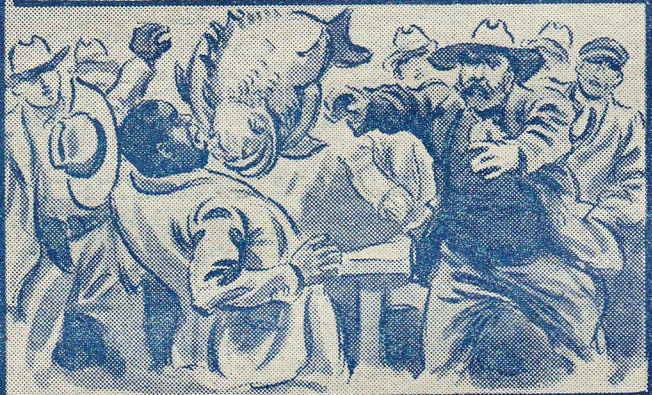


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Sidney's Word of Honour.

BURKE continued his tale of treachery.

"On the other hand, many a time I have stepped between an oppressor and his victim, and my authority has always been used to restrain the ferocity of the native troops." He smiled faintly. "I want you to know the best as well as the worst, Sidney."

"Forgive me, Bernard!" Sidney held out his hand, and the captain grasped it warmly.

There was silence for a few minutes.

"Now you know all," resumed Burke. "do you wonder that I hate Jacques Louvois—that I have sworn to take upon him a revenge as terrible as the injury he did me?"

"No, I do not wonder."

"The chance came unexpectedly. It was Fate that brought him to the Congo. He has escaped me this time, but one swallow does not make a summer." Burke gritted his teeth. "My time will come."

Sidney was looking very thoughtful. "And yet—" he said slowly, half to himself.

The captain looked at him quickly.

"What are you thinking of?"

Sidney coloured a little.

"I was thinking of Mademoiselle Louvois. Her uncle is a scoundrel; but she—I am sure of it—she is as good and pure as she is beautiful."

Burke smiled grimly. He could see the drift of Sidney's thoughts.

"I do not doubt it, Sidney. I should not be surprised to learn that she is destined to be a new victim of some black treachery of his."

Sidney started.

"What do you suspect, Burke?"

"When I first learned that Louvois was setting out from Boma with his niece for Nkota Pool, I guessed that there was some foul play afoot. The nature of it I cannot say."

"You are right, Bernard. The same thought crossed my mind. She cannot have known the kind of place she was going to. Hellendorf is a scoundrel; and Louvois, he was so decided in getting rid of me as soon as we reached the

bungalow, I knew there was something behind it. And yet, how to interfere between her and her uncle—and I a perfect stranger?"

So ran Sidney's muttered reflections. But Burke was no longer listening. His mind was filled by his own bitter thoughts.

Sidney had finished his meal. He rose and lighted a cigarette.

"Well, Burke, am I a prisoner?"

The captain shook his head.

"No, Sidney. All I ask is your pledge not to interfere again between Jacques Louvois and me."

Sidney hesitated. He was thinking of Marie.

"And if I do not give it?"

"You will give it. You will not

accept your freedom at my hands and remain my enemy."

"No, I could not do that. I give you my parole, then."

"I rely upon you."

There was a short silence.

"You are going to follow this trail, then, to the bitter end?" Sidney asked reflectively.

"To the death!"

"Have you thought what the consequences are likely to be? The wrongs you have received at the hands of Louvois will count for nothing at Boma. I have learned from mademoiselle that he has come to this region to take an official post. By attacking him, and using Government troops for the pur-



Hellendorf caught a momentary glimpse of the new comer ere a stunning blow sent him crashing to the earth. It was Sidney Lisle!

pose, you place yourself in a peculiar position. What will they say in Boma?"

Burke shrugged his shoulders.

"Let them say what they will. So long as I have my revenge I care little what follows. Besides, a bribe at Boma will effect almost anything if it be large enough."

Sidney smiled.

"However, Louvois is pretty certain to remain in the shelter of the station at Nkota Pool—"

The captain made a disdainful gesture. "That will not save his skin."

"You would not venture to attack a Belgian station under the flag of King Leopold?" ejaculated Sidney.

Burke did not reply. But the look upon his face would have made Jacques Louvois shiver to his very soul if he could have seen it.

The Belgian Resorts to Drastic Measures—Sidney Appears.

"HOW do you like my bungalow, mademoiselle?"

It was morning, the day after Marie's coming to Nkota Pool.

The girl had wandered down amongst the nodding palms towards the river, more for the sake of avoiding Hellenendorf than for anything else.

Her face was thoughtful and almost gloomy. Her reflections, indeed, were painful enough.

Her uncle had not given her a faithful description of Nkota before she left Boma.

She knew that she was going to an up-country station, where things would be rough and ready; but she had not imagined that the bungalow of Ludwig Hellenendorf was to be her permanent residence.

She felt that her uncle had deceived her; she felt that it was impossible that she should remain at Nkota. But how to get away? That Louvois would refuse to return to Boma she felt sure. In her new distrust of him, she asked herself what motive he could have had for thus placing her in such a false position. Sidney's parting words recurred to her.

Was she threatened, then, by some peril, and had he foreseen it?

She wished—ah, how she wished!—that he had not gone.

That, again, was her uncle's doing.

The voice of Hellenendorf broke unpleasantly upon her reverie. She turned to face him, with a light almost of anger in her eyes.

Already she had seen that he meant to renew his old attentions. And she remembered that she was no longer in Europe. What if he would not take "No" for an answer?

"What do you think of Nkota?" he continued. "A pretty place, isn't it?"

Her eyes dwelt upon the shining river, the graceful palms, the dark, deep forest beyond.

"Very beautiful."

"Do you think you could be happy here?"

"I am afraid not, monsieur."

"Might I ask—why not?"

"A thousand reasons."

"I am sorry. I had hoped that I should be able to make you happy here."

"Monsieur!"

"It is true, mademoiselle. You are

aware that I love you. I told you so before. I tell you so again."

Marie coloured deeply.

"You have no right to speak to me so. I gave you an answer once—"

"But you might change that."

"Impossible!"

"You are cruel! I love you devotedly."

"Monsieur, you displease me by saying so, and I beg of you not to mention the subject again."

A gleam shot into the Belgian's eyes.

"Ah, that is what I cannot promise!"

"Monsieur Hellenendorf!"

"I repeat that I love you!"

"You insult me!"

Marie turned haughtily away. An oath rose to the Belgian's lips. He sprang forward and caught her arms.

"How dare you!"

She tore herself free, and faced him with flashing eyes and beating heart, and the colour coming and going in her cheeks. Never had she looked more beautiful, and the Belgian's eyes gleamed with bold admiration as he looked at her.

"You must listen to me, mademoiselle."

A sense of her powerlessness rushed upon her as she caught his mocking smile. The colour faded from her cheeks, leaving her deadly pale.

"I love you, Marie, and I have sworn that you shall be my wife. I am not the kind of man to abandon a cherished project because of a woman's 'No.' I expected all this. You say you have given me my answer. Well, I say to you that that answer must be changed."

She did not reply. It seemed to her as if her heart were ceasing to beat.

The Belgian came a step nearer. She shrank back, her eyes fixed on his, dilating.

"Here, I am master. If you will not listen to fair words, you shall listen to harsh ones. You disdained me before. I have not forgotten it. But now it is I who can dictate!"

"You—you coward!"

He laughed boisterously.

"You will find it better, mademoiselle, to conciliate me than to defy me."

"Conciliate you! You coward! I despise you!" she broke out—"I despise and detest you!"

The sallow face all of a sudden reddened with rage.

"By Heaven—"

"Let me pass!"

He had planted himself in her path to the house. His eyes, fixed upon hers, glittered with mockery. Her words had roused all the venom of his evil nature.

"A kiss, mademoiselle—a forfeit for your cruel words. I claim it!" he laughed.

And, baffling her attempt to elude him, he caught her in his arms.

A startled scream broke from Marie, ringing far through the palm-trees.

Hellenendorf laughed again.

"Help, help!" screamed Marie, as a footstep sounded amongst the trees.

Hellenendorf, turning, with an oath upon his lips, caught a momentary glimpse of the newcomer ere a stunning blow sent him crashing to the earth.

It was Sidney Lisle!

Sidney and Marie—The Treachery of Hellenendorf.

SIDNEY stood over the Belgian, his eyes ablaze, his fists clenched, ready to repeat the blow if Ludwig Hellenendorf rose.

But he did not rise. He had fallen like

a log, and he lay like one, his eyes closed, his breathing stertorous. He was stunned. Sidney had struck with all the force of his powerful arm, and a second blow was not needed.

He turned from the fallen ruffian to Marie. The girl's face was full of amazement.

"Monsieur Lisle! Thanks—oh, thanks!"

Sidney drew a deep breath. He had seen her in the arms of Hellenendorf, and it had kindled in his heart a rage that astonished himself. He could have killed the Belgian.

"I heard you call, mademoiselle. I was yonder, by the river. Has he hurt you?"

"No; he—he frightened me."

She was recovering her composure now; but her heart was still beating violently. A short silence fell between them.

She wondered how he came to be at hand. She had been amazed to see him there.

And Sidney did not explain that he had been lingering about Nkota in the hope of seeing her—with no definite object in view, save that of assuring himself that all was yet well with her.

What he had seen gave him sufficient assurance upon that point. All was not well—all was very far from well.

Marie spoke again, casting a disquieting glance at the stark, silent Belgian. There was no sound of anyone approaching the spot; the circling palm-trees concealed the scene from the view of the bungalow.

"He—he is not dead?"

"Dead! Oh, no!" Sidney reassured her, with a smile. "That would be no more than he deserves, though, the cowardly dog!"

"Oh, no, no!"

Sidney reflected. He had an opportunity now of speaking freely to Marie, but he did not know how long it would last. They might be interrupted at any moment. It did not take him long, then, to decide what to say.

"Mademoiselle, you believe that I am your friend, do you not?"

"Surely, I do!"

"I am a stranger to you, almost, and if I ask you to trust me—"

"I would do so with my life," she said, with unconscious earnestness.

Sidney's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"Thank you! Will you, then, allow me to give you counsel?"

"Gladly—gladly! I was never more in need of it than at this moment," she said, in a faltering voice. "What to do I know not."

"You are in danger here."

"Alas! I know it."

"And M. Louvois, your natural protector, is not worthy of your trust."

A deeply-troubled look came over her face. She felt that Sidney was right, and yet—Louvois was her dead father's brother, and she was loath to believe. She was silent.

"Believe me, mademoiselle, I speak only for your good. I counsel you to leave Nkota."

"Oh, would that I could!"

"I will aid you to do so."

She started.

"You, monsieur?"

"I! Say but the word, and I will take you back to Boma in spite of them all."

"You are very kind," she faltered. "I thank you from my heart. But—but I—"

Sidney understood her hesitation—to leave her uncle, her guardian, to trust

herself to a stranger. True, he had proved his faith, but—in fact, there were endless "buts."

"It is true, mademoiselle, that this flight would be a desperate step for you to take. I am aware of that. But it is the lesser of two evils. Can you remain in the society of that?"

He made a gesture towards the silent Belgian.

She shuddered.

"Oh, heavens!" she cried. "What can I do?"

Sidney was silent in his turn. It was not his place to urge her.

"Perhaps if I appealed to my uncle he would take me away," said Marie, with a gleam of hope.

Sidney looked doubtful.

"And if he does not?"

She did not reply for a full minute. She was thinking deeply, painfully; but at length her troubled face set in an expression of resolve.

"If he does not, monsieur, I shall accept your generous offer of aid. After what has passed, I cannot remain here."

"So be it. But we must not forget that Ludwig Hellendorf will oppose your going, and that he has force upon his side."

Marie looked startled.

"I had not thought of that."

"It will be necessary to use caution. At midnight I will have a canoe on the Congo. I will await you at the landing-place. If you have decided to fly; you will meet me there. They do not watch you?"

"Oh, no."

"You think you will be able to come if you wish?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"You must take care, of course, that they do not suspect your intention. Speak to M. Louvois, but let nothing of this escape you."

"I will be careful. And, oh, believe that I am very grateful!"

"I would die for you, mademoiselle!"

She coloured a little as she gave him her hand. But the warmth of his tone woke a strange, pleasant thrill in her heart.

"Adieu, then, monsieur!"

"Or au revoir!" he said, with a smile.

He watched her till the palms hid her. How beautiful she was—how sweet! How worthy of love and tenderness! And at that thought the colour deepened in his sunburnt cheek.

He remembered the Belgian, with a start, and turned to look at him.

Hellendorf still lay motionless, his eyes closed, his under-jaw dropped. There was a big blue bruise on his face. His breathing was thick and heavy, and came in jerks. He looked as if he would not recover for hours—as if he possibly would not recover at all.

Whether he recovered or not, Sidney cared little. If he had been able to look a little into the future, he would have sent a bullet through the Belgian's black heart as he lay there. But the future was hid. Leaving Hellendorf where he lay, to fare as he might, Sidney strode away from the scene of the rencontre, and entered the shades of the forest.

His footsteps died away. Ludwig Hellendorf was alone.

And then a strange and startling change came over the Belgian.

He sat up, his eyes opened, and he rubbed with his hand the aching bruise his face bore. He cast a look of demonic hatred in the direction in which the Britisher had gone.

"Curse him! Curse him! He shall die like a dog for that blow!" he hissed,

his eyes gleaming like a savage animal's. "Heaven! How my head aches! Curse him!"

And then, in the midst of his cursing, a grim chuckle broke from him at the thought of how he had deceived the Englishman.

The blow had stunned him; he had lain unconscious for many minutes. But when consciousness struggled back, and he found Sidney and Marie in talk, his native cunning and treachery suggested the course he followed. And he had played his part so well that Sidney, keen as he was, had no suspicion of the truth.

The Belgian had overheard only the last sentences of Sidney and Marie. But they were sufficient to place him in possession of their plans.

He picked himself up and walked unsteadily towards the bungalow. His brain was by no means clear yet; his head was aching terribly; one of his eyes was closed. He felt sick and dull; but, all the same, a sense of fierce satisfaction was strong within him. He held the man he hated in the hollow of his hand.

"He will take her to Boma, will he?" He gritted his teeth, and grinned derisively. "Well, we shall see!"

A Vain Appeal—The Snare for Sidney.

"UNCLE! Uncle Jacques!"
Louvois removed his cigar and looked up uneasily. "There was an expression upon his niece's face that he did not like.

"Well, Marie?"

"I want you to take me back to Boma."

"Back to Boma! Nonsense!"

"Uncle, I must go. It is impossible for me to remain here."

Louvois shifted nervously.

"What has happened?"

"I have been insulted by that—that man!" Her cheeks burned at the remembrance. "Uncle, will you take me back to Boma?"

He did not answer the direct question.

"Surely you exaggerate, Marie? I am certain that Ludwig did not mean to offend you. He loves you."

"Uncle!"

"He wishes to make you his wife. In my opinion, you do wrong to disdain him."

"Monsieur!"

"It is time, Marie, that I made you an explanation. I am under deep obligations to M. Hellendorf."

"However—"

"Do you know why I left Europe?"

She shook her head.

"It was because I was a ruined man. Ludwig Hellendorf's help was to me like a plank to a drowning man. He has obtained for me a post on the Congo—security from my creditors, and a chance of getting rich. Can you guess why he has done it, Marie?"

She was silent.

"It is because he loves you."

"And you—you accepted all that, thinking that I—I would—"

"Marry him. Yes."

"It was cruel—base!"

"Marie!"

"Yes, I repeat it. But I will not submit. I would choose a reptile from the swamp rather than Ludwig Hellendorf!" she cried, with flashing eyes.

An extremely unpleasant look crept over the thin face of her uncle.

"Calm yourself, Marie," he said coldly. "It is necessary to remember that I am not master here; nor does it rest with you to give orders."

"Do you mean, monsieur, that we are at the mercy of the Belgian?"

"Can you not see that such is the case?"

"And you, my uncle, placed me in this position?" she exclaimed, with angry scorn.

"Reproaches are useless, Marie. You had better take a sensible view of the case."

She set her lips firmly. Her resolution was already taken.

"Monsieur, do you refuse to take me back to Boma?" she asked quietly.

"It is impossible!"

"How impossible?"

"For one reason, because Hellendorf would not permit our departure—not yours, at all events."

"I am a prisoner, then?"

Jacques Louvois shrugged his shoulders.

"One word more," said the girl calmly, very quietly. "I consider, monsieur, that you have forfeited all claim to my obedience."

And with that she left him.

Louvois gave another shrug. He was disturbed; but at the same time relieved. He had feared a scene of tears and reproaches. That Marie would give him serious trouble he did not anticipate. She

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would end by a surrender. What else could he do?

"The dickens! What's the matter, Hellendorf?"

He looked up as the Belgian stood before him.

The aspect of Hellendorf's face was certainly a little startling, and Louvois stared at him in amazement.

"Nothing—only—the Englishman has been here," the Belgian replied grimly.

"Sidney Lisle," ejaculated Louvois, with a start.

"Yes. What has mademoiselle been saying?"

"That she wished to leave Nkota."

"And you told her—"

"That it was impossible."

Hellendorf chuckled.

"She has lost no time. That was the first part of the game."

Louvois looked bewildered.

"What are you talking about, Ludwig?"

The Belgian threw himself into a seat and lighted a cheroot.

"Only this—that Sidney Lisle and Marie have agreed to fly together, if you should refuse to take her back to Boma."

"Is it possible?"

"As I say."

"But how—"

Hellendorf laconically explained. The Frenchman listened in amazement and alarm.

"The dickens! It is lucky we know their intentions," he exclaimed. "It will not be difficult to checkmate that meddling Englishman. I had a feeling that Lisle suspected something." Louvois continued, nodding his head sagely.

"But I thought that after the way I had dismissed him we had seen the last of him. I was mistaken. He will have to be reckoned with. Have you formed a plan?"

The Belgian nodded.

"What are you going to do?"

"Lisle will be allowed to come to the rendezvous. But he will not find Mademoiselle Louvois there. He will find me and half a dozen riggers ready to lay him by the heels."

"And Marie?"

"She shall be guarded in her room."

"But—but—" Louvois looked nervously at the Belgian. "What will you do with Lisle when you have taken him?"

Hellendorf's face blazed with sudden ferocity.

"Do you see the mark upon my face, and then ask me that question?"

"You will kill him?"

"I will kill him like a dog!"

"But—there is danger—"

"You are a coward, Louvois, and a fool as well. The danger would lie in sparing him, not in killing him. If we made him a prisoner he would get away sooner or later; and if the story were told in Boma, and the English consul took it up, it might be ruin to me, to say nothing of the revenge he would seek—a bullet for me and another for you, probably. Ah! I see that affects you!" he said derisively, as Jacques Louvois gave a start and changed colour.

"Let him die, then. He deserves it for his meddling!" Louvois said savagely.

"Oh, he shall die! His life is little enough to pay for the blow he gave me. And, besides, it is not only an enemy, but a rival I am going to rid myself of."

"What do you mean?"

"Bah! What do you think he is meddling for? The days of Don Quixote are past. The fool has fallen in love with Marie. That's his motive."

"In that case it's doubly necessary to be rid of him," Louvois said thought-

fully. "Only, let there be no bungling about it."

"Rely upon me," Hellendorf grinned. "And after I have plunged my sword through his heart he shall be flung to the crocodiles. Ah, I am thirsting for that moment!"

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