked, Knowledge came to him with a sudden rigor of the muscles of the wasted body, and a bursting forth from every pore of the dank, dark-hued sweat of coming dissolution.

He was not ever going to get well, and fetch the clergyman to pray over and bless her resting-place. He was going to die and lie beside her there, under the red earth topped by the boulder-cairn. He smiled. What an easy

solution of the problem! He had been too intent upon gratifying her last desire to entertain for a moment the thought of suicide. He had always held self-destruction as the last resource of the coward and the criminal, and besides there was the child.

The child!...

With a pang of dread and terror unfelt by him before, he raised his gaunt head with an effort from the uneasy pillow, and looked towards where she lay, with staring, haunted eyes. The window was open a little way at the top, and for fear of the night-chill his fine leopard-skin kaross had been spread over her.... One dimpled, rounded, bare arm lay upon the soft dappled fur, the babyish fingers curled one upon the other. Rosy human tendrils that should never twine again in a mother's hair. Her child, her daughter!... Born of her body, sharing her nature and her sex, soon to be orphaned. For he who could not even lift himself from bed, and drag his body across the floor to cover that lovely babyish arm, would soon be no better protector than the restless ghost that tugged at his heart with its unseen hands. He knew now why it could not rest.

What would become of the child! Another fiery scourge, wielded by the Hand Unseen, bit deep into his shrinking conscience, into his writhing soul. His own act had brought this about. Be a cur, and accuse Destiny, blame Fate, lay the onus upon God, as so many defaulters do—he could not. He lay looking his deed in the foul face until the dawn crept up the sky, and learning how it may be that the sins of their fathers are visited on the children.

He called for ink and paper as soon as the house was awake, and with infinite labour and many pauses to recover spent strength and breath, for he was greedy of life now, for the reason that we know—he wrote a letter home to England, to a relative who was the head of his family, and bore a great historic title—so great that those who spelled it out upon the envelope were half afraid to slip the heated knife under the crested seal. But Bough did it, and opened, and read.

It was not going to be the soft snap he had thought, but it would be good enough. Wires might be pulled from Downing Street that would set the Government at Cape Town working to trace the tall thin Englishman who had travelled up with two waggons from Cape Colony in the company of a child and the woman now dead, and for whose sake he had given up those almighty swell connections. What a fool—what a thundering, juicy, damned fool the man had been! whose gaunt eyes were even now making out the landfall of Kingdom Come through the gathering mists of death.

The letter worried Bough. To have the English Government smelling at your heels is no joke, thought he. Any moment the mastiff may grip, and then, if you happen to be an ex-convict and deserter from their Colonial Police, and supposing you have one or two other little things against you ... the most honest of speculators being occasionally compelled to dirty his hands, if only to tone down those immaculate extremities to something approaching the colour of other people's—then what

becomes of the risky but profitable business of gun-running from the English ports through to the Transvaal?

For by men like Bough and his associates vast supplies of munitions and engines of war were wormed through. The machine-guns in carefully numbered parts came in cases as "agricultural implements," the big guns travelled in the boilers of locomotives, the empty cases of the shells, large and small, were packed in piano-cases, or in straw-filled crates as "hardware"; the black powder and the cordite and the lyddite came in round wooden American cheese-boxes, with a special mark; and the Mauser cartridges were soldered in tins like preserved meat. How handsomely that business paid only Bough and his merry men, and Oom Paul and his burghers of the Volksraad, knew.

But Her Majesty's Government, bound about with red-tape, hoodwinked by Dutch Assistant-Commissioners of British Colonies, and deceived by traitorous English officials, were blind and deaf to the huge traffic in arms and munitions. Not that there were no warnings. To the very end they were shouted in deaf ears.

What of that letter sent from the Resident Commissioner's office at Gueldersdorp, that little frontier hamlet on the north-east corner of British Baraland, September 4, 1899, little more than a month before the war broke out, the war that was to leave Britain and her Colonies bleeding at every vein?

The Boers were in laager over the Border. A desperate appeal for help had been made to the Powers that were, and the reply received to the now historic telegram, through the

Resident Commissioner, has equally become a matter of history.

"All that was possible" was being done by the Imperial authorities, His Excellency assured the inquirer, to safeguard the lives and property of the inhabitants of the Gold-Reef Town in the event of an attack by a hostile force.

Also the military armament of the place was about to be materially increased.

And yet up to the little frontier town upon which so much depended not a single modern gun had been despatched.

An easy prey had the little town upon the flat-topped hill, set in the middle of a basin, proved to the Boer General and his commandos but for one thing. For weeks after the bursting of the first shell over Gueldersdorp three sides of the beleaguered town were so many open doors for the enemy. Only upon the threshold of each door stood Fear, and guarded and held the citadel.



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That hard taskmaster, Satan, is sometimes wonderfully indulgent to those who serve him well. While Bough, the keeper of the tavern, was yet turning about the open letter in his thick, short, hairy hands, weighing the chances attending the sending of it against the chances of keeping it back, the woman who served as mistress of the place thrust her coarsely-waved head of yellow bleached hair and rouge-ruddled face in at the room door, and called to him:

"Boss, the sick toff is doing a croak. Giving up the ghost for all he's worth—he is. Better come and take a look for yourself if you don't believe me."

Bough swore with relief and surprise, delayed only to lock away the letter, and went to take a look. It was as he hoped, a real stroke of luck for a man who knew how to work it.

Richard Mildare—for Bough knew now what had been the name of the Englishman: Captain the Hon. Richard Mildare, late of the Grey Hussars—was dead. No hand made murderous by the lust of gold had helped him to his death. Sudden failure of the heart is common in aggravated cases of rheumatic fever, and with one suffocating struggle, one brief final pang, he had gone to join her he loved. But his dead face did not look at rest. There was some reflection in it of the terror that had come upon him in the watches of that last night.

Bough stayed some time alone in the room of death. When he came out he was extremely affable and gentle. The woman, who knew him, chuckled to herself when he met the Kaffir serving-maid bringing back the child from an airing in the sun, and told her to take it to the mistress. Then he went into the bar-room to speak to the Englishman's Boer driver.

Leaning easily upon the zinc-covered counter he spoke to the man in the Taal, with which he was perfectly familiar:

"Your Baas has gone in, as my wife and I expected."

Smoots Beste growled in his throat:

"He was no Baas of mine, the verdoemte rooinek! I drove for him for pay, that is all. There is wage owing me still, for

the matter of that—and where am I to get it now that the heathen has gone to the burning?"

Smoots, who was all of a heathen himself, and regularly got drunk, not only on week days, but on Sabbaths, felt virtuously certain that the Englishman had gone to Hell.

Bough smiled and poured out a four-finger swig of bad Cape brandy, and pushed it across the counter.

"You shall get the money, every tikkie. Only listen to me."

Smoots Beste tossed off the fiery liquid, and returned in a tone less surly:

"I am listening, Baas."

Said Bough, speaking with the thickish lisp and slurring of the consonants that distinguished his utterance when he sought to appear more simple and candid than usual:

"This dead toff, with his flash waggon and fine team, and Winchester repeating-rifles, had very little money. He has died in my debt for the room and the nursing, and the good nourishment, for which I trusted him all these three weeks, and I am a poor man. The dollars I have paid you and the Kaffir and the Cape boys on his account came out of my own pocket. Rotten soft have I behaved over him, that's the God's truth, and when I shall get back my own there's no knowing. But, of course, I shall act square."

The Boer's thick lips parted in a grin, showing his dirty, greenish-yellow teeth. He scratched his shaggy head, and said, his tongue lubricated to incautiousness by the potent liquor:

"The waggons, and the oxen, and the guns and ammunition, and the stores in the second waggon are worth good money. And the woman that is dead had jewels—I

have seen them on her—diamonds and rubies in rings and bracelets fit for the vrouw of King Solomon himself. The Englishman did not bury them with her under that verdoemde kopje that he built with his two hands, and they are not in the boxes in the living-waggon."

"Did he not?" asked Bough, looking the Boer driver full in the face with a pleasant smile. "Are they not?"

Smoots Beste's piggish eyes twinkled round the bar-room, looked up at the ceiling, down at the floor, anywhere but into Bough's. He spat, and said in a much more docile tone:

"What do you want me to do?"

Bough leaned over the counter, and said confidentially:

"Just this, friend. I want you to inspan, and take one of the waggons up to Gueldersdorp, with a letter from me to the Civil Commissioner. I will tell him how the man is dead, and he will send down a magistrate's clerk to put a seal on the boxes and cases, and then he will go through the letters and papers in the pocket-book, and write to the people of the dead man over in England, supposing he has any, for I have heard him tell my wife there was not a living soul of his name now, except the child——"

"But what good will all this do you and me, Baas?" asked the Boer subserviently.

Bough spread his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, when the magistrates and lawyers have hunted up the man's family, there will be an order to sell the waggons and oxen and other property to pay the expenses of his burying, and the child's keep here and passage from Cape Town, if she is to be sent to England ... and what is left over,