

Chapter 1

The Legend of Solomon's Mines

My name is Allan Quatermain, and this is the story of my search for King Solomon's Mines. I am more accustomed to handling a rifle than a pen, having been a trader and hunter in Africa most my life; so I will be brief and to the point, in the belief that simple things are always the most impressive.

About eighteen months ago I had been elephant hunting and was returning home to Durban by sea from Cape Town. Soon after boarding my ship I went down to dinner, and found myself sitting opposite two English gentlemen whose names, I later learned, were Captain John Good and Sir Henry Curtis. This Sir Henry was a large, powerful-looking man, and Captain Good, his friend, was a naval officer, a smaller man and rather stout¹. He was very neatly dressed and wore an eye-glass. We fell to talking about all sorts of things as we ate, until Captain Good got onto the subject of elephants. A man sitting nearby, who recognized me, said aloud, 'Hunter Quatermain should be able to tell you about elephants if anybody can.'

Sir Henry started² visibly. He leaned forward and stared keenly at me. 'Excuse me, sir,' he said gravely, 'but is your name Allan Quatermain?'

I said that it was, and the two men flashed glances at each other but said no more for some time. After dinner they asked if I would follow them to their cabin to smoke a pipe. I accepted, and soon we were alone.

'Mr Quatermain,' said Sir Henry, 'we have been hoping to meet you. I believe you know a man called George Curtis?'

'Yes,' I said. 'We met about two years ago. He was on his way to the interior³, and I've never heard since what became of him.'

There was a pause.

'Mr Quatermain,' said Sir Henry suddenly, 'do you know anything of Mr Curtis' purpose for heading northward?'

'I heard something,' I answered, and stopped, for I was reluctant to say more.

Once again the two men exchanged glances, and Captain Good nodded.

Sir Henry breathed deeply. 'George Curtis is my brother, and I have heard nothing of him for more than two years. I am anxious to know if he is alive or dead, and have come out from England to look for him myself. Captain Good was so kind as to come with me. I know of your reputation, and was hoping I might ask your advice ... and perhaps your assistance.'

'Please tell us what you know or have heard of George,' said Good.

I felt a chill run up and down my spine, and for some time I stared at the cabin floor, not wishing to speak.

Finally Sir Henry broke the silence. 'What was it that you heard about my brother's journey?'

'I heard—that he was starting for Solomon's Mines.'

1 *stout*—plump or heavily built.

2 *started*—showed sudden surprise.

3 *the interior*—the remote, inner part of Africa.