in a house like this it was to have someone to wait up- drove over from Yarleys, a f ten miles, arriving about ck.

swell has gone up to dress, d so have the other gentle- the head butler, Mr. Smith, Champers told me to give note and to say that dinner -past eight."

ok the note and asked to be his room. Once there, al- had only five and twenty he opened it eagerly, while cked his bag.

Alan," it ran, "Don't be late r or I may not be able to ace next to me. Of course t takes me in. They are a than usual this time, odious -and I can't stand one on the as well as on the right.—

What have you been doing? nguished guests, to say noth- uncle, seem to be in a great you. I overheard them talk- I was pretending to arrange ers. One of them called you onious prig and obstinate nd another answered— I think r Robert—'No doubt, but ob- nkeys can kick and have been upset other people's apple- now.' Is the Sahara Syndi- applecart? If so, I'll forgive

—Remember that we will church together to-morrow, down to breakfast in knick- or something to put them off. o the same—I mean I'll dress were going to golf. We can Christians later. If we don't ke that I mean—they'll guess ant to come to church, except which would bring the judg- heaven on us.

S.—Don't be careless and note lying about, for the un- nan who waits upon you reads etters. He steams them over Smith the butler is the only ble man in this house."

aughed outright as he finished ular and outspoken epistle. mehow revived his spirits that. e previous day, had been low It refreshed him. It was like of frosty air from an open blowing clean and cold into a over-heated room. He would ed to keep it, but remember- ara's injunctions and the un- man, threw it into the fire and it burn. Jekki coughed to in- hat it was time for his master and Alan turned and looked n an absent-minded fashion.

s worth looking at, was Jeeki. reader imagine a very tall and ly-built negro with a skin as a well-polished boot, wooly white as snow, a little tufted so white, a hand like a leg of but with long, delicate fin- l pink filbert shaped nails, an ble countenance, but set in it, a massive brow, two extraor- humorous and eloquent black hich expressed every motion through the brain behind them s, when their owner chose to em to do so. Such was Jeeki.

I unlace your boots, Major?" in his full, melodious voice. aking the most perfect Eng- expect that the gong will sound and a half minutes."

let it sound, and be hanged to wered Alan. "No, I forgot — I urry. Jeeki, put that fire out. n all the windows as soon as I n. This room is like a hot-

Major."

uests were gathered in the hall g sherry and bitters, a proceed- at to Alan's mind set a stamp e house. His host, Mr. Champ- swell, came forward and greet- with much affectionate enthu- and Alan noticed that he looked ale, also that his thoughts seem- be wandering, for he introduced ch banker to him as a noted Jew. e noted Jew as the French bank- hough the distinction between was obvious, and the gentlemen ned evidently resented the mis- Sir Robert Aylward, catching f him, came across the hall in ual direct fashion, and shook y the hand.

d to see you, Vernon," he said, his piercing eyes upon Alan as he were trying to read his ts. "Pleasant change this from y and all that eternal business, ? Ah! you are thinking that one quite clear of business after all," glanced round at the company. s one of your cousin Haswell's he can never shake himself free thing, never get any real recre-

a French gentleman on Alan's aving discovered that he was the er who had formulated the great g scheme, began to address him her maître," speaking so rapidly own language that Alan, whose h was none of the best, struggled him in vain. Whilst he was try- answer a question which he did nderstand, the door at the end of ll opened, and through it appear- rbara Champers.

as a large hall, and she was a way off, which caused her to look who indeed was only a middle height. Yet even at that distance it was impossible to mistake the dignity of her appearance. A slim woman with brown hair, cheerful brown eyes, a well-modelled face, a rounded figure and an excellent complexion, such was Barbara. Ten thousand young ladies could be found as good, or even better looking, yet something about her differentiated her from the majority of her sex. There was determination in her step, and overflowing health and vigor in her every movement. Her eyes had a trick of looking straight into any other eyes they met, not boldly, but with a kind of virginal fearlessness and enterprise that people often found embarrassing. Indeed, of the usual fringe of feminine airs and graces, a nymph of the woods and waters, who although she was three and twenty, as yet recked little of men save as companions whom she liked or disliked according to her instincts. For the rest, she was sweetly dressed in a white robe with silver on it, and wore no ornaments save a row of small pearls about her throat and some lilies of the valley at her breast. Barbara came straight onwards looking neither to the right nor the left, till she reached her uncle, to whom she nodded. Then she walked to Alan and offering him her hand, said:

"How do you do? Why did you not come over at lunch time? I wanted to play a round of golf with you this afternoon."

Alan answered something about being busy at Yarleys.

"Yarleys!" she replied. "I thought that you lived in the city now, making money out of speculations, like everyone else that I know."

"Why, Miss Champers," broke in Sir Robert reproachfully. "I asked you to play a round of golf before tea and you would not."

"No," she answered, "because I was waiting for my cousin. We are better matched, Sir Robert."

There was something in her voice, usually so soft and pleasant, as she spoke these words, something of steeliness and defiance, that caused Alan to feel at once happy and uncomfortable. Apparently also it caused Aylward to feel angry, for he flashed a glance at Alan over her head of which the purport could not be mistaken, though his pale face remained as immovable as ever. "We are enemies. I hate you," said that glance. Probably Barbara saw it; at any rate before either of them could speak, she said:

"Thank goodness, there is dinner at last. Sir Robert, will you take me in, and Alan will you sit on the other side of me? My uncle will show the rest their places."

(To be Continued.)

The meal was long and magnificent; the price of each dish of it would have kept a poor family for a month, and on the cost of the exquisite wines they might have lived for a year or two. Also the last were well patronized by everyone except Barbara, who drank water, and Alan, who since his severe fever took nothing but weak whiskey and soda and a little claret. Even Aylward, a temperate person, absorbed a good deal of champagne. As a consequence the conversation grew animated, and under cover of it, while Sir Robert was arguing with his neighbor on the left, Barbara asked in a low voice:

"What is the row, Alan? Tell me, I can't wait any longer."

"I have quarrelled with them," he answered, staring at his mutton as though he were criticizing it. "I mean, I have left the firm and have nothing more to do with the business."

Barbara's eyes lit up as she whispered back, "Glad of it. Best news I have heard for many a day. But, then, may I ask why you are here?"

"I came to see you," he replied humbly — "thought, perhaps, you wouldn't mind."

"Now that you are really clear of it, I am going for them," she said presently. "I have only restrained myself for your sake," and leaning back in her chair she stared at the ceiling, lost in meditation.

Then there came one of those silences which will fall upon dinner parties at times, however excellent and plentiful the champagne.

"Sir Robert Aylward," said Barbara in that clear, carrying voice of hers, "will you, as an expert, instruct a very ignorant person? I want a little information."

"Miss Champers," he answered, "am I not always at your service?" and all listened to hear upon what point their hostess desired to be enlightened.

"Sir Robert," she went on calmly, "everyone here is, I believe, what is called a financier, that is, except myself and Major Vernon, who only tries to be and will, I am sure, fail, since Nature made him something else, a soldier and—what else did Nature make you, Alan?"

As he vouchsafed no answer to this question, although Sir Robert muttered an uncomplimentary one between his lips which Barbara heard, or read, she continued:

"And you are all very rich and successful, are you not, and going to be much richer and much more successful next week. Now, what I want to ask you is—how is it done?"

"Accepting the premises for the sake of argument, Miss Champers," replied Sir Robert, who felt that he could not refuse the challenge, "the answer is that it is done by finance."

"I am still in the dark," she said. "Finance, as I have heard of it, means floating companies, and companies are floated to earn money for those who invest in them. Now this afternoon, as I was dull, I got hold of a book called the 'Directory of Directors,' and looked up all your names in it, except those of the gentlemen from Paris, and the companies that you direct—I found about those in another book. Well, I could not make out that any of these companies have ever earned any money, a dividend, don't you call it? Therefore, how do you all grow so rich, and why do people invest in them?"

Now Sir Robert frowned. Alan colored, two or three of the company laughed outright, and one of the French gentlemen who understood English, and had already drunk as much as was good for him, remarked loudly to his neighbor, "Ah! she is charming. She do touch the spot, like that ointment you give me to-day. How do we grow rich, and why do the peoples invest? Mon Dieu! why do they invest? That is the great mystery. I say that cette belle demoiselle, votre niece, est ravissante. Elle a d'esprit, mon ami Haswell."

Apparently her uncle did not share these, setniments, for he turned red as any turkey-cock, and said across the great round table:

"My dear Barbara, I wish that you would leave matters which you do not understand alone. We are here to dine, not to talk about finance."

"Certainly, Uncle," she answered sweetly. "I stand, or rather sit, reproved. I suppose that I have put my foot into it, as usual, and the worst of it is," she added, turning to Sir Robert, "that I am just as ignorant as I was before."

"If you want to master these matters, Miss Champers," said Aylward, with a rather forced laugh, "you must go into training and worship at the shrine of"—he meant to say Mammon, then thinking that the word sounded unpleasant, substituted—"of the Yellow God, as we do."

At these words Alan, who had been studying his plate, looked up quickly, and her uncle's face turned from red to white. But the irrepressible Barbara seized upon them.

"The Yellow God," she repeated. "Do you mean money, or that fetish thing of Major Vernon's with the terrible woman's face that I saw at the office in the city? Well, to change the subject, tell us, Alan, what is that yellow god of yours, and where did it come from?"

"My uncle Austin, who was my mother's brother and a missionary, brought it from West Africa a great many years ago. He was the first to visit the tribe who worship it; in fact, I do not think that anyone has ever visited them since. But really, I do not know all the story. Jeeki can tell you about it if you want to know, for he is one of that people, and escaped with my uncle."

Now Jeeki having left the room some of the guests wished to send for him, but Mr. Champers-Haswell objected. The end of it was that a compromise was effected, Alan undertaking to produce his retainer afterwards when they went to play billiards or cards.

* * * * * * * *

Dinner was over at length, and the diners, who had dined well, were gathered in the billiard room to smoke and amuse themselves as they wished. It was a very large room, sixty feet long indeed, with a wide space in the centre between the two tables, which was furnished as a lounge. When the gentlemen entered it they found Barbara standing by the great fireplace in this central space, a little shape of white and silver in its emptiness.

"Forgive me for intruding on you," she said, "and please do not stop smoking, for I like the smell. I have sat up expressly to hear Jeeki's story of the Yellow God. Alan, produce Jeeki, or I shall go to bed at once."

Her uncle made a movement as though to interfere, but Sir Robert said something to him which appeared to cause him to change his mind, while the rest in one way or anoter signified their enthusiastic assent. All of them were anxious to see this Jeeki and hear this tale, if he had one to tell. So Jeeki was sent for and presently arrived clad in the dress clothes which are common to all classes in England. There he stood before them, white headed, ebony faced, gigantic, imperturable. There is no doubt that his appearance produced an effect, for it was unusual and indeed, striking.

"You sent for me, Major?" he said, addressing his master, to whom he gave a military salute, for he had been Alan's servant when he was in the army.

"Yes, Jeeki. Miss Barbara here and these gentlemen wish you to tell them all that you know about the Yellow God."

The negro started and rolled his round eyes upwards till the whites of them showed, then began in his schoolbook English:

"That is a private subject, Major, upon which I should prefer not to discourse before this very public company."

A chorus of remonstrance arose, and one of the Jew gentlemen, approaching Jeeki, slipped a couple of sovereigns into his great hand, which he promptly transferred to his pocket without seeming to notice them.

"Jeeki," said Barbara, "don't disappoint us."

"Very well, Miss, I fall in with your wishes. The Yellow God that all these gentlemen worship, quite another god to that of which you desire that I should tell you. You know all about him. My god is of the female sex."

At this statement his audience burst into laughter, while Jeeki rolled his eyes and waited till they had finished.

"My god," he went on presently, "I mean, gentlemen, the god I used to pray to, for I am good Christian now, has so much gold that she does not care for any more," and he paused.

"Then what does she care for?" asked someone.

"Blood," answered Jeeki. "She is God of Death. Her name is Little Bonsa or Small Swimming Head; she is wife of Big Bonsa or Great Swimming Head."

Again there was laughter, though less general. For instance, neither Sir Robert nor Mr. Champers-Haswell laughed. At any rate, it caused him to cease his stilted talk and relapse into the strange vernacular that is common to all negroes, tinctured with a racy slang that was still his own.

"You want to hear Yellow God palaver?" he said rapidly. "Very well, I tell you, you cocksure white men who think you know everything, but know nothing at all. My people, people of the Asiki, that mean people of spirits, what you call ghosts and say you no believe in, but always look for behind door, they worship Yellow God, Bonsa Big and Bonsa Little, worship both and call them one; only Little Bonsa on trip to this country just now, and sit and think in city office. Yellow God live long way up a great river, then turn to the left and walk six days through big forest, where dwarf people shoot you with poisoned arrow. Then turn to the right, walk up stream where many wild beasts. Then turn to the left again and go in canoe through swamp where you die of fever, and across lake. Then walk over grassland and mountains. Then in kloof of the mountains where big black trees make a roof and river fall like thunder, find Asiki and gold house of the Yellow God. All that mountain of gold, full of gold, and beneath gold house Yellow God afloat in water. She what you call queen, priestess, live there also, always there, very beautiful woman with face like Yellow God, cruel, cruel! She take a husband every year, and every year he die because she hunt for right man, but never find him. Oh! no, she no kill him, he kill himself at end of year, glad to get away from Asika and go to spirits. While he live he have very good time, plenty to eat, plenty wives, fine house, much gold as he likes, only nothing to spend it on, pretty necklace, nice paint for face. But Asika, little bit by little bit, she eat up his spirit. He see too many ghosts. The house where he sleeps with dead men who once have his billet, full of ghosts, and every night there come more and sit with him, sit all round him, look at him with great eyes, just like you look at me, till at last when Asika finish eating up his spirit, he go crazy, he howl like a man in hell, he throw away all the gold they give him, and then, sometimes after one week, sometimes after one month, sometimes after one year if he be strong, but never more, he run out at night and jump into the canal where Yellow God float, and get get him, while Asaki sit on the bank and laugh, 'cause she hungry for new man to eat up his spirit too."

Jeeki's big voice died away in a whisper and ceased. There was a silence in the room, for even in the shine of the electric light, and through the fumes of champagne, in more than one imagination there rose a vision of that haunted water in which floated the great Yellow God, and of some mad being casting himself to his death beneath the moon, while his beautiful witch wife, who was "hungry for more spirits," sat upon its edge and laughed. Although his language was now commonplace enough, even ludicrous at times, the negro had undoubtedly the art of narration. His auditors felt that he spoke of what he knew, or had seen, that the very recollection of it frightened him, therefore he frightened them.

Barbara broke the silence which she felt to be awkward.

"Why do more ghosts come every night to sit with the queen's husband, Jeeki?" she asked. "Where do they come from?"

"Out of the dead, Miss, dead husbands of Asika from beginning of the world; what they call Munganas. Also, always they make sacrifice to Yellow God. From far, far away them poor niggers send people to be sacrifice that their house or tribe get luck. Sometimes they send kings, sometimes great men, sometimes doctors, sometimes women what have twin babies. Also the Asika bring people what is witches, or have drunk poison stuff, which blacks call muavi, and not been sick, or perhaps son they love best to take curse off their roof. All these come to Yellow God. Then Asika doctor, they have death-palaver. On night of full moon they beat drum, and drum go, Wow! Wow! Wow! and doctors pick out those to die that month. Once they pick out me," and as he said these words he gasped, and with his great hand wiped off the sweat that started from his brow, "But Yellow God no take me that time; no want me, and I escape."

"How?" asked Sir Robert.

"With my master, Major's uncle, Reverend Austin, he who come to try to make Asika Christian. He snap his fingers, put on small mask of Yellow God which he prig, Little Bonsa herself, that same face which sit in your office now," and he pointed to Sir Robert, "like one toad upon a stone. Priests think that god make herself into man, want holiday, take me out into forest to kill me and eat my life. So they let us go by, and we go just as though devil kick us—fast, fast, and never see Asika any more. But Little Bonsa I bring with me for luck, tell truth I no dare leave her behind, she not stand that; and now she sit in your office and think and make magic there. That why you grow rich, because she know you worship her."

"That's a nice way for a baptized Christian to talk," broke in Barbara again, adding, "But Jeeki, what do you mean when you say that the god did not take you?"

"I mean this, Miss; when victim offered to Big Yellow God, priest-man bring him to edge of canal where the great god float. Then, if Yellow God want him, it turn and swim across water."

"Swim across water! I thought you said it was only a mask of gold?"

"I don't know, Miss; perhaps man inside the mask, perhaps spirit. I say it swim across water in the night, always in the night, and lift itself up and look in victim's face. Then priest take him away and kill him, all same for that Johnnie, he die in about one year, always die, no one ever live long if Yellow God swim to him and rise up and smile in his face. No matter if it Big Bonsa or Little Bonsa, for they man and wife joined in holy matrimony, and either do trick."

As these words left Jeeki's lips, Alan became aware of some unusual movement on the left, and looking round, saw that Mr. Champers-Haswell, who stood by him, had dropped the cigar which he held to the floor, and, white as a sheet, was swaying to and fro. Indeed, in another instant he would have fallen, had not Alan caught him in his arms and supported him till others came to his assistance, when between them they carried him to a soft. On their way they passed a table where spirits and soda-water were set out, and to his astonishment Alan noticed that Sir Robert Aylward, looking little, if at all, better than his partner, had helped himself to half a tumberful of cognac, which he was swallowing in great gulps. Then there was confusion and someone went to telephone for the doctor, while the deep voice of Jeeki was heard exclaiming:

"That Yellow God at work—oh, yes, Little Bonsa on the job. I am Christian man, but no doubt she very powerful fetish, and can do anything she like to them that worship her, and you see, she sit in the office of these gentlemen. 'Spect she make Reverend Austin and me bring her to England because she got eye on firm of Messrs. Aylward and Haswell, London, E.C. Oh, shouldn't wonder at all, for Bonsa know everything."

"Oh, confound you and your fetish! Be off, you old donkey," almost shouted Alan.

"Major," replied the offended Jeeki, assuming his grand manner and language, "it was not I who wished to narrate this history of bloodstained superstition of poor African. Musn't blame old Jeeki if they make Christian gents sick as Channel steamer."

"Be off," repeated Alan, stamping his foot.

So Jeeki went, but outside the door, as it chanced, he encountered one of the Jew gentlemen, who also appeared to be a little "sick." An idea striking "You like Jeeki's pretty story, sir? Well, Jeeki think that if you make little present to him, like your brother in there, it please Yellow God very much, and bring you plenty luck."

Then acting upon some unaccustomed impulse, that Jew became exceedingly generous. In his pocket was a handful of sovereigns, which he had prepared to stake at bridge. He grasped them all and thrust them into Jeeki's outstretched palm, where they seemed to melt.

"Thank you, sir," said Jeeki. "Now I sure you have plenty luck, just like your grandpa Jacob in Book when he do his brudder in eye."

CHAPTER IV.

Barbara.

There was no bridge or billiards at the Court that night, where ordinarily the play ran high enough. After Mr. Haswell had been carried to his room, some of the guests—among them Sir Robert Aylward—went to bed, remarking that they could do no good by sitting up; while others, more concerned waited to hear the verdict of the doctor, who must drive from six miles away. He came, and half an hour later Barbara entered the billiard room and told Alan, who was sitting there, smoking, that her uncle had recovered from his faint and that the doctor, who was stopping there all night, said that he was in no danger, only suffering from a heart attack brought on by overwork or excitement.

When Alan woke next morning the first thing that he heard through his open window was the sound of the doctor's departing dog-cart. Then Jeeki appeared and told him that Mr. Haswell was all right again, but that all night he had shaken "like one jelly." Alan asked what had been the matter with him, but Jeeki only shrugged his shoulders and said that he did not know—"perhaps Yellow God touch him up."

At breakfast, as in her note she had said she would, Barbara appeared wearing a short skirt. Sir Robert, who was there also, looking extremely pale even for him, and with black rims round his eyes, asked her if she was going to golf, to which she answered that she would think it over. It was a somewhat melancholy meal, and although by common consent, no mention was made of Jeeki's tale of the Yellow God, and beyond the usual polite inquiries, very little of their host's seizure.

As Barbara went out she whispered to Alan, who opened the door for her, "Meet me at half-past ten in the kitchen garden."

Accordingly, having changed his clothes surreptitiously, Alan, avoiding the others, made his way by a circuit-out route to the kitchen garden, which, after the fashion of modern places, was hidden behind a belt of trees nearly a quarter of a mile from the house. Here he wandered about till presently he heard Barbara's pleasant voice behind him saying:

"Don't dawdle so, we shall be late for church."

So they started somewhat furtively, like runaway children. As they went Alan asked how her uncle was.

"All right now," she answered, "but he has had a bad shake. It was that Yellow God story which did it. I know, for I was there when he was coming to, with Sir Robert. He kept talking about it in a confused manner, saying that it was swimming to him across the floor, till at last Sir Robert bent over him and told him to be quiet, quite sternly. Do you know, Alan, I believe your pet fetish has been manifesting itself in some unpleasant fashion up there in the office."

"Indeed! If so, it must be since I left, for I never heard of anything of the sort, nor are Aylward and your uncle likely people to see ghosts. In fact, Sir Robert wished to give me more than £15,000 for the thing only the day before yesterday, which doesn't look as though it had been frightening him."

"Well, he won't repeat the offer, Alan, for I heard him promise my uncle only this morning that it should be sent back to Yarleys at once. But why did he want to buy it for such a lot of money? Tell me quickly, Alan, I am dying to hear the whole story."

So he began and told her, omitting nothing, while she listened eagerly to every word, hardly interrupting him at all. As he finished his tale they reached the door of the quaint old village church, just as the clock was striking eleven.

"Come in, Alan," she said gently, "and thank Heaven for all its mercies, for you should be a grateful man today."

Then without giving him time to answer she entered the church and took their places in the great square pew for the servants were empty, for those who frequented the Court were not church-goers, and "like master, like man." Indeed, the gentle-faced old clergyman looked quite pleased and surprised when he saw two inhabitants of that palatial residence amongst his congregation, although it is true that Barbara was his friend and helper.

The simple service went on; the first lesson was read. It cried woe upon them that join house to house and field to field, that draw iniquity with cords of vanity and sin as it were with a cart rope; that call evil good and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness, that justify the wicket for reward; that feast full but regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of His hand, for of such it prophesied that their houses, great and fair, should be without inhabitant and desolate.

It was very well read, and Alan, listening, thought that the denunciations of the old seer of thousands of years ago were not inappropriate to the dwellers in some houses great and fair of his own day, who, whatever they did or left undone, regarded not the work of the Lord, neither considered the operation of His hand. Perhaps Barbara thought so too; at any rate, a rather sad little smile appeared once or twice upon her sweet, firm face as the immortal poem echoed down the aisle.

The peace that passeth understanding was invoked upon their heads, and ris-

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him, he touched his white hair with his finger and said:

ing with the rest of the scanty congregation, they went away.

"Shall we walk home by the woods, Alan?" asked Barbara. "It is three miles round, but we don't lunch till two.

He nodded, and presently they were alone in those woods, the beautiful woods through which the breath of spring was breathing, treading upon carpets of bluebell, violet and primrose, quite alone, uncompanioned save by the wild things that stole across their path, undisturbed save by the sound of the singing birds and of the wind among the trees.

"What did you mean, Barbara, when you said that I should be a grateful man to-day?" asked Alan presently.

Barbara looked him in the eyes in that open, virginal fashion of hers, and answered in the words of the lesson, "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity and sin as it were with a cart-rope, that lay house to house"—and through an opening in the woods she pointed to the roofs of the Court standing on one hill, and to the roof of Old Hall standing upon another—"and field to field" and with a sweep of her hand she indicated all the country round, "for many houses great and fair that have music in their feasts shall be left desolate." Then turning, she said:

"Do you understand now, Alan?"

"I think so," he answered. "You mean that I have been in bad company."

"Very bad, Alan. One of them is my own uncle, but the truth remains the truth, Alan, they are no better than thieves; all this wealth is stolen, and I thank God that you have found it out in time before you became one of them in heart as well as in name."

"If you mean the Sahara Syndicate," he said, "the idea is sound enough; indeed, I am responsible for it. The thing can be done, great benefits would result—too long to go into."

"Yes, yes, Alan, but you know that they never mean to do it, they only mean to get the millions from the public. I have lived with my uncle for ten years, ever since my poor father died, and I know the backstairs of the business. There has been half a dozen schemes like this, and although they have had their bad times, very bad times, he and Sir Robert have grown richer and richer. But what has happened to those who have invested in them? Oh! let us drop the subject, it is unpleasant. For myself, it doesn't matter, because, although it isn't under my control, I have money of my own. You know we are a plebian lot on the male side, my grandfather was a draper in a large way of business, my father was a coal merchant who made a great fortune. His brother, my uncle, in whom my father always believed implicity, took to what is called finance, and when my father died he left me, his only child, in his guardianship. Until I am five and twenty I cannot even marry or touch a halfpenny without his consent; in fact, if I should marry against his will the most of my money goes to him."

"I expect that he has got it already," said Alan.

"No, I think not. I found out that, although it is not mine, it is not his. He can't draw it without my signature, and I steadily refuse to sign anything. Again and again they have brought me documents, and I have always said that I would consider them at five and twenty, when I came of age under my father's will. I went on the sly to a lawyer in Kingswell, and paid him a guinea for his advice, and he put me up to that. 'Sign nothing,' he said, and I have signed nothing, so, except by forgery, nothing can have gone. Still for all that it may have gone. For anything I know I am not worth more than the clothes I stand in, although my father was a very rich man."

"If so, we are about in the same boat, Barbara," Alan answered with a laugh, "for my present possessions are Yarleys, which brings in about £100 a year less than the interest on its mortgages and cost of upkeep, and the £1,700 that Aylward paid me back on Friday for my shares. If I had stuck to them I understand that in a week or two I should have been worth £100,000, and now you see, here I am, over thirty years of age, without a profession, invalided out of the army, and having failed in finance, a mere bit of driftwood without hope and without a trade.

Barbara's brown eyes grew soft with sympathy, or was it tears?

"You are a curious creature, Alan," she said. "Why didn't you take the £15,000 for that fetish of yours? It would have been a fair deal and have set you on your legs."

"I don't know," he answered dejectedly. "It went against the grain, so what is the use of talking about it? I think my old uncle Austin told me it wasn't to be parted with. No, perhaps it was Jeeki. Bother the Yellow God, it is always cropping up."

"Yes," replied Barbara, "the Yellow God is always cropping up, especially in this neighborhood."

They walked on in silence, till suddenly Barbara sat down upon the bole of a felled oak and began to cry.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Alan.

"I don't know," she answered. "Everything goes wrong. I live in a kind of gilded hell. I don't like my uncle, and I loathe the men he brings about the place. I have no friends, I scarcely know a woman intimately; I have troubles I can't tell you and—I am wretched. You are the only creature I have left to talk to, and I suppose that after this row you must go away, too, to make your living."

Alan looked at her and his heart swelled within him, for he had loved this girl for years.

"Barbara," he gasped, "please don't cry, it upsets me. You know you are a great heiress——"

"That remains to be proved," she answered. "But any way what has it to do with the case?"

"It has everything to do with it, at least so far as I am concerned. If it hadn't been for that I should have asked you to marry me a long while ago, because I love you, as I would now, but of course it is impossible."

Barbara ceased her weeping, wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, and looked up at him.

"Alan," she said, "I think that you are the biggest fool I ever knew—not but that a fool is rather refreshing when one lives among knaves."

"I know I am a fool," he answered. "If I wasn't I should not have mentioned my misfortune to you, but sometimes things are too much for one. Forget it and forgive me."

"Oh! yes," she said, "I forgive you; a woman can generally forgive a man for being fond of her. Whatever she may say, she is ready to take a lenient view of his human weakness. But as to forgetting, that is a different matter. I don't exactly see why I should be so anxious to forget, who haven't many people to care about me," and she looked at him in quite a new fashion, one indeed which gave him something of a shock, for he had not thought the nymph-like Barbara capable of such a look as that. She and any sort of passion had always seemed so far apart.

Now after all Alan was very much a man, if a modest one, with all a man's instincts, and therefore there are appearances of the female face which even such as he could not entirely misinterpret.

"You—don't—mean," he said doubtfully, "you don't really mean?" and he stood hesitating before her.

"If you would put your question a little more clearly, Alan, I might be able to give you an answer," she replied, that quaint little smile of hers creeping to the corners of her mouth like sunshine through a mist of rain.

"You don't really mean," he went on, "that you care anything about me, like, like I have cared for you for years?"

"Oh! Alan," she said, laughing outright, "why in the name of goodness shouldn't I care about you? I didn't say that I do, mind, but why shouldn't I? What is the gulf between us?"

"The old one," he answered, "that between Dives and Lazarus."

"Alan," said Barbara, looking down, "I don't know what has come over me, but for some unexplained and inexplicable reason I am inclined to give Lazarus a lead—across that gulf."

Now, like the glance which preceded it, this was a saying that Alan could not misunderstand. He sat himself on the log beside her, while she, still looking down, watched him out of the corners of her eyes. He went red, he went white, his heart beat very violently. Then he stretched out his big brown hand and took her small white one, and as this familiarity produced no remonstrance, let it fall, and passing his arm about her, drew her to him and embraced her, not once, but often, with such vigor that a squirrel which had been watching these proceedings from a neighboring tree, bolted round it scandalized, and was seen no more.

"I love you, I love you!" he said huskily.

"So I gather," she answered in a feeble voice.

"Do you care for me?" he asked.

"It would seem that I must, Alan, otherwise I should scarcely—oh! you foolish Alan," and heedless of her Sunday hat, which never recovered this encounter, but was kept as a holy relic, she let her head fall upon his shoulder and began to cry again, this time for very happiness.

He kissed her tears away, then as he could think of nothing else to say, asked her if she would marry him.

"It is the general sequel to this kind of thing, I believe," she answered, "or, at any rate, it ought to be. But if you want a direct answer—yes, I will, if my uncle lets me, which he won't, as you have quarrelled with him, or, at any rate, two years hence, when I am five-and-twenty and my own mistress; that is if we have anything to marry on, for one must eat. At present our worldly possessions seem to consist chiefly of a large store of mutual affection, a good stock of clothes and one Yellow God, which after what happened last night, I do not think you will get another chance of turning into cash."

"I must make money somehow," he said.

"Yes, Alan, but I am afraid it is not easy to do—honestly. Nobody wants people without capital whose only stock in trade is a brief but distinguished military career and a large experience of African fever."

Alan groaned at this veracious but discouraging remark, and she went on quickly:

"I mean to spend another guinea upon my friend the lawyer at Kingswell. Perhaps he can raise the wind, by a post-obit, or something," she added vaguely, "I mean a post-uncle-obit."

"If he does, Barbara, I can't live on your money alone, it isn't right."

"Oh! don't you trouble about that, Alan. If once I can get hold of those dim thousands you will soon be able to make more, for unto him that hath shall be given. But at present they are very dim and for all I know may be represented by stock in deceased companies. In short the financial position is extraordinarily depressed, as they say in the Market Intelligense in the Times. But that's no reason why we should be depressed also."

"No, Barbara, for at any rate we have got each other."

"Yes," she answered springing up, "we have got each other, dear, until death do us part, and somehow I don't think he'll do that yet awhile; it comes into my heart that he won't do that, Alan, that you and I are going to live out our days. So what does the rest matter. In two years I shall be a free woman. In fact if the worst comes to the worst I'll defy them all," and she set her little mouth like a rock, "and marry you straight away, as being over age, I can do, even if it costs me every halfpenny that I've got."

"No, no," he said, "it would be wrong, wrong to yourself and wrong to your descendants."

"Very well, Alan, then we will wait, or perhaps luck will come our way—why shouldn't it? At any rate for my part I never felt so happy in my life, for, dear Alan, we have found what we were born to find, found it once and for always, and the rest is mere etceteras. What would be the use of all the gold of the Asiki people that Jeeki was talking about last night, to either of us, if we had not each other? We can get on without the wealth, but we couldn't get on apart, or at least I couldn't, and I don't mind saying so."

"No, my dearling, no," he answered turning white at the very thought, "we couldn't get on apart—now. In fact I

(To be continued).

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