

"Why should I mind that he loved you best? If I had ever had a son I should have wished him to love a girl like you."

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Mr. Valetta was waiting for me in the verandah. He said:
"I think I must insist on seeing you home, Mrs. Stair. There seems to be some disturbance in the town."

"What is it?"

"I don't exactly know, but I have seen men running about in an excited way, and there has been some cheering. I fancy I heard your husband's name. Is he in the town to-night? At any rate all the ruction has moved over in the direction of the camp. Look at the lights flashing in your huts."

I looked and saw; and even as we stood there, another wild burst of cheering came echoing across the open. Then I knew.

Gathering up with shaking hands the draperies of my cloak and gown I prepared to speed my way home and to my share of the terror and beauty of life waiting there. But before I went I said to the husband of Nonie Valetta:

"Is it true that she is so near death?"

"The doctor holds out no hope. It is not so much the actual fever, as the complications that have set in. And her heart is all to pieces."

"Well . . . let her depart in peace. Do not allow any news to reach her that will disturb her at the last. I want you to promise me that."

"I promise, Mrs. Stair, solemnly. Shall I come with you?"

"No, no. Go to her," I said, and sped away on swift feet.

Long before I reached the camp cheering and all sounds of exultation had ceased, and a strange stillness supervened. At the foot of the kopje, trampling on the tennis-court and among the zinias were many men, their faces all turned towards the huts, talking among themselves in low voices. As I passed by a muffled silent figure I caught a word or two.

"By God! That dirty brute of an *Umlimo*! . . . Keeping a man like Kinsella—all these months! Nearly two years!"

"The trouble with the natives won't be long coming now. . . . Stair ought to get the V.C. Who would have thought he had it in him!"

There was no mistake then—Maurice had been successful! But why were these men standing out in the inhospitable night? What was going on in the silent, brilliantly-lighted huts? What subtle note of regret had my ears caught in the low spoken words?