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SINNERS IN HEAVEN

PART THREE—Continued.

With only the birds for witness, the sound of the surf for choir, the radiance of the eastern sky for altar, simply and from their hearts' depths these two pledged their troth. The few chief sentences, from the marriage service were chosen by Barbara for their only rites.

There would be many, away in the world, to scoff, many to condemn. But no outward consecration of ground, no army of ordained priests, could have rendered more sacred that moment when the hush was broken by their low-voiced avowals. Perchance the "Destiny that shapes our ends," seeing all things, reading all hearts, who had flung these two together upon this far garden of His own creation, and given them there the one supreme gift which is part of Himself, would understand and accept their vows:

"To love and to cherish till death us do part. And thereto I plight thee my troth."

Their voices did not falter. The small tin ring encircled the girl's finger; they stood silent a while, with locked hands. Then he drew her toward him, and very gently their lips met.

"My wife!" he breathed.

Barbara bathed, dressed, and got breakfast, with no thought of fatigue after a sleepless night. Her heart seemed almost unbearably full. As she watched the smoke curl up from her own fire, and that rising from Meama's hut, she resembled the primitive woman glorying in this life shorn of all false trappings. Was not Meama likewise cooking food for her man? In the south, too, the native women were so employed. Man and his mate—in palace or hovel, in mansion or hut! All the artificiality hiding the big realities faded away with the worlds beyond the blue horizon.

It was the same with Alan. Like some fine, strong, wild thing, he dived, swam and splashed in the river; then returned for breakfast, ravenously hungry, singing as he swung down the bay.

"I have a great surprise!" Barbara announced. "Here is a tin of 'bully beef.' I saved it for my emergency. Shall we have it for our wedding feast, as a special treat?"

He shouted with laughter. "Lord! To think of 'bully' becoming a special treat for a wedding feast! Bring it along, O wise and thrifty woman."

They ate their "wedding feast" in a mossy shady dell; and even the memory of Aunt Dolly, who unconsciously had provided it, failed to cast more than a momentary shadow across their joy.

Alan lay along the bottom of the boat, his head pillowed in Barbara's lap, as the sun began to sink.

"Well!" he asked. "Have you found a desert island honeymoon very irksome? What about the big cities where you expected to 'feel life'?"

She laughed low, passing caressing fingers through his hair. "I have no other heart's desire. You are life itself to me now, Alan. That's why—"

"You came to me last night!" he suggested softly, as she stopped.

She nodded. The boat drifted idly, caressed by the soft breeze, rocking gently with the tide.

"Thank God you did," he murmured, after a pause. "Everything was becoming unbearable."

She trailed her fingers in the water, lost in thought.

"It was strange," she observed presently, "that the day on which I first began to feel—that you had become to me—should have been my wedding day!"

"Those first months here nearly drove me mad—until I was sure the field was clear," he replied. "Then I meant to win!"

"Oh, Alan!" With sudden passion she drew his head back against her breast. "If I lost you—my husband—I should die."

He turned in her arms, and pressed his lips to her soft neck.

"Barbara! It means—all that—to you, at last!"

They stayed in the boat until darkness had fallen. Then Alan took the

By CLIVE ARDEN
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ears he had fashioned, and padded back to land.

Silence fell upon them as they neared the shore. It was the hour when exterior things diminished to nothingness, and the Big Things were too vast for conversation. He beached the boat, then slipped his arm around the girl and drew her toward the hut.

"Our wedding night, Barbara," he whispered.

Her feet lingered a little, and she paused now and then to admire beauties of scent or sound; the rising moon showed her face tremulous. Outside the dark hut, she drew herself free, turning toward the sea as though loath to leave it. It seemed as though she were silently bidding farewell to some part of her life; and the man behind her stood motionless, his eyes on her averted head, silently waiting, making no attempt to touch her.

At last, slowly, she turned and held out her hands. He took them close in his.

"Come, my dearest," he said.

V

Six months, when you live in an earthly paradise, are but a flash of vivid light in a sky which is always blue. These two had crossed their looming mountains and arrived at the valley upon the other side; and they found it fair and shining, full of the songs of birds.

The days sped by, each seeming to exceed in beauty its predecessor. There was no need now to fill each moment with arduous, thankless toil. All walls and divisions were down. When Alan, with a few slashing cuts, severed the bamboo partition in their sleeping hut, it had been symbolic.

"There!" he exclaimed, his foot upon the canes strewn the floor. "No more twos. Everything's one."

"One!" she breathed, renouncing, with the outward surrender of her only privacy, all the private strongholds of her nature. But the look she gave him was no longer elusive. It was steadfast, shining, exultant.

In the wilderness Barbara had found the "hidden want": the love which, with all its many far-reaching subtleties, can alone tune the extraordinary cosmology, called life into any semblance of a harmonious whole.

Sometimes they played ridiculous games upon the sand, gambling with the money lying useless in their luggage.

They hunted, fished, worked, bathed together. And, during these months, each learned much, which was accumulated and stored within their hearts.

Their clothes were in rags, but they made fun of the matter. Alan clung to his old razor, and Barbara to her scissors.

"After all," she said, "we can cover ourselves in reed matting. Provided you don't grow a beard, I can face anything."

Six months of perfect happiness; it was against all the rules of fate; but even fate seemed to have cast off these two for a time. For some reason the world was made passing beautiful, and human beings placed in it without any choice. But the attainment, much less the possession, of permanent bliss therein has not been decreed.

At the end of six months, the first ominous cloud appeared. Chimabohol the native chief, fell ill and died. Babooma became head of the tribe.

No care or pity for his fellows permeated the hide of brutality encasing Babooma. All the worst instincts of the savage, held in check by the old chief under Croft's influence, now rose to the surface. His own adherents, impatient of restraints, hailed him with joy. The division in the settlement became at once more evident: murmuring dissatisfaction upon one side, threats and tortures upon the other.

The white man's popularity had increased with the increase of health, cleanliness and industry among the natives. Now he took full advantage of it, and only his continuous intervention maintained order. The position, however, was fraught with danger. To continue to inspire a semi-superstitious fear after more than eighteen months was in itself a precarious task, only achieved by the weight of his own personality. Furthermore, he was confronted by Babooma's personal hatred. From Roowa he had learned of the chief's mania for women, and women were scarce in the tribe. White women no longer offended the black men's instincts.

At present vivid memories of a wounded shoulder, blue devil hissing from round Croft's hut, the supposition of a hidden white tribe ever at hand, restrained Babooma from defiance of a man tabu. But familiarity and the scraps of education imparted by the white people were gaining upon superstition. . . . It was only a matter of time.

Barbara had quickly perceived that her man was seriously troubled concerning the tribe. Dimly aware herself of the first faint clouds in the brightness of their sky, heralding a possible storm, she sought to hide them, to keep their happiness undisturbed.

During the following months the cloud grew ever more menacing. Those natives who, fundamentally brutal and idle, had not appreciated their enforced life of industry, quickly de-

teriorated under Babooma's leadership. His adherents increased in number, as did his cruelties. There being insufficient grown women, he seized young girls, almost children, made them the toys of his lusts, and afterward they disappeared—sometimes, under cloak of religious fanaticism, upon the sacrificial altar to Bahuka; sometimes to satiate his own appetite for human flesh.

Many times Croft was on the point of utilizing that last bullet. But with it his influence would have vanished. Natives regard their own chief with extraordinary superstition. To them he is permanently tabu. The next in rank was one of Babooma's followers.

Only more danger would have resulted for Barbara and himself, and probably civil war in the settlement. These people were insisting on making their own hell, and nobody could save them short of exterminating half their number.

After a time Alan refused to allow Barbara near the settlement. She said little. She passed long hours with Meama and her children, banishing the mental torture during his absence in the radiance of her welcome upon his return.

One night he returned, after a stormy day's battling in the south, with his own optimism gravely shaken. It was, he knew, but a question of days before the threatening mine should burst. The division had widened to an extent which only blood and explosion would, eventually, bridge; it needed but a match to the fuse, and that explosion would come.

Barbara did not meet him as usual. He wondered a little, making his way quickly down to their hut. Supper was ready, but she was not there. He looked into the sleeping hut, but that also was empty. Anxiously, he turned his steps toward Roowa's abode. Meama sat outside, suckling a new addition to her family, crooning softly over the little dark form.

She waved an arm toward the east. "The great chief's wife went up to the heights—long, long ago! Meama still watching for her," she said.

He strode off up the slope, and the native woman continued her crooning song.

Barbara was seated upon the rocks where, nearly a year before, the dawn had witnessed their simple marriage ceremony. Her elbows were propped on her knees, her chin was sunk in her hands.

Alan approached noiselessly, but she became instinctively aware of his presence. He noticed a strange expression in her eyes as she turned to greet him: a far-seeing wonder blended with a tenderness which seemed reflected in the smiling, tremulous lines of her mouth.

She silently stretched out her hands, and he took them in his, mystified.

"I wondered what had become of you—" he began.

"I felt I must come here. This always seems a kind of sacred temple, our own. . . . Oh, Alan!"

She gazed into his face half-smiling, yet with a suspicion of tears dimming the soft light in her eyes.

"What, dear?" he asked, more puzzled.

She made no reply; but the glory in her face seemed to deepen, radiating toward him. . . . Looosing his hands, her arms crept up to his shoulders, round his neck, drawing his head down to her own.

A sudden, vague realization of some stupendous happening caused him to draw her close. "What is it, Barbara?" he murmured. "What are you trying to tell me?"

She tilted her head back a little, and saw the dawning comprehension in his face. A faint smile flickered again across her own.

"Can't you guess—my husband?"

Instantly he was conscious of the same inimitable tenderness in her regard which he had just seen in the eyes of the woman suckling her child. The same mysterious essence of motherhood seemed to emanate from both.

With a muttered cry, his lips sought hers; he caught her close, pressing her to his heart as if daring all the forces of nature, all the venom of savage humanity, to take her from him now.

Suddenly, impulsively, she looked up into his eyes.

"Shall you love—it?" she whispered.

A reflection of her own tenderness showed in the smile which answered her. The glory of the sinking sun illuminated his face.

"Shall I?" he breathed. "My dearest—what a question!"

VI

Hand in hand they descended the hill, full of this fresh wonder. After supper they sat on the shore in the moonlight, talking in low tones of the future, making wonderful plans. . . . Both possessed that curious sensitiveness to nature which compels one, in any crisis, to make for open spaces, limitless horizons of ocean. . . . It was after midnight when at last they went to bed. The night breeze had died down, and a peculiar sense of aridness pervaded the island; the water became calm to stillness.

Barbara was restless, and lay long awake. The strange stillness with its sensation of false calm heralding approaching tempest, revived her premonitions of disaster. When at last she fell asleep, it was only to be tortured with the same premonitions magnified into nightmare realities. She awoke gasping and sobbing in Alan's

arms, and clung to him feverishly. "I dreamed you had disappeared," she cried, in bewildered explanation. "How could that happen?" He soothed her. "How could my bulk disappear? Don't talk nonsense!"

They breakfasted later than usual, and had barely finished when the noise of many agitated voices reached their ears.

Glancing apprehensively at each other, they hurried out of the hut. The sky was leaden, hues of angry orange suffusing the horizon, the air oppressive. From the direction of the palm grove streamed a hurrying, chattering crowd of black figures—men, women and children.

Croft's brow contracted, and his lips set. The mine had evidently exploded even sooner than he expected.

Seeing him, a wailing cry arose from the advancing crowd. Weary and terrified, they stumbled forward to the palisade, where the women fell upon the ground, moaning, weeping, waving wild arms, sometimes adding their voices to the unintelligible babble of the men. To comprehend their meaning was at present impossible.

Presently their talk grew more coherent; he was able to make out its drift.

"We will serve thee, O Great White Chief! . . . Thou art merciful! Thou art wise beyond the wisdom of our men! . . . We will work for thee, O Chief! Thou carest not to torture and kill. . . . A-aa! A-aa!"

Thou hast done much for our tribe. Under thee it will become strong, if thou wilt be our chief. The fruits



A Wailing Cry Arose.

of the earth will grow, the fish leap up from the water! . . . We love thee, O Mighty Friend of the Gods! We will serve thee! . . . Thus, and much more with a similar burden, did they babble in their eagerness. Commanding silence, he bade one of them explain the cause of this visitation.

Babooma, it transpired, soon after Croft's departure the previous evening, had worked himself into a passion. Expressing contempt for the white man and his gods, he raised the tabu. Encouraged by his own adherents, he then declared war upon the white chief with instant death to all who thwarted his designs. This set the fuse alight. An outburst of murmuring disloyalty to Babooma warred with the usual superstitious fear of him as their god-ordained chief; while their genuine affection for Croft flared up to white heat. To prove his words, maddened by opposition, Babooma seized and strangled one of the men who dared openly to rebel.

This was too much for the peaceful faction. Secretly and swiftly, they conspired together, under cover of night. While the rest of the tribe slept, they stole out—some eighty-odd, including women and children—and sped through the woods to the north.

This drastic move meant a tremendous decision, bound around as they were with age-old superstitions. It was a forlorn, terror-stricken little band which Croft presently addressed. He spoke kindly, trying to allay their fear, feeling a certain relief that the anticipated trouble had occurred so soon. Most of the men, he noticed, were fully armed; therefore it should not be impossible to overthrow Babooma and, once for all, quell the savage element.

"Whether I can be your chief or not is in the hands of my gods," he concluded with prudent piety; "but rest assured of my protection. Your women and children are tired from the long walk through the forest. Let them come inside our garden for safety and food."

He opened the entrance in the palisade. Awestruck into silence, they fled through, their minds full of the "little blue devils," experienced here by their menfolk. Might these not spring up and burn them even now at the great white chief's command?

They squatted in one close group, hungry and grateful for all they received, following Barbara's movements with adoring, wondering eyes, as she distributed food. Their faith in Croft equalled their faith in their god, Bahuka; once within the palisade, their fears of Babooma sank. Then men, resting outside, kept a sharp watch for any daylight attack. Roowa was sent to attend to his store of native weapons.

Presently the excited visitors in the garden, tired and satisfied, fell asleep.

TO BE CONTINUED

Doughnuts!

A new, simple way to make them light and delicious

1 egg
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup sweet milk
2 cups self-rising flour (about)
1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
1/2 teaspoon vanilla

Beat egg, add sugar and milk, then self-rising flour, nutmeg and vanilla. Dough will be very soft and sufficient flour must be sprinkled on board to keep it from sticking; work in just enough extra flour so that dough can be handled. Fry in deep hot fat.

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