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beached. He turned to a tall thin native who stood aloof from the crowd of boatmen who had assisted at the landing.

"Dem Consul, he lib—?"

"Massa," said the black man impressively, "him lib for bush one time—dem white man him lib for bush, but dem bush feller he chop um one time, so Consul him lib for bush to hang um bush feller."

To the girl this was so much gibberish, and she glanced from the native to Amber who stood alert, his eyelids narrow, his face tense.

"How you call um, them white man who go dead?" he asked.

Before the man could answer something attracted his attention and he looked up. There was a bird circling slowly above him.

He stretched out his arms and whistled softly, and the bird dropped down like a stone to the sandy beach, rose with an effort, waddled a step or two and fell over, its great crop heaving.

The native lifted it tenderly—it was a pigeon. Round one red leg, fastened by a rubber band, was a thin scrap of paper. Amber removed the tissue carefully and smoothed it out.

"To O. C. Houssas.

"Messrs. Lambaire and White have reached Alebi Mission Station. They report having discovered diamond field and state Sutton died fever month ago.

"(Signed) H. Sanders."

He read it again slowly, the girl watching with a troubled face.

"What does it say?" she asked.

Amber folded the paper carefully.

"I do not think it was intended for us," he said evasively.

CHAPTER XIII.

In the Forest.

IN the Khassi backland three men sat. The sun was going down, a log fire such as the native will build on the hottest day sent up a thin straight whisp of smoke.

The stout man in the soiled ducks was Lambaire, the thin man with the yellow unshaven face was Whitey. He was recovering from his second attack of fever, and the hand that he raised to his mouth shook suggestively. Young Sutton was a sulky third.

They did not speak as they disposed of the unpalatable river fish which their headman had caught for them. Not until they had finished, and had strolled down to the edge of the river, did they break the silence.

"This is the end of it," said Lambaire thickly.

Whitey said nothing.

"Three thousand pounds this expedition has cost, and I don't know how many years of my life," Lambaire continued, "and we're a thousand miles from the coast."

"Four hundred," interrupted Whitey impatiently, "and it might as well be four thousand."

There was a long pause in the conversation.

"Where does this river lead to?" asked Lambaire, "it must go somewhere."

"It goes through a fine cannibal country," said Whitey grimly, "if you're thinking of a short cut to the sea leave out the river."

"And there's no River of Stars—no diamonds: a cursed fine explorer that father of yours, Sutton." He said this savagely, but the boy with his head on his knees, looking wistfully at the river, made no reply.

"A cursed fine explorer," repeated Lambaire. Sutton half turned his head. "Don't quarrel with me," he said drearily, "because if you do—"

"Hey! if I do?" Lambaire was ripe for quarrelling with anybody.

"If you do, I'll shoot you dead," said the boy, and turned his head again in the direction of the river.

Lambaire's face twitched and he half rose—they were sitting on the river bank. "None o' that talk, Sutton," he growled tremulously; "that's not the sort o'—"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Whitey, "we don't want your jabber, Lambaire—we want a way out!"

A way out! That is what the



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