

by me any day. As it is, we're well out of the mess, and shall just get home in seven weeks, as I had promised Kathleen. Well, our final hunt has been a good one, if the last day of it was a trifle too exciting. Another cup of coffee, old chap?"

They had more coffee and more tobacco, and at 9.30, with the clear stars sparkling from the dark heaven above them, the whole camp was wrapped in sleep.

Seven weeks and a single day later the two friends, having extricated themselves from the African wilderness and hurried home from Mombasa, got briskly out of the Dover express at Victoria Station. They were met by two ladies, the younger of whom went straight up to John D'Aere, and exchanged kisses with him. She was a wonderfully good-looking girl, as Northam's eye at once noted, tallish, fresh-looking, blue-eyed, having an abundance of fair brown hair, and bearing about her such visible evidences of health, enjoyment, and high spirits as at once captured the onlooker. Introductions followed, and, in a few minutes the quartet were driving off to lunch together at the Trocadero on the most friendly terms. In another month John D'Aere and Kathleen Hetherall were married.

It is to be confessed at once that this match, which all their friends predicted, would be an unusually happy one, turned out a sad, lamentable failure. There was only one reason for this, and that reason was the man whose life D'Aere had saved in Central Africa. It was one of those hideous ironies of fate with which the world teems, and the catastrophe following the mad and reckless infatuation which Kathleen D'Aere and Charlie Northam developed for one another is, alas, common enough. In six months Kathleen had thrown her happiness to the winds, run off with the fascinating but philandering Northam and wrecked the life of one of the best fellows in England.

John D'Aere obtained his divorce with as little publicity as possible, and, with the ruin of a long life-time before him, went out into the desert places of the earth, in search of such excitement and adventure as might bring solace to his wounded soul. Two years went by, and he had succeeded to an uncle's baronetcy, with a very considerable accession to his already ample fortune. Another three years had passed, and one clear fresh morning a big steam yacht, with D'Aere and two friends on board, stood into the little harbour of Mogador, the southernmost port of Morocco, on the Atlantic seaboard. There was a fresh westerly breeze blowing, and as they entered the narrow channel which leads into the tiny bay, the white foam spouted outside the sea walls of the town and ran spuming southward along the rock-bound coast. Once behind the island that guards the entrance, all was peace, and the great white city, with its mosques and minarets and embattled walls, shone before them. A few hours later, having viewed the place and ridden out to Ratto's Palm Tree House Hotel, the three friends were standing near the British Vice-Consulate. Suddenly a low voice at Sir John's elbow said "Can I speak with you, Mr. D'Aere?"

The voice seemed familiar, and he turned quickly, to see in front of him nothing but a veiled Moorish woman.

"Please step into the court yonder," said the figure as it moved away, "and I will come to you."

D'Aere was curiously moved. The voice brought back many memories to him. Asking his friends to wait for him, he moved quietly into an adjacent court, a quiet place having a single narrow gateway and surrounded by high walls. There he found the veiled figure waiting for him.

"Who is it?" he asked, somewhat abruptly, "and what do you want?"

"I am Bernard, sir," said the woman. "You remember me, I was . . . Mrs. D'Aere's"—she stumbled at the name—"maid." As she spoke, she let down her veil.

"Good God, is it you, Bernard?" said Sir John, surprised into a familiar tone quite unexpected even to himself. And, in truth, he had reason for his surprise. He had last seen Bernard five years before, a plump, well-looking, extremely self-sufficient English maid. The woman before him was a mere wreck of humanity, worn, yellow, and haggard, prematurely grey, her skin hanging in wrinkles about her face. Sir John had no reason to regard the woman with any friendly feeling, but he was deeply shocked.

"What does this mean?" he ejaculated. "It means, sir, that my mistress is a slave far beyond the mountains—the Atlas—and in a worse plight than I am. Oh, sir, you must help her—she is dying!" At this point the poor, over-wrought creature burst into tears and broke down completely. In ten minutes Sir John had got her into the Vice-Consul's house, and there, while his friends waited for him in another room, heard her story. Retribution had fallen, and it was a sufficiently pitiable one.

Her mistress and Northam, taking her with them, had in the first instance gone to South America. Tiring of that part of the world, they came back to Europe and set off on a wandering expedition into Morocco. Northam was so ill-advised as to attempt to penetrate an unexplored part of the Atlas. The expedition was captured by a wild and fanatical Berber tribe. Northam himself was slain, and the two women became slaves and worse than slaves in the establishment of the Berber chief. In six months this tribe was assailed and conquered by a clan of Moorish Arabs inhabiting the plains beyond the Atlas, and the two Englishwomen were transferred to the walled castle of Sidi Absalaam, the most renowned robber chieftain of those regions. Three months before the meeting with Sir John D'Aere, seeing her mistress daily becoming weaker, more ill and more despairing, under the horrors of her situation, Bernard had made her escape, and, travelling mostly by night, had, after two months of terrible sufferings, reached Marakesh (Morocco City). From there, by the kindness of a Jewish trader, she had been forwarded to Mogador, where she had arrived only the day before Sir John's yacht entered the harbour.

A long consultation with the British Vice-Consul ensued. It was out of the question, as that gentleman pointed out, to attempt to rescue Mrs. Northam (as she now was) by recourse to the Moorish Government. To penetrate the Atlas and subdue the tribesmen in the vicinity of Sidi Absalaam's town would need an expeditionary force of 3000 men and a delay of many months, even if the Sultan decreed it—an extremely unlikely proceeding. A private expedition, and that as small as possible, would be the only plan. John D'Aere, despite the fact that he was engaging in the rescue of a faithless woman, hesitated not a moment. After all, he was a man, and no matter what had passed, there was still a tender corner in his heart for this poor, lost suffering creature, who had once been so brilliant a woman and his wife.

There was a certain man in Mogador, luckily, one Hassan Ali, who was highly recommended by the Vice-Consul as the

guide and ally of the expedition. He was a famous hunter, explorer, and fighting man, and he was, moreover—a rare thing in Morocco—honest and reliable. Hassan Ali knew Sidi Absalaam's town, but he knew also that the rescue would be a difficult and a dangerous one, and his price was high. He would guide the expedition to Sidi Absalaam's and back for £250 down, and if the rescue was achieved he was to receive £250 more, Sir John D'Aere finding all other expenses. These terms were at once agreed to.

Two months later, a small caravan with the three Englishmen, Sir John, and his two friends, disguised in Moorish dress, waited breathlessly one moonless but starlit night in a thick tamarisk grove two miles from Sidi Absalaam's town. They had with them the swiftest and stoutest mules that could be procured in Morocco—horses would have excited too much suspicion—and a couple of trusty fellows procured by Hassan Ali, who himself had succeeded in getting into communication with Mrs. Northam. And now, upon this fateful night, Hassan himself was waiting under the walls of Sidi Absalaam's castle to bring off that unfortunate lady.

The rescue succeeded to a miracle. Mrs. Northam let herself down from her window by a long cord; Hassan met her and brought her away on a swift mule; and by one o'clock in the morning had reached the grove. It was a strange meeting, thoroughly English, though a deep tragedy lay hidden in the words of the man and the woman. D'Aere went forward and took Kathleen's hand in his as she sat on her mule.

"Thank God, you are here, Kathleen," he said. "We have been on tenter-hooks for the last two hours."

"Thank God, too, John," she replied, as her thin hand pressed his. "I never expected to see an English face, much less yours, again. Oh, what do I not owe you? You of all people in the world!"

"There, not another word," said he kindly, but abruptly. "We must talk later. To-night we have to get on instantly and as far as possible. To-morrow I suppose, we must fight it out." So, under the wonderful North African starlight, they pressed on.

At four o'clock next afternoon the rescuing party was attacked, as they had expected. A band of sixty wild Moorish horsemen, carrying long guns and eager for blood, came down on them. But the English party had six good shots among them and each man had at his side a spare repeating rifle in addition to the one he held. Their position, at the head of a narrow, boulder-

strewn valley, was also well chosen. Sidi Absalaam and his tribesmen despite their numbers, were hopelessly beaten off, leaving seventeen dead men, including the chief, behind them and carrying with them many wounded.

Two months later the little expedition, after much hard travel and many adventures, reached Mogador. Mrs. Northam, ill and emaciated at the beginning of the journey, had steadily grown weaker, and for the last fortnight had been carried in a litter. She begged to be taken on board the yacht, which now again lay in the harbour.

"I can't live long, John," she had whispered, as they reached the town. "Take me on board the yacht. I am afraid of Morocco. Let me die anywhere but there."

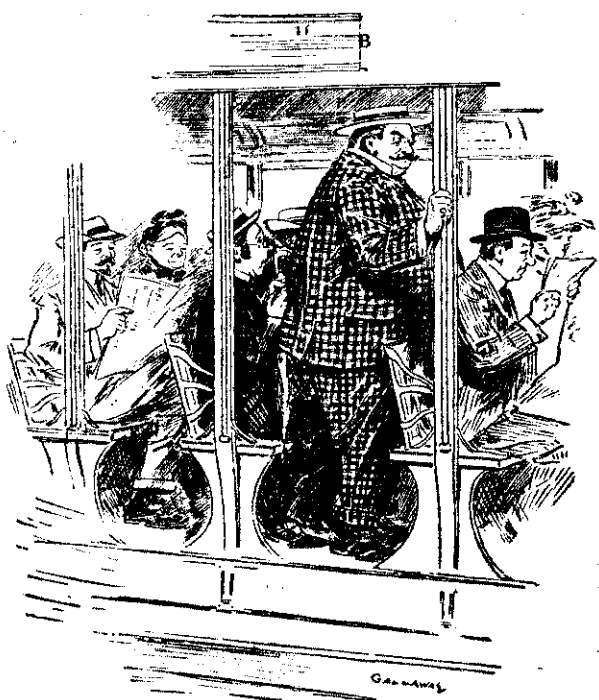
And in truth, as anyone could see, death was in her hollow, faded face. Her sufferings had been too much for her. Her spirit—she always had pluck—had kept her going during the earlier perils of the desert march; but, as they neared Mogador and safety, she had steadily faded and grown weaker. To John D'Aere, who had known her—ah, so well—in her good days, the sight was inexcessably piteous. At Mogador, accompanied by Bernard, who had during the period of waiting, become, under good living, and lack of terror, somewhat less of a scarecrow, Kathleen was taken on board the yacht. Then the party steamed slowly into the Atlantic and up the coast. They were nearing Cape Spartel, two days later; it was close upon sunset and Kathleen lay on deck under the awning. She had been talking over many things with D'Aere.

"Ah, John," she whispered, "you were always far too good to me. And to think how I have hurt you—destroyed your life. I was mad, mad! Well, I have paid for my hideous folly. I have suffered as few women suffer—but no, nothing can atone for what I have done. Do you know, when I was a child, I once heard a sermon on a curious text, which has always stuck in my mind. It was 'Faithful are the Wounds of a Friend.' How I have wounded you, John, and how good you have been to me!"

Then a little flush ran over her pale, worn face as she whispered to the man beside her, "John, I shall not stay very long. I would like you to give me one kiss before I go."

So, for the first time since their parting, D'Aere leant over her and kissed her upon her cheek and brow.

Three hours later, with John D'Aere's hand in hers, she passed away. The yacht reached Gibraltar early next morning, and two days after, as she had prayed and hoped, Kathleen Northam was buried in British soil.



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