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The Finding of Diamond Pan.

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

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"It's no good, little girl; I've seen it coming for weeks, and now it has come we may as well look it in the face. It isn't nice, but we've got to. I'm frozen clean out, and I'd better strike out a new line of some sort before I have to pay with my liberty when I can't pay any longer with my purse."

"But do you mean to tell me, Tom, that such a horrible injustice as that can be possible? That just because you haven't got as much money and can't employ as many Kaffirs as Macadam and that German Jew partner of his, Grunstein, you'll not only have to lose your claim, but be fined like this to your last sovereign? I don't wonder, upon my word, at men being driven from honest work into I. D. B. when there are laws like that on the fields. Why, it's worse than I. D. B. itself. Here they'll give a man 15 years on the breakwater for just being found with diamonds he can't account for strictly enough to please the detectives, and yet they'll allow one man to ruin another and perhaps spoil all his prospects in life just because he is richer and because he has got a grudge against him. It's shameful, that's what it is, and if I had my way and I was a man I'd—"

"No, you wouldn't," little girl, or if you did there'd only be another funeral very soon after. There is only one law here, and that is the law of money. Every one's here to make it, and every one, whether he's an honest man or a thief, is bound to uphold everything that protects it. If you have money, you can do as you please, but if you haven't you might as well try to hold up the next rock slip at De Beers as to try to work against it. If I was to take it out of either Macadam or Grunstein in the way you mean, there wouldn't be a man in camp to put his hand out to save me from being lynched the next minute, though there isn't a Kaffir or a kopje walloper on the fields who doesn't see the swindle."

"But what makes me maddest of all, Luce, is that it isn't only Macadam's grudge against me for hanging on to that stone which fell with some of my blue into his claim. It's that greasy, hook-nosed son of a thief Grunstein being sponged on you and wanting me out of the place, so that, as he thinks, he can have the running to himself. That's why he keeps Macadam up to it and goes in with him, and that's why I've hung on so long."

"But it's no use any longer. I can't go on, and I'd better stop before I'm ruined completely. In another week I shouldn't have even the claim to sell. Now I can get something for it, and with that I'll have to clear off the fields and try my luck over the borders. It's my only chance. It looks like chucking up the sponge, I know, and I don't like it, especially as it means leaving you, little girl, almost alone, but if I were to hang on it would really be playing their game for them."

"Well, I suppose you're right, Tom, and if it can't be helped, it can't. But never mind, we're both of us young enough yet, and you've all Africa before you. I know you'll do your best—and Tom, you can remember this, that however long you are doing it when you come back you'll find me just the same as I am now. A bit older, of course, but not so very old, I hope, that you'll!"

The conversation came to an abrupt end just here, or perhaps it might be more correct to say that it was continued in a language which is not translatable through the cold and unsympathetic medium of print.

The facts which had so far formed the basis of the conversation between Miss Lucy Carnegie, the daughter of a fairly well-to-do diamond broker, and Mr. Tom Burrows, a not particularly prosperous diamond miner, may be briefly summarized as follows:

In the days of the open mine working at the De Beers and Kimberley mines there existed a law which was the cause of much heartburning and no little injustice among miners. A digger was compelled, under penalty of progressive fines, which either amounted to or actually culminated in confiscation of his claim, to keep pace in removing his "blue" with his next-door neighbor to such an extent as to preclude his ground falling into his neighbor's claim. Such a regulation was really a necessity, but at the same time it is obvious that it might be made an instrument of both tyranny and dishonesty by fortunate and wealthy diggers to freeze out their less prosperous neighbors by driving them either to abandonment of their claim or to sell at an absurdly low price.

This is what had happened to Tom Burrows. His next neighbors, Macadam and Grunstein, were both richer men than himself, and they owned claims on both sides of his. He had quarreled with Macadam, and Grunstein disliked him and wanted to get rid of him for the reasons which he stated to his sweetheart. Hence they put all the Kaffir workmen they could hire into their claims and got out their "blue" at a rate which Burrows, with his two Kaffirs and one bushman, could not possibly keep pace with.

The necessary result was that his ground kept falling into theirs far faster than he could get it removed. His neighbors laid the usual informations against him, and time after time he was summoned and fined for failing to obey the law. The fines and the extra expense that he had been forced into for labor had now almost exhausted his resources, and, as he said, if it went on much longer he would lose his claim. This would have meant utter ruin and the deferring of his hopes for an indefinite time, and hence his resolve to throw up the sponge, as he put it, and end the unequal contest.

The next day he sold his claim to his

victorious neighbors at about a third of its value, and that night went home to his little tin shanty in Curry street in no very cheerful or amiable frame of mind, but still by no means despondent. He was young, hearty and athletic. He possessed nearly £200 and, as he believed, a sweetheart who would be as faithful as she was good and pretty. All Africa was open to him, and there were even bigger prizes to be drawn in the fascinating lottery of diamond digging than there had been in the rosiest days of the Victorian and Californian gold-fields.

Still, he didn't like the idea of being beaten, still less did he like the idea of leaving Kimberley without taking his sweetheart with him, as he had hoped to do when they had plighted their troth some six months before. For all



"Well, I suppose you're right, Tom."

that, there was no help for it. There were no other claims worth having within reach of his means, and he could only remain in camp by taking a berth as overseer or something of that sort, which, of course, would offer no prospect of that sudden rise to wealth which in common with every other digger on the fields he had so confidently anticipated, and which alone could realize the hopes that he cherished on a certain subject which lay very near to his heart.

Now there is a well known fact which writers of fiction have very naturally plagiarized to a considerable extent. It is, generally and more especially in such gambles with destiny as diamond hunting and gold digging, that a man's fortunes change for the better, if they are going to do so at all, just when he seems to have the best reasons for accusing the fates of using loaded dice to his disadvantage. It is also true that under such circumstances the capricious fates delight to bring about the change through some apparently inadequate and often disreputable agency.

It was just this way with Tom Burrows. Shortly after he had begun on his claim he had, to all intents and purposes, bought a bushman from a white digger whom he one day found ill using him a little worse than a Shorditch savage is accustomed to use his wife. He had expostulated with the digger, who told him in terms of almost sulphurous eloquence to mind his own business. For the next 4½ minutes by the clock the bushman had a rest, and his master, when he had decided that he had really been in a fight and not an earthquake, was not in a position to go on with his licking.

The next proceeding was an adjournment to the nearest bar, where Tom stood the digger a drink, paid the value of the trifle which he had accused the bushman of stealing and so secured his consent to the immediate transfer of his services. That was the end of man Tom was.

Now, this bushman, who was known on the fields as Shirty from the fact that he was the only one of his kind who possessed a shirt, or even a fragment of one worn in the fashion of the white man, was a dirty, drunken, disreputable little savage. Like the rest of his species, he had received but few advantages from nature, and even these he had not turned to any account.

A dispassionate estimate would have placed him considerably lower in the scale of respectability than a decently brought up dog, but in one respect at least he would not have suffered by comparison with a dog. Though he only dimly grasped what it meant, he had never forgotten the one kindness that had been done him during the course of his sordid and degraded existence, and so it happened in the weird arrangement of human things he was able to repay it with magnificent interest.

Of course he knew of the sale of the claim. His new master had treated him finely, but still with no approach to brutality, and he had no taste to change his service for that of Macadam or Grunstein. The first thing he did on receiving his dismissal and the last of his wages was to go and have a drink of Cape Smoke, and it seemed as though some occult virtue in that commonly fatal fluid killed somewhere within the recesses of his half developed little brain a ray of real, independent intelligence.

He didn't take a second drink, and, still more wonderful, he seemed to know that if he had done so he would have gone on as long as his money lasted or he could see to get the stuff into his mouth. He went right away, as a dog who hears his master's whistle would have done, to Tom's shanty. Tom was there in the middle of his brown study, and he greeted his late retainer somewhat gruffly. But Shirty did not mind this; he was accustomed to it.

Humbly but insistently he took him by the edge of his coat and drew him into the door and out into the open air. It was a clear, magnificent starry night, and when they got out Shirty began pointing at the stars and muttering in his queer, guttural voice, with many clicks and grunts, and in an almost

hopeless mixture of English, Dutch and his own language about some place where there were as many of the "sheeney klippies" which people found in the mines as there were stars in the sky. Moreover, those same stars would show him, Shirty, how to guide the good white baas to the place where they were.

Tom did not get at the meaning of this all at once, but when he did and he had satisfied himself, first, that Shirty was not drunk, and, secondly, that he was very much in earnest he took him back into the hut and put him through a stiff and lengthy cross examination, the result of which was that Shirty, after coming to the end of his vocabulary, went down on his hands and knees on the mud floor and with an old knife and certain bits of stick drew lines and made dots and stuck the bits of stick upright at equal distances from each other until there were 30 of them in a line reaching half way across the floor.

Tom got the key to the hieroglyphics by recognizing that the dots were intended to show the positions of the bigger and brighter stars which Shirty had pointed out to him during his preliminary discourse outside, and ultimately, after considerable study and much talk in mixed languages, he arrived at the definite conclusion that somewhere, 30 days' journey out to the northwest, over the arid wilderness of the great and terrific Thirstland, there was a half dried river whose bed was strewn with diamonds as thickly as some streams were with pebbles.

Then straightway arose the question as to how much confidence he might have in his guide. Was it worth while on such evidence to plunge into that awful wilderness whose only known history was one of hunger and thirst and sufferings unspeakable which had been endured by the few who had come back out of the many who had essayed to cross it in the hope of finding better lands beyond?

If the question had faced him at any other time, he would probably have dismissed it with scant consideration. But just now he was in the same frame of mind as that in which a man who is having a fight to a finish with bad luck planks the remainings of his dwindling pile on the turn up of a single card or the chance of a single number. If Shirty's story of the river of diamonds was only a half, a quarter or even a hundredth part true, and he could get there and come back, he would return not only a rich man, but a man of many millions.

He thought about it nearly all night. Then he went to bed and slept on it. When he woke soon after daybreak, he heard himself half unconsciously muttering:

"Millions! Millions!"

He accepted the omen and decided to go. That day he bought his outfit—a very light wagon, something after the American spider build, four draft mules and a horse for himself, a tent and the rest of a prospector's usual kit—and at dawn the next morning he started. He had told no one, not even his sweetheart, the real object of his journey. He saw no use in raising in her breast dazzling hopes which might after all end in the whitening of a few bones in some unknown spot far away out yonder over the wilderness, and to have confided in any one else would have been madness.

Plenty of diggers went prospecting in those days, squeezed out by the constantly growing pressure of the new companies that were being formed to buy up and unite the richest claims, so all he said was that he was going to do as these did and without further explanation turned his back on the camp and his face toward the long, straight line which marked the seeming meeting place of the endless veld and the endless sky.

Forty days later half a dozen heavy winged as vultures were wheeling slowly to and fro in the dead, breathless air, looking down in hideous anticipation at two slowly moving figures which were dragging themselves, seemingly with the last efforts of their lives, over the frightful wilderness of sand and stone and dwarfed thorny shrubs which stretched away in a ghastly monotony of unbroken level till the wearied eye could see no farther. One was the figure of a man, the other that of a mule. Two bigish bundles were slung across the mule's saddle. They were neither very big nor very heavy, yet every now and then the mule stumbled feebly under them. The man had tied his left hand to the saddle, and in his right he had a whip stock, which he was using half as a walking stick and half as a crutch.

His eyes were half closed, and his head hung down till his chin touched his breast and rolled slowly from side to side with the motion of his body. His mouth was half open, and the tip of his tongue protruded a little between his dry, black, cracked lips. It was as dry and black as they were, and if you could have put your ear close to his face you would have heard his teeth grating upon it.

Every now and then one or two of the vultures would swoop down a little lower to investigate, as though wondering when it would be safe to begin the promised banquet. It would probably have begun before this but for one fact, which the vultures didn't see, or, if they did, didn't understand. The mule's tongue was hanging out of one side of its mouth, dry and black, like the man's, but its head was stretched out straight; its eyes, though half glazed, were wide open, and its nostrils were distended and quivering.

It smelled water, and it was going toward it. It might be near or far, but as long as it could put one hoof before the other it would stagger on in that direction, swerving neither to right nor left till it reached the water or dropped dead in its tracks.

Tom Burrows knew this and that was why he had tied himself to the saddle. The mule was the better animal now, and its instinct must take the place of the human reason that had failed. If the mule reached the water, he would

reach it; it not—well, it would do it no injury if he had to cut its throat to gain strength enough to struggle on a little farther.

This was so far the end of his expedition and the outcome of his hopes. Poor little Shirty's body had more than a week ago been assimilated into the system of a starving lion, his horse had died of the "big head" sickness before that, one of his mules had strayed and by this time no doubt its bones were picked clean. Two others had taken the sickness and had died the same night. The wagon stood abandoned five or six days' journey back, and here he was, with the strongest and wiriest of his animals worn to a skeleton, like himself, and half mad with thirst, within scent of water, it was true, but within sight of nothing but the bare, baked wilderness around and the blazing white hot heavens above.

Hour after hour passed in dumb, hopeless struggling, and blind, half conscious suffering, and still man and beast staggered on, and the wheeling vultures came lower and closer.

At last, about the middle of the afternoon, the mule stopped and a sort of shudder ran through her body. Tom stumbled and would have fallen if his hand had not been fast to the saddle. As if the stoppage had roused him out of his slumber, he pulled himself up; his reason seemed to be awakening for a last struggle with delirium, and he raised his head and looked about him and tried to remember where he was and what had happened to him.

Had the mule given out at last? Its knees were shaking, and its head drooping. This was the end then. He dropped his stick and fumbled for his knife to cut his left hand loose, so that—No, the mule didn't fall; it raised its head again. A horrible sound, like a human death rattle, seemed to come out of its dried throat, and then it started forward again. He staggered on beside it, feeling a vague sort of anger at the necessity for any more exertion. Presently the ground began to dip a little, then more and more, and the mule hobbled on quicker and quicker, making the noise in its throat almost continuously.

Was it coming to water at last? Tom pulled himself, together once more, rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand and looked about him. He saw lakes and rivers and splashing cascades whose waters made no sound, but he had seen these every day—every hour almost—since the thirstmadness began, ever in the skies, not on the earth, and he was not quite mad enough yet not to know that.

But stop! If there was no water on earth, there surely had been some here once. He rubbed his eyes harder, till he even brought a little moisture into them. That cleared his sight, and he saw that the mule had brought him to a little shallow valley, and that along the middle of it there ran a string of patches of sand, broken by worn boulder sand lumps of dry baked gray blue earth that had once been mud.

The mule tottered to one of the sand patches and thrust its nose into the sand with a hoarse, rattling grunt. At the same moment it flashed across Tom's half clouded mind that water is often found beneath the dry beds of vanished African streams. He cut his hand loose, flung himself down on the sand and began to dig with his knife feebly, but desperately. The mule meanwhile began scraping with its fore hoofs, and this encouraged him to go on. He broke the sand up with the knife blade and scooped it out with his hands. Presently the knife blade began to rattle and clink against pebbles in the sand, and when the hole was about a foot deep there were more stones than sand.

He thrust his hands down and brought up a double handful of them. He happened to look at them before he threw them away, and as he did so a sound something like what the mule was making came from his throat. The pebbles were diamonds of all sizes and colors, and in his two hands there he probably held £100,000 worth. He flung them away with a cry that it would not have done any one much good to hear. What were all the diamonds in the world worth in comparison to half a pint of water?

He thrust his hands into the hole again. This time he uttered a very different cry, for now the stones at the bottom were wet. He grabbed them up and threw them out, now with frantic energy—thousands and thousands of pounds' worth of them. The mule put his nose among them and seemed to draw the moisture off them with its breath. That was all the good they were just then.

After a few more minutes of hard work a little water—real liquid water—collected at the bottom of the hole. He tried to thrust his head into it so he could get his lips to the water, but it was too small, so he made a cup of his hands and put them against his mouth, and in that instant he passed from the torments of hell to the joys of paradise. His lips and tongue seemed to melt as the water touched them, and his thickening blood pulsed with new life already.

He was brought out of his ecstasy by the mule thrusting its nose down into the hole. He tried to drag it back; he might as well have tried to drag a tree up by its roots. For a few mad moments man and beast fought for the water. He kicked it and even struck it with the knife, but the mule was too busy over to notice it. Then the delirium left him again. There was a light short spade and a little prospector's pick tied between the two bundles on the mule's back. He cut them adrift and went to another patch and began to dig, leaving his beast to enjoy what he had earned so well.

He soon got to the water this time. There was plenty of it apparently under the whole river bed—plenty, no doubt, to wash out the diamondiferous earth, perhaps even enough with proper management to run a little crushing mill if ever he should come to hard "blue."

There is no miracle so great as the,