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## Chapter 23

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After six weeks' incessant throbbing the great engines were still, and the Dunottar Castle lay at anchor a mile or two from the African coast and off the town of Attra. The heat, which in motion had been hard enough to bear, was positively stifling now. The sun burned down upon the glassy sea and the white deck till the varnish on the rails cracked and blistered, and the sweat streamed like water from the faces of the labouring seamen. Below at the ship's side half a dozen surf boats were waiting, manned by Kru boys, who alone seemed perfectly comfortable, and cheerful as usual. All around were preparations for landing - boxes were being hauled up from the hold, and people were going about in reach of small parcels and deck-chairs and missing acquaintances. Trent, in white linen clothes and puggaree, was leaning over the railing, gazing towards the town, when Da Souza came up to him -

"Last morning, Mr. Trent!"

Trent glanced round and nodded.

"Are you disembarking here?" he asked.

Da Souza admitted the fact. "My brother will meet me," he said. "He is very afraid of the surf-boats, or he would have come out to the steamer. You remember him?"

"Yes, I remember him," Trent answered. "He was not the sort of person one forgets."

"He is a very rough diamond," Da Souza said apologetically. "He has lived here so long that he has become almost half a native."

"And the other half a thief," Trent muttered.

Da Souza was not in the least offended.

"I am afraid," he admitted, "that his morals are not up to the Threadneedle Street pitch, eh, Mr. Trent? But he has made quite a great deal of money. Oh, quite a sum I can assure you. He sends me some over to invest!"

"Well, if he's carrying on the same old game," Trent remarked, "he ought to be coining it! By the by, of course he knows exactly where Monty is?"

"It is what I was about to say," Da Souza assented, with a vigorous nod of the head. "Now, my dear Mr. Trent, I know that you will have your way. It is no use my trying to dissuade you, so listen. You shall waste no time in searching for Monty. My brother will tell you exactly where he is."

Trent hesitated. He would have preferred to have nothing at all to do with Da Souza, and the very thought of Oom Sam made him shudder. On the other hand, time was valuable to him and he might waste weeks looking for the man whom Oom Sam could tell him at once where to find. On the whole, it was better to accept Da Souza's offer.

"Very well, Da Souza," he said, "I have no time to spare in this country and the sooner I get back to England the better for all of us. If your brother knows where Monty is, so much the better for both of us. We will land together and meet him."

Already the disembarking had commenced. Da Souza and Trent took their places side by side on the broad, flat-bottomed boat, and soon they were off shorewards and the familiar song of the Kru boys as they bent over their oars greeted their ears. The excitement of the last few strokes was barely over before they sprang upon the beach and were surrounded by a little crowd, on the outskirts of whom was Oom Sam. Trent was seized upon by an Englishman who was representing the Bekwando Land and Mining Investment Company and, before he could regain Da Souza, a few rapid sentences had passed between the latter and his brother in Portuguese. Oom Sam advanced to Trent hat in hand -

"Welcome back to Attra, senhor?"

Trent nodded curtly.

"Place isn't much changed," he remarked.

"It is very slowly here," Oom Sam said, "that progress is made! The climate is too horrible. It makes dead sheep of men."

"You seem to hang on pretty well," Trent remarked carelessly. "Been up country lately?"

"I was trading with the King of Bekwando a month ago," Oom Sam answered.

"Palm-oil and mahogany for vile rum I suppose," Trent said.

The man extended his hands and shrugged his shoulders. The old gesture.

"They will have it," he said. "Shall we go to the hotel, Senhor Trent, and rest?"

Trent nodded, and the three men scrambled up the beach, across an open space, and gained the shelter of a broad balcony, shielded by a striped awning which surrounded the plain white stone hotel. A Kru boy welcomed them with beaming face and fetched them drinks upon a Brummagem tray. Trent turned to the Englishman who had followed them up.

"To-morrow," he said, "I shall see you about the contracts. My first business is a private matter with these gentlemen. Will you come up here and breakfast with me?"

The Englishman, a surveyor from a London office, assented with enthusiasm.

"I can't offer to put you up," he said gloomily. "Living out here's beastly. See you in the morning, then."

He strolled away, fanning himself. Trent lit a long cigar.

"I understand," he said turning to Oom Sam, "that old Monty is alive still. If so, it's little short of a miracle, for I left him with scarcely a gasp in his body, and I was nearly done myself.

"It was," Oom Sam said, "veree wonderful. The natives who were chasing you, they found him and then the Englishman whom you met in Bekwando on his way inland, he rescued him. You see that little white house with a flagstaff yonder?"

He pointed to a little one-storey building about a mile away along the coast. Trent nodded.

"That is," Oom Sam said, "a station of the Basle Mission and old Monty is there. You can go and see him any time you like, but he will not know you."

"Is he as far gone as that?" Trent asked slowly.

"His mind," Oom Sam said, "is gone. One little flickering spark of life goes on. A day! a week! who can tell how long?"

"Has he a doctor?" Trent asked.

"The missionary, he is a medical man," Oom Sam explained. "Yet he is long past the art of medicine."

It seemed to Trent, turning at that moment to relight his cigar, that a look of subtle intelligence was flashed from one to the other of the brothers. He paused with the match in his fingers, puzzled, suspicious, anxious. So there was some scheme hatched already between these precious pair! It was time indeed that he had come.

"There was something else I wanted to ask," he said a moment or two later. "What about the man Francis. Has he been heard of lately?"

Oom Sam shook his head.

"Ten months ago," he answered, "a trader from Lulabulu reported having passed him on his way to the interior. He spoke of visiting Sugbaroo, another country beyond. If he ventured there, he will surely never return."

Trent set down his glass without a word, and called to some Kru boys in the square who carried litters.

"I am going," he said, "to find Monty."