

The Stone of Boxman's Drift

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THE STONE OF BOXMAN'S DRIFT

The sun had sunk down behind the distant Griqualand mountains and had left a few bright slashes upon the western sky, which faded slowly from scarlet into pink and from that into the prevailing grey. A deep purplish haze lay over veldt, and kopje, and kloof. Through the gathering twilight the Vaal river lay like a silver serpent, winding its way through valley and gorge, until it lost itself amid the mists of the horizon. Here and there along its course a group of glittering twinkling yellow lights, like golden pendants on a silver string, marked the position of the score of hamlets and townships which are studded along its banks.

But how come towns and hamlets to be there? To the north stretch the wilds of Bechuanaland, where the savage and the wild beast are still contending their world-old quarrel. It is the desolate kingdom of the two-footed man-slayer and of the four-footed man-eater. To the south lies a barren and unprofitable region, where water is scarce, and the dry withered veldt grass can hardly support the flocks of gaunt ill-fed sheep which roam over it. The east and west are still the homes of three Kaffir tribes, who have slowly and sullenly retreated before the advancing tide of civilisation. How comes it, then, that men are so ready to risk their lives and their property in the valley of the Vaal? The answer is the old, old one. It is the search for riches that brings them there. Of all the thousands who live down there, there is not one who does not hope that a single stroke of a pick may send him home some day a wealthy man, to take his place among the magnates of his native shire. To the eyes of hope these scattered shanties and dilapidated huts are the porticos which lead up to honour, position, wealth, all that can place a man above his fellows. For in this desolate valley, amid the sordid clay and gravel, lies buried that which can lend state to the stately monarch, and beauty to the beautiful woman; that which rejoices the soul of the covetous and pleases the eyes of the fastidious. As surely as California is the home of gold, and Nevada of silver, so is this wild and desolate African valley the chosen seat and

throne of the most precious of the products of nature, the regal diamond.

Who can say by what convulsion and cataclysm of nature they come to be there? those sparkling fragments of carbon, lying scattered broadcast among the gneiss and the felspar, and other humbler crystalline brethren. A poor Boer, trekking through in his waggon, observes his children playing with a glittering stone. Struck by its appearance, he takes it with him to Natal, where it is pronounced to be a diamond of the purest water. The news spreads fast over the whole habitable globe. There is in very truth a valley as marvellous as that of Sindbad, where a king's ransom may be picked up for the stooping. From every country, by land and by water, on foot, on horseback, in buggy or in waggon, the searchers after wealth converge upon it. Neither savage man nor savage beast can deter them from their purpose. And so the mining camps spring up and the pits are dug, and nature's hidden wealth is torn from her, and pressed into the service of restless avaricious man.

But where money is all other things must come even in the heart of savage Africa. The store enlarges and becomes an emporium, while the liquor saloon expands into the hotel. The bank, the police-station, and the church are all found to be necessary adjuncts of civilisation. Thus, at the time of which I write, the hamlet of Dutoitspan had grown into the flourishing city of Kimberley, while all the other camps, which extended for sixty miles or more along the Vaal river, bore evident signs of prosperity, as befitted a settlement which was turning out a million or more of money every year. Luxuries were very dear, but they were attainable. Frock coats and felt hats were occasionally to be seen in the streets. Now and again the rough inhabitants rose superior to the law, and argued with six-shooters, or emphasised their remarks with knives, but in spite of these occasional outbreaks, Peniel, Winter Rush, Blue Jacket, or Hebron were by no means rowdy localities. The work was too hard and constant to allow of dissipation. A successful digger might at long

intervals indulge in a night's orgy, and be found lying heavy with whisky on the roadway in the morning, but the necessity of working his claim was too urgent to allow him to devote much of his time to the consumption of alcohol. Vice is not seldom the offspring of idleness, and here all were busy.

A mile or so from the camp at Winter Rush there is a small gulch, or ravine, named Boxman's Drift, which is a mere rocky cleft in the hill, with a small stream running down the centre. This locality had been frequently prospected, and several experimental pits sunk in it, but with so little success that it had long been abandoned as useless. It chanced, however, in 1872, that two Englishmen, finding every other claim occupied, erected a hut in this lonely gulch, and succeeded, either through hard work or good luck, in making their workings pay their way. Indeed, after a year or two they struck pay gravel, and were able to enlarge their claim and to hire a couple of Kaffirs to assist them in the work. They were steady, industrious men, quiet in their habits, loyal to each other, and accustomed to work from daybreak to sunset during six days out of the seven. On the evening in question they had remained in their pit digging and washing, until light failed them, when the elder, Bill Stewart, clambered reluctantly out, and reaching down a powerful hand, pulled his partner up after him.

"I'll tell you what it is, Bill," said the latter, a slim, flaxen-haired man in the prime of life, "if we are going to make this pit much deeper we shall need a cord and a windlass. It's all very well for giants like you, but it would take me all my time to get out if I were alone."

"We'll set Pompey to cut steps," the other answered. "Talking about deep places, d'ye see that flaw in the rock?" pointing with his shovel to a dark crack which zigzagged along one side of the valley. "That's deep enough. It's my belief that it extends to somewhere near the centre of the earth—or maybe right through to old England. 'Twould save postage if we could drop our letters through."

"Aye, it's very deep," said his companion. "The day you went to Kimberley I tried it with a beer-bottle bent on to a hundred fathoms of string, but I never touched bottom."

"I'll try the beer-bottle without the string, for I am as dry as a chip," said Bill Stewart, slinging his tools over his shoulder. "Have you the take, Headley?"

"All safe."

"Then come along, and we'll reckon it up at the hut."

The hut in question was a square wooden shanty which had been erected on entirely novel architectural principles by Stewart, or Big Bill, as he was usually called in the camps. He was a stolid, slow-tempered man; but if there was a subject upon which he was thin-skinned it was when any one ventured to hint that there was any room for improvement in Azalea Cottage, as he grandiloquently termed it. It was in vain to quote against it any obvious defect, for Bill would at once proceed to prove that that had been specially introduced, and was the result of his own care and forethought.

"Crooked," he would say; "yes, it's not one of your twopenny-halfpenny square-faced blocks that look as if they were turned out by a machine at so much a dozen. It's a select house, sir. There is style about it. Chinks! Why, yes, sir, I like chinks. They promote ventilation, and all good architects aim at that. I took some trouble to work all those chinks in. Holes in the roof? Well, it's an advantage to know when it's raining without going outside to look. Besides, it's handy when the fire smokes. We'd all have been smothered if I hadn't thought to leave those holes there." These were Bill Stewart's usual answers to the casual and inquisitive stranger; but should the banter proceed too far, an angry light would appear in his big blue eyes. "That house, sir," he would remark, "is good enough for my pard, Headley Dean, who is a gentleman born, and so I guess it's good enough for you!" At which descent to personalities the stranger, if he were a wise man, would shift the conversation to the price of stones, or the latest blunder of the Cape Town Government.

The two partners, as they sat opposite to one another on either side of the blazing fire, were a remarkable contrast to each other. Headley Dean, with his crisp, neatly-trimmed hair and beard, his quick, glancing eyes, and his nervous, impulsive ways, had something of the Celt, both in his appearance and in his manner.

Eager, active, energetic, he gave the impression of a man who must succeed in the world, but who might be a little unscrupulous in his methods of doing so. Big Bill, on the other hand, quiet, unimpressible, and easy-going, with a sweeping yellow beard and open Saxon countenance, may have had a stronger and deeper nature than his partner, but was inferior to him in fertility of resource, and in decision of character in all the minor matters of life. This superior readiness made the big man look up to the other and bow to his opinions in a manner that was almost ludicrous considering the relative size and physical strength of the pair.

"Well, and how much have we taken?" asked Stewart, stretching his mud-bespattered boots up to the blaze.

"Not very much," said the other, stirring his pannikin of tea and looking down at the small, flat box in which the day's takings had been placed. "There are fourteen stones of a sort, but there's not one worth more than a few shillings. If we get three pound for the lot it's as much as they are worth."

Bill Stewart whistled. "Our working expenses are close on two pound a day," he remarked. "We won't make a fortune at this rate!"

Headley Dean took a flat tin case from a shelf, and having unlocked it, laid it upon the table. It was divided into compartments, and was half-full of diamonds, arranged in their different classes. He proceeded to examine each of the stones taken that day, and to assign them to their various categories.

"These three are off-coloured," said he. "That makes a hundred and eighteen off-coloured stones which we hold."

"Better sell," suggested Bill Stewart, lighting his pipe with an ember.

"Better do nothing of the sort!" replied his partner, curtly. "You might as well give them away. Why, the market is at its very lowest!"

"Hold on to them then," said the other, puffing philosophically.

"I intend to. Here are twin stones. They are no great shakes. And here are four flawed ones, and two smoky. Only one pure coloured stone among the lot, and it so small as to be almost worthless. Yet we hear of other fellows

getting unexpected pieces of luck. Look at that fellow over at Murphy turning up a twenty thousand pounder out of a claim that had ruined four men before him! Why are we never to have a show? Why are we to be always at this drudgery while the best years of our life are passing over our heads? And you can sit there and smoke, and look as contented as though we hadn't a wish unsatisfied." He locked up the box with a vicious snap, and replaced it with a bang upon the shelf.

"Well, pard," said the big miner, "to tell the truth, I think we have a deal to be thankful for. If we don't win we don't lose. We pay the boys and the licences, and we bank a few hundreds. There's many a dead-broke down there in the valley would be glad to swap with us. If we hang on long enough we must come on a streak of luck. You keep your beak in the air and wait for it."

"It's a precious long time coming," the other remarked, peevishly.

"All the more welcome when it does come. Now, suppose—just suppose we was to hit on a real hundred carat pure-water stone, and your share was to be ten thousand, and my share was to be ten thousand, what would you do with your share, eh?"

"What would I do?" said Dean, nursing his knee, and staring into the fire with glistening eyes. "What would I not do? I would take my natural position in the world once more as a gentleman. I would wash the dirt of labour from my hands for ever. Is it not the hope of some such chance that spurs me on to dig like a mole in this filthy gravel, or to stay day after day knee-deep in the mud of the gulches? I should return to society and to the world."

"Hum! That's just it," Big Bill remarked, ruefully. "You and me's been thick enough in these days, but if our luck were to come you'd mount a play hat and a boiled shirt and sail right away into society, which might be glad enough to see you, but would look twice at your pardner. It would be Sir Edward this, or My Lord that, and goodbye to old Bill Stewart."

"Nonsense, man," said Headley Dean, "success would never alter me. We have worked together and we shall rise together. Here's my hand on it. But you—what would you do with your money in case we had any such piece of luck?"

"Build a house," his companion answered, with decision. "Build a house, and boss the job myself. It should be in the country just in the very snuggest and blue-bloodiest bit of England. It should be like the houses of the nobles and gentry, big and square, with about half a hundred flagstaffs stuck on the roof, and a Union Jack flying from each. None of your grey stone, you understand, but the blazing bricks, with ivy and ancestral oaks and balconies, and the family tree stuck up above the hall door, all in the best o' taste."

Headley Dean laughed languidly at his comrade's ideal country house.

"It would be something between a grandstand and a private lunatic asylum," he remarked. "But I fear you won't have the chance of building it just yet awhile. Have you seen my pipe?"

"Yes; I seed it lying in the claim just as we struck work."

"Strange, I have no remembrance of using it to-day. Well, I suppose I must clamber down and fetch it, unless you happen to be going that way."

"I don't leave Azalea Cottage to-night," said Bill Stewart, with decision.

His partner glanced at him with surprise, for it was seldom that his good-natured companion refused to execute his small errands.

"Then I suppose I must go myself," he remarked, somewhat sulkily, and strode off into the darkness.

The big miner, left to himself, rose and began pacing up and down the room, chuckling softly and rubbing his broad palms together with delight. So amused was he that he was compelled at last to lean up against the doorpost shaking with suppressed merriment. When, however, the sound of hurrying feet announced his companion's return he managed to resume his gravity, and reseated himself on the chair by the fire.

"Bill!" cried Headley Dean, bursting into the room with a face white with emotion. "Bill!"

"What now, pard?"

"Come down to the pit with me Bill! Never mind your hat, but come at once. Come, come!" He tugged at his companion's coat with nervous trembling fingers.

"What's up now?"

"Don't ask questions, but come." With feverish energy he rushed out of the hut, half leading, half dragging his friend, and retraced his steps to the diamond pit. The night was dark and the path was steep, but the two never slackened their pace until they were at the brink of the claim. "Look there!" said Headley Dean, pointing downwards with a quivering finger.

It was indeed a strange and impressive sight. The pit was full of light—a vague, greenish, glimmering light, which pervaded its whole extent without appearing to radiate from any central point. Every stick and stone, and even the missing pipe, were visible in the dim ghostly illumination. Had the floor and walls been strewn with phosphorus they could not have been brighter.

Bill Stewart gave a long whistle as he gazed down at this extraordinary phenomenon. "Why, pard," said he at last, though in no very excited tones, "it must be a carbuncle."

"An enormous one! A gigantic one!" said the other in a subdued whisper. "In letting myself down into the pit I took a grip of the small bush which used to grow on the side of the ridge. It came away in my hand, and at once the pit was filled with that wondrous light."

"Think of that now! The stone must have been under the roots of the bush. Suppose I go down and hoist you up on my back, so that you may examine the place."

"I am almost afraid to," cried Dean; "what a blow if it should prove to be anything else!"

"Nonsense, man, what else could it be? There's nothing else in all nature that gives a light like that except a carbuncle. Come along down, and we'll soon pick out our little twinkler."

The two scrambled down into the pit, and Stewart, picking up his partner in his herculean grip, held him up against the side of the wall. With eager nervous fingers Dean felt all over the place where the bush had been, thrusting his hand into every cleft and cranny. "There's no stone here," he said at last, in a disconsolate voice.

"Oh, but there is, though," cried the other from below. "There must be."

"I have searched every square inch of it," Dean answered moodily.

"Well, if this doesn't lick cock-fighting! I tell you there is a stone there. Look again."

"Let me down!" cried Dean, excitedly. "Don't you see what's over my head! Let me down!"

"What is it now? What's over your head?"

"Why, my shadow! Don't you see it against the wall?"

"What then?" asked his slow-witted comrade.

"If the shadow is above, the light must be below. Why, of course it must come from the roots of the fallen bush. What a fool I was not to think of it! Here's the bush—yes, and here's the stone! Hurrah! hurrah!" He capered about the bottom of the pit, holding up above his head a great blazing scintillating crystal.

"It is a beauty, ain't it?" said Stewart, with his hands in his pockets. "I never seed a finer. But there's one thing it can't do. It can't stop us from getting cold if we stand all night in this damp hole. We can admire it a great deal more at our ease if we march it up to the cottage."

This matter-of-fact advice had the effect of steadying his partner's excited nerves. "You are right, Bill," he said. "We must get it to a place of safety." Clambering to the surface, they made their way back to the hut, where they proceeded to make a more minute examination of their prize.

It was rather larger than a pigeon's egg in size, and of a lustrous ruby tint, save on one side where there was an opaque discolouration. Held up to the light it proved to be beautifully transparent, save at that one point. Headley Dean produced a delicate pair of scales from a drawer, and weighed it with the utmost care and nicety.

"A hundred and fourteen carats," he said. "The largest stone that has been found during my time. One small flaw at the side, but that can be got over in the cutting. It is worth a small fortune in itself."

"Of course it is," said Big Bill gleefully. "There won't be no more tin pannikins for us, pard."

Headley Dean had stowed the stone away in his innermost pocket, and was sitting lost in thought, his heavy brows drawn down over his keen, shifting eyes, and his clenched hand drumming against the table. His partner's chatter fell meaningless upon his heedless ear. A dark

thought had come into his mind, and he had not cast it out. It had fastened there, and was rapidly sprouting and growing until his whole better nature was clouded and obscured.

"It's too big a stone to sell in these parts," remarked Stewart. "We must realise all we have here, and make tracks for London. That's the place for dealers and big prices! Then you can go straight into your natural spear, as I think I've heard you call it, and I'll get started on the house. But, bless you! we won't lose sight of each other on that account. For half the time I'll be in London a-visiting you in your natural spear, and the other half you'll spend with me, a-walking under the oaks."

Still the gloom grew deeper upon his partner's face as the devil of avarice whispered in his ear. He put his hand upon the little hard lump where the carbuncle lay hid, and his brows grew darker and his eyes more keen.

"Twenty thousand," said Big Bill, "or maybe thirty thousand. What's half that? Two's into thirty—fifteen! Yes, fifteen thousand pounds apiece. How much is that at five per cent? Five tens's fifty, and fifteen fifties"—he counted on his great red fingers, like an overgrown schoolboy—"seven hundred and fifty pounds a year! How's that for a fortune? But what on earth's the matter with you, pard? Have a drop. This bit o' excitement has been too much for you."

"No, no," said Headley Dean, pushing back the bottle which his partner held towards him. "I don't want any brandy; I want to put this matter in its right light, though, so that we may know exactly how we stand, that there may be no misunderstanding. I think you rather mistake our relations to one another in the matter. Of course, you know very well that I want everything to be honourable between us, and that I would not willingly take advantage of you in any way."

"In course you wouldn't!" cried the big miner, heartily.

"Still, on the other hand, business is business, even between the best of friends. If we had been at work together during working hours, and had come on this stone, why of course it would have belonged to us both in equal shares. But this, you see, is quite a different matter."

"Eh?" cried Stewart.

"Quite a different matter. It was an accident at a time when I was not looking for a stone, and when you were not present. You see that, don't you? I'm sure I only want to do what is fair. Suppose you were to pick up a purse of gold in the drift, I could not claim half because I was your partner. It would be a thing outside our agreement. And so is this a thing outside our agreement. Still, of course I would not be mean about it. If I get a fair price for the stone you shall certainly have a share. I only wish you to understand that you have no right to claim a full half." He spoke with his face averted and his eyes still fixed on the fire, for, clothe it as he would with sophistry, he was too sensitive not to feel deeply the ignominy of his position.

His partner sat for some minutes in a silence which was far more suggestive than any words. The ticking of the Kimberley-made clock and the crackling of the fire appeared to be almost oppressively loud in the complete stillness. At last Stewart spoke in a slow, measured voice, very unlike his usual cheery tones.

"You don't intend that I should have half the price of the stone?" he said.

"You have no right to it."

"Oh!" No physical pain could have wrung from the stalwart miner the groan which was elicited by this unlooked-for treachery. Not another word passed his lips, but, putting on his broad hat and drawing it down over his brows, he passed away out of the hut and into the night. His heavy footsteps might be heard scrunching their way among the shingle which lined Boxman's Drift, until they slowly died away in the distance.

Headley Dean continued to sit by the fire and to brood over the incident of the evening. What though his innermost conscience told him that he had acted shamefully, he was still ready with some sophism, some subtle distinction between what should and what should not be divisible between partners, to bolster up his misdeed. If his heart failed him for a moment he had but to draw the beautiful glowing carbuncle from his pocket to find an argument which would silence every doubt. How could he bear to part with half of it, he who had discovered it all! What use was a paltry income of seven hundred pounds? With fifteen hundred some little show might be kept up. If Bill had a share of the money he would

only waste it on some tomfoolery. Still, he should of course give him something, five hundred down, or even a thousand. No one could say that that was not generous.

This was the train of thought which passed through Dean's head as he sat waiting for his companion's return. An hour passed, and then another, but there were no signs of the absentee. The young miner went to the door and peered out into the darkness. All was very still save the melancholy whooping of a veldt-owl somewhere down the kloof.

"What can have become of the fellow?" he muttered to himself. "He must have turned sulky, and gone off to Winter Rush or to Peniel for the night. Well, anyhow, I can't sit up all night, for I must be off to Kimberley by the early coach in the morning."

With this reflection he threw himself down on his bunk without undressing, with the precious carbuncle still pressed close to his heart. For an hour or more he lay awake, listening for a footstep which never came, but at last he sank into a troubled and uneasy sleep.

He woke in the morning with a strange sense of sadness and depression. The door of the hut was half-open, and the keen fresh air of the drift was blowing in through it, yet he felt hear and weary. He sat up for a moment with his hand on his forehead, endeavouring to collect his thoughts. What misfortune had occurred to him that he should feel like this? His eye fell upon the empty bunk opposite, where the burly form of his partner was wont to lie. Ah, of course, he remembered it all now. It was no misfortune, but a crowning piece of good luck. Why, then, should he feel so sad at heart? He had never felt like that when he was a poor adventurer. He drew the stone again from its place of concealment; and again its lurid brilliance, which caught and reflected the clear morning light, reconciled him to the dull prickings of his conscience.

He had determined to set off for Kimberley by the early coach, in order that he might submit his stone to an expert, and have a definite opinion as to its value. Having ascertained that, his next step would be to convey it to London, and there dispose of it. Full of his purpose, he snatched a hurried breakfast, and started off down the drift with the precious

jewel in his hand. As he walked he held it up against the rising sun, and marvelled to see how it shimmered and glittered and gleamed. So intent was he upon it that he did not observe until he was close upon him that his injured partner was standing silent and thoughtful with his arms folded across his broad chest, beside the diamond pit.

"Ah, good morning, Bill," said Headley Dean, with outstretched hand; "I sat up late waiting for you."

But Stewart took no notice of the proffered hand. "If any man had told me—" he began; "but there! there's no use talking about it. Are you still of the same mind you were in last night?"

"What, about the stone? Why, Bill, you know miner's law, and you know you have no claim on the stone. Any one would tell you that. Why should you turn rusty about it? It's a mere matter of business. Besides, you shall have a thousand—I promise you that. I am going down to Kimberley to have it valued."

"Look here, Headley Dean," said Bill Stewart, talking very slowly and deliberately. "I've known you as an honest man for six years, and if anyone had come to me and told me that you were no better than a thief I'd have knocked him flat. Yes, thief is the word, though you may colour up at it. I won't believe now that it's you that's dishonest. It isn't the old Headley Dean that I knew. It's some evil spirit that has taken possession of him. I shall protect you against it in spite of yourself, pard. You shall not do a thing that will be a shame to you for ever. Give me the stone!"

"What, would you rob me by violence?" cried Dean, for his partner was advancing upon him with a very determined expression upon his stolid face. "I won't stand it, Stewart. Keep your hands off me!"

"Give me the stone!"

"Never."

"Then I shall take it;" and in a moment the big miner had seized his companion by the hand which held the diamond. Headley Dean was a far less muscular man, but his nervous energy and his strength of purpose enabled him to struggle for a few moments with the giant. Then his fingers opened, the carbuncle flew out of them,

and, bounding down the slope of the valley, vanished over the side of the unfathomable volcanic crack.

For an instant the two stood silent and spellbound, staring at the spot where the stone had disappeared. Then, with a cry of rage and disappointment, Headley Dean rushed to the head of the fissure and gazed down into the narrow cleft. All was black and silent beneath him. Far down in those dark inaccessible depths the great Boxman's Drift carbuncle would flicker and gleam at the bottom of the terrible chasm until some fresh convulsion of nature would in the course of ages bring it again within the reach of man. And he—he had lost his stone, he had lost his honour, he had lost his friend, he had lost his self-respect. What was there left to him? He turned sharply upon his heel, and with his head sunk upon his breast he went back without a word to the cottage.

Now that the demoralising presence of the stone had been removed he saw clearly enough the meanness and unutterable vileness of his own conduct. He was not by nature a dishonest man, nor was he devoid of a code of honour from which he had never before deviated. But his principles were not very firm, and the sudden temptation had been too strong for him. To do him justice, his remorse and grief at his own conduct were now so strong that they entirely overcame his sorrow at the loss he had sustained. It was for himself he mourned and not for the stone. There was no reparation which he would not willingly offer to undo the past and make up for the shameful injustice which he had done his partner. Anything to feel the grip of his hard hand once more, and to know that he was forgiven. What were all the diamonds in Africa compared to one's own self-respect and the friendship of such a man? He could see it clearly enough now that it was too late. With his elbows upon his knees, and his face buried in his hands, he racked his brain to find some method of showing his sincere repentance and of repairing the evil that he had done.

A heavy footfall was heard outside the cottage, and the big miner came lounging in.

Headley Dean rose and faced him with downcast eyes and trembling lip. "I hardly know what to say to you, Bill," he said, in a low, broken

voice. "I have behaved abominably—shamefully. The stone was, as you said, like an evil spirit, which brought all the bad that is in me to the surface. If I could repair the past by cutting my right hand off I would do it without hesitation. No doubt you think I am saying this just because I have lost the stone. It is only natural you should think so. There's one thing I'll do, though, to show that I am in earnest. We have in that tin box a thousand pounds' worth of diamonds, which belong to us jointly. You may do what you will with my share. You would scorn to take it yourself, no doubt, but you may give it to the hospital at Kimberley. I at least shall never touch them."

Bill walked over to the fire and lit his pipe. "You say if you had the stone you would go fair halves?" said he.

"If I had it you should have the disposing of it," Dean answered.

"I bear no malice," said Stewart. "Shake hands on it."

The great red hand of the big miner enclosed the nervous white one of his partner. When they separated Headley Dean stood staring and rigid and pale to the very lips, for there, in the centre of the palm of his outstretched hand, lay the very stone which he had just seen disappear into the bowels of the earth.

"Whoa!" cried Big Bill, supporting him into a chair. "You ain't strong enough to bear up against this sort o' surprise. There, the colour's coming back to your cheeks. Why, bless you! there's nothing very wonderful about it. That chasm ain't the same depth all along. Where you measured there's no bottom to it, but where the stone fell in it ain't more 'n forty feet deep. It was too narrow for me or you to go down, but I got little Kaffir Jim and lowered him down with a rope. He got it in no time. He tells me it was a-shinin' as bright as ever, but the curve of the rock hid it from the top. So, you see, it ain't lost yet!"

Headley Dean could but sit and listen and gaze at the wondrous gem. The sudden revulsion of feeling had stupefied him.

"The fun of the thing," said Bill Stewart, chuckling heartily to himself, "is that this is the third time as that 'ere stone has been discovered. I found it three nights back, but I had often noticed, pard, what a relish and a

pleasure it was to you to find a stone, and, being myself of a kind o' coarse and common nature, that don't feel these things so much, I made up my mind that you should find it for yourself. I therefore put your pipe in the pit—like you put the cheese in a mouse-trap—and I pulled the bush out, knowing you always use it for getting up and down, and I hid the stone amongst the roots. Thinks I, 'When pard goes down out will come the bush, and he'll be fairly dazzled,' for I knew the thing would shine in the dark. Well, you goes, and you finds it, and then you begins playing a game on your pard, and we gets skylarking and the stone gets down the crevice, and Kaffir Jim fetches it up, and here we are, all snug and comfortable. Who's game to come to Kimberley and have it valued?"

"You shall do what you will with the gem," said Headley Dean, laying it upon the table; "I have forfeited all part and share in it."

"All right, Boss," Stewart answered, shoving it away into his trousers pocket, "we'll talk about that during our voyage to London. If this here stone is not going to put you into your natural spear, why, souse it goes into the Atlantic Ocean, and then what becomes of my house and flagstaff, etc. They all depend on the stone of Boxman's Drift."

There is no need to say more. The gem realised even more than had been anticipated, and the two partners are now well-to-do country gentlemen in one of the inland shires. Big Bill has built a house which is a source of never-failing delight to himself, and of wonder to the whole countryside. Headley Dean lives hard by, a quiet and contented man. The two old friends are much together, and have many a chat about their old African experiences, but it may safely be said that they never did, and never will, allude to the one eventful estrangement which had occurred between them.