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RIDER HAGGARD,

Author of King "Solomon's Mines," "She," " Jess," &c.

CHAPTER I. Most of you boys will have heard of Allan Quatermain, who was one of the party who discovered King Solomon's mines some little time ago, and afterward came to live in England near his friend Sir Henry Curtis. He has gone back to the wilderness now, as these old hunters almost invariably do, on one pretext or another. They cannot endure civilization for very long, its noise and racket and the omnipresence of broadclothed humanity proving more trying to their nerves than the danger of the desert. I think that they feel lonely here, for it is a fact that is too little understood, though it has often been stated, that there is no loneliness like the loneliness of crowds, especially to those who are unaccustomed to them. 'What is there in the world,' old Quatermain would say, ' so desolate as to stand in the streets of a great city and listen to the footsteps falling, falling, multitudinous as the rain, and watch the white line of faces as they hurry past, you know not whence, you know not whither? They come and go, their eyes meet yours with a cold stare, for a moment their features are written on your mind, and then they are gone forever. You will never see them again, they will never see you again; they come up out of the blackness, and presently they once more vanish into the blackness, taking their secrets with them. Yes, that is loneliness pure and undefiled; but to one who knows and loves it, the wilderness is not lonely, because the spirit of nature is ever there to keep the wanderer company. He finds companions in the rushing winds-the sunny streams babble like Nature's children at his feet; high above him, in the purple sunset. are domes and minarets and palaces, such as no mortal man hath built, in and out of whose flaming doors the glorious angels of the sun do move continually. And then there is the wild game, following its feeding grounds in great armies, with the spring-buck thrown out before them for skirmishers; then rank upon rank of long-faced blesbuck, marching and

'Oh, no,' he would say, 'the wilderness is not lonely, for, my boy, remember that the further you get from man the nearer you grow to God,' and though this is a saying that might well be disputed, it is one I am sure that any body who has watched the sun rise and set on the limitless deserted plains; and seen the thunder chariots roll in majesty across the depths of unfathomable sky, will easily under-

wheeling like infantry; and last the shining

troops of quagga and the fierce-eyed shaggy

vilderbeeste to take the place of the cossack

host that hangs upon an army's flanks.

Well at any rate he went back again, and now for many months I have heard nothing at all of him, and to be frank, I greatly doubt if anybody will ever hear of him again. , I fear that the wilderness, that has for so many years been a mother to him, will now also prove his monument and the monument of those who accompanied him, for the quest upon which he and they have started is a wild one indeed.

But while he was in England for those three years or so between his return from the successful discovery of the wise king's buried treasures, and the death of his only son, I saw a great deal of old Allan Quatermain. I had known him years before in Africa, and after he came home, whenever I had nothing better to do, I used to run up to Yorkshire and stay with him, and in this way I at one time and another heard many of the incidents of his past life, and most curious some of them were. No man can pass all those years following the rough existence of an elephant hunter without meeting with many strange adventures,

and one way and another old Quatermain has certainly seen his share. Well, the story that I am going to tell you in the following pages is one of the later of these adventures; indeed, if I remember right, it happened in the year 1875. At any rate I know that it was the only one of his trips upon which he took his son Harry (who is since dead) with him, and that Harry was then about fourteen. And now for the story, which I will repeat, as nearly as I can in the words in which hunter Quatermain told it to me one night in the old oak-panelled vestibule of his house in Yorkshire. We were talking about gold-mining-

'Gold-mining!' he broke in, 'ah! yes, once went gold-mining at Pilgrims' Rest in the Transvaal, and it was after that that we had the turn up about Jim-Jim and the lions. Do you know it? Well, it is, or was, one of the queerest little places your ever saw. The town itself was pitched in a sort of stony valley, with mountais all about it, and in the middle of such scenery as one does not often get the chance of seeing.

Well, for some months I dug away gayly at my claim, but at length the very sight of a pick or of a washing trough became hateful to me. A hundred times a day I cursed my own folly for having invested eight hundred pounds, which was about all that I was worth at the time, in this gold-mining. But like other better people before me, I had been bitten by the gold bug, and now had to take the consequences. I had bought a claim out of which a man had made a fortune—five or six thousand pounds at least—as I thought, very cheap that is, I had given him five hundred pounds down for it. It was all that I had made by a very rough year's elephant hunting beyond the Zambesi, and I sighed deeply and prophetically when I saw my successful friend, who was a Yankee, sweep up the roll of Standard bank notes with the lordly air of the man who has made his fortune, and cram them into his breeches pockets. "Well," I said to him-the happy vender-" it is a magnificent property. and I only hope that my luck wil be as good as yours has been." He smiled; to my excited nerves it seemed that he smiled ominously, as he answered me in a peculiar Yankee drawl: ' I guess, stranger, as I ain't the man to want to turn a dog's stomach against his dinner, more especial when there ain't no more going of the rounds; as for that there claim, well, she's been a good nigger to me; but between you and me, stranger, speaking man to man now that there ain't any filthy lucre between us to obsculate the features of the truth,

guess she's about worked out!" 'I gasped; the fellow's effrontery took the breath out of me. Only five minutes before he had been swearing by all his gods, and they appeared to be numerous and mixed, that there were half a dozen fortunes left in the claim, and that he was only giving it up because he was downright weary of shovelling the gold out.

" Don't look so vexed, stranger," went on my tormentor, " perhaps there is some shine in the old girl yet; any way you are a downright good fellow, you are, therefore you will, I guess, have a real A 1 plate-glass opportunity of working on the feelings of Dame Fortune. Any way it will bring the muscle up upon your arm if the stuff is uncommon stiff, and what is more you will in the course of a year earn a sight more than two thousand dollars in value

'And he went, just in time, for in another minute I should have gone for him, and I saw his face no more.

Well. I set to work on the old claim with my boy Harry and a half dozen Kafirs to help me, which, seeing that I had put nearly all my worldly wealth into it, was the least I could do. And we worked, my word, we did work -early and late we went at it-but never a bit of gold did we see; no, not even a nugget large enough to make a scarf pin out of. The American gentleman had mopped up the whole lot and left us the sweepings.

' For three months this game went on till at last I paid away all or very near all that was left of our little capital in wages and food for the Kafirs and ourselves. When I tell you that Boer meal was sometimes as high as four pounds a bag, you will understand that it did not take long to run through our banking ac-

'At last the crisis came. One Saturday night I had paid my men as usual, and bought a muid of mealie meal at sixty shillings for them to fill themselves with, and then I went with my boy Harry and sat on the edge of the thundering great hole we had dug in the hillside, and which we had in bitter mockery

(To be Continued.)

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