

BIG Jim Sefton pulled himself together as his horse shied violently across the track.

"Steady, old gal," he muttered. "It's a broken branch, not a snake."

The mare, still eyeing the thing that had alarmed her, sidled warily forward, and big Jim relapsed once more into his reverie. His face, tanned to a dark mahogany, was set and a little stern: his eyes—vivid blue eyes they were, contrasting strangely with the colour of his skin—were surrounded by a network of little wrinkles that proclaimed the dweller in the open of harsh lights. And just now the look in them showed that their owner's thoughts were many miles away.

Twenty—to be exact: twenty straight ahead, at the destination to which he was riding. The burning midday sun beat down on him from a cloudless blue sky: he didn't notice it. Big Jim had sojourned under that same scorching heat for too many years now for it to worry him. Splashes of brilliant colour in the trees that flanked the track, which would have called forth the excited admiration of most people, never even caused him to turn his head.

The sight of an English rose garden would have appealed to him more than all the tropical flowers in the world. He had seen them all too often: he was sick of them with a deadly nausea. To him they were typical of the soul of the country: lovely, gaudy, and—meretricious.

“It’s rotten,” he suddenly said aloud. “Rotten. And why the devil I stay here, God alone knows.”

And then he laughed shortly: it was not the first time he had delivered himself of the same sentiment, and he was still there.

The laugh died away on his lips: once again his thoughts had gone back to the bungalow twenty miles ahead. How were the two people there faring in this land of harshness and crude contrasts? Two more unsuitable settlers it would have been hard to imagine—especially the man. And yet it was possible they had made good: in the course of his life big Jim had seen some amazingly square pegs fitting into the roundest of holes with apparent success.

It wasn’t that Jack Fairbrace was a weakling—far from it. He was a good shot, and a first-class player of ball games. But he was essentially orthodox: he was part and parcel of the club life and social amenities of England. And big Jim couldn’t picture him in Africa.

Frid—his wife—was different, but then a woman is always more adaptable than a man.

He recalled that night at Henley four years ago when he had painted for her a description of the land he had made his own. Painted the glamour of it, and the beauty, the passion of it and the appeal. And he'd believed it—then: he invariably did when he was away, which was why he always came back. And she had listened with her lips parted and her head a little thrown back.

“Sorry, old gal,” he said gruffly, as the mare fidgeted under a hand grown suddenly powerful. “For the moment I thought of other things.”

For it had been on the lap of the Gods that night. The nearness of her and the scent she used had gone to his head. He could still hear the gentle lap of the water against the punt as they drifted lazily along; the faint strains of the band playing at Phyllis Court still rang in his head. And suddenly he had taken her in his arms and kissed her.

For a moment or two she had lain up against him, her lips on his. Then, very gently, she had pushed him away.

“Jim,” she had said quietly, “I ought to have told you I’m engaged. It isn’t given out yet, and that’s why I’m not wearing a ring.”

“I see,” said big Jim, and lit a cigarette with a hand that shook a little. “I’m sorry; I didn’t know.”

And because of a certain strict notion of honour he had gone away the next day. And

she had let him go. He had said nothing more, though the Fates that govern these things alone know what would have been the result if he had. He knew that he loved her—at least he'd loved her that night ; and she—well, she had wondered and waited and finally married Jack Fairbrace. Which has happened before in this world, and is likely to happen again. Moreover, she was happy with him, for Jack was a good soul and a white man. And if sometimes she thought of a big bronzed man with vivid blue eyes, and wondered where he was and what he was doing, she kept those thoughts to herself. Once or twice she had seen him before he went back to Africa, but always when other people were present. The mere fact that she had taken care that they were, may perhaps serve as a pointer.

And then one day Jim Sefton—having just finished a fifteen months' trek in the back of beyond up Tanganyika way—arrived in Johannesburg. It was his permanent postal address, and amongst the mail that had been collecting for him he found a letter from Enid Fairbrace. It was nearly a year old and it ran as follows :

My dear Jim,

By the time you get this—unless you're in Johannesburg at the moment—we shall be out in Africa ourselves. A bit of a surprise, isn't

it, and I can still hardly believe that we're really going. But things are altering so in England, and servants are so difficult, and all one's money goes on merely living.

At any rate, we're going to try something new. Do you remember that time you told me about the country, and how wonderful it was? We've bought a farm, more or less in partnership with another man. And we're coming out to make our fortunes. So mind you come and see us if ever you happen to be in our locality. I know it's rather like asking a man who has been in India whether he knew your cousin, but however much out of the way it is you must make a point of coming to see us— if only to tell us where we are making mistakes. Come whenever you like; don't bother to write.

*Yours very sincerely,
Enid Fairbrace.*

He hadn't written; he had taken her at her word. It was so long now since her letter had come that he had decided it would be better to do so. In addition, he wasn't sure exactly when he would be able to get to the address she had given: he had one or two other things to do first. And now, those things finished, he was on his way to renew a friendship which might so easily have become something else.

It was over two years now since he had seen Enid Fairbrace, and he was conscious of a certain

curious excitement at the prospect of meeting her again. He told himself that no trace of his old feeling for her remained : that he was merely going to see the wife of a man to whom he had taken quite a liking in England. But the curious excitement refused to vanish at this logical and cold-blooded presentation of the case, and after a while, with a little shrug of his broad shoulders, Jim Sefton admitted the truth to himself. He was in love with another man's wife : he always had been in love with her, and he'd been a silly quixotic fool to let her go without a struggle.

He glanced at the sun and realised the time was about three o'clock.

"Another three miles," he muttered to himself, and broke into a jog-trot. The track was clearly defined, and with the directions given him by the man at the railway station thirty miles back, from whom he had hired his horse, it presented no difficulties to a man like Jim Sefton. To a townsman it would probably have seemed impenetrable jungle bush : to Sefton's practised eye the route was as clearly marked as if there had been signposts.

"There's the drift, old gal," he said as the horse splashed through the shallow water. "Only another two miles to go."

And then he pulled up : a white man, with a gun under his arm, had suddenly appeared in a clearing in front of him.

"Good afternoon," said Jim Sefton. "I'm right, ain't I, for the Fairbraces' house?"

"Straight as you can go," answered the stranger, staring at him intently. "Are you a doctor by any chance?"

"I am not," said Sefton. "Why? Anybody ill?"

"Fairbrace is pretty seedy," answered the other man. "I'm Granger—his partner. Live with them."

"What's the matter with him?" asked Sefton. "Malaria?"

"Personally I think he's got a bad dose of tampane fever," said Granger. "High temperature; all the usual symptoms."

"How is Mrs. Fairbrace?" said Sefton after a pause, and once again the other man eyed him intently.

"Very fit," he answered after a little pause. "A little uneasy, naturally, about her husband. You know them, I suppose?"

"Quite well," said Sefton. "In fact I was on my way to answer in person a year-old invitation of hers to look them up. I've been up Tanganyika way, and found the letter waiting for me two or three weeks ago in Jo'burg. Sefton is my name."

The other man nodded.

"I rather guessed you were. Heard them mention you often."

"How are they getting on?" asked Sefton. "Have you got a good show here?"

"Quite," said Granger briefly. "We want the railway, of course. But there's always a catch somewhere. However, you'll see for yourself. The house is on some high ground about a mile and a half ahead. And look out for snakes: there are a lot of mambas about."

"Thanks; I will," answered the other. "See you later, I take it."

With a nod he trotted on, and then, just before he got to a turn in the track, something impelled him to look back. Granger was still standing motionless staring after him, though the instant Sefton looked round he turned and vanished into the bush. And a slight frown showed for an instant on big Jim's forehead. Doubtless it was quite unreasonable, but he was conscious of a distinct feeling of dislike for Jack Fairbrace's partner.

The frown deepened as he rode on. He had come now to stretches of cultivated land, which he knew must belong to the people he was going to see. And though he kept a wary eye skinned for that most deadly of all snakes—the black mamba—subconsciously he took in the condition of the ground through which he was riding.

Jim Sefton was not a farmer himself, but few men in Africa had a sounder knowledge of the game. And it was soon obvious to him that this

was very far from being a good show. The part he was going through was under cotton, and he could tell at a glance that the crop was poor and the weeds plentiful. In the distance there were some tired-looking orange trees chiefly remarkable for the complete absence of fruit. In fact everything showed unmistakable signs of neglect and laziness.

"Something very wrong," he reflected. "I'm glad I came."

Suddenly in the distance he saw the house, and his mare, as if sensing the end of the journey, quickened her pace. And five minutes later he was shaking hands with Enid Fairbrace whilst a boy took his horse away to the outhouse that served as a stable.

"Jim!" she cried, "but I'm glad to see you."

He smiled gravely, and studied her with his keen blue eyes.

"You're looking well, Enid," he said at length. "Awfully well. A bit worried, but I suppose that's due to Jack's fever."

"How did you know anything about that?" she asked in surprise.

"I met your partner, Granger, down by the drift," he answered, and if he noticed the sudden shadow that passed over her face he said nothing. "I'm sorry he's so seedy. Granger said something about tampane fever."

"He's got this beastly temperature which he can't shake off," she said, leading the way

into the house. "I don't think it is anything serious, but it makes the poor old boy so weak and irritable. Come and see him."

He followed her into her husband's bedroom, and the sick man sat up with a smile when he saw him.

"Hallo, Jim!" he cried. "Where the deuce have you sprung from?"

Jim Sefton sat down on the bed and laughed.

"Out of the blue, as usual, old man," he answered. "Only got Enid's letter three weeks ago. This is a bad affair, though, finding you down with fever. How did you get it?"

"Out shooting the other day with Bill," said Fairbrace irritably. "That's Granger—my partner. Or, to be correct, I should say I'm his. This place belonged to him originally, and he supplies all the farming knowledge."

"He does, does he?" remarked Jim Sefton. "And what do you supply—the capital?"

"Well, naturally I've put in a bit of cash," answered the other. "And, by Jove! it's a pretty expensive game. Still, as Bill says—you've got to put money in if you want to get money out."

Jim Sefton grunted and did not pursue the topic. He took a glance at the marks on the sick man's neck, and felt no doubt in his own mind that Granger's diagnosis was right, and that tampane fever was the trouble. He told them so, which reassured Enid considerably, and

then, having talked for a time to the invalid, he followed her into the hall for tea. And the first thing that struck him was the difference between the inside of the farm and what lay outside. There were no evidences here of the laziness and neglect which had been so obvious as he had ridden up: everything was cosy and comfortable—English chintzes, big easy chairs, flowers prettily arranged—and with a sigh of satisfaction he took the cup she handed him.

“You’ve made it charming, Enid,” he said. “Perfectly charming. Jack and his partner are two singularly fortunate individuals.”

And as he spoke there came the sound of a shot. It was fairly close to, and instinctively Jim Sefton sat up in his chair.

“It’s probably Mr. Granger,” said Enid. “He’s always shooting something.”

“It sounded pretty near,” said Sefton. “Not more than a couple of hundred yards away.”

“I expect it’s a snake,” she answered indifferently. “There are a lot near here.”

They looked round as a step came on the stoep outside, and the next moment Granger entered.

“Got a mamba,” he cried. “A big one. Care to see it, Enid? I’ve got it outside.”

She gave a little shudder.

“Well, please keep it there. Do you want some tea, Mr. Granger?”

He took the cup she handed him and sat down.

"I've really brought it up to show Jack," he remarked. "Would you believe it, Sefton, but he's never seen one all the time he's been out here."

Jim Sefton grunted his surprise and went on with his tea. At the moment he was more interested in the fact that Granger called his partner's wife Enid, and she, very pointedly, did not call him Bill. And during the next half-hour or so his interest did not wane. Not much ever escaped those keen eyes of his, and in this case the signs were plain to read. Granger was in love with Enid Fairbrace, and she was fully aware of the fact. Equally plain was the other side of the case, that she was not in love with Granger.

There was nothing novel in the situation, and once or twice a cynical smile twitched round his lips. When two men and a singularly attractive woman live together in the back of beyond, something of the sort is likely to occur. And the only variation that is of interest is the end, which in primitive places is frequently in keeping with its surroundings.

It was typical of the man that he should come straight to the point when he found himself alone with Enid that evening before dinner. They were strolling round the little garden she had made near the house, and

suddenly he paused and waved his stick comprehensively round the ground that lay beneath them.

"What's the idea, Enid?" he remarked.

"I suppose you know you're just throwing money away, going on as you are at present?"

She changed colour a little as she stared at him.

"What do you mean, Jim?" she demanded.

"My dear," he said gravely, "the work on your farm is rotten. I haven't examined it closely: I don't know whether you've got a good proposition here, granted it is worked efficiently, or not. But what I do know is that, worked as it is at present, you'll never make a penny."

"But Mr. Granger said it was going so well," she stammered.

"Then Mr. Granger is a damned liar," returned Jim Sefton. "You don't like him, do you, Enid?"

It was more of a statement than a question.

"No, I don't," she answered quietly. "I positively dislike him. But I thought he knew all about farming, and that's why——"

"You go on living in the same house with a man who is in love with you."

He lit a cigarette, and looked at her with a faint smile.

"You're pretty quick, Jim," she said.

"My dear," he answered, "I'm in love with

you myself. I know it now: I've been in love with you all along. Like a fool, I let you go at the beginning, and now it's too late."

"Yes," she said very steadily, "it's too late now, Jim."

"Then it wouldn't have been too late if I'd told you before, if I . . ." For the life of him he couldn't help the tremble in his voice.

"No, my dear," she told him in a low voice. "It wouldn't have been too late. But I thought it was just a summer evening's madness."

For a while they stood side by side in silence; then big Jim squared his shoulders.

"We can all make pretty average fools of ourselves," he said abruptly. "And I'm certainly no exception to the rule. I guess I'll have to be moving on, Enid: to stop on here is going to be a bit beyond my powers. But before I go I'd like to try and straighten up this little show of yours. There's no earthly good you two going on as you are at present."

"But what are we going to do, Jim? Jack and Mr. Granger drew up a sort of deed of partnership. You see, the land belonged originally to Mr. Granger, and the idea was that Jack's money should be used for its development."

"And a very excellent idea indeed," answered Jim dryly, "if it was being properly developed. As it is, Granger is not doing his side of the bargain. What has been done with the money,

I don't know. If it has been put into the land, then Granger is hopelessly inefficient: if it hasn't, he's a scoundrel. Either way he cuts no ice, and the sooner he's told so the better. My dear," he went on after a while, "I know the brand. I've met 'em before. They generally drink too much, and they're incapable of putting their backs into an honest job of work. In this case the specimen has fallen into very pleasant quarters. He is supplied with money by Jack; he has the most charming and delightful home; and he is in love with you. And it's the last item"—his mouth tightened a little—"that gets my goat particularly."

"I hate him," said Enid under her breath. "It's the way he looks at me sometimes. Oh! Jim—if only we could get rid of him—buy him out or something—and you could come and help us."

It was out before she realised what she'd said, and Jim Sefton gave a short laugh.

"Do you think that would help, Enid?" he answered. "What about the last item?"

"I wasn't thinking, Jim," she whispered. "Forget it."

"Impossible," he smiled. "But we'll rule it out as a method of settlement."

"Anyway, you'll stop till Jack gets better, won't you, Jim?"

"Yes; I'll stop till Jack gets better. In fact, this matter can't be fixed up until he does

get better. He's got to do the talking, and if he attempted to do it now it would only send his temperature up and make him worse. But I'll be here to back him up: I promise you that."

For a moment or two he stared at the sun as it sank lower and lower in the west. Then he turned to the woman at his side.

"My God! Enid—what fools we are at times; what cursed fools! You're very fond of Jack, I know: but there's something else I know too. And it was my fault, all my stupid blundering fault."

"No, dear," she answered quietly, "it wasn't. It was just one of those things that happen—why or how, one doesn't quite know when one looks back. And the only thing that is left is to play the game."

Big Jim Sefton nodded, and held out his hand.

"Right you are, partner," he said. "It's a bargain: we'll play the game."

And inside the house at that moment, whilst Jack Fairbrace tossed and muttered feverishly in his bed, his partner, with a three-finger sundowner in his hand, was perfecting the last details of his particular game.

The sudden arrival of Jim Sefton on the scene was an undoubted nuisance. He looked the type of uncompromising individual to whom explanations might prove difficult. For even

as Sefton had recognised the type to which Granger belonged, so had Granger placed the new-comer with equal accuracy. And big Jim belonged to the type that the Grangers of this world most fear and dislike: the type that is straight as a die and yet on occasions will take the law into its own hands and administer it in a fashion distinctly illegal.

That he was bound to spot that all was not well with the farm, Granger knew. The marvel was that he had been able to keep it from the Fairbraces for as long as he had. But on that point he didn't feel much concern: sooner or later it would have been bound to come out. He would have preferred to have postponed it a little, until the other thing had been settled; and even now it was quite on the cards that nothing would be said until Jack got over his fever.

With a hand that suddenly shook uncontrollably Granger poured himself out another stiff drink. *Until* he got over his fever. . . .

It started another train of thought in his mind: the old, old train that had never been long absent ever since Enid Fairbrace had first come into his life. At first it had been vague and transitory; and then after a while it had become fixed and ugly. Once or twice he had recoiled from it—not because of some sudden interlude of decent feeling, but merely because it frightened him. Granger had a very whole-

some respect for his own skin, and he was fully aware of what happened to those who broke the sixth commandment. And even if the thing could be done so that legally there was no proof against him, that would not be sufficient for his purpose. No trace of suspicion must arise in Enid's mind that he had anything to do with it.

It had been difficult: a hundred different schemes for the removal of what he fondly believed to be the obstacle to his own happiness had suggested themselves, only to be rejected one by one. A shooting accident had held pride of place for some time, but that had at length gone the way of the others. It was true it could be staged in such a way as to make his own neck safe, but what would Enid say? To kill a man accidentally is not the surest way of gaining the widow's affection. . . .

And so it had gone the way of the others, and he had hung on, wondering and plotting, and never getting any nearer the mark until that very afternoon, when, in a flash, the master idea had come. He wondered if it was always the same: if the obvious, the only, plan invariably came suddenly like that. It was so simple, so sure. If not to-night, nor to-morrow night—then the night after. Or the one after that. He could afford to wait a few days now: he who had already waited a year.

He rose to his feet as the sound of steps

outside announced the return of the others. So engrossed had he been in his scheme that he had almost forgotten Jim Sefton, and he scowled as he heard his deep laugh on the stoep. And then the scowl was replaced by a look of triumph: the second sundowner was beginning to take effect. All the more kudos to him for pulling off his plan right under the damned fellow's nose; he wasn't afraid of a dozen Seftons. His scheme was safe; absolutely and completely safe.

Throughout dinner he dominated the conversation, and the level of the whisky in the decanter fell rapidly. He could talk well when he chose to, and if the other two were a little silent he attributed it to his own brilliance. No reference was made to the farm, and after a while he began to wonder if his fears as to Sefton's powers of observation had not been groundless. So much the better; anyway it didn't much matter.

The meal concluded, he made some excuse and went out of doors. Sefton had declined his perfunctory suggestion that he should join him in a stroll, and stretched out in an arm-chair was watching Enid through the smoke of his cigarette. His opinion of Granger had been confirmed by what he had seen: he talked too much and he drank too much, which is a bad mixture in anyone, but fatal in a man whose job is the land.

And then he dismissed Granger from his mind. Enid was there in front of him, and thoughts were not included in playing the game. Yes: he'd been a fool—a silly quixotic fool. Or had it been, as Enid said, just one of those things that happen, one knows not why nor how.

Just once or twice their eyes met and held, and then with a sigh he rose and stretched his big frame.

“ I'll go and look up the invalid,” he said, “ and after that I think I'll turn in pretty early.”

She was doing some needlework, and just for a moment he laid his hand on her shoulder as he passed. She gave a little quiver, and his grip tightened. Then he went on into Jack's room.

For a while he stood looking down at the sick man. The fever had come back, and he was hot and restless. Outside the tree beetles kept up their everlasting chorus, and from the far distance came once the coughing grunt of a lion.

He sat down by the bed, and pulled out his cigarette case. There was nothing to be done for Jack Fairbrace: only time would cure him. But unbidden, thrust out as soon as it was there, the thought came into his mind. Supposing he didn't pull through; supposing . . .

He shut his case with an angry snap, and a cigarette rolled out on the floor. And then

things happened rapidly. At one moment he was leaning forward to pick up his cigarette: the next he was at the other side of the room with every vestige of colour out of his face. For in stooping down he had looked under the bed.

And now, silent as a cat, he again stooped down and stared. For perhaps half a minute he remained motionless: then step by step, with a puzzled frown on his face, he approached the man who still tossed and turned and muttered. He took a candle off the table and put it on the floor in order to see better, and when at length he rose to his feet his face looked as if it had been carved out of granite. For temptation—fierce, bitter temptation—had come to Jim Sefton. And it lasted—but what matter how long it lasted? Time is not the essence of the thing that put big Jim on the rack and left him sweating.

Gradually his face relaxed a little, and he shook himself like a dog. The fight was over: it almost made him laugh to think that it had ever taken place. He walked to the door and glanced out: Enid's head was still bent over her work. Then he returned to the bed, and stooping down he pulled out the thing that lay underneath. Concealing it as well as he could with his coat he crossed the hall behind Enid's back and entered Granger's room. And the next moment there lay under Granger's bed

that which had caused Jim Sefton such a shock.

He re-entered the hall, and sat down opposite Enid. His expression was normal again, the hand that held his cigarette as steady as a rock. And after a while—it was just as his keen ear caught the sound of a footstep outside—he spoke.

“ I shall probably sit up latish with Granger to-night, my dear. But don't you wait up.”

She looked up at him quickly : there was a strange new note in his voice.

“ What is it, Jim ? Why do you speak like that ? ”

But he only shook his head with a grave smile.

“ Don't worry your head about anything. Just a native superstition : that's all. Go and sit with Jack for a bit, and then go to bed.”

And as Granger opened the front door she rose and went into her husband's room. Jim Sefton had moved his chair a little so that his face was in the shadow. And he noted the gloating look in Granger's eyes as they followed her.

“ Very pleasant out now,” he said calmly, and Granger nodded.

“ Very.” He sat down, so that he could watch the door of Jack's bedroom, and Jim's eyes never left his face. For ten minutes or a quarter of an hour they kept up a desultory

conversation, and then came the symptom Jim Sefton had been waiting for—the thing that proved finally what he wanted to know. Granger was getting nervous, and was answering at random.

Twice he rose and walked over to the door of Jack's room, and the second time he went in.

"Hadn't you better be careful, Enid," he said. "In case there's a possible risk of infection and all that."

"Tampane fever isn't infectious," remarked Jim Sefton quietly. "Still, you're looking a bit done in, Enid: why don't you turn in?"

He was standing behind Granger as he spoke, and when she saw the look in his eyes she rose at once.

"I think I will," she said, "I'm feeling a bit sleepy. Good night."

She passed between the two men, and they waited until they heard her door close.

"You're quite right, Granger," said Sefton. "In this climate women can't do too much. Personally I think a little drink, and I shall follow her example."

He followed the other man back into the hall, and glanced at his watch. It was nine o'clock, and at eleven they were still sitting there. Moreover the whisky bottle that had been full was now empty.

It was when he perceived the fact that Granger announced his intention of going to

bed. A very decent fellow, Sefton, he had decided : misjudged him badly. Bit of a fool : give no trouble, anyway. As a matter of fact he'd meant to be in bed before ; it might happen any moment now. Might have happened while they were sitting there, which would have been a bit awkward. Oughtn't to have sat up so long. Once in bed bound to be a delay, and delay fatal.

He swayed a little ; his brain was most confoundedly muzzy. Damned fellow Sefton must have a head like a copper boiler. And those blue eyes of his seemed to bore into one's brain.

He staggered and pulled himself together ; no doubt about it, he'd had one too many.

"Good nye, ole boy," he remarked unsteadily. "Show you round the bally farm to-morrow."

With a candle in his hand he lurched off to his room, whilst big Jim still sat motionless. Even after the door had closed he never moved, though his brain was busy. It was justice—primitive justice—if it succeeded. And if it didn't . . .

A crash from Granger's room announced that he had upset the water jug. And then it came—a sudden terrible scream of mortal fear. It startled even big Jim himself, though his hand was steady as he reached for the gun beside him.

Simultaneously the doors of Granger's and

Enid's rooms burst open. But it was on Granger that Jim Sefton's eyes were fixed.

"A mamba," he yelled. "I've been bitten by a mamba. Quick! Oh! my God—be quick."

"Where's the potassium permanganate?" said big Jim, and Enid darted across to a cupboard.

"It's empty," she cried in despair. "It was full this morning, I know."

And once again Jim Sefton's blue eyes were fixed on Granger. His face was chalky; his shaking mouth jibbered inarticulate words.

"Who emptied it?" said Jim in a terrible voice. "Who emptied it, Granger?"

And Granger cursed foully, only to begin raving once again for mercy. Into his fuddled brain had come the certainty that Jim knew; the certainty also that nothing could save him. It was he who had emptied the bottle of permanganate; it was he who had signed his own death warrant. How his plans had miscarried he had no idea—all that mattered was that they had.

A figure in pyjamas appeared in the door of Jack's room.

"What is it?" muttered the sick man weakly. "What's happened?"

But no one answered him; no one even knew he was there. For the end was close to, and Granger was not a pretty sight. And

Enid in spite of having loathed the man was crying softly, though her brain was racing in a jumbled chaos of thought. What had Jim meant by asking who had emptied the bottle?

It was Jim who took charge when it was over. It was Jim who went to the window of Granger's room and shot the snake inside by the light of the candle on the table. It was Jim who put Jack back to bed, and sat up with Enid till she fell asleep in her chair. And he was still sitting opposite her when the dawn came, so that the first thing she was conscious of as she woke were those vivid blue eyes of his.

But during the days that followed he said very little, and she asked no questions. And it was only as he was going a fortnight later that she could stand it no longer. Jack was fit; arrangements for disposing of the farm were in train; and then they were going back to England.

"Jim," she said, as she stood beside his horse, "there was some mystery that night. What was it?"

For a moment a tiny smile flickered over his lips.

"There is a native superstition, my dear," he said gravely, "which like so many things of that sort is founded on fact. They say that if you kill a snake, its mate will come to find it. Granger killed a mamba that afternoon; I

killed the mate that night. You see the dead snake was under his bed."

"But what can have induced him to put it there?" she cried.

"I wonder," answered big Jim Sefton.

He bent down suddenly and raised the hand lying on his horse's neck to his lips. Then he dug his heels in, and without a backward glance trotted off along the road that to a townsman's eye would have seemed impenetrable bush.