

THE OTHER MAN

By FREDERIC REDDALE

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Richard Dysart! Alive?—perhaps. Dead?—if not, he surely soon will be unless succor comes.

Down the little kloof through which the old wagon had creaked so cheerfully the day before there stole like shadows two dusty Kaffir boys. Timidly they gained its shelter, and cautiously peered through the spokes of the heavy wheels.

They point eagerly at the recumbent figure, and chatter to each other in their queer, clicking speech. Then, looking fearfully around and over their shoulders, they advance, and Joey drops on his knees beside his master.

"Baas, Baas!" he whines, and with thumb and forefinger raises an eyelid to see if there be left any life.

The blue and parched lips move, and there is a whispered moan:

"Water! Water!"

The other boy looks on stupidly and stolidly, but Joey dashes to the wagon for a tin cup, which he fills at the stream, and raising the head of the sorely wounded man, manages to tilt some of the blessed liquid down his throat.

Catching sight of the neck of a flask protruding from the sufferer's pocket, Joey sends some brandy chasing after the water, and the vivifying effect of the cordial is almost magical.

Dysart opened his eyes, drew a few shuddering breaths, and then managed to sit up, supporting himself with one hand while he pressed the other to his wounded side.

At sight of the blood-stained jacket and the dark pool which discolored the ground there were more excited Kaffir clicks, while the poor, faithful, half-famished blacks watched their master anxiously.

Slowly and painfully the details of the tragedy came back to his throbbing and fever-parched brain. His gaze sought the ground on either hand, then he groaned:

"Robbed! The damned hound!"

Reaching out his hand for the precious flask, he took another gulp of its contents, and then made as if he would rise, but fell back, helpless as a child. His limbs were cramped and stiff with the night's exposure, to a freezing temperature, and he was besides, awfully weak from loss of blood.

But Dysart knew what must be done if he would save his life, and so he whispered—

"Strip me, Joey."

Tenderly as women the boys did his bidding. Slowly and amid many smothered exclamations of pain they got his belt and jacket off; then his heavy flannel shirt, and a silk undershirt—the last refusing to budge until all around the wound had been well wetted. Then was disclosed an angry red puncture just below and a little to the left of the right armpit. There was a larger and more jagged wound at the back, where the heavy-calibre bullet had ploughed its exit, lodging between the flesh and the clothing, whence it dropped to the ground as the last garment was removed.

Joey picked it up with a click and a grin of astonishment and handed it to Richard, who coolly slid it into his trousers-pocket. Under his directions the wound was washed clean, and then carefully bandaged with the silk shirt torn into strips.

By this time the warming sun had done its genial work, and Dysart's legs were thawed out. So, by dint of both boys bracing themselves and tugging on his sound arm he managed to stagger to his feet and totter to the wagon, where, after much boosting and groaning on their part and his, he was made fairly comfortable on the heavy mattress which covered the bed of the conveyance. Then the wounded man collapsed.

The days ran into weeks, and the weeks mounted into months before the lonely adventurer began to mend. Fever wasted him to a skeleton; malaria sapped his vitality. Help there was none within a hundred miles; he could not stand the jolting of the wagon, and in his lucid moments he sternly vetoed Joey's offers to go for help. He knew what that would mean—a rush of strangers to his claim.

So there, on the banks of the Mool river, he fought his second fight with death, tended and nursed only by his faithful Kaffirs—and won out at last!

All through those weary weeks, in the intervals of delirium and the tedium of convalescence, he planned and plotted vengeance on the miscreant who had robbed him. He would chase him round the world and back again if need be! Daily and hourly he looked for a rush of diamond seekers to the new field. That they did not come proved that the unknown robber must have kept his own counsel, and

was doubtless far enough away enjoying the fruits of his unholy spoil.

But there were enough shining stones left on the beach to make another fortune—several fortunes, in fact—and Dysart was still a rich man.

The first thing was to get to the coast, and easily divining that the criminal would make for the nearest seaport rather than for Kimberley or Pretoria, Richard determined to strike for Ladysmith, at that time the nearest town whence ran the railroad for Durban.

It was on a bright morning late in the South African spring when the

word was given to inspan and trek once more, to the huge delight of Joey and his brother. The oxen had waxed fat over their long idleness, and good speed might be looked for.

The little party reached Ladysmith without mishap further than the loss of two of the cattle from drinking "red water." There Dysart disposed of some of his smallest stones, so as not to excite too much inquiry, suitably rewarded Joey and the other boy with a handful of yellow sovereigns apiece, made them a present of a new wagon and a dozen oxen, entered and proved his claim to the new field on the Mool, replenished his wardrobe, got a shave, a haircut and a bath, and then was ready to turn amateur detective.

He stumbled on his first clew by accident.

"A middlin' fine passel o' stones, Bister Dysart," said one of the dealers, a little Houndsditch Jew named Moses Plish, to whom he sold a small part of his find, after the purchase was concluded. "There was another gent 'ere avile ago with jest sich a lot; in a steamin' 'urry 'e was too!"

"Indeed?" said Richard, as nonchalantly as possible, keeping his eyes averted lest old Plish should eep his angry gleam.

"Yessir; a cool an' 'aughty customer 'e was! 'Ow much for the lot, sez-zee, 'an' no questions asked?" I 'ad done a leetle business with 'im afore, an' I knowed 'is ways!"

"That's curious," said Richard. "I wonder if I have ever met your man? I don't mind telling you, Plish, that I've located and proved a new claim, and I supposed I was first on the ground. But you can never be sure. What did you say his name was?"

"I didn't say, Bister Dysart," said Plish, with a cunning grin, "'cos I never 'eard it—'stways 'is genooine nyme; ven I see 'im afore, a matter o' two or three years back, 'e usefer play the planner in a dance 'ouse in Durban."

"H-m-m," mused Dysart, drumming on the dirty table. "What was this chum like, Plish?"

"Tall an' thin, sorter grizzly 'air, with vite 'ands and long fingers like a voman's. But all this 'ere's strictly confidensul an' atween ourselves, Bister Dysart, like as vun gent to another."

"Oh, certainly," asserted Richard, quietly pocketing the invidiously impudent classification. "It doesn't really matter, you know. Thought I might know the beggar, 'and he rose to go."

"'Ere's somethin' 'e left be'ind 'im, sir," said Plish, who had been rummaging in a drawer, displaying a dirty canvas bag.

Rick seized it and went to the open door to examine it.

Sure enough, it was the canvas bag of which he had been looted on the bank of the Mool! Turning to the Jew, he inquired as carelessly as possible:

"You don't mean to tell me he had this full of stones?"

"Oh, no, Bister Dysart, not by no manner o' means; I only saw abart a 'andful," was the reply.

"I'll keep this bag, Plish, if you've no objections," said Richard, stowing it away carefully.

"Don't bention it, Bister Dysart, sir," was the affable reply.

"One more question, Plish, and I'm done," said Richard. "Which way was your friend traveling, do you suppose?" He had risen, and stood carelessly flicking his boot with his riding-whip, yet much depended upon the reply he should receive.

"I 'appen to know 'e vent 'round to Cape Town by the first steamer," said Plish. "But all this is strictly personal an' privit, Bister Dysart, sir," he whined, for something in Richard's manner told him he had been talking too much.

"Quite so," was the terse answer, and with a parting nod off he swung down the wide and sunny street.

A week later he landed in Cape Town, where, in the process of forming a company to work the new claim, and arranging for the shipment to London and the insurance of the remainder of his stones, he was able to make a few cautious and casual inquiries about the man of whom he was in search. Not much could be gleaned, yet enough to convince him that the trail led in the direction he was himself most anxious to pursue—namely, to England.

He left Cape Town nine months and more behind the other. For clues he possessed a rather hazy personal description which might or might not be trustworthy, a dirty canvas bag and a 44-calibre bullet.

On board the steamer running around from Durban to Cape Town Richard Dysart still further added to his stock of information.

He was accosted on deck one morning by a certain Sgt. Cupples, one of the special force detailed to patrol in plain clothes the various steamship lines on the watch for contraband diamonds and smugglers thereof.

To his surprise, he learned that his own movements since arriving at Ladysmith were perfectly well known, and this led to some confidential talk concerning the devious ways of the I. D. B., which proved especially interesting to our friend.

"What moonshining is to the southern states of America, what counter-

fetting is at home and abroad, what the slave trade was a few years ago, so is the present day illicit trade in diamonds in South Africa," said Cupples. "In the estimation of legitimate mine owners and traders it may be set down as 'the sum of all villainies.' Despite the utmost vigilance of the Cape police and an army of secret agents, stones are annually smuggled out of the country to the tune of thousands of pounds."

"How can the authorities manage to cover such a vast field with any degree of success?" inquired Rick.

"Well, you see, the camps and productive fields are all known, mapped and located. These outlets are watched and their output is pretty accurately known from month to month. So also with the towns inland and the coastwise cities like Durban, Delagoa Bay, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town itself. The 'fences' are also known and kept under closer surveillance, and there is one of our men on every outgoing steamer."

Dysart nodded; much of this was already familiar to him.

"But suppose a new field is discovered—a man might become legitimately possessed of stones in that way?" he ventured.

"You are referring to your own case," said the police agent with a smile; and then, in answer to the other's mute query: "We know all about

HE WAS ACCOSTED ON DECK ONE MORNING BY A CERTAIN SERGEANT CUPPLES.

you, Mr. Dysart. In the first place, you declared and proved your claim according to law; in the second place, Moses Plish 'gave you away' before you'd been out of his place an hour!"

"The devil he did!" exclaimed Richard. "I wonder if he did as much for my predecessor?"

Sgt. Cupples looked at him narrowly from under the peak of his steamer cap, took a few turns along the deck, and then said quietly:

"I'm on that case myself. Better let me have the whole story, Mr. Dysart. Being a mine owner, you are as much interested in this matter as I am."

"And a good deal more," said Richard quietly. So, in the seclusion of a little nine-by-twelve stateroom on the Lanark Castle, the story of the grim tragedy on the Mool river was for the first time told to the ear of a white man.

At its conclusion:

"We can run him down, Mr. Dysart—that's certain. But whether we can hold him is another matter. You can charge highway robbery with intent to kill, and it's 20 years in Portland prison if he's convicted. But I question whether the loot would come under the statute of illicit diamonds, because at the time of the seizure the claim had not been entered and proved."

"That's quite to my liking," exclaimed Richard, who had begun to fear that his private vengeance might be balked. "It's a personal matter between him and me, and I'd like to deal with the rascal myself in my own way. You have no clew as to his identity?"

"Not a particle beyond the personal description of old Plish," was the regretful reply.

CHAPTER V.

In due time Rossiter Kane attained the height of his ambition, and became a landed proprietor in a country where the possession of a few acres is the patent of nobility and gentility, and the "open sesame" to sundry other things.

A charming little estate in Hampshire, consisting of park and woodland, carved out of a corner of the New Forest, with a dainty old house built by Vanbrugh, was on the market, and he promptly secured it. Not the least of its attractions lay in the fact that, although in another county, it was within riding or driving distance of both Denecroft and Gatewood. "The Cedars" was its name, and to celebrate his new ownership Kane determined to give a "pheasant ball" in his accustomed lavish manner of entertaining. With the event itself we have not much concern, but it brought certain matters to a crisis, as he intended it should.

Other things fell out not so entirely to his liking.

On a bright autumn morning Kane rode over to Denecroft, ostensibly to announce the forthcoming function in person, and inquired for Miss Dysart.

"This is very kind of you, Mr. Kane," said Stella, after his salutations were made and the object of his call announced.

He bowed his acknowledgments over the little hand, and at her bidding seated himself near by.

"I trust your brother is well?" he inquired.

She started. "Oh, Sir Arthur, you mean? Yes, he is as usual, thank you. When you said my 'brother' it

took me by surprise for a moment; all this morning I have been thinking of my poor brother Richard."

"I think I understand," he said simply, eyes and voice full of sympathy.

"We have had no news from him for more than a year," she went on. "Mr. Kane, report says you know South Africa like a book; is it possible you could have met Rick?"

There was a wealth of yearning in her tones, such as Kane would have liked to see evoked on his own account.

"South Africa is a wide country, Miss Dysart," he rejoined. "Where was your brother when you last heard from him?"

"At Kimberley, I think."

"Ah! I suppose he went by his own name?" he ventured, and then, in answer to her glance of surprise, implying that no Dysart would stoop to travel under an alias, "because, you know, lots of new chums out there drop their civilized patronymics, and no one thinks the worse of them in consequence."

"I don't know, I am sure," she replied doubtfully. "Rick never said anything about it."

"You may be certain that if I had ever heard your name out there, Miss Dysart, recent events would prove an undoubted reminder. But I am morally sure I never met your brother. Tell me all you care to—I may be able to help you."

And thus invited, she briefly outlined for him the story of Rick's exile.

"It's a common enough story," said Kane. "Hundreds of young Englishmen leave the old country with no better excuse and no better prospects than he had, and after a few ups and downs become successful in one of a dozen ways open to men of courage and conviction. Take my own case," he concluded, smiling.

Her looks brightened, and his cheery words seemed to give her renewed confidence.

"Could you show me his picture?" he continued. "I never forget a face, and if we have ever met I can tell you in an instant."

"The only photograph I have was taken long before Rick left England, and I am afraid it would not assist your memory, Mr. Kane. But Miss Churchill has one which was done in South Africa less than two years ago, I should think."

"The very thing!" he exclaimed. "I purpose riding over to Gatewood, and will let you know the result."

"I—we—shall be so grateful to you, Mr. Kane, for any news or encouragement. When I sit here, talking to you about the Cape it seems as if Rick were not so far away after all!"

And she flashed him a dazzling smile through tears which would flow all unbidden at the memory of the exile.

Kane rose as if to go, and Stella rose too. He had started for Denecroft that morning of set purpose to propose to the girl, but the conversation was taking a turn that he had not foreseen, and one which might or might not form a propitious prelude to what he wanted to say.

However, he was not the man to shrink from a slight obstacle, and to leave Denecroft without having spoken his rede would seem too much like a repulse or a defeat. So he determined to make it now or never. But he must not be too precipitate.

Despite his supreme confidence in his lucky star, Kane knew perfectly well that in thus raising his eyes to an alliance with an English girl of rank and fortune the chances were dead against him. A year ago the world did not know his name. Had they met two years ago he shuddered to think of what their relative positions would have been. He knew very well that it was his wealth alone which now enabled him to meet her on even terms, and he realized clearly that unless he could impress his personality and his manhood upon her, mere money would profit him nothing.

Could he make himself indispensable to this gentle and high-born English maiden—he, the erstwhile adventurer and outcast? At least, he could try! It should be the fight of his life! If the way to Stella's heart lay through her regard for the absent and long-lost brother, why, Rossiter Kane could be counted upon to play the sympathetic part desired. So he deftly took up his cue, saying in answer to her last words:

"To say that I am highly honored by your confidence but faintly expresses my sentiments, Miss Dysart. Indeed, I am glad you confided in me, for it shows you do not regard me as an utter outsider."

He paused, and her eyes met his ardent gaze. In that moment, in that glance, the whole of life was changed for these two.

With woman-like intuition she divined his drift, and although up to that time she had not distinctly realized his passionate admiration of her, or that she was being wooed, the instant discovery of it was, if anything, pleasurable rather than otherwise.

"Forgive me if I speak of myself," he said. "My life has been a rough one, and I have had neither the leisure nor the desire for the society of women—until lately—until I met you. Then newer and sweeter hopes arose. From the very first moment I loved you with all the strength of my manhood, and I determined, if I might, to win the priceless treasure of your love."

He advanced a pace, and took her unresisting hand in his. It was characteristic of the man that at this crisis he indulged in no special pleading, but went straight to the point.

Stella's golden head sunk lower and lower, until he could not see her face. But the little hand was not withdrawn. Bending over her he went on:

"Miss Dysart," he said, "all that I am, all that I hope to be, all that I

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have, I lay at your feet, but they cannot outweigh my love. Will you be my wife?"

There was no answer. She stood before him, nervously clasping and unclasping her fingers, her head with its aureole of sunny hair so drooped that her face was hid from view. Kane could not see her eyes—a glance into their depths would perchance have apprised him how to proceed, but he was forced to "go it blind," as he would have said concerning some mere business venture.

"I know it looks like cool presumption for a man from nowhere in particular to aspire so high, Miss Dysart," he went on in a deep undertone that she alone could hear. "The prisoner throws himself unreservedly upon the mercy of his judge. I'm unworthy of you in every sense," he said, with that complete self-abasement which the strongest and most unscrupulous men feel when in the presence of a pure and innocent woman, "save that I love you, and you alone. I never said that to a girl before," he continued, as if the thought had just occurred to him that perhaps she might be hesitating for fear that a man of his years was not as heart-free as he was foot-free.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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