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[WITH 2 COLOURED PICTURES,
"MEMORIES" AND "PIERROT."]
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"A CAROL OF CHRISTMAS."—By L. E. Lawrence.

"Oh no I'm not. I am only very fond of you, nurse—very much in love with you."

"Nonsense. You—a nobleman's brother!"

"Bother my brother."

"And—and this house does not deter you—these dreadful surroundings altogether?"

"Not a bit. I am thinking of you," he said, very earnestly.

"I know how good you are—how—how—how—"

"That will do," she said, in her old sharp, crisp way. "You are very wrong and very foolish. You know nothing about me."

"Yes I do."

"How do you know that I am not sealed to a single life—that I have not taken vows—"

"Oh damn—that is, oh the devil—no, I mean Lord save us. Don't say that."

She smiled. "Well, I'm not of the strict order of sister-hoods—only on trial, as it were; but for all that, your proposition—which is extremely absurd, I have already said—must be very respectfully declined."

"Heaven help a poor fellow, then!"

"It is so abrupt—so unkind to harass me in this way—so—"

"Go on," he said, as she stopped. "Have it all out; say the worst of me that you can. I deserve it all."

"—So generous of you."

"Susan!"

"But you must go away now," she said, hastily. "I—I am nursing a sick woman here—an old nurse of my own, who was very kind to me when I was a little child, whom I have only just discovered in sore distress. Go now, please do."

"This is not your home, then?"

"No."

"Then—"

"Don't ask any more questions. Please leave me. You have upset me dreadfully."

"May I come again—just once more?"

"Just for once, then, if you like, to say good-bye to me before you go abroad."

"I will come—this evening."

"No, this day week."

"Oh, it is a century."

"No sooner," said she, very firmly, "or I'll never speak to you again!"

"Very well, then."

The Honourable George Vibert went away very much elated, although Sister Susan had not responded cordially to his suit, and was anxious evidently to give him time to think it over. But she said "this day week," and he had told her he was going away to-morrow. That meant that he was not to be in too much of a hurry to depart.

Need we dwell upon the after part of this eventful history? Everybody can guess how the story is to end—in love and harmony and orange blossoms. In a fashionable marriage, too, to the intense delight of Sister Susan's aristocratic family, who had always harassed the poor girl's life out, and begged her to give up her nursing fads and fancies, her self-sacrifice and abnegation. This newspaper cutting explains everything:—

On the 14th inst., at St. George's, Hanover-square, by the Rev. Canon Blathermost (uncle of the bride), assisted by the Rev. Capucian Tubbs, M.A., the Honourable George Vibert, second son of the late Baron Tugsdale, of Tugsdale Court, to Lady Susan Dorothea Emily Victoria Angelina Dallymore, eldest daughter of the late Earl of Canterfield, of Canterfield Court, Hampshire.

THE SQUAW.

BY BRAM STOKER.

NURNBERG at the time was not so much exploited as it has been since then. Irving had not been playing *Faust*, and the very name of the old town was hardly known to the great bulk of the travelling public. My wife and I being in the second week of our honeymoon, naturally wanted some one else to join our party, so that when the cheery stranger, Elias P. Hutcheson, hailing from Isthmian City, Bleeding Gulch, Maple Tree County, Neb., turned up at the station at Frankfort, and casually remarked that he was going on to see the most all-fired old Methusalem of a town in Yurup, and that he guessed that so much travellin' alone was enough to send an intelligent, active citizen into the melancholy ward of a daft house, we took the pretty broad hint and suggested that we should join forces. We found, on comparing notes afterwards, that we had each intended to speak with some diffidence or hesitation so as not to appear too eager, such not being a good compliment to the success of our married life; but the effect was entirely marred by our both beginning to speak at the same instant—stopping simultaneously and then going on together again. Anyhow, no matter how, it was done; and Elias P. Hutcheson became one of our party. Straightway Amelia and I found the pleasant benefit; instead of quarrelling, as we had been doing, we found that the restraining influence of a third party was such that we now took every opportunity of spooning in odd corners. Amelia declares that ever since she has, as the result of that experience, advised all her friends to take a friend on the honeymoon. Well, we "did" Nurnberg together, and much enjoyed the racy remarks of our Transatlantic friend, who, from his quaint speech and his wonderful stock of adventures, might have stepped out of a novel. We kept for the last object of interest in the old city to be visited the Burg, and on the day appointed for the visit strolled round the outer wall of the city by the eastern side.

The Burg is seated on a rock dominating the town, and an immensely deep fosse guards it on the northern side. Nurnberg has been happy in that it was never besieged; had it been it would certainly not be so spick and span perfect as it is at present. The ditch has not been used for centuries, and now its base is spread with tea-gardens and orchards, of which some of the trees are of quite respectable growth. As we wandered round the wall, dawdling in the hot July sunshine, we often paused to admire the views spread before us, and in especial the great plain covered with towns and villages and bounded with a blue line of hills, like a landscape of Claude Lorraine. From this we always turned with new delight to the city itself, with its myriad of quaint old gables and acre-wide red roofs dotted with dormer windows, tier upon tier. A little to our right rose the towers of the Burg, and nearer still, standing grim, the Torture Tower, which was, and is, perhaps, the most interesting place in the city. For centuries the tradition of the Iron Virgin of Nurnberg has been handed down as an instance of the horrors of cruelty of which man is capable; we had long looked forward to seeing it; and here at last was its home.

In one of our pauses we leaned over the wall of the moat and looked down. The garden seemed quite fifty or sixty feet below us, and the sun pouring into it with an intense, moveless heat like that of an oven. Beyond rose the grey, grim wall seemingly of endless height, and losing itself right and left in the angles of bastion and counterscarp. Trees and bushes crowned the wall, and above again towered the lofty houses on whose massive beauty Time has only set the hand of approval. The sun was hot and we were lazy; time was our own, and we

lingered, leaning on the wall. Just below us was a pretty sight—a great black cat lying stretched in the sun, whilst round her gambolled prettily a tiny black kitten. The mother would wave her tail for the kitten to play with, or would raise her feet and push away the little one as an encouragement to further play. They were just at the foot of the wall, and Elias P. Hutcheson, in order to help the play, stooped and took from the walk a moderate sized pebble.

"See!" he said, "I will drop it near the kitten, and they will both wonder where it came from."

"Oh, be careful," said my wife; "you might hit the dear little thing!"

"Not me, ma'am," said Elias P. "Why, I'm as tender-hearted as a Maine cherry-tree. Lor, bless ye, I wouldn't hurt the poor pooty little critter more'n I'd scalp a baby. An' you may bet your variegated socks on that! See, I'll drop it fur away on the outside so's not to go near her!" Thus saying, he leaned over and held his arm out at full length and dropped the stone. It may be that there is some attractive force which draws lesser matter to greater; or more probably that the wall was not plumb but sloped to its base—we not noticing the inclination from above; but the stone fell with a sickening thud that came up to us through the hot air right on the kitten's head, and shattered out its little brains then and there. The black cat cast a swift upward glance, and we saw her eyes like green fire fixed an instant on Elias P. Hutcheson; and then her attention was given to the kitten, which lay still with just a quiver of the little tiny limbs, whilst a thin red stream trickled from the gaping wound. With a muffled cry, such as a human being might give, she bent over the kitten, licking its wound and moaning. Suddenly she seemed to realise that it was dead, and again threw her eyes up at us. I shall never forget the sight, for she looked the perfect incarnation of hate. Her green eyes blazed with lurid fire, and the white, sharp teeth seemed to almost shine through the blood which dabbled her mouth and whiskers. She gnashed her teeth, and her claws stood out stark and at full length on every paw. Then she made a wild rush up the wall as if to reach us, but when the momentum ended fell back, and further added to her horrible appearance, for she fell on the kitten, and rose with her black fur smeared with its brains and blood. Amelia turned quite faint, and I had to lift her back from the wall. There was a seat close by in the shade of a spreading plane-tree, and here I placed her whilst she composed herself. Then I went back to Hutcheson, who stood without moving, looking down on the angry cat below.

As I joined him, he said:

"Wall, I guess that air the savagest beast I ever see—'cept once when an Apache squaw had an edge on a half-breed what they nicknamed 'Splinters' 'cos of the way he fixed up her papoose which he stole on a raid just to show that he appreciated the way they had given his mother the fire torture. She got that kinder look so set on her face that it jest seemed to grow there. She followed Splinters more'n three year till at last the braves got him and handed him over to her. They did say that no man, white or Injun, had ever been so long a-dying under the tortures of the Apaches. The only time I ever see her smile was when I wiped her out. I kem on the camp jest in time to see Splinters pass in his checks, and he wasn't sorry to go either. He was a hard citizen, and though I never could shake with him after that papoose business—for it was bitter bad, and he should have been a white man, for he looked liked one—I see he had got paid out in full. Durn me, but I took a piece of his hide from one of the skinnin' posts an' had it made into a pocket-book. It's here now!" and he slapped the breast pocket of his coat.

Whilst he was speaking the cat was continuing her frantic efforts to get up the wall. She would take a run back and then charge up, sometimes reaching an incredible height. She did not seem to mind the heavy fall which she got each time but started with renewed vigour; and at every tumble her appearance became more horrible. Hutcheson was a kind-hearted man—my wife and I had both noticed little acts of kindness to animals as well as to persons—and he seemed concerned at the state of fury to which the cat had wrought herself.

"Wall, now!" he said, "I du declare that that poor critter seems quite desperate. There! there! poor thing, it was all an accident—though that won't bring back your little one to you. Say! I wouldn't have had such a thing happen for a thousand! Just shows what a clumsy fool of a man can do when he tries to play! Seems I'm too darned slipperhanded to even play with a cat. Say, Colonel!" it was a pleasant way he had to bestow titles freely—"I hope your wife don't hold no grudge against me on account of this unpleasantness? Why, I wouldn't have had it occur on no account."

He came over to Amelia and apologised profusely, and she with her usual kindness of heart hastened to assure him that she quite understood that it was an accident. Then we all went again to the wall and looked over.

The cat missing Hutcheson's face had drawn back across the moat, and was sitting on her haunches as though ready to spring. Indeed, the very instant she saw him she did spring, and with a blind unreasoning fury, which would have been grotesque, only that it was so frightfully real. She did not try to run up the wall, but simply launched herself at him as though hate and fury could lend her wings to pass straight through the great distance between them. Amelia, womanlike, got quite concerned, and said to Elias P. in a warning voice:

"Oh! you must be very careful. That animal would try to kill you if she were here; her eyes look like positive murder."

He laughed out jovially. "Excuse me, ma'am," he said, "but I can't help laughin'. Fancy a man that has fought grizzlies an' Injuns bein' careful of bein' murdered by a cat!"

When the cat heard him laugh, her whole demeanour seemed to change. She no longer tried to jump or run up the wall, but went quietly over, and sitting again beside the dead kitten began to lick and fondle it as though it were alive.

"See!" said I, "the effect of a really strong man. Even that animal in the midst of her fury recognises the voice of a master, and bows to him!"

"Like a squaw!" was the only comment of Elias P. Hutcheson, as we moved on our way round the city fosse. Every now and then we looked over the wall and each time saw the cat following us. At first she had kept going back to the dead kitten, and then as the distance grew greater took it in her mouth and so followed. After a while, however, she abandoned this, for we saw her following all alone; she had evidently hidden the body somewhere. Amelia's alarm grew at the cat's persistence, and more than once she repeated her warning; but the American always laughed with amusement, till finally, seeing that she was beginning to be worried, he said:

"I say, ma'am, you needn't be skeered over that cat. I go heeled, I du!" Here he slapped his pistol pocket at the back of his lumbar region. "Why, sooner'n have you worried, I'll shoot the critter, right here, an' risk the police interferin' with a citizen of the United States for carryin' arms contrary to regulations!" As he spoke he looked over the wall, but the cat, on seeing him, retreated, with a growl, into a bed of tall flowers, and was hidden. He went on: "Blest if that ar critter ain't got more sense of what's good for her than most Christians. I guess we've seen the last of her! You bet, she'll go back now to that busted kitten and have a private funeral of it, all to herself!"

Amelia did not like to say more, lest he might, in mistaken kindness to her, fulfil his threat of shooting the cat: and so we went on and crossed the little wooden bridge leading to the gateway whence ran the steep paved roadway between the Burg and the pentagonal Torture Tower. As we crossed the bridge we saw the cat again down below us. When she saw us her fury seemed to return, and she made frantic efforts to get up the steep wall. Hutcheson laughed as he looked down at her, and said:

"Good-bye, old girl. Sorry I in-jured your feelin's, but you'll get over it in time! So long!" And then we passed through the long, dim archway and up the steep incline, and came to the gate of the Burg.

When we came out again after our survey of this most beautiful old place which not even the well-intentioned efforts of the Gothic restorers of forty years ago have been able to spoil—though their restoration was then glaring white—we seemed to have quite forgotten the unpleasant episode of the morning. The old lime tree with its great trunk gnarled with the passing of nearly nine centuries, the deep well cut through the heart of the rock by those captives of old, and the lovely view from the city wall whence we heard, spread over almost a full quarter of an hour, the multitudinous chimes of the city, had all helped to wipe out from our minds the incident of the slain kitten.

We were the only visitors who had entered the Torture Tower that morning—so at least said the old custodian—and as we had the place all to ourselves were able to make a minute and more satisfactory survey than would have otherwise been possible. The custodian, looking to us as the sole source of his gains for the day, was willing to meet our wishes in any way. The Torture Tower is truly a grim place, even now when many thousands of visitors have sent a stream of life, and the joy that follows life, into the place; but at the time I mention it wore its grimmest and most gruesome aspect. The dust of ages seemed to have settled on it, and the darkness and the horror of its memories seemed to have become sentient in a way that would have satisfied the Pantheistic souls of Philo or Spinoza. The lower chamber where we entered was seemingly, in its normal state, filled with incarnate darkness; even the hot sunlight streaming in through the door seemed to be lost in the vast thickness of the walls, and only showed the masonry rough as when the builder's scaffolding had come down, but coated with dust and marked here and there with patches of dark stain which, if walls could speak, could have given their own dread memories of pain and fear. We were glad to pass up the dusty wooden staircase, the custodian leaving the outer door open to light us somewhat on our way; for to our eyes coming out of the bright sunlight the one long-wick'd, evil-smelling candle stuck in a sconce on the wall gave an inadequate light. When we came up through the open trap in the corner of the chamber overhead, Amelia held on to me so tight that I could actually feel her heart beat. I must say for my own part that I was not surprised at her fear, for this room was even more gruesome than that below. Here there was certainly more light, but only just sufficient to realise the horrible surroundings of the place. The builders of the tower had evidently intended that only they who should gain the top should have any of the joys of light and prospect. There, as we had noticed from below, were ranges of windows, albeit of mediæval smallness, but elsewhere in the tower were only a very few narrow slits such as were habitual in places of mediæval defence. A few of these only lit the chamber, and these so high up in the wall that from no part could the sky be seen through the thickness of the walls. In racks, and leaning in disorder against the walls, were a number of headsman's swords, great double-handled weapons with broad blade and keen edge. Hard by were several blocks whereon the necks of the victims had lain, with here and there deep notches where the steel had bitten through the guard of flesh and shored into the wood. Round the chamber, placed in all sorts of irregular ways, were many implements of torture which made one's heart ache to see—chairs full of spikes which gave instant and excruciating pain; chairs and couches with dull knobs whose torture was seemingly less, but which, though slower, were equally efficacious; racks, boots, belts, gloves, collars, all made for compressing at will; steel baskets in which the head could be slowly crushed into a pulp if necessary; watchmen's hooks with long handle and knife that cut at resistance—this a specialty of the old Nurnberg police system; and many, many other devices for man's injury to man. Amelia grew quite pale with the horror of the things, but fortunately did not faint, for being a little overcome she sat down in a torture chair, but jumped up again with a shriek, all tendency to faint gone. We both pretended that it was the injury done to her dress by the dust of the chair, and the rusty spikes which had upset her, and Mr. Hutcheson acquiesced in accepting the explanation with a kind-hearted laugh.

But the central object in the whole of this chamber of horrors was the engine known as the Iron Virgin, which stood near the centre of the room. It was a rudely-shaped figure of a woman, something of the bell order, or, to make a closer comparison, of the figure of Mrs. Noah in the children's Ark, but without that slimmess of waist and perfect *rondeur* of hip which marks the æsthetic type of the Noah family. One would hardly have recognised it as intended for a human figure at all had not the founder shaped on the forehead a rude semblance of a woman's face. This machine was coated with rust without, and covered with dust; a rope was fastened to a ring in the front of the figure, about where the waist should have been, and was drawn through a pulley, fastened on the wooden pillar which sustained the flooring above. The custodian pulling this rope showed that a section of the front was hinged like a door at one side; we then saw that the engine was of considerable thickness, leaving just room enough inside for a man to be placed. The door was of equal thickness and of great weight, for it took the custodian all his strength, aided though he was by the contrivance of the pulley, to open it. This weight was partly due to the fact that the door was of manifest purpose hung so as to throw its weight downwards, so that it might shut of its own accord when the strain was released. The inside was honeycombed with rust—nay more, the rust alone that comes through time would hardly have eaten so deep into the iron walls; the rust of the cruel stains was deep indeed! It was only, however, when we came to look at the inside of the door that the diabolical intention was manifest to the full. Here were several long spikes, square and massive, broad at the base and sharp at the points, placed in such a position that when the door should close the upper ones would pierce the eyes of the victim, and the lower ones his heart and vitals. The sight was too much for poor Amelia, and this time she fainted dead off, and I had to carry her down the stairs, and place her on a bench outside till she recovered. That she felt it to the quick was afterwards shown by the fact that my eldest son bears to this day a rude birthmark on his breast, which has, by family consent, been accepted as representing the Nurnberg Virgin.

When we got back to the chamber we found Hutcheson still opposite the Iron Virgin; he had been evidently philosophising, and now gave us the benefit of his thought in the shape of a sort of exordium.

"Wall, I guess I've been learnin' somethin' here while madam has been gettin' over her faint. Pears to me that we're a long way behind the times on our side of the big drink. We uster

think out on the plains that the Injun could give us points in tryin' to make a man uncomfortable; but I guess your old mediaeval law-and-order party could raise him every time. Splinters was pretty good in his bluff on the squaw, but this here young miss held a straight flush all high on him. The points of them spikes air sharp enough still, though even the edges air eaten out by what uster be on them. It'd be a good thing for our Indian section to get some specimens of this here play-toy to send round to the Reservations jest to knock the stuffin' out of the bucks, and the squaws too, by showing them as how old civilisation lays over them at their best. Guess but I'll get in that box a minute jest to see how it feels!"

"Oh no! no!" said Amelia. "It is too terrible!"

"Guess, ma'am, nothin's too terrible to the explorin' mind. I've been in some queer places in my time. Spent a night inside a dead horse while a prairie fire swept over me in Montana Territory—an' another time slept inside a dead buffler when the Comanches was on the war path an' I didn't keer to leave my kyard on them. I've been two days in a caved-in tunnel in the Billy Broncho gold mine in New Mexico, an' was one of the four shut up for three parts of a day in the caisson what slid over on her side when we was settin' the foundations of the Buffalo Bridge. I've not funked an odd experience yet, an' I don't propose to begin now!"

We saw that he was set on the experiment, so I said: "Well, hurry up, old man, and get through it quick!"

"All right, General," said he, "but I calculate we ain't quite ready yet. The gentlemen, my predecessors, what stood in that thar canister, didn't volunteer for the office—not much! And I guess there was some ornamental tyin' up before the big stroke was made. I want to go into this thing fair and square, so I must get fixed up proper first. I dare say this old galoot can rise some string and tie me up accordin' to sample?"

This was said interrogatively to the old custodian, but the latter, who understood the drift of his speech, though perhaps not appreciating to the full the niceties of dialect and imagery, shook his head. His protest was, however, only formal and made to be overcome. The American thrust a gold piece into his hand, saying, "Take it, pard! it's your pot; and don't be skeer'd. This ain't no necktie party that you're asked to assist in!" He produced some thin frayed rope and proceeded to bind our companion with sufficient strictness for the purpose. When the upper part of his body was bound, Hutcheson said:

"Hold on a moment, Judge. Guess I'm too heavy for you to tote into the canister. You jest let me walk in, and then you can wash up re-gardin' my legs!"

Whilst speaking he had backed himself into the opening which was just enough to hold him. It was a close fit and no mistake. Amelia looked on with fear in her eyes, but she evidently did not like to say anything. Then the custodian completed his task by tying the American's feet together so that he was now absolutely helpless and fixed in his voluntary prison. He seemed to really enjoy it, and the incipient smile which was habitual to his face blossomed into actuality as he said:

"Guess this here Eve was made out of the rib of a dwarf! There ain't much room for a full-grown citizen of the United States to hustle. We uster make our coffins more roomier in Idaho territory. Now, Judge, you jest begin to let this door down, slow, on to me. I want to feel the same pleasure as the other jays had when those spikes began to move toward their eyes!"

"Oh no! no! no!" broke in Amelia hysterically. "It is too terrible! I can't bear to see it!—I can't! I can't!"

But the American was obdurate. "Say, Colonel," said he, "why not take madam for a little promenade? I wouldn't hurt her feelin's for the world; but now that I am here, havin' kem eight thousand miles, wouldn't it be too hard to give up the very experience I've been pinin' an' pantin' fur? A man can't get to feel like canned goods every time! Me and the Judge here'll fix up this thing in no time, an' then you'll come back, an' we'll all laugh together!"

Once more the resolution that is born of curiosity triumphed, and Amelia stayed holding tight to my arm and shivering whilst the custodian began to slacken slowly inch by inch the rope that held back the iron door. Hutcheson's face was positively radiant as his eyes followed the first movement of the spikes.

"Wall!" he said, "I guess I've not had enjoyment like this since I left Noo York. Bar a scrap with a French sailor at Wapping—an' that warn't much of a picnic neither—I've not had a show fur real pleasure in this dod-rotted Continent, where there ain't no bars nor no Injuns, an' wheer nary man goes heeled. Slow there, Judge! Don't you rush this business! I want a show for my money this game—I du!"

The custodian must have had in him some of the blood of his predecessors in that ghastly tower, for he worked the engine with a deliberate and excruciating slowness which after five minutes, in which the outer edge of the door had not moved half as many inches, began to overcome Amelia. I saw her lips whiten, and felt her hold upon my arm relax. I looked around an instant for a place whereon to lay her, and when I looked at her again found that her eye had become fixed on the side of the Virgin. Following its direction I saw the black cat crouching out of sight. Her green eyes shone like danger lamps in the gloom of the place, and their colour was heightened by the blood which still smeared her coat and reddened her mouth. I cried out:

"The cat! look out for the cat!" for even then she sprang out before the engine. At this moment she looked like a triumphant demon. Her eyes blazed with ferocity, her hair bristled out till she seemed twice her normal size, and her tail lashed about as does a tiger's when the quarry is before it. Elias P. Hutcheson when he saw her was amused, and his eyes positively sparkled with fun as he said:

"Darned if the squaw hain't got on all her war paint! Jest give her a shove off if she comes any of her tricks on me, for I'm so fixed everlastingly by the boss, that darn my skin if I can keep my eyes from her if she wants them! Easy there, Judge! don't you slack that ar rope or I'm euchered!"

At this moment Amelia completed her faint, and I had to clutch hold of her round the waist or she would have fallen to the floor. Whilst attending to her I saw the black cat crouching for a spring, and jumped up to turn the creature out.

But at that instant, with a sort of hellish scream, she hurled herself, not as we expected at Hutcheson, but straight at the face of the custodian. Her claws seemed to be tearing wildly as one sees in the Chinese drawings of the dragon rampant, and as I looked I saw one of them light on the poor man's eye, and actually tear through it and down his cheek, leaving a wide band of red where the blood seemed to spurt from every vein.

With a yell of sheer terror which came quicker than even his sense of pain, the man leaped back, dropping as he did so the rope which held back the iron door. I jumped for it, but was too late, for the cord ran like lightning through the pulley-block, and the heavy mass fell forward from its own weight.

As the door closed I caught a glimpse of our poor companion's face. He seemed frozen with terror. His eyes stared with a horrible anguish as if dazed, and no sound came from his lips.

And then the spikes did their work. Happily the end was

quick, for when I wrenched open the door they had pierced so deep that they had locked in the bones of the skull through which they had crushed, and actually tore him—it—out of his iron prison till, bound as he was, he fell at full length with a sickly thud upon the floor, the face turning upward as he fell.

I rushed to my wife, lifted her up and carried her out, for I feared for her very reason if she should wake from her faint to such a scene. I laid her on the bench outside and ran back. Leaning against the wooden column was the custodian moaning in pain whilst he held his reddening handkerchief to his eyes. And sitting on the head of the poor American was the cat, purring loudly as she licked the blood which trickled through the gashed socket of his eyes.

I think no one will call me cruel because I seized one of the old executioner's swords and shore her in two as she sat.

AN AFRICAN LOVE STORY.

By E. M. S.

SOME time ago, when I was still a young man with a constitution as yet unimpaired by the trials of later years, I chanced to find myself in the Central African village of Banza-Manteka. I had just arrived, and was seated on one of my boxes under a large spreading tree while my tent was being pitched. The sun was in the zenith, and shed its effulgent rays on the parched earth with an almost blinding intensity. The King Makololo, having heard that a white man was coming, had retired to array himself in the royal robes, and he presently emerged from his hut attired in a waist cloth, a servant's red livery-coat, and a small red cap. In his right hand he carried a blue and red umbrella, and in his left a couple of fowls tied by the legs; and he was accompanied by a boy holding a small bunch of bananas. A genial smile of welcome illuminated his face as he advanced and shook hands with me with the usual greeting of "*Mboté mundélé*," to which I replied, "*Mboté mfoomoo*." He then sat down, and in a short but appropriate speech begged me to accept the fowls and bananas as a present.

After having carefully examined them and discovered that the fowls were old and skinny and the bananas of inferior quality, I presented him with eight red handkerchiefs. The King looked at my gift with surprise and disdain, and immediately demanded the return of his present. I took the fowls in my right hand and gently impelled them at his head. The impact caused his Majesty to reel backwards, and he recovered himself just in time to catch the bananas full in his face. He then rose, and venting his feelings in voluble, but, I am afraid, unparliamentary language, in which the words *Mundélé mbee* (bad white man) recurred frequently, retired towards his hut. I put the handkerchiefs back into my box, and was giving directions for the preparation of my lunch when my eyes fell on a young girl who was holding an animated conversation with the King, and who, every now and then, cast indignant glances towards me. She appeared to be about nineteen years of age, but she was probably much younger. Her figure was beautifully moulded, and her scanty drapery scarcely concealed her somewhat ample charms. Her hair, or rather her wool, was arranged in little knots round her head, and glistened brightly with palm-oil. She was indeed a lovely creature, and I gazed at her in rapt admiration.

"Hi, Mpangoo," cried I, and my little black servant came running towards me. "Go and find out who that girl is." And in a few minutes he returned with the information that she was the King's daughter—the Princess Nsalala.

"Tell the King I want to speak to him."

His Majesty soon returned, looking very sulky, but carrying the bananas and chickens.

I beamed on him as he came, and shaking him warmly by the hand, requested him to sit down.

I then took the fowls and bananas, and in return, I gave him a dozen red handkerchiefs, a piece of velvet, a knife, and a red cap.

Alas! such is man. I make no excuse for my behaviour on this occasion; I simply state the fact as it occurred.

The King was delighted, and continued muttering, "*Mundélé mboté*" (good white man), while he greedily but critically examined his newly-acquired treasures.

The young Princess now came forward and sat beside the King, and I was able to inspect her more closely.

Her complexion was perfect, and its shining ebony hue reminded me of "Day and Martin," and carried my thoughts back to my home in far-away England. Her eyes were large and timid, like those of the wild buffalo. Her cheeks were delicately rounded; while her nose, which was too broad and flat according to our European notions, was slightly tilted upward, giving her a very *piquante* expression. Where all was so admirable it is difficult to make comparisons, but perhaps the most beautiful feature was her mouth. The lips, which occupied a great portion of the area of her face, were of a reddish brown and exquisitely shaped, and at that moment they were parted in a heavenly smile of expectancy, disclosing the even rows of powerful white teeth.

I opened my box and extracted a glass bead necklace, and then, with a grace which a French courtier might have envied, I moved towards her, and with a low bow and a few muttered words of praise, threw the necklace over her head.

She smiled and gave me a look which sent the blood coursing through my veins.

I turned to the King, and, shaking hands with him, said that he must come and see me again before I left, and I might have another small present for him.

I was alone with the Princess Nsalala.

At first there was an awkward silence, as I knew her language very imperfectly, and had to pick my words.

After an interval of a few minutes I said, "*Njé motti ndombi*" (you are a pretty girl).

"*Gooliaco*" (bosh), replied she, but with a smile which showed that the graceful compliment was not displeasing.

I produced an anklet from one of my pockets, and, casting a tender glance at her, bent down and clasped it round her delicate ankle. I then rose and washed the mud off my hands in the clear limpid stream which rippled close by.

On my return I fancied I saw a cloud on the pure young face, and, smiling at her, I sat down and murmured softly, "*Booboo mboté mingi*" (it is a very fine day).

"*Mpeeli-mosi vas makélé?*" (where is the other?) said she, pointing to the anklet.

"*Mpeeli-mosi veh*" (I have no other), said I, with a deprecating look.

"*Njé livoonoo!*" (you are a liar) said she.

Struck by the intuitive insight of this uncultured child of the desert, I drew forth another anklet and clasped it round the other ankle, again performing the necessary ablution.

She once more raised those wonderful eyes and allowed them to dwell on mine for a few moments.

"Steady, old boy," said I to myself; but it was too late. I felt a tingling in the extremities, and a violent throbbing of that organ which is situated on the left side of the body, and on which so much of our earthly happiness depends—the liver, of course, I mean—and I knew that I had met my fate—I was in love.

"*Twalla mbeezi*" (give me some meat), said the Princess after a pause,

I handed her a tin of preserved mutton, which she speedily dispatched.

"*Njé goodia mbeezi ulangoo?*" (Do you like fish?)

"*M*" (yes), replied she eagerly.

The natives have no word for "yes," but they signify assent by raising the chin, and, without opening the lips, they make the sound "*m*."

I opened a box of sardines and handed it to her. She extracted a fish with her pretty fingers, holding it by the middle, and then, with an adroit movement, shot it into her mouth. One fish followed another until the box was empty.

At this stage of the proceedings I attempted to take her hand, but she withdrew it coyly, and said, in rather an injured tone, which seemed to imply that I had forgotten something, "*Twalla malafoo*" (give me some gin).

I sent my boy for a bottle, and, having opened it, handed it to her. After a few copious draughts she placed the bottle beside her, and, to my unspeakable joy, I noticed that a blush mounted to her dark, beautiful skin. Cupid's arrow had evidently penetrated the outer layer and was wending its way towards her heart.

"*Twalla mpili-mosi*," said she, when the bottle was finished.

I assured her that it was the only one I had, or I should have been only too delighted to give her dozens.

"*Livoonoo!*" (liar) said she.

This time I was really annoyed, and, with indignation and resentment burning in my breast, I rose and walked towards my tent; but before reaching it, I turned round and looked at her. The man who turns round and looks is lost.

She was still sitting on the ground near my box, and her large but beautiful lips were protruded to their full extent into what I believe the French call a *mouse*.

This *mouse*-ing was too much for me.

I got two more bottles of gin from my tent and brought them to her; but she scarcely deigned to notice me as she gently snatched them from me and placed them behind her, where I could not easily reach them.

"*Mceno mbee?*" (I am bad), said I, interrogatively.

"*Veh, njé mboté*" (no, you are good), said she, with a somewhat sarcastic inflection on the word "good."

My slight knowledge of her language placed me at a great disadvantage, and after having thought of several pretty compliments and discovered that I could not translate them into the native tongue, I said "*Njé cucalla varra?*" (Do you live here?) to which she replied "*M, Mfoomoo tatako mecno*" (Yes, the King is my father).

I continued to utter soft nothings, partly in English and partly in native, which I will not inflict upon the reader, though they were of the utmost and most vital interest to us.

At last, emboldened by success, I took her damp hand in mine, and, to my great delight, she did not attempt to withdraw it.

We sat thus, hand in hand, for some time, saying little, and that little more or less unintelligible.

The natives had disappeared into their huts, and we two were the only living creatures within sight, with the exception of some fowls and a goat.

It was one of those few moments when one feels absolutely happy and contented, and one's only wish is that it might continue thus until the end of time.

Behind us was the great wooded hill, on the side of which the long straggling village was situated on a plateau. The small thatched huts were dotted here and there amongst the palm trees, and were arranged with very little pretence at regularity. From our position we could see a long stretch of the great Congo river, and the roar of the falls about ten miles higher up was distinctly audible.

Alas! this could not go on for ever.

I racked my brains to find words in which to declare my love, and quotations from different poets rose to my mind, but I found that I could not run to it in her language, so I screwed up my courage and simply asked her to become my wife.

With a prudence and forethought which every well brought-up girl should possess, and which augured well for our future domestic happiness, she requested me to state how much I was prepared to allow for rations. I said that eight handkerchiefs and one bottle of gin a week ought, with economy, to be ample. She received my suggestion with scorn, and remarked that double the amount would scarcely be enough; but after a good deal of talk, we agreed upon a dozen handkerchiefs and two bottles of gin a week.

Then came the question of dress.

With some misgivings I said that she ought to be able to dress well on three longs (6 yards) of cloth a month. She gave me a glance which froze my blood, and, without a word, rose and walked away. I followed her, and in agonised tones offered her eight longs, ten longs, but without avail. Then, as an ultimatum, I said "twelve longs." She immediately returned and sat down, and with a sweet smile and a blush consented to be my bride.

At this moment the sound of angry voices reached us, and I perceived that some of my men were having a violent altercation with a party of natives. I seized my stick and went towards them, and on my approach they scattered in all directions. Having sent for my interpreter, a Zanzibari, who understood English, I assembled the natives for a palaver.

It appeared that one of my men had bought a pine-apple from a woman, and had only paid her one *mitako* instead of two, which she demanded.

A *mitako* is the money of the country, and consists of a piece of brass wire bent double.

Having threatened him with the stick if he misbehaved in future, I made him pay her three *mitakos* more.

The woman (a hideous old hag) was delighted, and was loud in her praise of my wisdom.

I then turned to her and asked her what she meant by cheating my man and trying to make him pay double the value. She protested that it was a superior pine-apple—larger, riper, &c.—than any other; but as a portion of it still remained, we were able to disprove this. After having stated my opinion of her conduct, I ordered her to pay a fine of three *mitakos*, which I handed back to my man.

Having thus punished the guilty and rewarded the innocent I declared the palaver over, and the natives broke into small groups and discussed the matter with puzzled looks, while the Princess and I returned and sat down under the tree.

"Ah! you are a great chief," said she. "They all run away when they see you coming. They are small, like that," holding her hand about two inches from the ground. "But you are as big as that," pointing to a large mountain at some distance from us.

I was much pleased at the aptness of the simile, and smiled at her in a superior and protective manner.

Then, with a curious look which somewhat disconcerted me, she asked, "How big are you in your own country?"

I was explaining the matter with perhaps more heat than the occasion demanded, when, fortunately, my boys Mpangoo and Mbakoo appeared with the lunch.

Having put another box in front of me they placed on it a tin plate, a tin mug, and a knife and fork, together with one of the fowls which they had roasted,