# A Question of Latitude

Richard Harding Davis

# Table of Contents

# A Question of Latitude

# Richard Harding Davis



Prepared by Don Lainson

Of the school of earnest young writers at whom the word muckraker had been thrown in opprobrium, and by whom it had been caught up as a title of honor, Everett was among the younger and less conspicuous. But, if in his skirmishes with graft and corruption he had failed to correct the evils he attacked, from the contests he himself had always emerged with credit. His sincerity and his methods were above suspicion. No one had caught him in misstatement, or exaggeration. Even those whom he attacked, admitted he fought fair. For these reasons, the editors of magazines, with the fear of libel before their eyes, regarded him as a "safe" man, the public, feeling that the evils he exposed were due to its own indifference, with uncomfortable approval, and those he attacked, with impotent anger. Their anger was impotent because, in the case of Everett, the weapons used by their class in "striking back" were denied them. They could not say that for money he sold sensations, because it was known that a proud and wealthy parent supplied him with all the money he wanted. Nor in his private life could they find anything to offset his attacks upon the misconduct of others. Men had been sent to spy upon him, and women to lay traps. But the men reported that his evenings were spent at his club, and, from the women, those who sent them learned only that Everett "treats a lady just as though she IS a lady."

Accordingly, when, with much trumpeting, he departed to investigate conditions in the Congo, there were some who rejoiced.

The standard of life to which Everett was accustomed was high. In his home in Boston it had been set for him by a father and mother who, though critics rather than workers in the world, had taught him to despise what was mean and ungenerous, to write the truth and abhor a compromise. At Harvard he had interested himself in municipal reform, and when later he moved to New York, he transferred his interest to the problems of that city. His attack upon Tammany Hall did not utterly destroy that organization, but at once brought him to the notice of the editors. By them he was invited to tilt his lance at evils in other parts of the United States, at "systems," trusts, convict camps, municipal misrule. His work had met with a measure of success that seemed to justify Lowell's Weekly in sending him further afield, and he now was on his way to tell the truth about the Congo. Personally, Everett was a healthy, clean−minded enthusiast. He possessed all of the advantages of youth, and all of its intolerance. He was supposed to be engaged to Florence Carey, but he was not. There was, however, between them an "understanding," which understanding, as Everett understood it, meant that until she was ready to say, "I am ready," he was to think of her, dream of her, write love−letters to her, and keep himself only for her. He loved her very dearly, and, having no choice, was content to wait. His content was fortunate, as Miss Carey seemed inclined to keep him waiting indefinitely.

Except in Europe, Everett had never travelled outside the limits of his own country. But the new land toward which he was advancing held no terrors. As he understood it, the Congo was at the mercy of a corrupt "ring." In every part of the United States he had found a city in the clutch of a corrupt ring. The conditions would be the same, the methods he would use to get at the truth would be the same, the result for reform would be the same.

The English steamer on which he sailed for Southampton was one leased by the Independent State of the Congo, and, with a few exceptions, her passengers were subjects of King Leopold. On board, the language was French, at table the men sat according to the rank they held in the administration of the jungle, and each in his buttonhole wore the tiny silver star that showed that for three years, to fill the storehouses of the King of the Belgians, he had gathered rubber and ivory. In the smoking−room Everett soon discovered that passengers not in the service of that king, the English and German officers and traders, held aloof from the Belgians. Their attitude toward them seemed to be one partly of contempt, partly of pity.

"Are your English protectorates on the coast, then, so much better administered?" Everett asked.

The English Coaster, who for ten years in Nigeria had escaped fever and sudden death, laughed evasively.

"I have never been in the Congo," he said. "Only know what they tell one. But you'll see for yourself. That is," he added, "you'll see what they want you to see."

They were leaning on the rail, with their eyes turned toward the coast of Liberia, a gloomy green line against which the waves cast up fountains of foam as high as the cocoanut palms. As a subject of discussion, the coaster seemed anxious to avoid the Congo.

"It was there," he said, pointing, "the Three Castles struck on the rocks. She was a total loss. So were her passengers," he added. "They ate them."

Everett gazed suspiciously at the unmoved face of the veteran.

"WHO ate them?" he asked guardedly. "Sharks?"

"The natives that live back of that shore−line in the lagoons."

Everett laughed with the assurance of one for whom a trap had been laid and who had cleverly avoided it.

"Cannibals," he mocked. "Cannibals went out of date with pirates. But perhaps," he added apologetically, "this happened some years ago?"

"Happened last month," said the trader.

"But Liberia is a perfectly good republic," protested Everett. "The blacks there may not be as far advanced as in your colonies, but they're not cannibals."

"Monrovia is a very small part of Liberia," said the trader dryly. "And none of these protectorates, or crown colonies, on this coast pretends to control much of the Hinterland. There is Sierra Leone, for instance, about the oldest of them. Last year the governor celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the year the British abolished slavery. They had parades and tea−fights, and all the blacks were in the street in straw hats with cricket ribbons, thanking God they were not as other men are, not slaves like their grandfathers. Well, just at the height of the jubilation, the tribes within twenty miles of the town sent in to say that they, also, were holding a palaver, and it was to mark the fact that they NEVER had been slaves and never would be, and, if the governor doubted it, to send out his fighting men and they'd prove it. It cast quite a gloom over the celebration."

"Do you mean that only twenty miles from the coast−−" began Everett.

"TEN miles," said the Coaster. "wait till you see Calabar. That's our Exhibit A. The cleanest, best administered. Everything there is model: hospitals, barracks, golf links. Last year, ten miles from Calabar, Dr. Stewart rode his bicycle into a native village. The king tortured him six days, cut him up, and sent pieces of him to fifty villages with the message: 'You eat each other. WE eat white chop.' That was ten miles from our model barracks."

For some moments the muckraker considered the statement thoughtfully.

"You mean," he inquired, "that the atrocities are not all on the side of the white men?"

"Atrocities?" exclaimed the trader. "I wasn't talking of atrocities. Are you looking for them?"

"I'm not running away from them," laughed Everett. "Lowell's Weekly is sending me to the Congo to find out the truth, and to try to help put an end to them."

In his turn the trader considered the statement carefully.

"Among the natives," he explained, painstakingly picking each word, "what you call 'atrocities' are customs of warfare, forms of punishment. When they go to war they EXPECT to be tortured; they KNOW, if they're killed, they'll be eaten. The white man comes here and finds these customs have existed for centuries. He adopts them, because−−"

"One moment!" interrupted Everett warmly. "That does not excuse HIM. The point is, that with him they have NOT existed. To him they should be against his conscience, indecent, horrible! He has a greater knowledge, a much higher intelligence; he should lift the native, not sink to him."

The Coaster took his pipe from his mouth, and twice opened his lips to speak. Finally, he blew the smoke into the air, and shook his head.

"What's the use!" he exclaimed.

"Try," laughed Everett. "Maybe I'm not as unintelligent as I talk."

"You must get this right," protested the Coaster. "It doesn't matter a damn what a man BRINGS here, what his training WAS, what HE IS. The thing is too strong for him."

"What thing?"

"That!" said the Coaster. He threw out his arm at the brooding mountains, the dark lagoons, the glaring coast−line against which the waves shot into the air with the shock and roar of twelve−inch guns.

"The first white man came to Sierra Leone five hundred years before Christ," said the Coaster. "And, in twenty−two hundred years, he's got just twenty miles inland. The native didn't need forts, or a navy, to stop him. He had three allies: those waves, the fever, and the sun. Especially the sun. The black man goes bare−headed, and the sun lets him pass. The white man covers his head with an inch of cork, and the sun strikes through it and kills him. When Jameson came down the river from Yambuya, the natives fired on his boat. He waved his helmet at them for three minutes, to show them there was a white man in the canoe. Three minutes was all the sun wanted. Jameson died in two days. Where you are going, the sun does worse things to a man than kill him: it drives him mad. It keeps the fear of death in his heart; and THAT takes away his nerve and his sense of proportion. He flies into murderous fits, over silly, imaginary slights; he grows morbid, suspicious, he becomes a coward, and because he is a coward with authority, he becomes a bully.

"He is alone, we will suppose, at a station three hundred miles from any other white man. One morning his house−boy spills a cup of coffee on him, and in a rage he half kills the boy. He broods over that, until he discovers, or his crazy mind makes him think he has discovered, that in revenge the boy is plotting to poison him. So he punishes him again. Only this time he punishes him as the black man has taught him to punish, in the only way the black man seems to understand; that is, he tortures him. From that moment the fall of that man is rapid. The heat, the loneliness, the fever, the fear of the black faces, keep him on edge, rob him of sleep, rob him of his physical strength, of his moral strength. He loses shame, loses reason; becomes cruel, weak, degenerate. He invents new, bestial tortures; commits new, unspeakable 'atrocities,' until, one day, the natives turn and kill him, or he sticks his gun in his mouth and blows the top of his head off."

The Coaster smiled tolerantly at the wide−eyed eager young man at his side.

"And you," he mocked, "think you can reform that man, and that hell above ground called the Congo, with an article in Lowell's Weekly?"

Undismayed, Everett grinned cheerfully.

"That's what I'm here for!" he said.

By the time Everett reached the mouth of the Congo, he had learned that in everything he must depend upon himself; that he would be accepted only as the kind of man that, at the moment, he showed himself to be. This attitude of independence was not chosen, but forced on him by the men with whom he came in contact. Associations and traditions, that in every part of the United States had served as letters of introduction, and enabled strangers to identify and label him, were to the white men on the steamer and at the ports of call without meaning or value. That he was an Everett of Boston conveyed little to those who had not heard even of Boston. That he was the correspondent of Lowell's Weekly meant less to those who did not know that Lowell's Weekly existed. And when, in confusion, he proffered his letter of credit, the very fact that it called for a thousand pounds was, in the eyes of a "Palm Oil Ruffian," sufficient evidence that it had been forged or stolen. He soon saw that solely as a white man was he accepted and made welcome. That he was respectable, few believed, and no one cared. To be taken at his face value, to be refused at the start the benefit of the doubt, was a novel sensation; and yet not unpleasant. It was a relief not to be accepted only as Everett the Muckraker, as a professional reformer, as one holier than others. It afforded his soul the same relaxation that his body received when, in his shirt−sleeves in the sweltering smoking−room, he drank beer with a chef de poste who had been thrice tried for murder.

Not only to every one was he a stranger, but to him everything was strange; so strange as to appear unreal. This did not prevent him from at once recognizing those things that were not strange, such as corrupt officials, incompetence, mismanagement. He did not need the missionaries to point out to him that the Independent State of the Congo was not a colony administered for the benefit of many, but a vast rubber plantation worked by slaves to fill the pockets of one man. It was not in his work that Everett found himself confused. It was in his attitude of mind toward almost every other question.

At first, when he could not make everything fit his rule of thumb, he excused the country tolerantly as a "topsy−turvy" land. He wished to move and act quickly; to make others move quickly. He did not understand that men who had sentenced themselves to exile for the official term of three years, or for life, measured time only by the date of their release. When he learned that even a cablegram could not reach his home in less than eighteen days, that the missionaries to whom he brought letters were a three months' journey from the coast and from each

other, his impatience was chastened to wonder, and, later, to awe.

His education began at Matadi, where he waited until the river steamer was ready to start for Leopoldville. Of the two places he was assured Matadi was the better, for the reason that if you still were in favor with the steward of the ship that brought you south, he might sell you a piece of ice.

Matadi was a great rock, blazing with heat. Its narrow, perpendicular paths seemed to run with burning lava. Its top, the main square of the settlement, was of baked clay, beaten hard by thousands of naked feet. Crossing it by day was an adventure. The air that swept it was the breath of a blast−furnace.

Everett found a room over the shop of a Portuguese trader. It was caked with dirt, and smelled of unnamed diseases and chloride of lime. In it was a canvas cot, a roll of evil−looking bedding, a wash−basin filled with the stumps of cigarettes. In a corner was a tin chop−box, which Everett asked to have removed. It belonged, the landlord told him, to the man who, two nights before, had occupied the cot and who had died in it. Everett was anxious to learn of what he had died. Apparently surprised at the question, the Portuguese shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows?" he exclaimed. The next morning the English trader across the street assured Everett there was no occasion for alarm. "He didn't die of any disease," he explained. "Somebody got at him from the balcony, while he was in his cot, and knifed him."

The English trader was a young man, a cockney, named Upsher. At home he had been a steward on the Channel steamers. Everett made him his most intimate friend. He had a black wife, who spent most of her day in a four−post bed, hung with lace curtains and blue ribbon, in which she resembled a baby hippopotamus wallowing in a bank of white sand.

At first the black woman was a shock to Everett, but after Upsher dismissed her indifferently as a "good old sort," and spent one evening blubbering over a photograph of his wife and "kiddie" at home, Everett accepted her. His excuse for this was that men who knew they might die on the morrow must not be judged by what they do to−day. The excuse did not ring sound, but he dismissed the doubt by deciding that in such heat it was not possible to take serious questions seriously. In the fact that, to those about him, the thought of death was ever present, he found further excuse for much else that puzzled and shocked him. At home, death had been a contingency so remote that he had put it aside as something he need not consider until he was a grandfather. At Matadi, at every moment of the day, in each trifling act, he found death must be faced, conciliated, conquered. At home he might ask himself, "If I eat this will it give me indigestion?" At Matadi he asked, "If I drink this will I die?"

Upsher told him of a feud then existing between the chief of police and an Italian doctor in the State service. Interested in the outcome only as a sporting proposition, Upsher declared the odds were unfair, because the Belgian was using his black police to act as his body−guard while for protection the Italian could depend only upon his sword−cane. Each night, with the other white exiles of Matadi, the two adversaries met in the Cafe Franco−Belge. There, with puzzled interest, Everett watched them sitting at separate tables, surrounded by mutual friends, excitedly playing dominoes. Outside the cafe, Matadi lay smothered and sweltering in a black, living darkness, and, save for the rush of the river, in a silence that continued unbroken across a jungle as wide as Europe. Inside the dominoes clicked, the glasses rang on the iron tables, the oil lamps glared upon the pallid, sweating faces of clerks, upon the tanned, sweating skins of officers; and the Italian doctor and the Belgian lieutenant, each with murder in his heart, laughed, shrugged, gesticulated, waiting for the moment to strike.

"But why doesn't some one DO something?" demanded Everett. "Arrest them, or reason with them. Everybody knows about it. It seems a pity not to DO something."

Upsher nodded his head. Dimly he recognized a language with which he once had been familiar. "I know what you mean," he agreed. "Bind 'em over to keep the peace. And a good job, too! But who?" he demanded vaguely. "That's what I say! Who?" From the confusion into which Everett's appeal to forgotten memories had thrown it, his mind suddenly emerged. "But what's the use!" he demanded. "Don't you see," he explained triumphantly, "if those two crazy men were fit to listen to SENSE, they'd have sense enough not to kill each other!"

Each succeeding evening Everett watched the two potential murderers with lessening interest. He even made a bet with Upsher, of a bottle of fruit salt, that the chief of police would be the one to die.

A few nights later a man, groaning beneath his balcony, disturbed his slumbers. He cursed the man, and turned his pillow to find the cooler side. But all through the night the groans, though fainter, broke into his dreams. At intervals some traditions of past conduct tugged at Everett's sleeve, and bade him rise and play the

good Samaritan. But, indignantly, he repulsed them. Were there not many others within hearing? Were there not the police? Was it HIS place to bind the wounds of drunken stokers? The groans were probably a trick, to entice him, unarmed, into the night. And so, just before the dawn, when the mists rose, and the groans ceased, Everett, still arguing, sank with a contented sigh into forgetfulness.

When he woke, there was beneath his window much monkey−like chattering, and he looked down into the white face and glazed eyes of the Italian doctor, lying in the gutter and staring up at him. Below his shoulder−blades a pool of blood shone evilly in the blatant sunlight.

Across the street, on his balcony, Upsher, in pajamas and mosquito boots, was shivering with fever and stifling a yawn. "You lose!" he called.

Later in the day, Everett analyzed his conduct of the night previous. "At home," he told Upsher, "I would have been telephoning for an ambulance, or been out in the street giving the man the 'first−aid' drill. But living as we do here, so close to death, we see things more clearly. Death loses its importance. It's a bromide," he added. "But travel certainly broadens one. Every day I have been in the Congo, I have been assimilating new ideas." Upsher nodded vigorously in assent. An older man could have told Everett that he was assimilating just as much of the Congo as the rabbit assimilates of the boa−constrictor, that first smothers it with saliva and then swallows it.

Everett started up the Congo in a small steamer open on all sides to the sun and rain, and with a paddle−wheel astern that kicked her forward at the rate of four miles an hour. Once every day, the boat tied up to a tree and took on wood to feed her furnace, and Everett talked to the white man in charge of the wood post, or, if, as it generally happened, the white man was on his back with fever, dosed him with quinine. On board, except for her captain, and a Finn who acted as engineer, Everett was the only other white man. The black crew and "wood−boys" he soon disliked intensely. At first, when Nansen, the Danish captain, and the Finn struck them, because they were in the way, or because they were not, Everett winced, and made a note of it. But later he decided the blacks were insolent, sullen, ungrateful; that a blow did them no harm.

According to the unprejudiced testimony of those who, before the war, in his own country, had owned slaves, those of the "Southland" were always content, always happy. When not singing close harmony in the cotton−fields, they danced upon the levee, they twanged the old banjo. But these slaves of the Upper Congo were not happy. They did not dance. They did not sing. At times their eyes, dull, gloomy, despairing, lighted with a sudden sombre fire, and searched the eyes of the white man. They seemed to beg of him the answer to a terrible question. It was always the same question. It had been asked of Pharaoh. They asked it of Leopold. For hours, squatting on the iron deck−plates, humped on their naked haunches, crowding close together, they muttered apparently interminable criticisms of Everett. Their eyes never left him. He resented this unceasing scrutiny. It got upon his nerves. He was sure they were evolving some scheme to rob him of his tinned sausages, or, possibly, to kill him. It was then he began to dislike them. In reality, they were discussing the watch strapped to his wrist. They believed it was a powerful juju, to ward off evil spirits. They were afraid of it.

One day, to pay the chief wood−boy for a carved paddle, Everett was measuring a bras of cloth. As he had been taught, he held the cloth in his teeth and stretched it to the ends of his finger−tips. The wood−boy thought the white man was giving him short measure. White men always HAD given him short measure, and, at a glance, he could not recognize that this one was an Everett of Boston.

So he opened Everett's fingers.

All the blood in Everett's body leaped to his head. That he, a white man, an Everett, who had come so far to set these people free, should be accused by one of them of petty theft!

He caught up a log of fire wood and laid open the scalp of the black boy, from the eye to the crown of his head. The boy dropped, and Everett, seeing the blood creeping through his kinky wool, turned ill with nausea. Drunkenly, through a red cloud of mist, he heard himself shouting, "The BLACK nigger! The BLACK NIGGER! He touched me! I TELL you, he touched me!" Captain Nansen led Everett to his cot and gave him fizzy salts, but it was not until sundown that the trembling and nausea ceased.

Then, partly in shame, partly as a bribe, he sought out the injured boy and gave him the entire roll of cloth. It had cost Everett ten francs. To the wood−boy it meant a year's wages. The boy hugged it in his arms, as he might a baby, and crooned over it. From under the blood−stained bandage, humbly, without resentment, he lifted his tired eyes to those of the white man. Still, dumbly, they begged the answer to the same question.

During the five months Everett spent up the river he stopped at many missions, stations, one−man wood posts.

He talked to Jesuit fathers, to inspecteurs, to collectors for the State of rubber, taxes, elephant tusks, in time, even in Bangalese, to chiefs of the native villages. According to the point of view, he was told tales of oppression, of avarice, of hideous crimes, of cruelties committed in the name of trade that were abnormal, unthinkable. The note never was of hope, never of cheer, never inspiring. There was always the grievance, the spirit of unrest, of rebellion that ranged from dislike to a primitive, hot hate. Of his own land and life he heard nothing, not even when his face was again turned toward the east. Nor did he think of it. As now he saw them, the rules and principles and standards of his former existence were petty and credulous. But he assured himself he had not abandoned those standards. He had only temporarily laid them aside, as he had left behind him in London his frock−coat and silk hat. Not because he would not use them again, but because in the Congo they were ridiculous.

For weeks, with a missionary as a guide, he walked through forests into which the sun never penetrated, or, on the river, moved between banks where no white man had placed his foot; where, at night, the elephants came trooping to the water, and, seeing the lights of the boat, fled crashing through the jungle; where the great hippos, puffing and blowing, rose so close to his elbow that he could have tossed his cigarette and hit them. The vastness of the Congo, toward which he had so jauntily set forth, now weighed upon his soul. The immeasurable distances; the slumbering disregard of time; the brooding, interminable silences; the efforts to conquer the land that were so futile, so puny, and so cruel, at first appalled and, later, left him unnerved, rebellious, childishly defiant.

What health was there, he demanded hotly, in holding in a dripping jungle to morals, to etiquette, to fashions of conduct? Was he, the white man, intelligent, trained, disciplined in mind and body, to be judged by naked cannibals, by chattering monkeys, by mammoth primeval beasts? His code of conduct was his own. He was a law unto himself.

He came down the river on one of the larger steamers of the State, and, on this voyage, with many fellow−passengers. He was now on his way home, but in the fact he felt no elation. Each day the fever ran tingling through his veins, and left him listless, frightened, or choleric. One night at dinner, in one of these moods of irritation, he took offence at the act of a lieutenant who, in lack of vegetables, drank from the vinegar bottle. Everett protested that such table manners were unbecoming an officer, even an officer of the Congo; and on the lieutenant resenting his criticism, Everett drew his revolver. The others at the table took it from him, and locked him in his cabin. In the morning, when he tried to recall what had occurred, he could remember only that, for some excellent reason, he had hated some one with a hatred that could be served only with death. He knew it could not have been drink, as each day the State allowed him but one half−bottle of claret. That but for the interference of strangers he might have shot a man, did not interest him. In the outcome of what he regarded merely as an incident, he saw cause neither for congratulation or self−reproach. For his conduct he laid the blame upon the sun, and doubled his dose of fruit salts.

Everett was again at Matadi, waiting for the Nigeria to take on cargo before returning to Liverpool. During the few days that must intervene before she sailed, he lived on board. Although now actually bound north, the thought afforded him no satisfaction. His spirits were depressed, his mind gloomy; a feeling of rebellion, of outlawry, filled him with unrest.

While the ship lay at the wharf, Hardy, her English captain, Cuthbert, the purser, and Everett ate on deck under the awning, assailed by electric fans. Each was clad in nothing more intricate than pajamas.

"To−night," announced Hardy, with a sigh, "we got to dress ship. Mr. Ducret and his wife are coming on board. We carry his trade goods, and I got to stand him a dinner and champagne. You boys," he commanded, "must wear 'whites,' and talk French."

"I'll dine on shore," growled Everett.

"Better meet them," advised Cuthbert. The purser was a pink− cheeked, clear−eyed young man, who spoke the many languages of the coast glibly, and his own in the soft, detached voice of a well− bred Englishman. He was in training to enter the consular service. Something in his poise, in the assured manner in which he handled his white stewards and the black Kroo boys, seemed to Everett a constant reproach, and he resented him.

"They're a picturesque couple," explained Cuthbert. "Ducret was originally a wrestler. Used to challenge all comers from the front of a booth. He served his time in the army in Senegal, and when he was mustered out moved to the French Congo and began to trade, in a small way, in ivory. Now he's the biggest merchant, physically and every other way, from Stanley Pool to Lake Chad. He has a house at Brazzaville built of mahogany, and a grand piano, and his own ice− plant. His wife was a supper−girl at Maxim's. He brought her

down here and married her. Every rainy season they go back to Paris and run race−horses, and they say the best table in every all−night restaurant is reserved for him. In Paris they call her the Ivory Queen. She's killed seventeen elephants with her own rifle."

In the Upper Congo, Everett had seen four white women. They were pallid, washed−out, bloodless; even the youngest looked past middle−age. For him women of any other type had ceased to exist. He had come to think of every white woman as past middle−age, with a face wrinkled by the sun, with hair bleached white by the sun, with eyes from which, through gazing at the sun, all light and lustre had departed. He thought of them as always wearing boots to protect their ankles from mosquitoes, and army helmets.

When he came on deck for dinner, he saw a woman who looked as though she was posing for a photograph by Reutlinger. She appeared to have stepped to the deck directly from her electric victoria, and the Rue de la Paix. She was tall, lithe, gracefully erect, with eyes of great loveliness, and her hair brilliantly black, drawn, a la Merode, across a broad, fair forehead. She wore a gown and long coat of white lace, as delicate as a bridal veil, and a hat with a flapping brim from which, in a curtain, hung more lace. When she was pleased, she lifted her head and the curtain rose, unmasking her lovely eyes. Around the white, bare throat was a string of pearls. They had cost the lives of many elephants.

Cuthbert, only a month from home, saw Madame Ducret just as she was−−a Parisienne, elegant, smart, soigne. He knew that on any night at Madrid or d'Armenonville he might look upon twenty women of the same charming type. They might lack that something this girl from Maxim's possessed−−the spirit that had caused her to follow her husband into the depths of darkness. But outwardly, for show purposes, they were even as she.

But to Everett she was no messenger from another world. She was unique. To his famished eyes, starved senses, and fever−driven brain, she was her entire sex personified. She was the one woman for whom he had always sought, alluring, soothing, maddening; if need be, to be fought for; the one thing to be desired. Opposite, across the table, her husband, the ex−wrestler, chasseur d'Afrique, elephant poacher, bulked large as an ox. Men felt as well as saw his bigness. Captain Hardy deferred to him on matters of trade. The purser deferred to him on questions of administration. He answered them in his big way, with big thoughts, in big figures. He was fifty years ahead of his time. He beheld the Congo open to the world; in the forests where he had hunted elephants he foresaw great "factories," mining camps, railroads, feeding gold and copper ore to the trunk line, from the Cape to Cairo. His ideas were the ideas of an empire−builder. But, while the others listened, fascinated, hypnotized, Everett saw only the woman, her eyes fixed on her husband, her fingers turning and twisting her diamond rings. Every now and again she raised her eyes to Everett almost reproachfully, as though to say, "Why do you not listen to him? It is much better for you than to look at me."

When they had gone, all through the sultry night, until the sun drove him to his cabin, like a caged animal Everett paced and repaced the deck. The woman possessed his mind and he could not drive her out. He did not wish to drive her out. What the consequences might be he did not care. So long as he might see her again, he jeered at the consequences. Of one thing he was positive. He could not now leave the Congo. He would follow her to Brazzaville. If he were discreet, Ducret might invite him to make himself their guest. Once established in her home, she MUST listen to him. No man ever before had felt for any woman the need he felt for her. It was too big for him to conquer. It would be too big for her to resist.

In the morning a note from Ducret invited Everett and Cuthbert to join him in an all−day excursion to the water−fall beyond Matadi. Everett answered the note in person. The thought of seeing the woman calmed and steadied him like a dose of morphine. So much more violent than the fever in his veins was the fever in his brain that, when again he was with her, he laughed happily, and was grandly at peace. So different was he from the man they had met the night before, that the Frenchman and his wife glanced at each other in surprise and approval. They found him witty, eager, a most charming companion; and when he announced his intention of visiting Brazzaville, they insisted he should make their home his own.

His admiration, as outwardly it appeared to be, for Madame Ducret, was evident to the others, but her husband accepted it. It was her due. And, on the Congo, to grudge to another man the sight of a pretty woman was as cruel as to withhold the few grains of quinine that might save his reason. But before the day passed, Madame Ducret was aware that the American could not be lightly dismissed as an admirer. The fact neither flattered nor offended. For her it was no novel or disturbing experience. Other men, whipped on by loneliness, by fever, by primitive savage instincts, had told her what she meant to them. She did not hold them responsible. Some, worth curing, she

had nursed through the illness. Others, who refused to be cured, she had turned over, with a shrug, to her husband. This one was more difficult. Of men of Everett's traditions and education she had known but few; but she recognized the type. This young man was no failure in life, no derelict, no outcast flying the law, or a scandal, to hide in the jungle. He was what, in her Maxim days, she had laughed at as an aristocrat. He knew her Paris as she did not know it: its history, its art. Even her language he spoke more correctly than her husband or herself. She knew that at his home there must be many women infinitely more attractive, more suited to him, than herself: women of birth, of position; young girls and great ladies of the other world. And she knew, also, that, in his present state, at a nod from her he would cast these behind him and carry her into the wilderness. More quickly than she anticipated, Everett proved she did not overrate the forces that compelled him.

The excursion to the rapids was followed by a second dinner on board the Nigeria. But now, as on the previous night, Everett fell into sullen silence. He ate nothing, drank continually, and with his eyes devoured the woman. When coffee had been served, he left the others at table, and with Madame Ducret slowly paced the deck. As they passed out of the reach of the lights, he drew her to the rail, and stood in front of her.

"I am not quite mad," he said, "but you have got to come with me."

To Everett all he added to this sounded sane and final. He told her that this was one of those miracles when the one woman and the one man who were predestined to meet had met. He told her he had wished to marry a girl at home, but that he now saw that the desire was the fancy of a school−boy. He told her he was rich, and offered her the choice of returning to the Paris she loved, or of going deeper into the jungle. There he would set up for her a principality, a state within the State. He would defend her against all comers. He would make her the Queen of the Congo.

"I have waited for you thousands of years!" he told her. His voice was hoarse, shaken, and thick. "I love you as men loved women in the Stone Age−−fiercely, entirely. I will not be denied. Down here we are cave people; if you fight me, I will club you and drag you to my cave. If others fight for you, I will KILL them. I love you," he panted, "with all my soul, my mind, my body, I love you! I will not let you go!"

Madame Ducret did not say she was insulted, because she did not feel insulted. She did not call to her husband for help, because she did not need his help, and because she knew that the ex− wrestler could break Everett across his knee. She did not even withdraw her hands, although Everett drove the diamonds deep into her fingers.

"You frighten me!" she pleaded. She was not in the least frightened. She only was sorry that this one must be discarded among the incurables.

In apparent agitation, she whispered, "To−morrow! To−morrow I will give you your answer."

Everett did not trust her, did not release her. He regarded her jealously, with quick suspicion. To warn her that he knew she could not escape from Matadi, or from him, he said, "The train to Leopoldville does not leave for two days!"

"I know!" whispered Madame Ducret soothingly. "I will give you your answer to−morrow at ten." She emphasized the hour, because she knew at sunrise a special train would carry her husband and herself to Leopoldville, and that there one of her husband's steamers would bear them across the Pool to French Congo.

"To−morrow, then!" whispered Everett, grudgingly. "But I must kiss you now!"

Only an instant did Madame Ducret hesitate. Then she turned her cheek. "Yes," she assented. "You must kiss me now."

Everett did not rejoin the others. He led her back into the circle of light, and locked himself in his cabin.

At ten the next morning, when Ducret and his wife were well advanced toward Stanley Pool, Cuthbert handed Everett a note. Having been told what it contained, he did not move away, but, with his back turned, leaned upon the rail.

Everett, his eyes on fire with triumph, his fingers trembling, tore open the envelope.

Madame Ducret wrote that her husband and herself felt that Mr. Everett was suffering more severely from the climate than he knew. With regret they cancelled their invitation to visit them, and urged him, for his health's sake, to continue as he had planned, to northern latitudes. They hoped to meet in Paris. They extended assurances of their distinguished consideration.

Slowly, savagely, as though wreaking his suffering on some human thing, Everett tore the note into minute fragments. Moving unsteadily to the ship's side, he flung them into the river, and then hung limply upon the rail.

Above him, from a sky of brass, the sun stabbed at his eyeballs. Below him, the rush of the Congo, churning

in muddy whirlpools, echoed against the hills of naked rock that met the naked sky.

To Everett, the roar of the great river, and the echoes from the land he had set out to reform, carried the sound of gigantic, hideous laughter.