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## "Love in the Wilds"

—OR—  
The Romance of a South African Trading Station.

CHAPTER XXII  
DAYS OF ANGUISE.

"You are deuced fortunate then," dars? No? A fact. Everybody could retorted Sir Charles, with his light laugh—your buoyant, light-hearted Sir Charles Andersons would laugh even at the undertaker's bill for their own funerals. "I am almost bored to death, Dartmouth; and with to Heaven I had been in your place vegetating in the country and quietly waiting for a cool quarter of a million."

A slight frown contracted the brow of the captain. He did not care to hear the last few months and his own good fortune jested on.

"You would have found it almost as unendurable," he said; "there is not much to choose between town and country, or town and anything else that I know of. Very few things are worth living for; very few games worth the candle."

"I want to know if any are," said Sir Charles. "I haven't had a hand in them if there are. But you want to hear some news and not to listen to my grumbling. Well, look here; here's a text for my discourse. That young lady there, behind those high-paced cobs, is little Lorretta; she is the last center of attraction. We've had her here since you went away. Good-looking, don't you think?" he whispered, as he lifted his hat with a deep bow.

"Passably so," said the captain, glancing indifferently at the fair demoiselle. "Whose heads has she been turning—"

"Heaps—not only heads, but pockets, too," said Sir Charles, and he laughed and sighed at the same moment. "Her last is young Willie Taunton—Lord Taunton now—the old peer died a month ago. She will soon clear him out, for there isn't much more than the encumbrances of the estate left to him. Poor Willie; he is not a bad sort!"

"Your fool seldom is," said the captain, with a quiet sneer.

"He laughs at scars that never felt a wound," quoted Sir Charles, quickly. "You are made of flint, old fellow, or some other composition equally hard, and are un-get-at-able, or you'd have been plucked before now. Well, there she is, and there is poor Willie, and, for the matter of that, there are a good many more in the same boat."

"Sir Charles Anderson for one."

"Myself for one," sighed the young baronet. "But we will not pursue this unpleasant subject, as the lecturer says. You know my Lady Markham has run away with young Wil-

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ter her for three days, and then returned to find the squire knocked over. In a few hours he died."

"Yes," said Sir Charles, eagerly. "He died, and left me by will the Dale and twenty thousand a year," said Captain Dartmouth, as quietly as before.

"What extraordinary luck!" exclaimed the young baronet.

"The very remark I made myself when I heard it. Now let us put these animals to it. Dinner is set for six."

Sir Charles knew his friend too well to mistake this hint, and rode on in silence toward the club, where the two, with some others, were to dine together.

As they turned the corner of Pall Mall a handsome carriage passed them. Sir Charles pulled up sharply and lifted his hat to the two ladies who were in it, and as the younger beckoned with her hands he turned and rode up to it, followed by Captain Dartmouth.

Sir Charles, with a flush of pleasure on his face, bent down and exchanged a few words with the lady and then turned to Reginald Dartmouth.

"Countess, this is my greatest friend, Captain Reginald Dartmouth, Captain Dartmouth, Countess Vitzarelli."

Reginald Dartmouth lifted his hat and bent low, the Countess Vitzarelli bowed slightly, and a soft smile lighted up a dazlingly beautiful face as she said, in a voice slightly toned with a foreign accent and exquisitely musical:

"I am very glad to know any friend of yours, Sir Charles. Captain Dartmouth of the Twenty-second? Yes?"

"No, of the Twenty-eighth," said Reginald, in the voice he knew so well how to soften.

"Ah, yes! The other is Captain Dartmouth. I had mistaken. Your English name puzzles me so! They all end in either 'on' or 'es,' and I get so confused!"

Once more the smile lighted up her face, and Reginald Dartmouth wondered what there was in it, and in the flash of the full, dark eyes, that touched a chord within his own heart and vibrated through his whole being.

Sir Charles had gone round to the other side, and was talking to the old lady, who was now introduced under the name of Madame Campani.

The captain, with his hand firmly grasping the bridle of the pulling chestnut, said:

"London is very full. I do not think I ever saw it more crowded."

"And I never saw it even so full," replied the countess, with a smile. "It is my first visit to the Vanity Fair of the world."

"That is a title we English bestow on your Paris," said the captain, guessing that the beautiful woman was French, yet uncertain enough to put the reply as a trap for her.

"Paris is not my city," she said. "I am not a French-woman," and again she smiled, this time, the captain caught at having outgeneraled him.

"But you are wrong; Paris is not really half as gay as your London. It is more on the surface in La Belle France. Here you make a trade of your pleasure and drive deep and soar high for it. Am I not right, Sir Charles?"

"Always, my lady," replied Sir Charles. "You are the only infallible person in the universe."

"And you the most incorrigible," and she touched his arm with her daintily-gloved morsel of a finger.

"But we must be going. We dine at seven, and madam here always takes two hours to dress."

"For shame, Lucille!" interposed the staid, middle-aged chaperon.

The countess laughed.

"Well, whether it takes two hours for your toilet or one, we must be going. Sir Charles, I count on you for to-morrow; and Captain Dartmouth—can you prevail upon him to favor us? It is short notice and a verbal invitation; but perhaps Captain Dartmouth will pardon both, and honor us."

She turned her large, brown eyes on Reginald Dartmouth's face, and he bowed low, as he said:

"The honor is on my side, madam. I shall only be too happy to do so."

"Will you tell my man to drive on, Sir Charles? Thanks. Good-by."

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"Hello, Dartmouth!" he said, banteringly. "Moon-struck, star-struck, or Lucille-struck? The last, I expect. Is she not beautiful?" he exclaimed, fervently, as the captain, with deliberate calmness, turned his horse's head and joined him.

"Yes," he said. "Who is she?"

"The Countess Vitzarelli."

"Yes, I heard the name; but who is the Countess Vitzarelli?"

"Pon my word, I don't know, and I was nearly adding, I don't care. She's of the right sort, though. They know her at the embassy and at the court. She moves in the best circles, and is kowtowed to the duchess herself. They say that she is the daughter of one of the old Italian princes, and that she is as rich as a doge. They have taken the Carnation House, in the park, and their turn-outs eclipse Lord Fitz's. There is a regular army of retainers, and everything is carried out with princely magnificence."

Reginald Dartmouth listened eagerly, though his face showed little or no interest.

"It is a noble name," he said, quietly. "I do not remember meeting with any living representative of it, though, Vitzarelli?"

"Yes, Lucille, Countess Vitzarelli. Beautiful name, I think—almost as beautiful as the owner. By Jove, we'd all fall in love with her if it was of the slightest use! Some of us have done so as it is. You'll be a victim, I think, Dartmouth. Pon my word, I never knew you so tongue-tied. You are in love a ready."

And he laughed merrily.

"No," said Reginald Dartmouth; "not in love, but troubled. I can not help thinking I have seen her face before. And yet—no, it can not be. It must be a resemblance to some one."

"If you mean she is like some one you know, or, rather, knew," said Sir Charles, slowly, and glancing at his companion's face with a marked hesitation, "I can help you."

"Who is she like?" asked Reginald Dartmouth, marking the tone, and hesitation and looking at his companion.

"Bella," replied Sir Charles.

Captain Dartmouth shrank back and turned white at mention of the name.

Sir Charles was about to apologize, but the cold smile, half scornful, half threatening, that rose to the other's lips stopped him.

"Not a word, my dear fellow! The name took me by surprise, that is all. I shall not show the white feather again if you hawl the names of all the ballet girls in London or Paris through the street. Yes, she is like Bella. It is strange!"

(To be Continued.)

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