

served she accepted his valuation of himself very readily.

"I have come to see you to-day," he went on, "in relation to a matter which is of supreme importance to you. Do you mind answering a few questions I put to you?"

"I have no objection," she said.

"Your father was an explorer, was he not?"

"Yes."

"He knew Central Africa very well?"

"Yes,—very well."

"He discovered a mine—a diamond mine, or something of the sort?"

She shook her head with a smile.

"That has yet to be proved," she said. "He had heard, from the natives, of a wonderful river—the River of Stars they called it, because in its bed were stones, many of which had been polished by the action of the water until they glittered,—they were undoubtedly diamonds, for my father purchased a number from the people of the country."

Amber nodded.

"And then I suppose he came home and got into touch with Lambaire?"

"That is so," she said, wondering at the course the interview was taking.

Amber nodded thoughtfully.

"The rest of the story I know," he said. "I was at pains to look up the circumstances attending your father's death. You received from the Commissioner of the district a chart?"

She hesitated.

"I did—yes."

He smiled.

"I have no designs upon the mine, but I am anxious to see the chart—and before you refuse me, Miss Sutton, let me tell you that I am not prompted by idle curiosity."

"I believe that, Mr. Amber," she said; "if you wait, I will get it for you."

SHE was gone ten minutes and returned with a long envelope, from which she extracted a soiled sheet of paper and handed it to the ex-convict.

He took it, and carried it to the window, examining it carefully.

"I see the route is marked from a point called Chengli—where is that?"

"In the Alebi forest," she said; "the country is known as far as Chengli; from there on, my father mapped the country, inquiring his way from such natives as he met—this was the plan he had set himself."

"I see."

He looked again at the map, then from his pocket he took the compass he had found in Lambaire's safe. He laid it on the table by the side of the map and produced a second compass, and placed the two instruments side by side.

"Do you observe any difference in these, Miss Sutton?" he asked, and the girl looked carefully.

"One is a needle compass, and on the other there is no needle."

"That is so; the whole of the dial turns," Amber nodded. "Nothing else?" he asked.

"I can see no other difference," she said, shaking her head.

"Where is the north on the dial?"

She followed the direction of the letter N and pointed.

"Where is the north on the needle?"

Her brows knit in a puzzled frown, for the thin, delicate needle of the smaller compass pointed ever so slightly in a more westerly direction than its fellow.

"What does that mean?" she asked, and their eyes met over the table.

Lambaire and his host had finished their business. Francis Sutton was in a jubilant mood, and came into the hall with his patron.

"You mustn't worry about my sister," he said; "she'll come round to my way of thinking after a while—she's a woman, you know," he added, vaguely.

"I understand, my boy," said the expansive Lambaire. "We both understand, don't we, Whitey?"

"Certainly," said Whitey.

"Still, she'll probably be annoyed if you go off without saying good-bye,—where is your mistress Susan?" he asked of the maid who had come in answer to his bell.

"In the study, sir."

"Come along." He led the way to the study and opened the door.

"Cynthia—" he began.

They were leaning over the table; between them lay the map and the two compasses. What Sutton saw, the other two saw; and Lambaire, sweeping past the youth, snatched up his property.

"So that's the game, is it?" he hissed; he was trembling with passion; "that's your little game, Amber!"

He felt Whitey's hand grip his arm and recovered a little of his self-possession.

"This man is not content with attempting to blackmail," he said, "not content with committing a burglary at my office and stealing valuable drawings—"

"What does this mean, Cynthia?"

Sutton's voice was stern, and his face was white with anger. For the second time Amber came to the rescue.

"Allow me," he said.

"I'll allow you nothing," stormed the boy; "get out of this house before I kick you out. I want no gaol birds here."

"It is a matter of taste, my Francis," said the imperturbable Amber; "if you stand Lambaire you'd stand anybody."

"I'll settle with you later," said Lambaire darkly.

"Settle now," said Amber in his most affable manner. "Mr. Sutton," he said, "that man killed your father, and he will kill you."

"I want none of your lies," said Sutton; "there's the door."

"And a jolly nice door too," said Amber; "but I didn't come here to admire your fixtures: ask Lambaire to show you the compass, or one like it, that he provided for your father's expedition. Send it to Greenwich and ask the astronomers to tell you how many points it is out of true—they will work out to a mile or show how far wrong a man may go who made his way by it, and tried to find his way back from the bush by short cuts."

"Francis, you hear this?" said the girl.

"Rubbish!" replied the youth contemptuously; "what object could Mr. Lambaire have had? He didn't spend thousands of pounds to lose my father in the bush! The story isn't even plausible, for, unless my father got back again to civilization with the plan, the expedition was a failure."

"Exactly!" applauded Lambaire, and smiled triumphantly.

Amber answered smile for smile. "It wasn't the question of his getting back, as I understand the matter," he said quietly, "it was a question whether, having located the mine, and the compass, whether anybody else would be able to locate it, or find their way to it, without Lambaire's Patent Compass."

"I see, I see," she whispered.

"Francis," she cried, "don't you understand what it all means—"

"I understand that you're a fool," he said roughly; "if you've finished your lies, you can go, Amber."

"I have only a word to add,"—Amber picked up his hat. "If you do not realize that Lambaire is the biggest wrong 'un outside prison—I might add for your information that he is a notorious member of the Big Five Gang; a forger of bank notes and Continental securities; he has also a large interest in a Spanish coining establishment—didn't think I knew it, eh, my Lambie?—where real silver half-crowns are manufactured at a profit, thanks to the fact that silver is a drug on the market. Beyond that I know nothing against him."

"There's the door," said Sutton again.

"Your conversation is decidedly monotonous," said Amber, and with a smile and a friendly nod to the girl, he left.

(To be continued.)

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