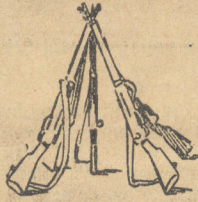


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Tracked In The Bush.

A STORY OF THE BUSHRANGERS OF AUSTRALIA.

By CECIL HERBERT.

FOES OF THE BUSH!—A RIDE FOR LIFE!

Crack! crack!
Dick Stanley started to his feet. He had been lying at full length in the shade of a gum tree, in the heart of the Australian bush, and his horse was cropping the herbage round him as he lay at rest.

It was a blazing day in the bush.

The sun was like a ball of fire in a sky of burning blue.

The vertical rays poured down upon the bush, and the dry twigs crackled in the scorching heat: and bird and beast were silent and at rest.

Dick Stanley had been dosing drowsily, his head on a heap of twigs, his long powerful limbs stretched at length on the baked earth. It was too hot for sleep, and the insects were buzzing too busily round him.

The sudden crack-crack of a rifle in the bush startled him instantly.

His face expressed blank amazement.

Who was shooting in the bush in that blaze of tropical heat? No hunter would be on the track: even the bushrangers would hardly be active at such a time? Whence had come the sudden, ringing shot through the silence of the bush?

Crack!
Crack!

Again the snots rang clearly through the thickets, and this time they sounded nearer to the young hunter.

Dick Stanley picked up his rifle, and looked to it to see that it was ready for instant use. In the bush that covered

the lower slopes of lonely Mount Sturt, in South Australia, he knew that many a gang of lawless bushrangers had their lairs. Foes were probably at hand—but the young Englishman had been through too many dangers during a year spent in the Australian bush to care for that.

Crack! crack!

There was a crash in the thickets.

A form came into view under the gum trees, and Dick gave a cry of astonishment.

It was no huge, bearded bushranger: no traveller or hunter, that appeared before his eyes in the scorching sunlight.

It was the slight figure of a girl that came tottering from the bush.

Dick Stanley sprang towards her.

The girl stopped, unsteadily, and her right hand came up: a revolver in it.

"Back! Stand back, or I will fire!"

The young hunter halted. He raised his broad sunhat, a slight smile upon his handsome bronzed face.

"I am no enemy, Miss. You do not need your revolver."

She looked at him quickly. The handsome sunburnt face; the clear honest eyes, the smile, reassured her, and the hand that held the revolver sank to her side.

"You—you are not one of them?" she panted.

"Of whom?"

"The bushrangers?"



Dick sprang upon the Frenchman, and grasping his wrist, forced the weapon upward.

He laughed.

"Do I look like a bushranger?"

Just You See if Your Chum up North Wouldn't Like This Paper

"No, no, but——"

"Are you pursued by them?" asked Dick, quickly. "If so, rely upon me. I will stand by you to the death."

"Heaven bless you! I have found a friend."

The tears started to the girl's eyes.

"You have indeed! But that firing—were they firing upon you—a girl?" cried Dick, in amazement.

She shook her head.

"No. My father——"

"Where is he?"

"He is here."

A man came staggering from the bush.

He was a man of sixty years at least, and his hair and beard were iron-grey, his face thin and hard and cold.

Little resemblance was there between him and the fair, blooming girl who ran to his side and caught him by the arm.

"Father! Father, dear! I have found help."

The man was pale and worn. He was evidently sinking with fatigue, and at the sight of his distress, Dick felt a pang of remorse for the feeling of dislike with which he had instinctively looked at the crafty face.

"A friend?" gasped the fugitive, leaning heavily on the girl's arm. "It is too late—we are doomed, and I can go no further."

He sank to the ground as he spoke.

The girl gave a cry of distress.

"Father! Father, dear! Make one more effort! We have eluded them so far—we may escape before they find the track a gain.

Crack!

Crack!

The shots were ringing in the bush.

The man gave a convulsive start as he heard them.

"It is useless, Clotilde." He gave a deep groan. "I am doomed."

"Never, never."

The girl ran towards Dick Stanley.

"You will save him?"

"I will save you," said Dick, "and your father if I can."

"No, no, you must save him—perhaps they will not harm me—but my father——"

"Are you sure then that they seek his life? Even the bushrangers would not kill for sport. It is his money——"

"No, no, he has no money—it is his life they seek."

"But why?"

"They hate him—it is Black George, the bushranger, who is hunting him down—save him."

Dick looked puzzled.

What the feud could be between Black George the bushranger and this trembling fugitive he could not imagine, but there was no doubting the girl's earnestness.

"Save him, save him!"

"I will save him!"

"Ah, too late!" screamed the girl. "They are here."

It was a cry of despair.

From the bushes came a spurring horseman, a bearded, brutal-faced fellow with a rifle in his hands.

He gave a yell of triumph at the sight of the man on the ground, and threw the muzzle of the rifle forward to fire.

Crack!

But it was not the bushranger's rifle that spoke.

His action had told plainly enough that he intended the swift and merciless death of the exhausted fugitive, and Dick Stanley did not hesitate.

It was his rifle that cracked, and the bushranger, his shot unfired, reeled off his rearing horse, and crashed to the ground.

There he lay groaning, with a bullet through his arm, and his shoulder dislocated by the fall.

Dick sprang towards the horse, and seized it by the bridle.

"Quick!" he cried. "Mount here. Quick!"

The man on the ground staggered to his feet.

New hope was blazing in his sunken eyes.

"By heaven!" he exclaimed. "It is a chance of life!

Whoever you are, I will make you rich if you save me——"

Dick smiled grimly.

"The steed is not for you."

He signed to the girl to approach.

She did not move.

"Give the horse to my father."

"I will taken him on mine——"

"No, no—I tell you it is he that is in danger——"

"Yes, yes, it is I!" cried the man, feverishly. "She is

right. Give me the horse. Listen, I am Raymond Glyn, the banker of Ballarat, and I will give you a thousand pounds if I escape this peril. Give me the horse!"

Dick's eyes blazed with scorn.

"Man, you know that your daughter's peril is as great as yours, aye, greater and worse," he cried. "Coward! stand back."

"Clotilde——"

The girl advanced to Dick.

"Give him the horse. I tell you I will not take it."

Crack!

Crack!

The bushrangers were still firing in the wood. A random shot whizzed across the glade, and the banker trembled convulsively.

Dick looked at the girl's firm face and clear steady eyes, and knew that it was useless to remonstrate.

"Very well," he said. "Let him take the horse."

The banker scrambled upon the captured steed.

Dick stepped to his own horse.

"You will mount with me, Miss Glyn."

She hesitated.

"A double-laden horse may mean capture and death!" she cried. "You have saved my father; I will not sacrifice your life. Go alone."

The banker was already riding at full speed through the bush to the north.

Dick smiled slightly.

"Do you think I would go alone, and leave you?"

"It may be death——"

"I am not afraid of death—but we are wasting time. Come!"

She made no further demur.

He lifted her to the horse's back, and sprang up himself, and rode on the track taken by the banker.

From the bush behind came ringing shot on shot.

AT BAY!

Crack!

Crack!

The wounded bushranger left in the glade was shouting to his comrades, and the shots were ringing closer.

The banker was dashing on at full speed, in his craven fear evidently oblivious of the danger of the girl who thought so much of his safety.

But Dick Stanley was following fast.

His horse was a powerful one, and bore the double burden well.

On they dashed through bush and bramble.

The girl was clinging to the young Englishman, and Dick held her with one arm, and guided his steed with the other.

A splendid horseman was Dick Stanley, and he needed all his skill in horsemanship now in this wild race for life through the tangled bush.

Right on, till the gleaming waters of a river appeared through the bush ahead, and the banker reined in his steed with an exclamation of dismay.

He turned in the saddle as Dick came riding up.

"How can we cross?" he cried. "You are a hunter—you know this country."

"I know it."

"Then how can we cross?"

"Follow me."

"But——"

Dick Stanley did not wait for him to finish.

He turned his horse to the right, and rode on swiftly along the river bank.

The banker, with gritting teeth, followed him.

It was impossible for him to take the lead now, as he did not know the way of escape which was evidently known to the young hunter, and so the double-burdened horse went first.

The banker cast nervous glances into the bush behind.

There was a sound of galloping steeds and rattling shots, but well behind the fugitives now. The bush-rangers had followed, but not so fast. It required life on the issue to make a man ride at full speed in the blazing, tropical heat.

The girl before Dick on his horse was almost fainting with the heat and the rapidity of the motion. She clung to him convulsively and did not speak.

Dick's eyes were on the river.

On his left it rolled broad and deep, and dark woods lined the bank on the other side. Behind him laboured the banker of Ballarat.

Again he called out to the young hunter.

"Which is the way—tell me, tell me? Is it a ford?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"I am looking for it."

"Tell me—"

Dick did not listen or reply.

He was watching the broad, rolling river intently.

He uttered an exclamation as he caught sight of a mass of trees growing in the centre of the stream, with the water surging and gleaming round them.

"There is the ford."

The half-submerged trees marked the ford of the wide river.

And as they drew nearer to the spot, the riders could see the stones glistening from the river-bed through the shallow water.

Dick rode into the river without a moment's hesitation.

The water rose over his stirrups as he dashed out into the stream.

The banker cast a look behind.

A shot from the bush came whizzing by, and it carried the hat from Glyn's head, and tossed it out into the stream.

Glyn turned white to the very lips.

He gave his horse a smart blow, and dashed into the stream.

Dick was making his way rapidly towards the further bank.

He passed the half-submerged trees in the middle of the stream, and kept on, keeping the mass of vegetation directly behind him as a protection from shots from behind.

In two or three minutes he was at the northern side of the river.

The bank was steep and thick with mud, but Dick went scrambling up it on his sure-footed horse, and reached dry and in safety.

He slid from his horse, holding the girl in his arms.

"My father!"

They were Clotilde's first words.

"He is safe."

The banker was indeed safe.

He was splashing ashore, and he drew in his horse beside the halted hunter.

"Why do you stop?" he cried. "They are close behind."

"I know they are."

"Then come on—come."

"We stop here."

"We cannot fight them—they are fifteen or twenty—"

"I can fight them, or a hundred of them, in a spot like this."

If they venture across the ford under my rifle, they have more courage than sense."

Dick was prepared to hold the ford against the bushrangers. It was indeed a strong position.

The ford, which was formed by a ridge of rock under the stream, was a narrow one, and on either side of the narrow path of it the water was deep and swift.

Horsemen could only hope to ride there in single file, and then they would be largely at the mercy of a dead shot on the bank.

Dick drew the horses back into the trees, which grew down almost to the water's edge.

The banker looked irresolute.

"Why not keep on?" he urged. "We are ahead of them—it will be safer—"

Dick made a gesture of impatience.

"How long do you think we can ride on in this blazing sun?"

"I can ride on."

"Miss Glyn cannot; and ere long our horses would sink under us. And when it came to a race on foot—as it would ere long—how long do you think you will keep ahead of the bushrangers—you, a townsman, pitted against those ruffians born to hardship and fatigue."

The banker was silent.

The young hunter's argument was convincing to even a man disturbed by craven fears.

"We should sooner or later have to turn at bay," resumed Dick Stanley, "And we should never find a spot so secure as this."

"I suppose you are right."

"I know I am."

The girl had not spoken.

She seemed too breathless and exhausted to speak, and she leaned against a gum tree trying to recover herself.

The banker was silent for a moment, biting his lips nervously.

His fearful glance crossed the stream, towards the scorched bush where the shouts of the pursuers were ringing louder every moment.

They evidently knew of the existence of the ford, and were making for it.

Dick Stanley drew a fallen log closer to the edge of the stream, and knelt behind it, his rifle levelled over the top and the brambles round him screening him from view.

His eyes were gleaming, and his face set and determined.

"Then you are determined to fight?" said the banker.

"Yes."

"I shall be of no use; I am not a fighting-man—"

"I know that."

"Then I need not remain."

"Father!" cried Clotilde, with scarlet cheeks.

"Silence, Clotilde. I shall be useless here, and our friend does not need me."

"Quite true," said Dick, unmoved. "You can go."

"Will you sell me your horse?" said the banker, nervously.

"I will give you any figure you choose to name."

"I will not sell him."

"Father, how can you ask it? Why should this gentleman fight our battles?" cried Clotilde. "I for one will not desert him in such peril."

"Your father is right, Miss Glyn," said Dick, quietly. "I will not sell the horse, but I will lend him to you, and I ever an opportunity comes you will return him. He has carried me through many dangers, and I could not part with him. Take him, Miss Glyn, and welcome."

"We cannot desert you."

"Nonsense, Clotilde, what good can we do by remaining?"

"Father—"

"I say, we had better go. As for this young man, I will richly reward him."

"You had better say no more about that," said Dick quietly. "I am acting in this matter solely for the young lady's sake, and I do not set your life at a pin's fee."

"I—you—"

"There is no need for more words. Go!"

Dick lifted his hat to the girl.

"Miss Glyn, please go—the bullets will be flying in a few moments. If I live we may meet again; if I die, remember Dick Stanley. Go! It is high time."

"I shall not go!"

"But—"

"I can handle a revolver, and I shall stay."

The six-shooter was in the girl's hand now.

Her face was set with resolve.

"Clotilde! You must come! I tell you it is needless to stay."

"Father! Will you desert a man who is risking, perhaps sacrificing, his life for us, the veriest strangers to him?"

"But I tell you—"

Crack! crack! crack!

Bullets were whizzing across the sunlit river. Horsemen appeared in the bush on the opposite bank.

Crack! crack!

The banker started violently.

His pale face and trembling lips showed how great was his fear.

"Clotilde! Come!"

"I cannot come! Father, think! If they overcome Mr. Stanley, we are lost if they cross the river. Prudence as well as honour bids us stay."

Splash!

A horseman plunged into the water and rode out on the ford.

"Halt!"

Dick Stanley shouted the order.

The bushranger gave a mocking yell and pressed on.

"Halt, or I fire!"

The horsemen took no heed.

Crack!

The ring of the hunter's rifle showed that he was in deadly earnest.

The horseman gave a fearful yell, and sank back in the saddle, a wave of pallor crossing his rough, bronzed face.

The startled horse reared and plunged, and the rider went, with a splash into the stream, and the horse dashed on to the bank.

As it came plunging through the bushes, Dick Stanley tumbled up and caught the bridle, and in a moment the runaway was secured.

To drag the frightened animal into the bush, and tether the reins to a tree, was the work of a moment.

None of the bushrangers had ventured to follow where one had led.

The deadly rifle on the other side deterred them.

Down the swift stream the wounded man went floating and struggling, and a ruffian threw a rope from the bank for him to catch.

Dick could have shot down the rescuer in the act, and so counted a foe the less, but he did not do so.

His business was to defend the ford, and only in defence of his own life would he take the lives of others, even of these ruffians of the bush.

The sun-gleaming water flowed on: the bushrangers, with growls and curses, remained in the bush without venturing to show themselves. The wounded man was drawn from the river, but in the clear still air his groans could be heard.

The banker seemed to regain somewhat of his courage when he saw the check of the pursuers. Clotilde breathed more freely.

"They are stopped," said the banker. "But Black George cannot be there. If he were there they would press on."

"Why should Black George be so determined upon your death?" asked Dick Stanley. "I have never encountered the man, but by all accounts he is far less savage than the average Bushranger, and in many respects a decent fellow."

"You are mistaken—he is a fiend, he is determined that I shall not escape. If I fall into his hands I am doomed, perhaps to death by torture."

Dick Stanley did not reply.

It had occurred to him from the beginning that this was no ordinary flight of peaceful travellers from the robbers of the bush.

There was some hidden cause for this relentless pursuit of the banker of Ballarat by the gang of Black George, the bushranger.

What was the cause of the feud between them he could not guess.

But, looking at Raymond Glyn's cunning, crafty face, he thought it was very probable that the wrong was on the side of the bushranger.

"But the pursuit is stopped," said the banker, after a pause. "Shall we not resume our flight?"

"They may come on at any moment."

"But we—"

"Go, by all means. Miss Glyn, I should counsel you to accompany your father, and escape."

"Where are we to go?" cried the girl, clasping her hands.

"If we fly, whither shall we fly?"

Dick looked surprised.

"Have you no destination in view?" he asked, looking at Raymond Glyn.

The banker shook his head.

"I am completely lost in the bush," he muttered. "I have lost the road to Sturtville—"

"You are twenty miles from it, and it is on the side of the river that we have left," said Dick Stanley, drily. "You cannot regain it without passing through the bushrangers."

"I feared so—I am quite lost! We fled for our lives, and we had no time to note in what direction."

"Then if you quitted me now, where would you go?"

"Anywhere, to escape those demons."

The young hunter smiled grimly.

"Then you had better remain. If you are not accustomed to the bush, you would in all probability wander in a circle and sink exhausted at last very near your starting-point, if you did not walk into the arms of the bushrangers in the meantime."

The banker made a gesture of despair.

"What can I do?"

"Let us remain with this gentleman, father, if he is willing to burden himself with such helpless and dangerous company," said the girl, quietly.

Dick looked at her.

"I am more than willing to do my best, Miss Glyn."

"Thanks, thanks; yet what right have we to ask it at your hands?"

"The right every woman has to help and protection from every man," replied Dick. "Besides, I believe I can save you. I know a place, at all events, where security can be found if you

can reach it. On the other side of the bush, on the slopes of Mount Sturt, is a mining settlement, and there the bushrangers would not dare to venture."

"You could guide us there?"

"Yes, and would."

The banker rubbed his hands.

"Then all is well—if we can only get rid of those scoundrels."

He looked across the river.

The bushrangers had not shown themselves again.

"But—in this mining-camp—what is it called?"

"Mount Camp."

"At Mount Camp—shall we be safe?—you see, as a banker, I have some small amount of money with me," said the banker, hesitatingly. "Perhaps what would seem a considerable sum to the miners, and—"

"It would be as well to say nothing about it, for there are rough men there," said Dick Stanley.

"It is very little, you understand," said Glyn, quickly.

"You must not suppose that it is a large sum. I—"

"I do not care how large or small it is," said Dick, impatiently. "Do you think it is in danger from me, sir?"

"No, no, but—"

Crack!

A bullet came whizzing over the shining water, and the banker broke off, and dodged into the bushes with ludicrous haste.

Then came a burst of firing.

The bullets tore through bush and bramble. Showers of leaves and twigs came down upon the three crouching there behind the trees.

Dick's eye was gleaming along the barrel of his rifle.

He thought that the burst of firing probably portended an onslaught, and he was right.

The volleying suddenly ceased, and there was a rush of horsemen into the water.

Five desperate riders came dashing along the ford, and at their head was a burly, black-bearded fellow with a seamed and scared face and fierce black eyes.

The banker gave a cry.

"Black George!"

DEFEATED—FRIEND OR FOE.

Black George the bushranger came on as fiercely and as fearlessly as though no foe was hidden in the bush on the bank, no rifle waiting ready to pick him off.

Dick Stanley felt something of admiration for the iron nerve of the bushranger.

But that did not hold back his shot.

His rifle bore full upon Black George, and his finger was upon the trigger, his eye gleaming along the barrel.

"Kill him!" muttered the banker between his white lips.

"Kill him!"

His fingers were twitching, his lips trembling.

"Kill him, Dick Stanley. A thousand pounds for his death!"

Dick Stanley took no notice of the savage words.

He had no intention of taking life if he could help it, except as a last resort to save his own or that of Clotilde Glyn.

His rifle was aimed at the bushranger's shoulder, and Dick Stanley was sufficiently good a marksman to be able to send a bullet where he chose.

Crack!

The bullet struck the bushranger's leather jacket like a hail on glass, and Black George gave a fearful cry.

As he reeled back his hand unconsciously tightened on the rein, and his horse was turned from the narrow way of the ford.

In a moment the animal's fore-legs were in deep water, and the bushranger went right over its sinking head with a splash into the river.

The struggling horse floated away, the bushranger clinging to the reins, his white face showing livid from the rushing water.

In a few minutes he was swept out of sight.

Crack! crack!

Dick Stanley, without a glance after the fallen chief of the bush robbers, fired again and again into the midst of the foe.

A horse struck by a bullet reared and plunged in the narrow way sending the others to right and left and a wounded man slid into the water.

Confusion reigned in the ford.

The startled horses went plunging into deeper water on either side, the riders trying in vain to keep them to the narrow way.

"Fire, fire!" cried the banker. "Kill the scoundrels!"

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Dick Stanley reloaded his rifle.

But he did not pull trigger again.

The attack was stopped, and that was enough for him.

Crack!

It was a rifle-shot from further up the bank which the young Englishman had so well defended.

A puff of smoke came curling from the bush, and a whizzing bullet struck one of the bushrangers full between the eyes.

The man gave a groan and pitched from his horse.

He fell heavily into the water, which carried away in head-long flight a senseless, lifeless body.

Dick Stanley gave a start.

Who had fired that shot?

Crack!

It was a second shot from the same direction.

A second bushranger went into the water, shot through the heart.

The horseman scrambled hastily back into the bush.

The banker of Ballarat gave a cry of joy.

"It is Lasalle—it must be Lasalle."

Dick Stanley looked at him inquiringly.

"Our friend," said the banker, "from whom we were separated when the bushrangers attacked us on the Sturtville road."

"I see."

There was a sound of hasty footsteps in the bush.

A young man, with a smoking rifle in his hand, came running down the bank of the river, and he uttered an exclamation as he caught sight of the banker and Clotilde.

Dick Stanley glanced at him.

He was evidently a Frenchman, and his dark face and quick black eyes did not favourably impress the young Englishman.

The banker shook his hand warmly.

"Lasalle! I was afraid you were lost."

The Frenchman smiled.

"I escaped them—I am sorry we were separated. It was because you took to the bush on the other side of the road. I have been looking for you."

"I am glad you have found us."

Henri Lasalle advanced towards the girl, raising his hat.

"We meet again, mademoiselle."

Clotilde bowed.

Even Dick Stanley could observe how distant her manner was to the young Frenchman.

For some reason, scarcely comprehensible to himself, the young Englishman was glad to note it. He saw, too, the momentary flush of mortification in the Frenchman's cheeks.

"I am glad you have escaped the bushrangers, Monsieur Lasalle."

The Frenchman looked at her.

"You do not say you are glad to see me, mademoiselle."

She was silent.

"Because you are not glad, I suppose?" he said, mockingly.

"What is the use of asking such a question?" said the girl, with a touch of impatience in her manner. "Surely this is no time—"

"*Ma foi!* But I should like it answered."

"Well, you are right, then," said Clotilde, with a flash in her eyes. "I will not say that I am glad to see you when I am not."

He showed his teeth for a moment under his black moustache.

"How frank you are."

"It is your own fault."

"But you have found another friend, I see," said Lasalle, bitterly, looking towards Dick Stanley. "I am no longer necessary to your safety."

The banker came nearer to them, looking uneasy.

"This is Mr. Stanley, a— a hunter," he said. "He has kindly helped us, and has really saved our lives, Lasalle."

The Frenchman nodded to Dick carelessly enough, but did not offer to shake hands; a fact for which the young Englishman was duly grateful.

"It was you fired those shots, monsieur?" asked Dick.

"Yes. I have killed a couple of the scoundrels, at least."

"A pity you did not fire at Black George," said the banker.

"He is there?"

"He was; but Mr. Stanley wounded him, and he went down the stream."

"It would have been wiser to shoot to kill, monsieur," said Lasalle.

"I did not care to do so."

The Frenchman stared at him, and then turned away as he began to talk in low tones to the banker. From the frequent glances they turned towards him, Dick knew that he was the subject of the discussion, and the Frenchman's look showed that his feelings were by no means amicable.

That, however, troubled Dick Stanley very little.

He stepped nearer Clotilde, and the smile the girl gave him encouraged him to speak.

"I think we are safe now," the young hunter remarked. "The lesson the bushrangers have had will prevent them from attempting to cross the stream again in a hurry, especially in the absence of their leader."

"You do not think Black George is dead?"

"I put the bulk to his shoulder, and I do not think he was born to be drowned," said Dick with a smile, "and so I think he will turn up again. But it will not be for some time, and until the bushrangers know for certain that we are gone, I do not think they will attempt to pass the ford."

"It is not likely. Then you think we should push on now to Mount Camp."

"Yes, I think so."

The girl nodded, and crossed over to her father. She spoke to him, and it was evident from the banker's manner that he was eager to start.

The Frenchman turned to Dick Stanley.

"It seems that you are going to guide us to Mount Camp," he said.

Dick's eyes glistened a little at his tone.

"I am going to guide Mr. Glyn and Miss Glyn there," he replied briefly.

"I am of the party."

"Very well; you can follow also."

"How long do you suppose it will take?"

"We may reach the camp by midnight—if we have a clear path."

"These scoundrels are not likely to pursue us in a hurry."

"That depends upon Black George to a large extent, and what interest he has in tracking down Mr. Glyn."

Lasalle started.

"What interest should he have, beside that of a scoundrel bent upon plunder?" he demanded, harshly.

"Mr. Glyn himself says that the bushrangers seek his life."

The Frenchman muttered something under his breath.

"*Bien!* What a fool you were, monsieur, not to put your bullet through the heart of Black George," he said, savagely.

Dick's eyes flashed.

"I acted according to my own judgment," he said, coldly.

"Nor do I allow any man to criticise my action in such terms, Monsieur Lasalle."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"*Ma foi!* I say what I think."

"You will not say what you think to me, unless your thoughts are a little more courteous," said the young hunter, grimly. "I will ask you to take back the word you used."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

Dick Stanley stepped towards him. The Frenchman's hand went quickly to his belt. Clotilde saw the action and ran quickly to the spot.

"Monsieur! Mr. Stanley!"

The blaze died out of Dick's eyes.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Glyn. I was wrong."

The Frenchman smiled mockingly.

"The presence of Miss Glyn need not deter you," he said.

"I am sure mademoiselle has no objection to our settling any little difference—"

The girl gave a scornful glance.

"You should be ashamed of those words, Monsieur Lasalle. I know that Mr. Stanley will not quarrel with you against my wish."

Dick bowed.

"You are right, Miss Glyn."

"Be it so," said the Frenchman, carelessly. "After all it would be to very little purpose for us to cut one another's throats, with the enemy at hand. Let us go."

Dick placed the girl upon her steed.

He had changed the stirrups, and fastened his blanket on the saddle, to make it more secure and comfortable for the girl. The Frenchman watched him with burning eyes. It was plain enough for Dick to see that Lasalle loved Clotilde, and also that his love was not returned, a very opposite feeling reigning in the girl's breast.

The Frenchman had no horse. But one of the dead bushranger's steeds had scrambled to the shore and was cropping

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the herbage, and after some difficulty Lesalle succeeded in capturing him. No sound came from the bushrangers on the other side of the stream as the four riders left the ford and plunged into the dim, deep bush!

HUNTED IN THE BUSH!

Red in the west, the sun slowly sank into the sea of bush. The blazing heat of the afternoon was cooling somewhat, and a faint breeze stirred the bush round the four adventurers, as they pressed on their way.

They went in silence.

The girl was fatigued, though she uttered no word of complaint, and indeed showed more courage and firmness by far than her father, the banker of Ballarat.

Dick Stanley was also silent.

Fatigue made no impression upon the hardy young hunter, and he seemed as fresh as ever after the hot, dusty trail through the bush and the fighting with the bushrangers.

But his brow was somewhat clouded.

He had ample food for reflection, and reflection of a not wholly pleasant nature.

Who were his companions?

What was their quarrel with Black George the bushranger?

More than ever it was borne in upon the young hunter's mind that the wrong in this quarrel was probably not wholly upon the side of Black George.

The banker was a cunning, crafty man, and Dick believed him capable of treachery or deceit of any kind, and of the Frenchman his opinion was lower still.

But Clotilde!

The young Englishman's face involuntarily softened whenever he glanced at the sweet, patient face of Clotilde Glyn.

Whatever might be the sins of her father, that brave heart was pure from the stain of deceit, he was certain of that.

That she believed in her father, and that she was deceived in him, Dick was certain.

For her sake, and for her sake alone, he was not sorry that he had become concerned in this strange adventure.

Once or twice the girl glanced at the hunter.

It was as if she felt a slight uneasiness, and would have wished to know what thoughts were passing in his mind.

Dick rode by her side, and whenever he could aid her in the rough path, he did so. Rough indeed the path was, over rugged ground, amid clinging and trailing bush.

The Frenchman's eyes were frequently fixed upon Dick with an expression in which hatred was growing.

As for the banker, he seemed too fatigued by the unaccustomed efforts of the flight to think of anything but himself, and sometimes of his foes, as an occasional nervous backward glance showed.

Lower sank the sun.

Dark shadows were thickening in the sea of bush, and the faces of the travellers were growing indistinct to one another.

Suddenly Dick Stanley drew rein, and signed to his companions to halt.

They obeyed, looking at him in wonder.

"What is the matter?" asked the banker, nervously.

"Why do you stop?"

Dick held up his hand.

"Listen!"

And he bent his own head to listen intently.

Dead silence reigned in the bush, save for the occasional flutter of a bird.

Through the silence came a faint sound from afar.

"Coo-ey!"

Faint, but unmistakeable!

"Coo-ey!"

The signal of a bushman to his comrade—whether of honest hunter or squatter, or of lawless bushranger, could not be told!

The banker was trembling. Clotilde pressed her hand to her heart. The sound was ahead of them on the rough, scarcely-marked track they were following.

Were the enemy ahead of them—were they cut off from the place of refuge towards which they had been toiling for hours through the baking heat of the bush?

Lesalle gritted his teeth.

"What do you make of that, monsieur?"

"You know as much as I do," said Dick Stanley. It is a bush signal."

"Of the bushrangers?"

"Possibly."

"But we left Black George and his men at the ford, and

there has been no sign of pursuit, so far," said the Frenchman gnawing his moustache.

Dick nodded.

"Quite true. But we have to deal with cunning foes."

"You think they may have got ahead of us?"

"It is possible."

"But how—without crossing the river?"

"The river might be crossed further down—bold horsemen might swim their horses across the flood; it would be dangerous, but Black George is no coward. They may have then discovered our flight, and set off to intercept us."

"But we had a long start."

"True, but the bushrangers may have had a change of horses, which would more than make up for that. Our steeds are weary. Besides, Black George may know paths in the bush unknown to me. This has been his hunting-ground for years. I think it very probable that three or four of the fastest horsemen in the gang have pushed on and cut us off from Mount Camp. Of course, they would guess that that was our destination, as it is the only place of refuge for miles."

"*Ma foi!* What do you advise then?"

"That is a difficult question to answer?"

The Frenchman sneered.

"You seem to have taken charge of this matter, monsieur. You have led us so far. It is a pity you can do nothing further."

Dick's eyes gleamed.

There was something in the Frenchman's manner that was very hard to bear.

But the presence of Clotilde restrained his temper.

"It is a difficult situation," he said. "If the foe are ahead of us, there are probably only a few of them, the best mounted in the band. We might face them and get the best of it, but as there is a woman in the party, it would be better to avoid that if possible. Then, again, it is possible that our fears are groundless, and that it is simply some kangaroo hunter signalling to his mate ahead of us."

"That is very likely."

"We cannot remain here, for the bushrangers are certainly on our track by this time, in any case," Dick remarked. "To strike off in a new direction is a risky proceeding. Upon the whole, perhaps, it would be best to keep on."

The Frenchman nodded.

"That is my belief, too."

The banker was shaking in his saddle.

"We must not meet them," he exclaimed. "Cannot we hide somewhere, until they have given up hunting for us?"

Dick Stanley looked thoughtful.

"That is possible," he said.

"Where could we hide?" asked the Frenchman, looking at him keenly.

"I know a spot some miles from here, where we might be secure. It is a small isle in the middle of a shallow lake, and a very lonely spot."

"But if we were discovered there——"

"It would be a good spot for defence."

"But they might surround us and cut off our escape."

"There is the risk of that, of course."

"Then in my opinion we should keep on, and take the risk of falling in with the bushrangers. After all, we can defend ourselves."

Dick Stanley looked at Clotilde.

The girl nodded her head.

"Let us keep on," she said.

The banker of Ballarat was trembling violently.

But he did not make any further opposition, and the party resumed their way.

They were keenly on the alert now.

Twice again the distant "coo-ey" was heard in the bush, and then, apparently, the signallers had joined one another, for the sound was not repeated.

Dick Stanley had pushed his horse a little ahead of the rest.

In case of danger he wished to face it first, in order that less peril might fall to the girl behind him.

He had a six-shooter in his right hand, and his keen eyes swept the bush on every side.

They drew near to the vicinity where, as Dick judged, the last "coo-ey" had been uttered.

The young man was more than ever on the alert.

A rustle in the bush caught his ear.

He threw up his hand as a sign to those behind to stop.

It was only just in time!

A couple of bearded, bronzed, ruffianly-looking fellows started up from the bush with rifles in their hands.

Not a word was uttered.

The rifles were lifted to fire, but Dick was the first.

Crack!

His revolver rang out, and one of the bushrangers, with a sobbing cry, fell to the ground, with a bullet through his chest.

The other fired.

But the sudden fall of his comrade had disconcerted him, and his aim was deflected a trifle—only a trifle, but enough to save the life of Dick Stanley.

Dick felt the wind of the bullet as it tore past his head.

The ruffian had no time to fire again.

Dick's revolver cracked a second time, and he dropped like a log.

The young Englishman's eyes flashed round him.

He was ready for further foes, but no more seemed at hand.

But a rustling in the bush showed that there were other hastening to the spot.

Dick beckoned to his companions.

"Follow me," he cried. "A rush may do it. Use the spur."

He was obeyed.

Clotilde dashed on, and Dick caught her rein, and guided her horse in the headlong flight.

After them came Lasalle and the banker, trampling over the fallen bushrangers in their mad gallop.

Crack! crack! crack!

The outlaws were firing in the bush!

A sudden squeal from a horse—a yell of terror from the banker!

His steed went down with a crash, rolling over in its death-agonies, and the banker was flung heavily into the bush.

One gasping yell as he went down: and then he lay dazed by the fall. The bush had broken its force, and saved his bones, but he was too dazed to move again.

Henri Lasalle dashed on.

The bushrangers were coming on with fierce yells, and the Frenchman was not in the least inclined to stop and face them for his companion's sake.

Clotilde had heard her father's cry.

She dragged at her horse.

"Come on," muttered Dick. "You must be saved."

"Stop."

"I tell you——"

"Stop!" shrieked Clotilde. "I will not desert my father. Save him! save him!"

Dick drew in his steed.

To save Clotilde from the clutch of the bushrangers he would have sacrificed his own life, or those of the banker and Lasalle.

But he could not refuse the girl's wild appeal.

"Ride on," he cried, hurriedly. "I will save him, or die—but ride on!"

He wheeled his horse and dashed back.

The Frenchman passed him in full career, without a backward glance. As Dick Stanley rode towards the fallen banker, Lasalle joined Clotilde, and caught her rein.

"Come," he shouted.

"I will not come."

"In a minute more you will be lost."

"Be it so: without my father I do not go."

"Folly! you must—you shall come!"

He dragged at her horse.

The girl, hardly knowing what she did in her excitement, struck him with her open hand. He released her rein, and she turned her horse back.

The Frenchman, livid with rage, grasped his revolver.

For a moment the girl's life trembled in the balance.

But he thrust it back into his belt.

Clotilde was not looking at him.

She had eyes only for Dick Stanley.

Dick had reached the fallen banker, and close as the bushrangers now were, he acted with perfect coolness and determination.

Without dismounting, he leaned down over the fallen man.

"Quick, man!"

The dazed banker was staggering to his feet.

Gladly he stretched out his hands to Dick, and in a moment

the young Englishman had dragged him upon his horse.

Crack! crack!

A bullet tore through Dick's broad-brimmed hat, and another drew a spurt of blood from his ear.

He was hardly conscious of it in the wild haste of the moment.

He dashed the spurs against his horse's side, and galloped back towards Clotilde.

The whole affair had not occupied half a minute.

Yet it seemed an age to the girl before the young hunter rejoined her with the dazed and moaning banker on his horse.

"God bless you!"

"Ride!" gasped Dick. "Ride for your life."

Crack! crack!

The bushrangers were close behind.

Dick, half-turned, revolver in hand, his eyes blazing.

Three rough forms were partly visible in the thick bush, and three rapid shots cracked out from Dick Stanley's revolver.

Not one of them was wasted.

For a moment the pursuit was checked.

The bushrangers were not in their whole force, and their loss had been terrible.

The fugitives dashed on unmolested.

But ere long the crashing in the bush, the pounding on the earth, in the growing dusk, told that the enemy were in hot pursuit.

IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH!

"*Ma foi!*"

It was a sudden exclamation from the Frenchman.

His horse had reeled to one side, and was staggering drunkenly.

Dick slackened rein a little.

"What is the matter?"

"A thousand curses! My horse is hurt."

The Frenchman stopped and sprang to the earth.

Only just in time to save himself from a fall, for his horse pitched heavily on its side the next moment.

The cause was clear. Blood was streaming down the poor animal's side, from a wound where a whizzing bullet had buried itself deep. The Frenchman had driven it cruelly on, unaware that it was wounded, and the animal had kept up in the race till its strength failed, and the sudden collapse followed.

Lasalle looked down at the fallen animal with snapping teeth.

The horse was expiring.

Its eyes were rolling wildly, its limbs convulsively shaking.

"A thousand curses!"

And in his rage Lasalle savagely kicked the fallen horse.

Dick's eyes flashed fire.

"You coward!"

The Frenchman looked at him savagely.

"You coward! How dare you!"

Lasalle's reply was another savage kick at the fallen horse.

Dick swung round his riding-whip, and slashed it across the ruffian's face.

"That's for your brutality."

Lasalle panted with rage.

He dragged the revolver from his belt.

In another moment the shot would have sped.

But Clotilde dashed between.

"Monsieur Lasalle! Hold your hand!"

The Frenchman panted.

"He has struck me."

"As you deserved—aye, richly deserved, for your cruelty," cried the girl, with flashing eyes. "But this is no time to quarrel. The enemy are upon us."

The hoof-beats of the bushrangers were growing louder and nearer.

Lasalle, with an effort choked back his fury.

"You shall answer for this another time, monsieur," he cried hoarsely.

"When you like," said Dick, contemptuously.

"Ride on," cried the banker. "Ride on! Are you mad Will you fall into their hands?"

Dick hesitated.

Ruffian and brute as the Frenchman was it went against the grain to desert him and leave him to his fate.

Lasalle had turned pale as he realised his position.

"*Ma foi!* Then I am lost."

"Ride on," cried the banker, feverishly.

"Mount behind me, monsieur," said Clotilde, quietly.

The Frenchman, without a word, obeyed.

The fugitives dashed on.

But louder and closer came the sounds of pursuit.

For the horses were weary with long riding, and the double load upon each told heavily against the fugitives in the race.

The start they had gained was being rapidly lost.

But for the growing dusk, it was probable that the bush-rangers would have been in sight, and could have shot them down as they rode.

Dick soon realised that flight was futile.

Unless the banker and Lasalle were abandoned, the flight had to stop; and of these two alternatives the second one was the only one passible.

How far is it to Mount Camp now, monsieur?" called out Lasalle in the gloom. In his mind too the same thought was growing.

"Twenty miles or more," said Dick quietly.

"We can never do it."

"Impossible."

"They will be fairly upon us before we have covered a mile or more."

"It is certain."

"Then it only remains to stop and fight—or die."

"I have been thinking so. Unless——"

"Unless what? If you have a plan, speak."

"We have but two horses. If you and I stop at bay, M^{rs} Glyn and her father may escape yet, we can hold off the bush-rangers long enough to give them a good start, and——"

The Frenchman laughed scoffingly.

"A pretty plan, truly."

"You refuse."

"I certainly refuse to throw my life away for any such Quixotic folly."

"Lasalle," cried the banker. "You have no right to refuse.

You joined us, as you said, to secure Clotilde's safety, and now——"

"Now I refuse to throw my life away."

"You—you are a coward——"

"Bah! What is the use of talking! I refuse. Beside, could you find your way to Mount Camp without guidance?"

"I—I—No, I suppose not. But I would take my chance."

"It is directly north now," said Dick Stanley. "I can give you a course to follow by the stars. If Lasalle will not remain with me, I will remain alone. Then you will have a chance."

"Do so, then, monsieur," cried Lasalle, "and more fool you Crack! Crack! Crack!"

Whizzing through the bush, the bullets tore past the fugitives.

"*Mon Dieu!* they are almost upon us."

The shouts of the pursuers rang through the gum trees.

Scarce a hundred yards separated the two parties now.

The Frenchman uttered a sudden oath.

He felt the horse sinking beneath him.

"He is struck!"

He sprang to the ground, and caught Clotilde as she also sprang. The horse rolled over in the bush, squealing with agony. The bushrangers were firing low in the hope of dismounting the fugitives, and they had partly succeeded.

Dick reined in alarm.

"Miss Glyn! Are you hurt?"

"No." The girl's voice was trembling. "I am not hurt.

But the horse——"

"What wretched luck!"

Dick sprang to the ground.

"It is ended," he cried. "Flight cannot save us now.

But now it is dark we may hide in the bush. Come with me."

There was evidently no other plan to follow.

Dick lifted the girl quickly to the horse behind her father paying no heed to the faint moaning and grumbling of the banker.

Taking the horse by the bridle, he led it quickly into the bush, at a course at right angles with the track he had been following. Lasalle ran by the steed on the other side.

At a score of yards from the track, they stopped.

Dick had his hand fast upon his horse's nostrils, to prevent any sound escaping the animal to give warning to the bush-rangers.

The fugitives listened with agonised intentness.

Would the bushrangers ride straight on, ignorant that they had left the track, or would they guess—and turn to hunt for them in the bush?

In the latter case all was lost.

Crack, crash, went the pounding hoof-beats, sweeping by in the darkness of the night.

Thud! thud! thud!

With crash of hoofs and jingle of bridle the bushrangers swept by.

The hoof-beats grew fainter towards the north.

Dick drew a deep breath of relief.

Fainter and fainter—till the sounds of furious pursuit almost died away in the still air of the night.

"Gone!" muttered the Frenchman. "We are saved!"

"Thank Heaven!" murmured Clotilde.

THE ISLE IN THE LAKE.

For some minutes the fugitives remained standing there in the gloom, motionless, almost overcome by the tense relief.

The bushrangers had passed on, and the sound of them was dying away in the distant bush.

In the gloom they could not see one another's faces, but they knew how white and set they were. Death had passed very close to them.

Dick Stanley made the first movement.

"Let us go," he said.

"*Ma foi!* Whither?"

"There is but one way to go."

"And that?"

"We must hide."

"Yes, yes, let us go," muttered the banker, feverishly.

"We are cut off from Mount Camp now."

"That is certain," said Dick. "The bushrangers are ahead of us, and all hope of reaching the camp is lost. They will soon discover that we are not in front of them, and will double back, but some of them will watch the routes to the camp. I think that most of Black George's gang are on the scene now, and he has ample force for the purpose, if he is determined to run us down, as he appears to be."

"Ah! there is no doubt about that."

"There seems to be little doubt of it. Whatever his motive, he is resolved that we shall not escape, and his men appear equally determined."

"They have their motive," said Lasalle, with a sneer.

"Mr. Glyn could tell you what it is."

How can you say so, Lasalle? I—I——"

"Bah! Why lie to this man? He is nothing to us; his opinion matters less than a rap to me, or to you either. Black George is determined to capture you because——"

"Silence!"

"As you like," said Lasalle, shrugging his shoulders.

Dick broke in.

"His motive matters little, as his determination is evident. We cannot reach Mount Camp, unless the bushrangers give up the hunt, and our only resource is to hide until they do."

"The place you were speaking of—the isle in the lake——"

"That is our only chance."

"Then let us go there."

"Have you any other plan? I do not wish to force my ideas upon you."

"*Peste!* I can think of nothing better."

"We have no choice in the matter," said the banker, nervously. "We will do whatever you think best, Mr. Stanley, and we shall be grateful for your courage and kindness in assisting us in this terrible extremity."

"Then come," said Dick, briefly.

Such words were natural enough upon the banker's lips, under the circumstances, but there was a ring of insincerity about them that Dick did not like.

He was fully aware that gratitude found no place in the heart of Raymond Glyn, and that once this peril was over, he would be quite content to see the back of the man who had saved him.

Dick's dislike of the banker and Lasalle was growing very keen.

He was more than ever persuaded that he had taken up the cause of a pair of rascals; yet for Clotilde's sake he was glad that he had done so.

Dick strode on, leading the horse by the bridle.

The patient animal, almost exhausted as it was, followed the hunter, bearing the double burden of the banker and Clotilde.

The Frenchmen strode on in silence.

Once he spoke to Clotilde, and the girl did not answer. Her gaze was fixed straight ahead into the black bush.

Lasalle's expression was very bitter.

In his wild savage way he loved the girl, and he knew

that he had cut a cowardly figure in her eyes that night.

For Clotilde he would have run great risks, but for her father none at all, and as it happened Clotilde's concern was more for her father than for herself.

That she would ever forgive him his desertion of the banker he could hardly hope.

He had left Raymond Glyn to death; and the Englishman had ridden back in the teeth of a thousand perils and saved him.

Dick Stanley was a hero in her eyes.

For the Frenchman, scorn was added to the dislike she had shown before.

Lasalle gritted his teeth savagely at the thought.

A fierce hatred of the Englishman was growing up in his breast, fed by jealousy and envy, and the smart across his face where Dick's riding whip had fallen.

He would gladly have driven a bullet through the head of the Englishman there in the dark bush.

Gladly the wearied adventurers hailed the sight of the lake.

Their first action was to drink deep and long of the cool water.

Dick filled his drinking-cup, which swung at his belt, and handed it to Clotilde. She thanked him and drank deeply. The banker and Lasalle plunged their heated faces into the lake. Dick followed their example.

Across the silver waters rose a thick, black mass in the middle of the lake.

Dick Stanley pointed to it.

"There is the isle."

The Frenchman looked across the shimmering waters.

"It is fifty yards from here. How are we to reach it?"

"The water is shallow; four feet at the deepest part. You can wade, or float on a log, as you desire."

Dick led the horse into the waters.

"You will be able to keep dry, Miss Glyn."



He saw rough hands laid upon the whimpering banker; he heard Clotilde's terrible scream, and saw her rush to her father. He saw Black George seize her and hold her back; not ungenitly.

It might come to that yet!

Careless of what might be passing in his companion's mind Dick Stanley strode on.

He seemed tireless, and while the Frenchman limped on heavy with fatigue beside the horse, Dick Stanley showed no sign of weariness.

"*Sacre!*" growled Lasalle at last. "Are we going to keep on for ever, monsieur? Are we never going to reach this infernal lake you speak of?"

"We are almost there," replied Dick, quietly.

"How far now?"

"I should say another half-mile."

"*Ma foi!* and my legs are dropping off already.

"It cannot be helped."

The Frenchman growled and said no more.

Ere long the bush parted, to show a glimmer of silver in the light of the stars, twinkling now in myriads in the clear heavens.

Wide rolled the waters of the lake in the heart of the bush fed by a stream that rippled into it from the shades of the gum trees.

She nodded.

The young hunter advanced into the water, careless of it. The horse followed steadily, Dick's hand firm on the bridle.

Right out into the glimmering water."

Higher it rode round the hunter and his horse, until it was swirling over Dick's waist, and over the stirrups of the horse.

The girl was a good rider. She drew herself beyond the reach of the water, and passed the lake dry-shod. Dick made for an opening in the thick vegetation of the isle, and drew the horse ashore.

Then he handed the girl to the ground.

He glanced back.

Lasalle and the banker were wading through the shallow lake after him, the former holding his firearms above his head to keep them dry.

They came plunging ashore and joined the hunter.

"Safe at last!" cried the banker, and he threw himself exhausted upon the ground.

"You must not sleep yet," said Dick.

"I must; I am exhausted."

"You will wake in a fever then. Dry yourself first, or you will regret it."

"He is right," said Lasalle.

And the banker, who was utterly exhausted, unwillingly acceded.

"There is a hut in these bushes," said Dick, glancing round, "I was here with a comrade some time ago, and we built it, and when we left, we left many of our things here, which will be useful now. The hut will shelter you, Miss Glyn. The open air will do for us."

He pushed into the thicket, leading the girl by the hand.

A small hut, built of saplings and roofed with bark, stood there under the thick trees, and Dick entered it, and from a recess drew a lantern, which he lighted.

A frightened rabbit scuttled away from the sudden light. The girl gave a little cry.

Dick laughed reassuringly.

"Only a rabbit, Miss Glyn. Here is my blanket and cloak; you will be able to sleep in comfort. Get all the rest you can; heaven only knows what may happen to-morrow."

"Mr. Stanley! The girl caught sight of his face in the light. "You are wounded."

Dick put his hand up to the side of his head.

His hair was clotted with blood.

"It is but a scratch," he said, lightly. "A bullet grazed my ear, that is all."

She held out her hand.

"Thank heaven for that! Good-night, Mr. Stanley. I will not thank you; words could not express what is in my heart," she said, softly.

Dick coloured.

"You need not thank me, Miss Glyn. I would die for you if need were."

And he pressed her hand and left her.

He returned to the shore. The Frenchman looked at him curiously, but did not speak. Dick proceeded to wring the water out of his clothes. The night was hot and sultry, and half-clad, the adventurers lay down in the sweet-smelling bush to sleep.

BITTER BLOOD.

Dawn flushed on the wide, wild bush!

Dick Stanley was the first to awake.

He had slept with his head pillowed upon his horse, well knowing that if a foe drew near, the well-trained animal would not fail to wake him.

But there had been no alarm.

The sky in the east was red and rosy, and the bush was awakening to the new day.

On all sides sounded the trilling of innumerable birds, and on the lake was heard the splashing of wildfowl.

Dick's first glance was turned to the opposite shore.

There was no sign of a foe.

That Black George and his band knew that the fugitives had not reached Mount Camp was certain, and they must be aware that the four were still in the bush.

Were they still on the hunt?"

The fugitives had left all known tracks and disappeared into the wild, boundless bush. It would require a skilful tracker to follow the faint trail they had left. Would the bushrangers keep up the long, obstinate hunt?

That question could not be answered yet. But Dick felt in his heart that they were not yet done with Black George.

"A fine morning." It was the Frenchman's sneering voice at his side. "You have brought us to a very remote hiding-place, monsieur. I suppose there is little danger of the enemy tracking us here."

"I cannot answer for that."

"At all events, there is no sign of them so far. But have you in your wisdom remembered that it is necessary to eat to live?"

Dick looked at him steadily.

"I have joined this party, Monsieur Lasalle, for Miss Glyn's sake, and for her sake alone. I do not undertake anything further. You can look out for yourself."

The Frenchman snapped his teeth.

"Good," he said, "we are secure here; there is no reason why we should not settle the quarrel that was left unfinished yesterday. Listen to me, monsieur. You, doubtless, know that mademoiselle is rich—at all events that her father is——"

"I have not given the matter a thought."

"How disinterested! But mark me; Monsieur Glyn is

bound to me by ties he cannot break if he would, and mademoiselle is to be my wife."

Dick looked at him scornfully.

"What has that to do with me?"

"Ah, you do think I have read nothing in the glances you have given her?" hissed the Frenchman, savagely.

"Before I believe what you have stated, Monsieur Lasalle, I shall require confirmation of it," said Dick, coolly,

"Easily done. Monsieur."

The banker looked at them.

"Is not mademoiselle to be my wife?"

"Yes."

The banker made the reply without hesitation.

Dick's lips tightened.

Why did that word send a sharp pain to his heart?

He could hardly have told himself.

Yet the thought that the sweet, kind girl was to link her life to that of this man whom he knew to be cruel, whom he believed to be a villain, was inexpressibly painful to him.

He made no reply, but the colour wavered in his sunburnt cheek. The Frenchman's eyes were fixed upon him with a mocking stare.

"Well, what do you say now, monsieur?"

"I suppose it is true."

"Then," said Lasalle, "you can dismiss whatever thought opposed to it that may have come into your mind, and I will allow your insolence to pass."

Dick's eyes blazed.

He had disliked this man from the first; he felt that he hated him now.

"I do not ask it," he said, between his teeth. "If you can punish my insolence, as you call it, I am prepared for you to do so."

Lasalle's hand went to his belt.

"Be it so. *Ma foi!* We are almost strangers, yet I feel that we were born to hate one another. In this early sunlight there is an excellent opportunity for a little pistol practice, and we can settle our difference before mademoiselle awakes."

"I am at your orders."

The banker sprang to his feet.

"Are you mad?" he cried, hoarsely. "A single shot may bring our foes upon us."

The Frenchman started.

In his bitter hate and rage he had forgotten that. His weapon remained half-drawn.

"*Ma foi!* That is true."

"Quite true," said Dick, with a nod. "We must postpone that little affair, Monsieur Lasalle, unless you care to settle it in the fashion of my country, with your fists."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not likely to do that. Well, it can wait; I shall kill you when we have left the bush, and it will be time enough."

"I will see that you have a chance of making your boast good."

"And meanwhile," cried the Frenchman, "remember what I have told you; that mademoiselle is to be my wife!"

Dick Stanley turned away without replying.

If he had answered, it would have been with a blow.

There was a rustle in the bush, but Dick did not notice it. Had Clotilde overheard the words of the Frenchman?

The banker looked at Lasalle with a dark frown.

"You must be mad," he exclaimed. "Why will you quarrel with him? Our very lives depend upon his good will."

"Bah!" said the Frenchman, between his teeth. "I hate him."

"Why should you hate him? And if you do, why should you quarrel with him? Leave your disputing to a safer time. If he is angered he may desert us, and what should we do then? I tell you plainly, Henri Lasalle, that if the bushrangers track us to this place, it is only yonder hunter's rifle that may save us; we cannot save ourselves."

Lasalle gritted his teeth.

"I at least can defend myself."

"But you could not hold the isle against their numbers. And what would you do for me? What did you do when I lay unhorsed, at the mercy of the enemy?"

"Every man for himself, in a race for life."

"Yes, or in a corner like this," said the banker. "You would let me fall to the vengeance of Black George, to save your own skin."

"I would fight for Clotilde; for yourself, you can look out."

"I trust in yonder hunter. He will not abandon me."

The Frenchman scowled.

"You would like him to take my place, perhaps?" he snarled. "Beware how you seek to double deal with me, Raymond Glyn."

"I do not seek anything of the kind."

"You may think that you have no further need of me now that you are far from Ballarat. Beware! Wherever you go, I could denounce you as the thief and defaulter you are."

"Silence."

"I will not be silent. Besides, do you think the hunter would stand by you if he knew the truth—that Black George is pursuing you for the gold you have robbed him of."

"Fool! Hold your tongue."

"Remember, then, and be careful how you make an enemy of me."

And the Frenchman swung sullenly away.

The banker looked after him with burning eyes.

"The insolent hound!" he murmured. "Were we once safe from this fearful peril, I would not care how soon a bullet knocked his brains out. But I must not quarrel with him—yet."

The sun was rising higher over the isle and the glimmering waters that swirled round it. The isle was not more than twenty yards across, and was almost circular in form. The trees and thickets grew thickly upon the whole surface, so that from the shore of the lake it looked like an impenetrable mass.

Clotilde came from the bushes surrounding the hut. Under the blue gum trees the party breakfasted, the provisions being supplied from Dick Stanley's haversack, consisting of damper and dried meat. In the heart of the isle Dick deemed it safe to ignite a fire, the smoke being lost in the towering branches of the huge trees. On the fire he cooked a couple of rabbits he had snared in the bush. The only drink was clear cool water from the lake, but it sufficed.

Breakfast over, the banker flung himself down to sleep again in the shade of a tree. He was weary and worn with the previous day's exertions. Lasalle glanced questioningly at Dick as he rose from the log where he had been sitting.

"We had better keep watch," he said. "I on one side of the isle, you on the other, as the bushrangers may come from either side."

"True."

"If they cross the lake, and get a footing on the isle, we are lost."

"Yes, our only chance will be to prevent them from getting a footing."

"As the isle is so small, that should be easy to two good riflemen."

"At all events we shall make an attack cost them dear," said Dick. "In case of attack, a whistle shall be the signal. But do not fire unless they attempt to reach the isle. It is better to remain hidden if we can."

"*Ma foi!* I know it."

The Frenchman picked up his rifle and strolled away to the eastern end of the island. Dick remained on the western side, where they had landed the previous evening.

He was careful to keep under cover; and it was well that he did so, for ere half-an-hour had elapsed, there was a foot-step on the opposite shore.

A roughly-clad form loomed up through the bushes.

Dick lay close, and watched.

He was a powerfully-built fellow, clad in kangaroo skin garb, with a black beard and a darkly bronzed face, come out of the bushes, and stand on the margin of the lake staring towards the isle.

Dick drew a sharp, quick breath.

For he knew that powerful form and dark bearded face.

If was Black George, the bushranger!

The fugitives had been tracked down after all!

THE FOE AT HAND!

Dick Stanley made no sound!

Black George the bushranger stood on the shore, gazing steadily towards the isle.

That he did not know that the fugitives were there, the expression of his face plainly showed, as well as the fact that he was standing exposed to a shot from the isle.

But there was suspicion in his face.

Long and steadily he looked.

Dick could see every change of his rough, rugged features in the clear sunlight that fell upon them.

Black George was pale and haggard, and there was blood

upon his coat, and he seemed to be in pain as he stood there. The wound of the previous day had not disabled him, but it had told upon him, in spite of his iron constitution.

A splendid chance was offered to the young hunter to pick off the dreaded chief of the bushrangers of South Australia.

He did not avail himself of it.

To shoot down an unsuspecting man, bushranger or not, without warning, was not in Dick Stanley's line.

Besides, though he could undoubtedly have disposed of the bushranger chief by a single shot, the report of his rifle would probably have drawn a host of enemies to the spot.

The whole gang were probably not far away.

Dick lay low, watching. Had Black George attempted to cross to the island, Dick would have had no choice as to what he should do. But the bushranger did not do so.

After gazing steadily at the isle for some minutes, he turned and strode back the way he had come, into the deep bush, and disappeared.

Dick Stanley drew a long breath.

Black George was gone!

Was he gone for good, or to call up his comrades, and commence a determined attack, now that the fugitives were cornered and could not escape?

It was impossible to tell.

Dick Stanley could only wait and watch.

Escape was impossible from the isle, with only one horse amongst four, and the bushrangers swarming on every side searching for them.

The plan was to remain in hiding until the outlaws either gave up the hunt, or sought in fresh parts for their prey, and that plan could not be changed now.

If they were discovered, if they were attacked, it only remained for them to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

Dick sat upon a log, and thoughtfully cleaned his rifle, watching the shore through the openings of the bushes. There was a rustle close to him. He stood up: Clotilde was by his side. Dick lifted his hat.

The girl's face was pale.

Dick guessed at once that she also had seen the bushranger.

"That was Black George?" she murmured.

He nodded.

"Yes, you know him?"

"I saw him yesterday—it was but a glimpse—but I have seen him before."

Her look was very troubled as she spoke.

Dick wondered where she could have seen the famous bushranger, but did not ask.

"I wished to speak to you, Mr. Stanley," said the girl, in a low voice, and with the colour deepening in her cheek.

"Perhaps I should not refer to the matter—but I do not wish you to think so hardly of me."

He looked at her in surprise.

"I should not be likely to think hardly of you, Miss Glyn."

"I am speaking of what Monsieur Lasalle told you this morning. He said it in my hearing."

Dick coloured a little.

"He said that you were to be his wife."

"It was false."

"But—"

"But my father said so also." A bitter look crossed the girl's face. "It is his wish—it has always been his wish—but I have never consented. I never will."

"Thank heaven for that."

The words leaped unconsciously, involuntarily, from Dick's lips, in his relief. Clotilde looked at him curiously, and smiled a little.

"I should not like you to think that I could marry such a man. I have seen that he is savage and cruel; I believe that he is wicked. In all other matters I respect my father's wishes; but in that, never!"

"You are right Miss Glyn."

"I wished to tell you that—I should not like you to think that—that what he said was true," said the girl, hesitatingly.

"It was very hard for me to believe," said Dick, quietly. "But I am glad to learn from your own lips that it is not true, Miss Glyn. I—"

"*Mille diables!*"

The hoarse voice of the Frenchman broke in.

Henri Lasalle sprang from the bush, his face convulsed with rage.

Dick faced him calmly.

"Well, and what is the matter with you?" he exclaimed.

"You have startled Miss Glyn?"

"I thought it would be so," hissed Lasalle, unheeding. "Yes, I know—I know—I am not blind! You love her! You would take her from me! Well, you shall die first! I saw it all from the beginning, and I have been a fool to spare you so long."

He was grasping his revolver. "Madman!" cried Dick. "Black George is on the opposite shore—a single shot, and we are lost."

"You should have thought of that before."

The Frenchman dragged out his revolver. Dick sprang upon him, and grasping his wrist, forced the weapon upward; only just in time, for the weapon cracked at the same moment, and the bullet flew only a foot above his head.

Far through the silence of the bush rang the report. The Frenchman struggled savagely to bring the revolver to bear upon Dick. But in close combat he was no match for the Englishman.

Dick wrenched the revolver away and tossed it into the lake. "Fool! You have betrayed us," he cried, as he hurled the Frenchman to the ground.

Lasalle lay dazed in the grass. From the distant bush came a faint, familiar sound. "Coo-ey!"

It was a signal of the bushrangers! The shot had been heard! "Coo-ey!" "Fool!" cried Dick. "You hear? It is your doing." Lasalle staggered to his feet. His face was convulsed with fury.

"*Sacre! So be it,*" he cried, hoarsely. "So be it! I care nothing."

Clotilde was pale as death. "We are lost," she murmured. Dick fixed his eyes furiously upon Lasalle. "You mad fool! You have betrayed us!" "You would have betrayed us! You would rob me of the girl who is my promised wife."

"It is false! I have Miss Glyn's own word that you lie. But I will not discuss it with you. The bushrangers will be upon us in a few minutes. Are you going to help in the defence? We shall have to fight for our lives."

Lasalle had recovered something of his coolness now. He had acted in a passion of jealous fury, without thinking or caring for what was to follow, but now he realised that he had thrown away the last chance of safety that had remained to them.

But he was in a savage, sullen mood, and he cared little. He knew that he had lost Clotilde for ever, and he was reckless. "Yes, I will fight!" he cried. "But if we beat them, Dick Stanley, ere we leave this isle you shall face me in mortal combat."

"There will be time to discuss that when we have beaten them."

The Frenchman sullenly tramped through the bushes to the opposite side of the little isle. Dick stepped to the shore.

The signals of the bushrangers were repeated up and down the lake.

Several dark figures showed in the bush near the shore. It was evident that there was no further chance of concealment—the outlaws of the bush knew where to look for the fugitives at last!

Splash! The blackbearded chief of the bushrangers strode into the water, his rifle held above his head, and a dozen armed ruffians at his heels.

The crisis had come! Dick Stanley lifted his rifle to cover the heart of Black George.

"Halt!" he cried. The bushrangers stopped knee-deep in the shallow lake. "Who orders Black George to stop?" called out the chief of the bushrangers, arrogantly.

"I do." Dick stepped into view, rifle to shoulder, finger on trigger. "I am Dick Stanley, and I order you to stop! I hold your life in the hollow of my hand, Black George!"

THE ATTACK!

Black George stood with the water swirling round his high boots, his eyes fixed upon the young Englishman.

The bushrangers behind him halted also, waiting for his word.

Dick's rifle never wavered for a moment. "I seek no quarrel with you, Dick Stanley," exclaimed the bushranger chief. "My foes are Raymond Glyn and Henri Lasalle."

"I have thrown in my lot with them." "For what reason?" "For the sake of the lady who is with them." "For no other reason?" "None." "You are not to share the old thief's plunder, then?" said Black George, mockingly.

Dick started. "What plunder are you speaking of?" A shaking voice came from the bushes behind Dick. "He lies, he lies! I have no plunder!" Black George laughed savagely.

"He has robbed me. I will have the loot and his life! Nothing shall stop me. But with you I have no quarrel. I admire your pluck, and I have no desire to do you injury. Get out of a quarrel that does not concern you, and leave that thief to his fate."

"I have told you why I take part in this affair." "Ah, the girl! Are you defending her, then?" "Yes."

"You are defending her against an imaginary danger, then," said Black George, ironically. "I do not quarrel with women, or visit the sins of the fathers upon the children. Raymond Glyn has robbed and betrayed me, and I will have his life, if it costs me my own. His daughter has nothing to fear from me. Take her upon your horse and ride away, and not a hand shall be raised to stop you."

Dick hesitated. Bushranger as Black George was, the young hunter had heard many a tale of his kindness and chivalry, strange enough in such a character.

And he believed now that the man was telling the truth, and that it was the banker of Ballarat who lied. And the outlaw's offer was generous, considering what he had suffered at the hands of the young hunter.

Dick Stanley was strongly tempted to accept the offer. He owed no duty to Henri Lasalle, and what regard could he have for the trembling, cowardly banker, whose dishonesty had brought him to this pass, and who evidently thought of no one but himself, not even his daughter?

But a hand fell upon Dick's arm: Clotilde stood by his side. The girl's beautiful eyes were fixed upon him.

"You will not desert my father?" Dick Stanley shook his head. "No. I will not desert him."

A single look from Clotilde had been sufficient to make him decide.

The banker was whimpering like a frightened animal. "Do not desert me! I will make you rich if you save my life."

Dick turned from the sight of him with loathing. "Well, what is your answer, my friend?" called out Black George.

"I cannot agree." "The devil! Why not? What is the rascal to you?" "Less than nothing: but I have given my word."

"It will cost you your life." "And you yours, if you advance." "Listen," cried Black George. "I would willingly spare you life, and you shall hear the story before you fire a shot for that skulking coward."

"He lies, he lies," came the quavering voice from the bush. "You shall judge if I lie. Listen! You know me: I am Black George the bushranger! For long years I have levied toll upon this land—and I have won wealth—wealth that was not mine, if you will, but if any man says that Black George ever dealt falsely with a friend, he lies. And whom do you think was the agent who disposed of my plunder—who aided me to turn it into cash, and lined his own pockets in the bargain—Raymond Glyn, the respectable banker of Ballarat?"

The girl gave a moan. "That it is true," said Black George, "the girl at your side will prove. She has often seen me come in secret to her father's house, though she never knew till now that I was Black George the bushranger."

Clotilde gave a sob. This hour was one of revelation to her: revelation bitter as death!

"I do not doubt you," said Dick Stanley, quietly. "Say no more."

"You shall hear all! For years I dealt fairly with that man—but at last he showed himself in his true colours! His bank failed—he fled with all he could lay his hands upon and that included all that I had trusted into his hands! He knew that I should pursue him for the plunder, and to save himself he betrayed me to the mounted police. My retreat in the bush was surprised: half my band fell in fighting, and I escaped by the skin of my teeth. What do you say now? Would you ask me to spare him?"

Dick Stanley was silent.

That the bushranger's tale was true he had not the slightest doubt.

The passionate fury in Black George's face was proof enough of that.

Yet he had given his word to Clotilde to defend her father—her father, who deserved death if ever a traitor did!

If he had not given it, it would have been the same: the girl would not have deserted her father, and Dick would not have left her.

"What do you say now?" cried Black George. "Will you defend him?"

"I can only say again what I have said before."

"You stand by a double-dyed villain?"

"I stand by the father of Clotilde Glyn."

"Can you save him? Do you think so for a moment?"

My men are all round the lake—if you could defend the isle where you stand, you could never escape."

Dick was silent.

"What do you say now?" cried the bushranger. "Will you throw away your life, Dick Stanley?"

"I have no more to say."

Black George made a gesture of rage.

"You are determined to defend that scoundrel?"

"Yes."

"Then you are a party to his villainy—a sharer in his theft, and you shall die, if you had a thousand lives," cried Black George.

Dick started violently.

"Hold," he cried. "One word. You say that the man has robbed you, and I believe you. What if the plunder is restored?"

A whimpering voice came from the bushes.

"I will part with nothing: you shall not rob me."

"Silence," said Dick Stanley, "will you cling to your dirty money, when it is a question of life or death?"

"I will not be robbed."

"Ha, ha! spoken like Raymond Glyn," cried Black George with a mocking laugh. "You will not part with your money, miser, till your life is also taken. Well, that will not be long."

"He will have no choice in the matter, if you come to terms, Black George," said Dick Stanley, steadily. "I stand by the man to save his life, but not to help him in a theft. Swear that his life shall be spared, and you shall have the plunder he bears."

"Never! I would give the loot—aye, ten times as much—rather than spare his life," cried the bushranger, hoarsely.

"Then we can come to no terms."

The bushranger looked hard at the young Englishman.

"I am sorry," he cried. "I understand your motive, my friend, and I do not blame you: but I cannot be balked of my revenge. Take my offer, go—and take the girl—you are both safe: but Raymond Glyn and Henri Lasalle, his confederate, are my prey."

"I cannot."

"Then remain—and die."

"I shall sell my life dearly."

Dick's rifle had never wavered for a moment.

The bushranger gave him a black look, and waded back to the shore. Evidently he did not care to advance in the face of that deadly rifle. But the respite was certain to be only a black one: only till Black George had more carefully disposed his forces for an attack on all sides at once.

Dick's face was pale but firm.

"Oh, heaven have mercy upon us!" cried Clotilde, weeping. "I have doomed you also, my brave friend: your death will lie at my door."

Dick pressed her hand.

"It is nothing: I would give a hundred lives for you."

"There is no hope?"

"None! We are lost."

"Heaven help us."

"I shall fight to the last, but they will win. Be it so: but ere the end comes, Miss Glyn—Clotilde—may I tell you that I love you?"

The girl coloured and started.

"I have not known you long, and I would not speak now," said Dick, quietly. "Don't be angry with me. In an hour I shall lie dead here in the bush, and it will not matter then."

"I am not angry," cried Clotilde. "I—I am grateful. If—if there were a chance of life, oh, earth might be happy for me yet."

Dick gave a groan.

"In the old country," he said. "I have a home—a mother and sister who would welcome you, and I love you. Life has so much to offer—if you could love me in return for my love."

"I could—I could—I do."

"Oh, my love! And we must die!"

Crack! crack! crack!

Bullets tore through the green vegetation of the isle. In a moment Dick was himself again, and he grasped his rifle for the last fight. The attack had commenced.

THE LAST FIGHT!

Crack! crack! crack!

From every side of the shallow lake came the whizzing bullets, tearing into the thick vegetation of the little isle.

Then came the crack of a rifle on the isle itself.

It came from the side where Henri Lasalle kept watch and ward.

It was followed by a cry and a splash.

The bushrangers were evidently coming to close quarters on that side of the island, while on Dick's side they had not yet shown themselves.

"Look out!"

Lasalle's shout rang through the trees. "They're coming."

Dick Stanley shouted back.

"I'm ready."

He had need to be ready.

Hardly had the words left his lips than a dozen burly forms showed themselves on the shore opposite him.

Dick's rifle came to his shoulder.

"Back!" he shouted. "Back, or receive my fire."

The bushrangers paid no heed.

Black George was not with them at this point, but the spirit of their leader was evidently shared by the ruffians.

They came savagely on, plunging knee-deep into the lake.

"Back!"

Onward they came!

Holding their rifles above their heads, and with the water swirling round their belts, the bushrangers rushed to the attack.

Dick hesitated no longer.

His eye glanced along the barrel of his rifle, and the splash and the crack speedily followed.

One of the outlaws gave a fearful yell and slid back into the water.

Dick did not fire to kill, but to disable.

But the man was hard hit.

The others came desperately on.

Crack! crack!

Two more rapid shots—and two wounded men splashing back to the shore they had left; and not six yards had yet been gained.

No wonder the others halted irresolutely.

Dick reloaded his rifle.

But it was not needed.

Back went the bushrangers, with furious curses upon their lips: back to the shore, back into the cover of the bushes.

Dick breathed again with relief.

On his side, at least, he had repelled the attack."

How had Henri Lasalle fared on the other side of the island.

The shots were ringing out there; but faster and more furious. Dick gave a glance across to the shore again. Was it safe to quit his post and go to the aid of Lasalle?

He turned quickly to Clotilde.

"Watch!" he cried. "Call me if I am needed."

The girl nodded quickly.

Dick dashed across the little isle through the thickets.

"A moi! a moi!"

It was a hoarse cry for help from Henri Lasalle!

It took Dick Stanley but a few moments to reach him.

The Frenchman had defended the isle well, as three groaning bushrangers dragging themselves from the water showed; but the outlaws had gained a footing.

Four of them were rushing upon the Frenchman, and the blood streaming down his face showed that Lasalle was wounded.

Dick dashed to Lasalle's aid.

His rifle cracked, and one of the outlaws dropped to the earth.

The next moment a terrible cry came from Lasalle.

A knife, wielded by a savage hand, had been driven home to the very hilt in his breast, and he fell to the ground writhing in the agony of death.

"*Mon Dieu!* Oh!"

They were his last words.

A shudder ran through his body, and he lay still.

He was dead.

Dick Stanley was rushing on. He clubbed his rifle and the heavy butt swept among the bushrangers, dashing them to the earth. One went down, stunned, another reeled back, a third was hurled into the water.

Dick glanced at the Frenchman.

He was past all aid.

And now a loud, thrilling cry came ringing through the bushes—a cry from Clotilde.

"Help! help!"

Dick, setting his teeth, dashed back through the bushes.

He was only just in time.

Five bushrangers had nearly reached the isle when he joined the girl. Clotilde, her face pale as death, pointed. The banker was squirming on the ground in abject terror.

Dick had no time to load his rifle.

He dragged the revolver from his belt and opened fire.

Crack! Crack!

Two of the enemy ducked under, hard hit.

The other three, with savage curses, swerved, and went swimming past the isle, not daring to attempt the landing in the face of the hunter's deadly revolver.

Dick gasped for breath.

"A respite," he cried.

Clotilde's hands were pressed to her heart. Her face was deadly pale, her eyes wide open with terror.

"Heaven help us! Heaven help us!" she moaned. "It is death, death! Where is Monsieur Lasalle?"

Dick made a gesture.

"Dead?"

"Yes."

"Good Heavens! We are all doomed."

The banker gave a convulsive groan.

"We are doomed! Save me, save me, and I will make you rich."

Dick Stanley looked at him grimly.

"Wretch!" he muttered. "It is time now to pay for your crimes; but not for you alone to pay. Wretch!"

Clotilde had sunk upon a log, overcome with the horror of the situation.

"Heaven help us."

Dick laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Come with me. There is a chance—a faint chance—"

"Not without my father!"

Her reply was firm and clear.

"Then all is lost."

The banker gave a scream.

"Do not desert me! Clotilde, do not let him abandon me."

Dick smiled grimly.

"I am here," he said. "Here to the end; but that is not far off now."

Crack! crack! crack!

The bushrangers had been holding off for a few minutes, but now the attack was recommencing more resolutely than ever.

The respite had been very brief.

Crack! crack! crack!

From all sides of the lake the bullets were tearing upon the little isle.

Dick knew that the heavy firing was to cover an advance; but from which side the advance was to come he could not tell.

Probably from both sides at once, and in that case it would be the last struggle.

Overwhelmed by odds, the young Englishman could only fight and die, selling his life as dearly as he could. And he was ready for it.

There was a splashing in the water round the isle. On all sides the foe were coming now, and the end was in sight.

Dick pressed Clotilde's hand.

"It is the end," he whispered. "I love you. Farewell."

"And I," cried the girl. "I love you. God bless you!"

Dick drew her into his arms.

One kiss; the first and the last! Then Dick Stanley turned finger on trigger, to face his foes. They had a footing on the island now, and were closing in on him.

Crack! crack crack!

The bearded face of Black George loomed up before him. Dick's revolver was levelled; but he turned it aside; in Black George lay Clotilde's only hope when the fight was over. The bushranger chief would not harm the girl, but the others—and so Dick spared the life of Black George, and his bullet struck down a yelling ruffian at his side.

It was his last shot.

For Black George's clubbed revolver struck him down the next moment; and he fell, with a crash a thousand lights dancing before his eyes.

He fell, and lay in the grass, unheeded; stunned by the blow yet not quite unconscious, unable to stir, yet seeing as in a fevered vision what passed around him.

He saw rough hands laid upon the whimpering banker; he heard Clotilde's terrible scream, and saw her rush to her father.

He saw Black George seize her and hold her back; not ungently.

Then a wave of pallor came over the girl's face—she reeled—and sank in the arms of the burly bushranger, unconscious.

Black George laid her on the grass.

Then he strode towards the banker. Glyn was paralysed with terror, and did not even make an attempt to struggle for his life. Not did an appeal for mercy pass his lips. He only stared at his captors in dumb, blind terror.

Black George looked at him with a savage grin.

"At last!" at last!" cried the bushrangers.

The banker did not speak.

"Search him! the loot is in paper form; he carries it in his breast, doubtless."

Rough hands searched the banker.

A leather pocket-book came to light, and it was handed to Black George who examined it eagerly. He uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Right! Here's all we want—now give the thief and traitor his deserts."

Roughly the banker's quivering form was thrust against a tree.

Four of the bushrangers levelled their rifles.

Crack—ck!

Four reports were blended almost into one.

At the point-blank range not a single bullet missed the mark.

The banker gave a low moan, and sank in a huddled heap at the foot of the tree.

Black George strode forward and looked at him grimly.

"Dead! So dies a traitor."

He made a sign of the hand to the bushrangers. Some of them cast savage glances at the young Englishman who lay in a semi-conscious state, but not one ventured to disobey the chief's commanding gesture.

The glade was cleared of the ruffians; Black George remained alone with Dick and the unconscious girl.

He filled his hat with water in the lake and dashed it over the young hunter's face.

Dick came to himself with a start.

His head was aching horribly; his senses were swimming, but slowly his brain seemed to grow steadier. He looked stupidly at the outlaw.

"Can you hear me?"

"Yes," muttered Dick, huskily. "Finish, and have done."

"I am finished. You spared my life, and I spare yours."

Dick looked at him in amazement.

"I have had my revenge; the traitor is dead; the loot is in my hands again. I am finished. As for you, I admire your pluck, and you will live. The girl is safe! Black George does not war with women. Pull yourself together."

"You spare us?"

"Yes."

"Heaven bless you, Black George."

Dick held out his hand impulsively.

The bushranger grasped it firmly.

"Circumstances—and wrongs—made me what I am," he said. "But I am not wholly a villain. Here is your horse—take the girl—go—I will keep my men from pursuing you. Farewell."

Dick staggered to his feet. The still unconscious girl was lifted to the horse's back, and Dick mounted. His head was still aching horribly, but he was quite himself again now.

"God bless you, Black George!"

He dashed into the lake. The bushranger chief rejoined his men; not a shot was fired as the young hunter rode ashore and dashed away into the bush.

Away at full speed through the bush in the bright sunlight!

Clotilde gave a long shudder and opened her eyes. She looked up wildly at Dick.

"My father?"

His expression told her; he could not speak.

"Dead?"

"I did all I could to save him, Clotilde."

"Ah—I know you did—but—dead' Oh, heaven!"

He had been a villain, but he had been her father! The girl sobbed convulsively as Dick rode on, holding her in his arms.

* * * * *

But Clotilde's grief yielded to time. In Mount Camp they rested, till the girl was somewhat herself again after her terrible adventure in the bush; and then they left for the nearest port. For Clotilde had promised to become Dick's wife, and at Sydney they were wedded, and it was as our hero's wife that Clotilde sailed for the old country, where amid new and peaceful surroundings she could learn to forget her wild adventure among the foes of the bush!

THE END.

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THE CHUMS OF NORMANHEIGHT.

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Guzzle's Revenge.

Herr Bohn was just about to take his German class, when a tall, bony lad, who looked as though his face had been smeared with walnut juice, entered the class-room.

He wore half-a-dozen diamond and ruby rings, a diamond breast-pin, and an enormous gold chain, while he gazed at the astonished master with an air of supreme superiority.

"I am a new scholar in this college," he said. "I have come here to study for a time. I shall then go to Oxford, where I shall take the highest degrees of your little country. I shall then return to my own vast realms, where I—"

"Suppose we start mit te commencement," interposed Herr Bohn. "Vat is your name?"

"By inheritance I am the Maharajah Mahadeva Mahmood Ghuzni!"

"Du mein Gute!" groaned Herr Bohn. "Vell Ghuzni—"

"That is not my full name."

"See here, my lad! If you tink I am going to call you all those Teufels of names each time I wish to address you, ten you make a mistake."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Lorn. "Call him Guzzle, sir."

The look the great Ghuzni fixed on Tom ought to have paralysed him, but its only effect was to make him laugh the louder.

"You may call me Maharajah Mahadeva Mahmood. I will not be called Ghuzni."

"I tink you will be called what I choose, but we shall see. Do you know any German?"

"I know most languages," answered Ghuzni, with a lordly wave of his hand.

"Goot! Ten ve vill start mit a little German. Sit down."

Ghuzni gazed at the form; then, pulling Freddy Barnes' handkerchief from his pocket, rubbed the form with it; and,

flinging the handkerchief on the floor, took his seat.

"Ach! Leave it tere, Barnes. We shall see it picked up just directly. Now, my lad, just read tat sennence, first in German, ten in English. Tat will do!" he added, as Ghuzni began stumbling over the words. "I see German is not von of te languages you know most of. Perhaps you may know te oders better. You cannot know tem vorse. I do not suppose you can give me the English of vat you cannot give me the German, so ve vill not try; but you shall try to pick up tat boy's handkerchief and hand it to him mit apologies."

"Never. Not I. I have royal blood in my veins. I am the Maharajah. I shall take possession of my birthright in a few years. I have wealth sufficient to buy this college, and never feel the loss. A lac of rupees is as nothing to me. I fling soverigns to beggars. Boy, if I have spoilt your handkerchief, buy more."

Ghuzni pulled out a handful of silver, and flung it on the desk in front of Freddy.

"Never mind about the handkerchief, sir," said that worthy, scrambling up the money and putting it in his pocket.

"Return te boy his money."

"Oh! I say, sir; it's all mixed up with my own."

"You must know how much you had."

"Nunno, sir. I'm awful careless with money matters."

"So I've noticed," murmured Tom, to whom Freddy owed sundry small sums.

"Well, if te silly boy chooses to give away his money, I cannot help it; but I vill have obedience, so pick tat handkerchief up."

"Do you take me for a dog?" snarled Ghuzni. "Pick it up yourself."

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"Ho, ho, ho! Te boy is funny," laughed Herr Bohn. "He amuses me greatly; but, my lads, I have my duty to perform. Ve, will commence it."

Grasping his cone, he caught the great Ghuzni by the back of the neck, and dragged him over the desk; then the music commenced.

"Vill you pick it up?"

"Noho!"

"Ten ve must begin again. So—so——"

"Yes."

"Boys generally call me—sir."

"Sirhir, sir—woohoo!"

"Und express teir regret for impertinence. Do I hear—te——"

"I'm sorry."

"Good. Now, Ghuzni, pick tat handkerchief up, hand it to him properly, and express your regret."

The order was obeyed sullenly. Herr Bohn had been hitting hard.

"It's all right, Maramy Momudid Mumblemunkins," said Freddy. "You can take it again as often as you like on the same terms."

For the remainder of that lesson Herr Bohn did not ask Ghuzni a question. He had an idea that a few more canings would be required, and he never caned a boy twice in one day.

"It strikes me, Bob, we shall get some fun out of Guzzle," said Tom, after class.

"Looks like it, old chap. I say, what a consummate ass the fellow is. I believe he is going across to old Surly's lodge. Let's follow, and see the fun."

"So you have taken care of my parrot?" inquired Ghuzni, glancing at a cage that hung over the open window.

"I have, my Lord Dook," answered Surly. "If you've got any more loose silver handy, it 'ud be sorter comforting to my feelings. I've heard sailors' parrots talk pretty sulphurous, but that ere bird takes the seed. He do straight. I ain't very particular, but I draw the line at his talk."

"Bah! I am a Buddhist, and I taught the bird to talk."

"Then all I can say is, the pair of you ought to have your necks wrung."

"Fellow! Place the cage on the table. Now open the door. Give me a lump of sugar. Now you shall hear it speak."

The parrot hopped down and gazed at its master with open eyes.

"Talk to these dogs!" cried Ghuzni, holding the sugar out of the bird's reach.

The parrot made one or two attempts to get the sugar without speaking; but, finding this impossible, commenced to talk in the language Ghuzni had taught it.

Now, Tom and Bob were most unruly boys. The wildest prank, provided there were no vice in it, always appealed to their feelings, but they were honest, truthful lads—consequently bad language in any shape or form was abhorrent to them.

The words that bird uttered were appalling.

"I'll wring the brute's neck!" cried Tom, springing forward.

"What—touch my bird?" shouted Ghuzni, grappling with him. "I'll kill you if you do."

"And I'll kill that blackguardly bird," cried Bob, seizing the poker; but he was saved the act of retribution, for at that moment Sarl's tomat bounded into the room. It was on the table in a moment; and, like a flash, went out of the window, so did the parrot.

"My bird—my parrot!" howled Ghuzni.

"It's gone from your gaze like a beautiful dream," said Tom. "It would serve you right if a tiger carried you off in a similar manner, for if you are not ashamed of yourself for teaching a wretched parrot to utter such vile things, you ought to be."

"I'll have vengeance," yelled Ghuzni, seizing a carving-knife off the table, and rushing from the room.

The old cat had caught the parrot by the throat, and effectually stopped its language for all time. But his object was not to stop the language. He wanted an *al fresco* dinner, and proceeded forthwith to have it. The Maharajah Mahadeva Mahmood Ghuzni had failed to impress the Chums of Normanheight; but when the Nemesistic tom-cat saw the Raja of higher degree coming onwards with a brandished carving-knife, the aforesaid feline apparently thought some-

thing was going to happen; and, like Excelsior, he climbed to higher things by ascending an apple tree, and taking his dinner with him.

Ghuzni's fury was something to behold. Holding the knife in his teeth, he sprang up the apple-tree, and a few feathers fluttered down on his face; then Surly, who had followed him up, gripped him by the hair, and wrenched the knife from his grasp.

"You ain't going to kill my cat," he cried.

"Your cat isn't going to kill my parrot."

"You may be right, my lord dook, but my opinion is, you're mistook."

"I fancy the parrot will be of the same opinion," said Tom.

Ghuzni gazed upwards and saw the remains of his quickly-disappearing bird; then his manner changed in a remarkable way.

"After all," he said, "I suppose it is only nature, and we can't blame the cat."

"Suttinly not, young gent. That 'ere cat is mighty fond of birds, and catches 'em in a remarkable manner."

"It's a fine cat—a great favourite, I suppose?"

"Why—yes. Comes to me like a dorg. Directly it's bedtime he goes and coils himself on my hearthrug, and if I don't put the light out pretty sharp, he gets up, climbs on the table, and blows the lamp out. One day I forgot to ring the college bell. Blest if that cat didn't go and ring it for me, then he goes and taps at the doctor's door, and when I come up, blest if the cat wasn't a screwing up his face trying to tell him it was seven o'clock."

"I think we'll go after that," said Tom, "but I tell you what it is, Bob—if Guzzle gets hold of that cat, he'll never call the doctor again."

"Think he means to kill it?"

"I'm mighty certain he will if he gets the chance," answered Tom.

Guzzle, as he was called from that day, got on very badly with the smaller boys, but he soon made friends with Snaggs, the bully, who immediately borrowed five pounds from him, and invited him to supper.

As soon as it was finished, Ghuzni, carrying a small hamper, made his way to Surly's room. Fortune favoured him. The porter was not there, but the cat was—fast asleep on the hearthrug.

Ghuzni opened his basket, and seized the cat; then the fun commenced. It is not an easy thing to put a cat in a small basket, and before Ghuzni had succeeded, he got clawed in a terrible manner; but he was a determined youth, and he meant having a fearful vengeance on that cat.

Having tied up his hamper so that escape was impossible, he carried it into the dormitory.

"Hallo, Guzzle! what have you got there?" inquired Tom.

"If you call me that again I'll stab you to the heart with this dagger," cried Ghuzni.

"Keep your wool on, Guzzle," laughed Tom. "How is it some of you niggers have curly hair, and some straight?"

"Dare to say that again, and——"

"Oh, bother! I'm not going to say everything twice over. What have you got in the hamper, stupid?"

"Sarl's cat. I am going to torture it to death."

"You are going to do no such thing," said Tom. "We don't allow that sort of blackguard's work here."

"Won't I? I'll soon show you——"

Tom sprang forward and dealt Ghuzni one on the nose that caused him to drop the dagger and hold his hands to the damaged organ. Then Tom seized the weapon, and cut the strings of the hamper.

The cat was out like a shot, but Guzzle caught it by the tail, and it went up him, clawing his face most vigorously.

The boys howled with laughter. Guzzle was getting a fearfully scratched. He only held on for a few moments, but they were painful ones for him. As the cat whizzed towards the door, he seized a water-jug, and hurled it in his blind fury. It did not hit the cat, but it struck Mr. Jackson's shins, just as that gentleman was entering the room to see lights out.

The jug was smashed to atoms, while Mr. Jackson was drenched down the legs. He was hurt, too—so was Guzzle the next moment, for the angry master dragged him across the bed and administered justice with his cane.

"Any boy who is not in bed in five minutes will receive similar punishment," he said, marching from the room.

THE END.

22/10/07