

The Quest of Betty Lancey

By MAGDA F. WEST

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CHAPTER XIII.—(Continued.)

"Your name?" asked Morris. "Benoni," answered the black. "Just Benoni."

"American?" asked Larry.

"I've lived there," volunteered Benoni. "Where are we going now?"

"Anywhere to get away from them," replied Johnny.

"Then don't go so far to the right. Turn at the next crossing—there—now turn to your left again—see? Beyond those hills we'll find a snug den!"

The motor wheezed and grunted and turned awkwardly into the debouchment of the mountain side.

"How'd you come to get in such a scrape?" asked Larry. "Ever see that woman before? Do you know her at all?"

"Benoni nodded. "Yes, I gave her passage money to go back to Maine to her family once, and she gambled it away. Then she came to me again, and wanted some more money and I refused to give it to her, and she's hated me ever since, I guess. I hadn't seen her for years."

"Like a woman," commented Johnny.

Larry smoked in silence, till Benoni asked: "Exploring? Or just touring?"

"How long since you've been in the States?" asked Johnny.

"Just came from there a week ago," replied Benoni.

"Then you heard of the Wayne murder mystery, of course? Well, were you hunting for the abducted Miss Lancey?"

"Benoni raised his woolly eyebrows. "You're a nice hunt," he observed. "Have you any trace of where she might be? Africa is very large, larger even than your vaunted State of Texas."

"I know," responded Larry, curtly. "But if a man's heart's in the hunt he doesn't stop to reckon the length of the chase."

Benoni smiled. "You are related to Miss Lancey?"

"Not yet," said Johnny. "He's just hoping that way."

Benoni sprung out of the car. He paced by its side nervously for a few seconds, and then stopped beside Larry.

"I am black, as you see," spoke Benoni, "but I own the blood of kings and my mind is far wiser than that of any white man."

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Johnny, exhausted, had dropped from his horse and was trying to drag himself towards the muddy plain.

Benoni was as unshaken as the palm tree standing motionless in the desert calm. He pulled Johnny up, bolstered him along with a draught from his flask, and set him to rights generally.

"How are you, Morris?" he asked.

"I'm neither," answered Benoni. "I want to sleep. I worked all night while you fellows rested. Will you keep watch for me? Wake me at the slightest sound. And if I'm not up by starlight, call me that name."

Long before that hour, though, the great black was up and ready. All of their luggage he stacked in a great heap and set fire to it. They waited till the pile gave signs of thorough ignition, then led by Benoni the trio set out through the jungle.

The walk was a fight for breath. There were briars that pricked, gnats that stung, knotted vines that trapped unwary feet. Sometimes the foot stepped upon a sordid snake, causing the reptile to coil around the ankle in a horrifying manner.

Benoni paused for nothing. With one arm plunged forward, with the other he grasped hold of Larry and bade him pull Johnny in their wake. This nightmare struggle lasted not longer than a quarter of an hour, but when they had come out into the open, Larry was shaking like a leaf in the wind and Johnny was too far gone for words.

"We can rest but an hour or two," volunteered Benoni, curtly. "Then we must go on."

"But where?" asked Larry. "I don't want to go into darkest Africa, but this affair is growing too shaky for me. I don't care about being handled like a packhouse cow!"

Benoni turned a reproachful eye upon him. "I have promised to help you find the girl you seek, can you not rely upon me? I know my Africa, and I know the ways of the jungle. You are for aiding me to escape from this cafe mob—that corral filled with worse than the beasts of the jungle—drunken, infuriated swine that once were men."

"Hello, what's this?" asked Johnny. "In always finding things—now ain't it looking at this in the desert, too?"

He held up to view a plump, poor Johnny, the shortest of the three, was carried off his feet and almost drowned, but they got ashore somehow, but all their food except two tins of biscuits in waterproof canisters were soaked. This happened their third day on the river, and they had yet another day's travel ahead of them.

The next day the rains commenced and the river teemed with the floods. Benoni moored the punt at the mouth of a cave that yawned from a little hillock on what had once been the river's bank.

"Doves like that nest in but one place in all this continent," he remarked, and his face became ashen gray as he noted the odd markings of purple and brown on his snowy breast. "Only one place," he repeated.

Johnny had been turning the bird over and over, rumpling up the helpless wings. Something caught his eye, and he held the dead dove out with upraised wing for the others to see. Scratched on its wing in rude letters they read:

"Benoni, Africa!"

"Benoni!" cried Larry. "Then he seized Benoni by the wrist. 'If doves like that nest in but one place on this continent, take us there, take us at once. What place is it? Where? Would she be safe? Or in the hands of savages?'"

"That is where we have been traveling," answered Benoni. "I'm going to tell you, my friend, I had not certainly known. We will not even rest for the hour, if you wish."

"I must," answered Johnny. "Safety razors. I'm beat out. I'm not a camel in the pink of condition. Ten days later they found a second pigeon."

"Tell me, tell me something," pleaded Larry.

But the sands were not more silent. Benoni made but one reply. "I dare not. It might destroy all hope!"

Day after day, clinked off this arduous travel. Once they met a caravan and Benoni bargained for fresh horses. The erstwhile novelty was succeeded by a feverish unrest. Both Americans stood the journey well, and Benoni set the pace in the dark condition. Ten days later they found a second pigeon.

This one was alive and fluttered to their very luncheon table. Larry covered it with his hat, and bent its wings back fiercely only to find a bitter disappointment, for there was no message traced upon the wing.

Two days later they reached a native village, hanging tassel-like upon the borders of an immense jungle. Benoni hired bearers to break the way for them, and for a week they journeyed in a setting of tropic grass and dusky skies. One morning Larry awoke to find the camp deserted of all but Benoni and Johnny. The horses were gone and even the little Arab had disappeared.

"What a shame," groaned Johnny. "How can a man with a mind do such things as this?"

"You never did," said Larry, quietly. "Here, let's take him home. Come, Sulvester, come on, we've got something to tell you."

CHAPTER XIV.

Benoni was waiting at the den. With him was a small Arabian servant. Benoni himself was astride a magnificent black horse, and smaller mounts were saddled for the two Americans. The little Arab rode a wizen, but an obscure street, and led the pack horse by a short tether.

The black was still more of the physically perfect by daylight than he had been under the lamplight and the later gleam of the moon. He was even yet more taciturn. Larry and Johnny jugged along side by side. Benoni paced them, at times making far excursions ahead, returning with foaming horses and flushed faces.

At noon they stopped beside a scant little creek for rest. The sun was unendurable and despite their visored and veiled helmets, Johnny and Larry were suffering terribly from sunburn and their hands were blistered from the reins.

The little Arab spread their luncheon for them and went over to rest with the horses, staked a few rods distant. Benoni produced healing salve and showed his two companions how to relieve the worst of their distress. The tropical noon sped in heat, silence and half-slumber. At 5 o'clock Benoni roused the little caravan, and after a hasty supper, told them to make ready for a long, hard ride. All night they journeyed. Through desert wastes and over rocky fastnesses, up steep mountains and across half-stagnant shallow rivers. And even when the dawn came there was no resting. The horses, jaded and covered with a coating of dust and sweat, stuck their feet wearily into the sand or clung

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The walk was a fight for breath. There were briars that pricked, gnats that stung, knotted vines that trapped unwary feet. Sometimes the foot stepped upon a sordid snake, causing the reptile to coil around the ankle in a horrifying manner.

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their meal finished, they fell to playing mumble-peg in the clearing where camp had been struck. Mumble-peg falling as a time-killer, they tried rolling marbles out of the soft clay, and had put up a very passable game of "Mibs" when they heard a rustling and crackling in the brush and foliage around them.

"Bets on a lion," said Johnny.

"Oh, make it a cannibal king or a boa constrictor," suggested Larry. "Something novel!"

Benoni appeared at the edge of the clearing.

"Larry wins," was Johnny's greeting. "I bet on a lion—he said 'I was a cannibal king approaching.'"

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CURRENT EVENTS OF THE WEEK

Doings of the World at Large Told in Brief.

General Resume of Important Events Presented in Condensed Form for Our Busy Readers.

Oklahoma has attacked the Pullman Car company to obtain lower rates.

The government has been asked to intervene in the Nicaraguan revolution.

A fire destroyed the business section of Paterson, N. J., causing a loss of \$500,000.

A Missouri court has fined a telephone company \$175,000 for violation of the anti-trust laws.

President Taft promises to do all in his power to hasten the irrigation projects authorized by congress.

Ten acres of tide lands at Tacoma, occupied by sawmills, boat houses, etc., were swept by fire; loss \$85,000.

Parliament has altered the coronation oath of the king of England, so as not to be offensive to the Catholic church.

Seven men supposed to have been lost in a gale on Cook's Inlet, Alaska, have been found alive, though suffering greatly.

Railroads of the United States are to adopt a uniform code of signals, so that employees of different roads can work together.

To offset bad crop prospects, farmers from the Northern wheat states are buying heavily in the Minneapolis wheat markets and the price is steadily rising.

The suit of Rudolph Franke against Commander Peary for extorting \$10,000 worth of valuable furs from Dr. Cook for bringing him back to civilization has been begun in a German court.

Roosevelt will undergo an operation for throat trouble.

Many congressional inquiries will be made during the summer.

Crops in the dry farming sections of Montana are unusually good.

Robbers held up an O. R. & N. train just leaving Ogden, Utah, but got little.

A variety actress in Cleveland, Ohio, has gone insane over the coming Jeffries-Johnson prizefight.

Jacob Schiff, one of the most prominent of New York bankers, says the financial stringency is past.

An American boat won the jubilee prize in the races at Kiel, Germany. The emperor's boat was beaten.

An imperial edict issued by the ruling regent in China refuses the demand of the people for a national parliament.

A Chinese tong war broke out in New York City and three Chinamen were killed and about 40 shots fired in less than two minutes.

Diaz is re-elected president of Mexico for six years, and Ramon Corral vice president. It is believed that Corral will succeed Diaz at the end of that time.

It is reported that labor conditions at the Bethlehem Steel works in Pennsylvania are disgraceful. The men work 12 hours per day, 7 days a week, and do not get enough pay to enable them to live outside of boarding houses.

Secretary of War Dickinson says Ballinger will be fully vindicated.

On advice of Ballinger, President Taft vetoed the Siletz settlers' land bill.

The Weyerhaeuser Timber company is accused of extensive timber land frauds in Idaho.

Senator Gore, the blind senator from Oklahoma, says there is much corruption in his state.

Secretary of War Dickinson refuses to remove the colored troops from Fort Lawton, near Seattle, Wash.

The Postal Telegraph company and the Western Union and Bell companies are in a big lawsuit over rights in Mexico.

It is said Roosevelt will urge Hughes to resign the Supreme court bench, to which he was recently appointed, and run again for governor of New York.

Three robbers, after committing a robbery and double murder at Lynn, Mass., were pursued by citizens in autos, one being killed, one captured, badly wounded, and the third forced to commit suicide.

A Mississippi river excursion boat, with 1,500 persons on board, caught fire and was entirely destroyed. So far as known only three persons lost their lives,