

brow. Meriem glanced toward him. "You are warm," she said. "Now that the sun is setting I find it quite cool. Why do you perspire now?"

He had not intended to let her know that he had seen her with the baboons; but suddenly, before he realized what he was saying, he had blurted it out.

"I perspire from emotion," he said. "I went into the jungle when I discovered your pony. I wanted to surprise you; but it was I who was surprised. I saw you in the trees with the baboons."

"Yes?" she said, quite unemotionally, as though it was a matter of little moment that a young girl should be upon intimate terms with savage jungle beasts.

"It was horrible!" ejaculated the Hon. Morison.

"Horrible?" repeated Meriem, puckering her brows in bewilderment. "What was horrible about it? They are my friends. Is it horrible to talk with one's friends?"

"You were really talking with them, then?" cried the Hon. Morison. "You understood them, and they understood you?"

"Certainly."

"But they are hideous creatures—degraded beasts of a lower order! How could you speak the language of beasts?"

"They are not hideous or degraded," replied Meriem warmly. "Friends are never that. I lived among them for years before Bwana found me and brought me here. I scarce knew any other tongue than that of the Mangani. Should I refuse to know them now simply because I happen, for the present, to live among humans?"

"For the present!" ejaculated the Hon. Morison. "You cannot mean that you expect to return to live among them? Come, come, what foolishness are we talking? The very idea! You are spoofing me, Miss Meriem. You have been kind to these baboons here and they know you and do not molest you; but that you once lived among them—no, that is preposterous!"

"But I did, though," insisted the girl, seeing the real horror that the man felt in the presence of such an idea reflected in his tone and manner, and rather enjoying baiting him still further.

"Yes, I lived, almost naked, among the great apes and the lesser apes. I dwelt among the branches of the trees. I pounced upon the smaller prey and devoured it—raw. With Korak and A'ht I hunted the antelope and the boar, and I sat upon a tree limb and made faces at Numa, the lion, and threw sticks at him and annoyed him until he roared so terribly in his rage that the earth shook.

"And Korak built me a lair high among the branches of a mighty tree. He brought me fruits and flesh. He fought for me and was kind to me—until I came to Bwana and My Dear I do not recall that any other than Korak was ever kind to me."

There was a wistful note in the girl's voice now, and she had forgotten that she was bantering the Hon. Morison. She was thinking of Korak. She had not thought of him a great deal of late.

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FOR a time both were silently absorbed in their own reflections as they rode on toward the bungalow of their host. The girl was thinking of a godlike figure, a leopard skin half concealing his smooth, brown hide as he leaped nimbly through the trees to lay an offering of food before her on his return from a successful hunt. Behind him, shaggy and powerful, swung a huge anthropoid ape, while she, Meriem, laughing and shouting her welcome, swung upon a swaying limb before the entrance to her sylvan bower.

It was a pretty picture as she recalled it. The other side seldom obtruded itself upon her memory—the long, black nights; the chill, terrible jungle nights; the cold and damp and discomfort of the rainy season; the hideous mouthings of the savage carnivora as they prowled through the Stygian darkness beneath; the constant menace of Sheeta, the

panther, and Hista, the snake; the stinging insects, the loathsome vermin. For, in truth, all these had been outweighed by the happiness of the sunny days, the freedom of it all, and, most, the companionship of Korak.

The man's thoughts were rather jumbled. He had suddenly realized that he had come mighty near falling in love with this girl of whom he had known nothing up to the previous moment when she had voluntarily revealed a portion of her past to him. The more he thought upon the matter the more evident it became to him that he had given her his love—that he had been upon the verge of offering her his honorable name.

He trembled a little at the narrowness of his escape. Yet he still loved her. There was no objection to that, according to the ethics of the Hon. Morison Baynes and his kind. She was of meaner clay than he. He could no more have taken her in marriage than he could have taken one of her baboon friends, nor would she, of course, expect such an offer from him. To have his love would be sufficient honor for her—his name he would, naturally, bestow upon one in his own elevated social sphere.

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A GIRL who had consorted with apes, who, according to her own admission, had lived almost naked among them, could have no considerable sense of the finer qualities of virtue. The love that he would offer her, then, would, far from offending her, probably cover all that she might desire or expect.

The more the Hon. Morison Baynes thought upon the subject the more fully convinced he became that he was contemplating a most chivalrous and unselfish act. Europeans will better understand this point of view than Americans—poor, benighted provincials, who are denied a true appreciation of caste and of the fact that "the king can do no wrong."

He did not even have to argue the point that she would be much happier amid the luxuries of a London apartment, fortified as she would be by both his love and his bank account, than lawfully wed to such a one as her social position warranted. There was one question, however, which he wished to have definitely answered before he committed himself even to the program he was considering.

"Who were Korak and A'ht?" he asked.

"A'ht was a Mangani," replied Meriem, "and Korak a Tarmangani."

"And what, pray, might a Mangani be, and a Tarmangani?"

The girl laughed.

"You are a Tarmangani," she replied. "The Mangani are covered with hair—you would call them apes."

"Then Korak was a white man?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And he was—ah—your—er—your—"

He paused, for he found it rather difficult to go on with that line of questioning while the girl's clear, beautiful eyes were looking straight into his.

"My what?" insisted Meriem, far too unsophisticated in her unspoiled innocence to guess what the Hon. Morison was driving at.

"Why—ah—your brother?" he stammered.

"No, Korak was not my brother," she replied.

"Was he your husband, then?" he finally blurted.

Far from taking offense, Meriem broke into a merry laugh.

"My husband!" she cried. "Why, how old do you think I am? I am too young to have a husband. I had never thought of such a thing. Korak was—why—"

and now she hesitated, too; for she never before had attempted to analyze the relationship that existed between herself and Korak. "Why, Korak was just Korak," and again she broke into a gay laugh as she realized the illuminating quality of her description.

Looking at her and listening to her,

the man beside her could not believe that depravity of any sort or degree entered into the girl's nature, yet he wanted to believe that she had not been virtuous, for the Hon. Morison was not entirely without conscience.

For several days the Hon. Morison made no appreciable progress toward the consummation of his scheme. Sometimes he almost abandoned it, for he found himself time and again wondering how slight might be the provocation necessary to trick him into making a bona fide offer of marriage to Meriem if he permitted himself to fall more deeply in love with her, and it was difficult to see her daily and not love her. There was a quality about her which, all unknown to the Hon. Morison, was making his task an extremely difficult one—it was that quality of innate goodness and cleanness which is a good girl's stoutest bulwark and protection—an impregnable barrier that only degeneracy has the effrontery to assail.

The Hon. Morison Baynes would never be considered a degenerate.

He was sitting with Meriem upon the veranda one evening after the others had retired. Earlier they had been playing tennis—a game in which the Hon. Morison shone to advantage, as, in truth, he did in most all manly sports. He was telling her stories of London and Paris, of balls and banquets, of the wonderful women and their wonderful gowns, of the pleasures and pastimes of the rich and powerful.

The Hon. Morison was a past master in the art of insidious boasting. His egotism was never flagrant or tiresome—he was never crude in it, for crudeness was a plebeianism that the Hon. Morison studiously avoided; yet the impression derived by a listener to the Hon. Morison was one that was not at all calculated to detract from the glory of the house of Baynes, or from that of its representative here present.

Meriem was entranced. His tales were like fairy stories to this little jungle maid. The Hon. Morison loomed large and wonderful and magnificent in her mind's eye. He fascinated her, and when he drew closer to her after a short silence and took her hand she thrilled as one might thrill beneath the touch of a deity—a thrill of exaltation not unmixed with fear.

He bent his lips close to her ear.

"Meriem!" he whispered. "My little Meriem! May I hope to have the right to call you 'my little Meriem'?"

The girl turned wide eyes upward to his face; but it was in shadow. She trembled, but she did not draw away. The man put an arm about her and drew her closer.

"I love you!" he whispered.

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SHE did not reply. She did not know what to say. She knew nothing of love. She had never given it a thought; but she did know that it was very nice to be loved, whatever it meant. It was nice to have people kind to one. She had known so little of kindness or affection.

"Tell me," he said, "that you return my love."

His lips came steadily closer to hers. They had almost touched when a vision of Korak sprang like a miracle before her eyes. She saw Korak's face close to hers, she felt his lips hot against her lips, and then for the first time she guessed what love meant.

She drew away, gently.

"I am not sure," she said, "that I love you. Let us wait. There is plenty of time. I am too young to marry yet, and I am not sure that I should be happy in London or Paris—they rather frighten me."

How easily and naturally she had connected his avowal of love with the idea of marriage! The Hon. Morison was perfectly sure that he had not mentioned marriage—he had been particularly careful not to do so.

And then, she was not sure that she loved him! That, too, came rather in the

nature of a shock to his vanity. It seemed incredible that this little barbarian should have any doubt whatever as to the desirability of the Hon. Morison Baynes.

The first flush of passion cooled, the Hon. Morison was enabled to reason more logically. The start had been all wrong. It would be better now to wait and prepare her mind gradually for the only proposition which his exalted estate would permit him to offer her. He would go slow.

He glanced down at the girl's profile. It was bathed in the silvery light of the great tropic moon. The Hon. Morison Baynes wondered if it were to be so easy a matter to "go slow." She was most alluring.

Meriem rose. The vision of Korak was still before her.

"Good night," she said. "It is almost too beautiful to leave." She waved her hand in a comprehensive gesture which took in the starry heavens, the great moon, the broad, silvered plain, and the dense shadows in the distance that marked the jungle. "Oh, how I love it!"

"You would love London more," he said earnestly. "And London would love you. You would be a famous beauty in any capital of Europe. You would have the world at your feet, Meriem."

"Good night!" she repeated, and left him.

The Hon. Morison selected a cigaret from his crested case, lighted it, blew a thin line of blue smoke toward the moon, and smiled.

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CHAPTER XIX.

A Night Ride.

MERIEM and Bwana were sitting on the veranda together the following day when a horseman appeared in the distance riding across the plain toward the bungalow.

Bwana shaded his eyes with his hand and gazed out toward the oncoming rider. He was puzzled. Strangers were few in central Africa. Even the blacks for a distance of many miles in every direction were well known to him. No white man came within a hundred miles that word of his coming did not reach Bwana long before the stranger. His every move was reported to the big Bwana—just what animals he killed and how many of each species; how he killed them, too, for Bwana would not permit the use of prussic acid or strychnin; and how he treated his "boys."

Several European sportsmen had been turned back to the coast by the big Englishman's orders because of unwarranted cruelty to their black followers, and one, whose name had long been heralded in civilized communities as that of a great sportsman, was driven from Africa with orders never to return when Bwana found that his bag of fourteen lions had been made by the diligent use of poisoned bait.

The result was that all good sportsmen and all the natives loved and respected him. His word was law where there had never been law before. There was scarce a headman from coast to coast who would not heed the big Bwana's commands in preference to those of the hunters who employed them, and so it was easy to turn back any undesirable stranger—Bwana had simply to threaten to order his boys to desert him.

But here was evidently one who had slipped into the country unheralded. Bwana could not imagine who the approaching horseman might be.

After the manner of frontier hospitality the globe round, he met the newcomer at the gate, welcoming him even before he had dismounted. He saw a tall, well-knit man of 30 or more, blond of hair and smooth shaven. There was a tantalizing familiarity about him that convinced Bwana that he should be able to call the visitor by name, yet he was unable to do so.

(To be continued next week)

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