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Bertram Mitford

"A Frontier Mystery"

Chapter One.

"Where I come in."

"White dogs!"

"Ha! Calves of Matyana, the least of the Great One's cattle."

"Pups of Tyingoza, the white man's dog! *Au*!"

"Sweepings of the Abe Sutu!"

"Amakafula!" (Kafirs.)

Such were but few of the opprobrious phrases, rolled forth alternately, in the clear sonorous Zulu, from alternate sides of the river, which flowed laughing and bubbling on in the sunlight, between its high banks of tree-shaded rocks. Yet in spite of the imputation of "whiteness" made by the one, they of the other party were in no shade of bronze duskiness removed from those who made it. Each party numbered about a dozen: young men all, with the same lithe straight forms destitute of all clothing but a skin *mútya*; armed with the same two or three assegais and a knobstick apiece, eke small hide shields. There was no outward visible difference between them, as how indeed, should there be, since both were sprung from absolutely the same stock? But the difference was essential for all that, for whereas one party dwelt upon the Natal side of the river, the other was composed of warriors of the king, the limits of whose territory they dared not overstep.

"Come over and fight!" challenged the latter, waving their shields.

"Ha! Come over to us," was the answer.

Here was an *impasse*. Brimming over with fight as they were, the first hesitated to embark on what would amount to nothing less than a raid upon English territory; for did the news of it reach the ears of the King—as it almost certainly would—why death to the whole lot of them was the least they could expect. On the other hand if the Natal party could be induced to cross why they would make such an example of these Amakafula—as they contemptuously called them—that the latter, for very shame's sake, would be only too careful to say nothing at all of the affair.

"We leave not our land," came the answer to this after a hesitating pause. "Cross ye hither, cowards. Ye are more than us by two."

"Ah—ah! But we shall be less by more than two when we reach the bank. You will strike us in the water."

"We will not," called out the spokesman on the Zulu side. "You shall even have time to recover breath. Is it not so, brothers?"

"*Eh-hé*!" chorussed his followers in loud assent.

"Swear it."

"U' Tshaka!"

The awful name rolled forth sonorously from every throat. An oath ratified on the name of the greatest king their world had ever known was ratified indeed. Hardly had it sounded than a joyful whoop rent the air. A dozen bronze bodies flashed in the sunlight and amid a mighty splash a dozen dark heads bobbed up above the surface of the long deeply flowing reach. A moment later, and their owners had ploughed their way to the other side, and emerged streaming from the river, their shields and weapons still held aloft in the left hand, as they had been during the crossing in order to keep them dry.

“We will drop our weapons, and fight only with sticks, brothers,” proposed the Zulu leader. “Is that to be?”

“As you will,” returned the Natal party, and immediately all assegais were cast to the ground.

The place was an open glade which sloped down to the water, between high, tree-fringed rocks. Both sides stood looking at each other, every chest panting somewhat with suppressed excitement. Then a quick, shrill whistle from the Zulu leader, and they met in full shock.

It was something of a Homeric strife, as these young heroes came together. There was no sound but the slap of shield meeting shield; the clash and quiver of hard wood; the quick, throaty panting of the combatants. Then the heavy crunch of skull or joint, and half a dozen are down quivering or motionless, while their conquerors continue to batter them without mercy.

Leaping, whirling—gradually drawing away from the rest, two of the combatants are striving; each devoting every nerve, every energy, to the overthrow of the other. But each feint is met by counter feint, each terrible swinging stroke by the crash of equally hard wood or the dull slap of tough hide shield opposed in parry. Already more are down, still about even numbers on each side, and still these two combatants strive on. Both are tall, supple youths, perfect models of proportion and sinewy grace and strength. Then a sudden crunching sound, and the blood is pouring from the head of one of them.

“One to thee, son of Tyingoza!” cries the wielder of the successful stroke, nimbly swerving to avoid the return one.

“It was ‘white dog’ but now,” snarls the other, savagely, and with a deft underswing of his knobstick delivering a numbing blow on the side of his adversary’s leg. It is a good blow, yet he is beginning to stagger, half stunned, and blinded with his own blood.

“Ha! Give up, and run to the river, while there is time,” jeers his opponent, who is the leader of the Zulu party.

For answer, he who is apostrophised as the son of Tyingoza, rushes upon the speaker with such a sudden access of apparently resistless ferocity, that the latter is forced backward somewhat by the very fury of the onslaught; but—such are the fortunes of war. Already the bulk of those who have crossed from the Natal side are down, two of them stone dead—and the rest, demoralised already, are plunging into the river and striking out for their own shore. They cannot get to the aid of their leader because of the foes who are pressing them hard, and barring their way. The said foes, now victors, thus freed, turn to spring to the aid of their own leader, and the whole group, uttering a loud bloodthirsty shout hurls itself upon the son of Tyingoza. He, though he has given up all hope, still battles valorously, when a stick, deftly hurled, strikes him hard and full upon one shin, snapping the bone, and vanquished he sinks to the earth, still instinctively holding up his shield to avert the rain of blows showered upon him, and which, in a moment or so will batter his skull to a pulp; for they see red now, those blood-frenzied combatants, and no considerations of mercy will avail to stay their murderous arms.

But that moment or so is destined to bring forth weighty results. There has been a spectator of the whole affray unseen by the combatants, and now he steps forth.

“Stand back!” he shouts, coming right between the slayers and their prey. “Back, I say! He is down and ye are many. Let him live.”

“No, he shall die. Out of our way, white man!”

None but a white man—or their own chief—could have restrained these hot bloods at such a moment, yet this one was determined to do it, although the process was not much safer than that of attempting to snatch a bone from a hungry mastiff.

“You are boys, therefore foolish,” he cried. “If you slay the son of a chief how long will it be before the English carry the word to the Great Great One’s ears? Then—good-night!”

This told—as no other argument would have told. They held their hands, though some muttered that both should be slain to make things all the safer. And the white man so far had displayed no weapon. In fact he had none.

“Get up, son of Tyingoza,” he said, “and get back to thine own side of the river, which it was foolish to leave.”

The wounded youth managed to stagger to his feet, the white man aiding him. Several of those who had fallen did likewise, the conquerors sullenly drawing off, to help their own stricken comrades. And what a scene the place presented. Broken knobkerries and broken heads, battered shields and twisted limbs, and red, nauseous, sticky pools glittering among the grass. Three of those fallen would never rise again. And what was it all about? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

“*Au*! it is Iqalaqala,” muttered the young Zulus, as the white man assisted the chief’s son to cross the river. “Fare thee well, Iqalaqala. We have but played at a fight. *Au*! It was only play.”

And that is how I come into the story.

Chapter Two.

Godfrey Glanton—Trader.

It was hot. Away on the skyline the jagged peaks of Kahlamba rose in a shimmer of haze. In front and below, the same shimmer was upon the great sweep of green and gold bush. The far winding of the Tugela shone here and there through the billowy undulations of the same, and above, a gleam of silver where Umzinyati’s waters babbled on to join it. So, too, over the far expanse of warrior Zululand—peaceful enough now to outward aspect in all conscience—the slumbrous yet far from enervating heat of mid-afternoon still brooded.

Yes, it was hot, decidedly hot, and I remarked thereupon to Tyingoza, who agreed with me of course. Every well-bred

native agrees with you—that is to say pretty well every native—and Tyingoza was a well-bred native, being of Umtetwa breed—the royal clan what time Tshaka the Usurper, Tshaka the Great, Tshaka the Genius, Tshaka the Terrible, shook up the dry bones and made the nation of Zulu to live. Incidentally Tyingoza was the chief of a very large native location situated right on the border—and in this connection I have often wondered how it is that with the fear of that awful and bloodthirsty tyrant Cetywayo (see the Blue Books) before their eyes, such a congested native population could have been found to plant itself, of its own free will, right bang within assegai throw of his "manslaying machine" (see again the Blue Books), that is to say, with only the division afforded by an easily fordable river between it and them. Tyingoza's father had migrated from Zululand what time the Dutch and Mpande fought Dingane, and Dingane fought both; for, like a wise man, he held that he could not *konza* to three kings, and now Tyingoza would have returned to his fatherland, with which all his sympathies—sentimental—lay, but for the material fact that he—and incidentally, his followers—were exceedingly comfortable where they were.

"M-m!" hummed Tyingoza. "In truth it is hot here, but—not over there, Iqalaqala."

There was a quizzical twinkle in Tyingoza's eyes, as he pointed down into the valley beneath—and I understood him. The above, by the way, was my native name, meaning one who is wide awake at a deal; bestowed presumably because when I had bought out the former owner of the trading store at Isipanga the guileless native had discovered rather a more difficult subject to get round than that worthy dealer; who was all too frequently in his cups, and easy to "best" while in that halcyonic condition. I did not resent the use of the sobriquet on this or any other occasion: in the first place because it was not an unflattering one; in the next because I liked Tyingoza, who was a gentleman every inch of him, and—shrug not in horror, oh ye noble white brethren—in my heart of hearts I could not but recognise that this aristocratic scion of a splendid race was, taking him all round, every whit as good a man, albeit dusky, as a certain happy-go-lucky inconsequent and knockabout trader in the Zulu.

I understood his meaning. "Over there"—*la pa*—referred to the abode of my nearest neighbour, a retired British officer, who had lived to no better experience than to imagine himself expressly cut out for a second and farming career, entered on late in life—and, I suspected, on little beyond a commuted pension, here on the Natal border. He owned a comfortable homestead, and a grown-up family, including a brace of exceedingly good-looking daughters. Here then was a bright and wholesome British home circle to which I, a lonely, knockabout sort of semi-barbarian, had found a welcome; and indeed, while not outwearing this, I believe I did not underrate it; for the bush path between my trading store and Major Sewin's farm had become far more worn and easier to be found by the unskilled stranger since its former occupant, a bankrupt and stertorous Dutchman, had been obliged to evacuate it in favour of its present owner.

Now, as Tyingoza spoke, I looked longingly down into the valley on the other side. Away, where it wound beneath a towering cone, I could make out a film of smoke, and was wondering whether it was too soon after my last visit to send my horse down along the ten miles of rugged bush path between it and where we sat—in something over the hour. I could get back at midnight, or soon after, and time was no object to me in those days. I had spent enough of it among savages to have acquired something of their indifference to it. It mattered nothing what time I slept or woke. If I felt sleepy I slept, if I felt hungry I ate—if I felt neither I did neither—and that about summed up my rule of life, as, in those days, it did that of many another circumstanced like myself. But of making a point of turning in or turning out at a given time—no. I had long parted with anything of the kind; indeed the fact that there was such a thing as a watch or a clock on the place was the merest accident.

Tyingoza produced his snuff-box—his Zulu conservatism had restrained him from learning to smoke—and handed it to me. Then he helped himself.

"They will not be here long," he said presently.

"No? Why not?" I answered, knowing to whom he referred.

"Their feet are planted on strange ground. They have built a house where it cannot stand. *Au*! They are even as children these Amangisi."

I did not resent the mild suggestion—"Amangisi" meaning English—because I knew that the speaker did not include myself, practically a son of the land, using the word as applicable to the newly imported emigrant.

"They do not understand the people," he went on, "nor do they try to. They treat the people as though they were soldiers under them. Now, Iqalaqala, will that do?"

I agreed that it would not; in fact I had more than once ventured to hint as much to Major Sewin—but that veteran, though a dear old man, was likewise a stiff-necked one, and had not taken my well-meant advice in good part.

"A nigger, sir," he had answered with heat, "is created to work. If he won't work he must be made to—and, damme, sir, I'm the man to make him."

I had ventured to remind him that there were about four hundred thousand of the said "niggers" in the colony of Natal, and that we stood in a precious deal more need of them than they did of us. But, as the last thing in the world I wished was to quarrel with him, I fear I did so half-heartedly.

"So," now continued Tyingoza, "they will have to herd their own sheep and milk their own cows themselves, for none will do it for them. Will they not soon become tired of this, and go elsewhere?"

This I thought more than likely, but I did not wish it. The chief's words had pretty well summed up the situation. The Natal native, especially there on the Zulu border, is a difficult animal to lead and nearly impossible to drive, and the hot-headed old soldier was of the sort which prefers driving.

"All you say is true," I answered. "Yet—We are friends, Tyingoza, wherefore for my sake, use your influence with your people not to join in driving out these. I do not want them to leave. See, I am lonely here, and if I had no neighbours I might leave too."

"*Au*! it is difficult," was the answer. "They are like children. Still for your sake, I will do what I can."

We were interrupted by the appearance of two young men. Their bronze figures, straight and tall, moved with easy, supple grace as they advanced to where we were seated, and, having saluted the chief with infinite respect, they

squatted down at a becoming distance; for they would not interrupt our conversation. However I wanted to get rid of them, so allowing sufficient time for the requirements of etiquette, I asked them what they had come for.

They answered that they were in need of a few articles such as I kept in the store, and so I took them within. I reached down from the shelves the things they required, a matter of trifles whose aggregate value hardly amounted to a shilling, and I thought as I moved thus, clad in an old shirt, and ditto pair of trousers, among green blankets and pots and kettles, and sheepskins and goatskins, with strings of beads and brass buttons festooned from the beams, and the shelves loaded with roll Boer tobacco and sugar pockets and coffee canisters and butcher knives, and all sorts of minor "notions" in demand for native trade—I wondered, I say, what sort of figure I should cut in the eyes of Major Sewin's highbred looking daughters should they happen suddenly to ride up and thus discover me; then I wondered why the deuce I should have thought about it at all.

The boys were soon satisfied, and I gave them a bit of tobacco apiece by way of clenching the deal, for it is bad policy to earn a name for stinginess among natives. But instead of going away they squatted themselves down outside. I did not immediately follow them.

"What was I saying, Iqalaqala?" began Tyingoza, as soon as I did. "The Ingisi down there is clearly anxious to herd his own sheep himself. These children he has sent away, saying they were of no use. But, you may hear from themselves. Speak."

Thus ordered, the two, squatting there, told their tale over again, and it did not take long in telling. They had been employed to herd sheep, and that morning the Major's "son"—as they described him—had ridden up to them in the veldt, and had become very angry about something; what it was they had no notion for they could not understand one word he said, which seemed to anger him still more, for he had cuffed one of them over the head and kicked him. One thing he was able to make them understand and this was that they should clear off the place. They had done so, but neither of them were pleased, as was natural; indeed there was that in the face of the cuffed and kicked one, which savoured of vindictiveness, and was a clear indication that sooner or later, and in some shape or form, the ill-advised settler would have to pay somewhat dearly for that act of violence.

I smoothed matters down as far as I was able: pointing out, I hoped with some tact, that they were young, and a little roughness now and then must be expected to come their way—it was not as if they had attained the dignity of head-ringed men—and so forth. They appeared to accept it, but I'm afraid they did not.

"What is thy name?" I said to the aggrieved youth.

"Atyisayo."

"Ha! Atyisayo! Meaning hot. Hot water," I rejoined. "Well you have got into hot water, as the proverb runs among us whites—as we all do sooner or later especially when we are young. But we get out of it again, and so have you, and you must think no more about it," I concluded.

"M-m! But he has not paid us anything. The Ingisi has sent us away without our hire."

"He will give it you. He is hot tempered but not a cheat. You will have it. I myself will see to that. *Hambani gahle*."

"Iqalaqala is our father," they murmured, rising to leave. "*Amakosi*! *Hlalani gahle*!"

I watched their receding forms, and shook my head. Then I looked at Tyingoza.

"It is a pity," I said. "Yes, a great pity. These people down there are good people—yes, even of the best of the land. It is only that they lack understanding, yet even that will come—with experience. I will go and talk again with them—yes—this very evening. Come with me, Tyingoza. Your words as a chief will carry much weight, and these people will treat you with consideration."

He answered something about having to go home and see about some new cattle that were being sent in to him. Then with a waggish expression of countenance he said:

"*Au*! Iqalaqala. When are you going to build a new hut?"

The joke was obvious. I did not live in the trading store but in a large, well-built native hut adjoining; as being cooler, and free from the mingled odours of the varying commodities in which I dealt. When a native sends *lobola* for a new wife he has a new and additional hut built for her accommodation. Tyingoza was chaffing me.

I called out an order to my native boy, whose quarters were at the back of the store. Presently he came trotting up, bearing a steaming kettle, and cups, and sugar. Tyingoza's face lit up at the sight. He had a weakness for strong black coffee, abundantly sweetened, and when he came to see me always got it, and plenty of it. So for another half-hour he sat imbibing the stuff, completely happy. Then he got up to go.

I bade him farewell, reminding him again of our conversation and his influence with his people; the while, he smiled quizzically, and I knew that his mind was still running upon his joke as to the new hut. Then I went into the old one, and carefully, and for me, somewhat elaborately, changed my attire, what time my boy was saddling up my best horse. I went to no pains in locking up, for was not Tyingoza my friend, and his people dusky savages, who wore no trousers—only *mútyas*; in short the very people to whom we are most anxious to send missionaries.

Chapter Three.

Of an Evening Visit.

As I rode down the rugged bush path I began to undergo a very unwonted and withal uneasy frame of mind. For instance what on earth had possessed me to take such an interest in the well-being or ill-being of Major Sewin and his family? They would never get on as they were. The best thing they could do was to throw it up and clear, and, for themselves, the sooner the better. And for me? Well, exactly. It was there that the uneasiness came in.

The sun was dipping to the great bush-clad ridge up the side of the Tugela valley, and the wide sweep of forest beneath was alight with a golden glow from the still ardent horizontal shafts. Innumerable doves fluttered and cooed around, balancing themselves on mimosa sprays, or the spiky heads of the plumed euphorbia; or dashing off to wing an arrow-like flight somewhere else, alarmed by the tread of horse-hoofs or the snort and champ at a jingling bit. Here and there a spiral of blue smoke, where a native kraal in its neat circle stood pinnacled upon the jut of some mighty spur, and the faint far voices of its inhabitants raised in musical cattle calls, came, softened by distance, a pleasing and not unmelodious harmony with the evening calm. Downward and downward wound the path, and lo, as the sun kissed the far ridge, ere diving beyond it, a final and parting beam shot full upon the face of a great krantz, causing it to flush in red flame beneath the gold and green glow of its forest fringed crest. All those evenings! I think it must be something in their sensuous and magic calm that permeates the soul of those whose lot has once been cast in these lands, riveting it in an unconscious bondage from which it can never quite free itself; binding it for all time to the land of its birth or adoption. I, for one, Godfrey Glanton, rough and ready prosaic trader in the Zulu, with no claim to sentiment or poetry in my composition, can fully recognise that the bond is there. And yet, and yet—is there a man living, with twenty years' experience of a wandering life, now in this, now in that, section of this wonderful half continent, who can honestly say he has no poetry in him? I doubt it.

The wild guinea fowl were cackling away to their roosts and the shrill crow of francolins miauw-ed forth from the surrounding brake as I dismounted to open a gate in the bush fence which surrounded what the Major called his "compound." As I led my horse on—it was not worth while remounting—a sound of voices—something of a tumult of voices, rather—caught my ear.

"Good Heavens! Another row!" I said to myself. "What impossible people these are!"

For I had recognised an altercation, and I had recognised the voices. One was that of the Major's nephew, and it was raised in fine old British imprecation. The other was that of a native, and was volubly expostulative—in its own tongue. Then I came in view of their owners, and heard at the same time another sound—that of a hard smack, followed by another. For background to the scene the fence and gate of a sheep-kraal.

The native was a youth, similar to those who had called at my store that afternoon. Unarmed he was no sort of match for the powerful and scientific onslaught of his chastiser. He had nimbly skipped out of harm's way and was volubly pouring forth abuse and threats of vengeance.

"What on earth—Are you at it again, Sewin?" I sung out. "Great Scott, man, you'll never keep a boy on the place at this rate! What's the row this time?"

"Hallo Glanton! That you? Row? Only that when I tell this cheeky silly idiot to do anything he stands and grins and doesn't do it. So I went for him."

The tailing off of the remark was not quite suitable for publication, so I omit it.

"That all he did?" I said, rather shortly, for I was out of patience with this young fool.

"All? Isn't that enough? Damn his cheek! What business has he to grin at me?"

"Well you wouldn't have had him scowl, would you?"

"I'd have hammered him to pulp if he had."

"Just so. You may as well give up all idea of farming here at this rate, Sewin, if you intend to keep on on that tack. The fellow didn't do it, because in all probability he hadn't the ghost of a notion what you were telling him to do. Here. I'll put it to him."

I did so. It was even as I had expected. The boy didn't understand a word of English, and young Sewin couldn't speak a word of Zulu—or at any rate a sentence. I talked to him, but it was not much use. He would leave, he declared. He was not going to stand being punched. If he had had an assegai or a stick perhaps the other would not have had things all his own way, he added meaningly.

In secret I sympathised with him, but did not choose to say so. What I did say was:

"And you would spend some years—in chains—mending the roads and quarrying stones for the Government? That would be a poor sort of satisfaction, would it not?"

"*Au*! I am not a dog," he answered sullenly. "Tyingoza is my chief. But if the Government says I am to stand being beaten I shall cross Umzinyati this very night, and go and *konza* to Cetywayo. Now, this very night."

I advised him to do nothing in a hurry, because anything done in a hurry was sure to be badly done. I even talked him over to the extent of making him promise that he would not leave at all, at any rate until he had some fresh grievance—which I hoped to be able to ensure against.

"Come on in, Glanton," sung out young Sewin, impatiently. "Or are you going to spend the whole evening jawing with that infernal young sweep. I suppose you're taking his part."

This was pretty rough considering the pains I had been at to smooth the way for these people in the teeth of their own pig-headed obstinacy. But I was not going to quarrel with this cub.

"On the contrary," I said, "I was taking yours, in that I persuaded the boy not to clear out, as he was on the point of doing."

"Did you? Well then, Glanton, you won't mind my saying that it's a pity you did. D'you think we're going to keep any blasted nigger here as a favour on his part?"

"Answer me this," I said. "Are you prepared to herd your own sheep—*slaag* them, too—milk your own cows, and, in short, do every darn thing there is to be done on the farm yourselves?"

“Of course not. But I don’t see your point. The country is just swarming with niggers. If we kick one off the place, we can easily get another. Just as good fish in the sea, eh?”

“Are there? This colony contains about four hundred thousand natives—rather more than less—and if you go on as you’re doing, Sewin, you’ll mighty soon find that not one of those four hundred thousand will stay on your place for love or money. Not only that, but those around here’ll start in to make things most unpleasantly lively for you. They’ll *slaag* your sheep and steal your cattle—and you’ll find it too hot altogether to stay. Now you take my advice and go on a new tack altogether.”

“Mr Glanton’s quite right, Falkner,” said a clear voice from the verandah above us—for we had reached the house now, only in the earnestness of our discussion we had not noticed the presence of anybody. “He has told us the same thing before, and I hope he will go on doing so until it makes some impression.”

“Oh, as to that, Miss Sewin,” I said, idiotically deprecatory, as the Major’s eldest daughter came forward to welcome me, “I am only trying to make my experience of service to you.”

“I don’t know what we should have done without it,” she answered, in that sweet and gracious way of hers that always made me feel more or less a fool. In outward aspect she was rather tall, with an exceeding gracefulness of carriage. Her face, if it lacked colour perhaps, was very regular and refined; and would light up in the sweetest possible of smiles. She had grey eyes, large and well-lashed, and her abundant hair was arranged in some wonderful manner, which, while free from plaits and coils, always looked far more becoming than any amount of dressing by a fashionable hairdresser could have rendered it. But there you are. What do I, a prosaic trader in the Zulu, for all my experience of border and up-country matters, know about such things? So you must take my plain impressions as I give them.

It seemed to me that Falkner Sewin’s face had taken on an unpleasant, not to say scowling expression, at his cousin’s remarks, and he had turned away to hide it. He was a personable young fellow enough, tall and well set-up, and muscular; handsome too, with a square, determined chin. He had been a few years in the Army, where he had much better have remained, for he seemed to have qualified for civil life by a superlative arrogance, and an overweening sense of his own importance; both doubtless valuable to the accompaniment of jingling spurs and the clank of scabbards, but worse than useless for farming purposes on the Natal border. Towards myself he had begun by adopting a patronising attitude, which, however, he had soon dropped.

The house was a single storied one, surrounded on three sides by a verandah. A large and newly made garden reached round two sides of it, and away, at the further end of this, I could see the residue of the family, occupied with watering-pots, and other implements of the kind. It was a bright and pleasant spot was this garden, and its colour and sweet odours always conveyed a soothing effect, to my mind, at any rate; for little time or inclination had I for the cultivation of mere flowers. A patch or two of mealies or *amabele*, in a roughly schoffeled-up “land” was about the extent of any “gardening” I allowed myself; wherefore this amazing blend of colour and scent appealed to me all the more.

“Take that chair, Mr Glanton,” Miss Sewin went on, pointing to a large cane chair on the verandah. “You must have had a hot ride. Falkner, you might see that Mr Glanton’s horse is looked after. Call one of the boys and have him taken round and fed. The others are somewhere down in the garden, Mr Glanton. You know, my father is just wild on getting up a garden here. It occupies his time nearly the whole day long.”

“And very well he has done with it hitherto, Miss Sewin,” I answered heartily. “It is a pleasure to see it. You know, we rough knockabouts haven’t much time for that sort of thing. But we appreciate it, or its results, all the more when we see them.”

“But don’t you ever feel inclined to make things bright and pretty about your place?” she went on. “I should have thought you could have managed to find an hour or two a day. Or are you always so very busy up there?”

I felt guilty, as I remembered how I was prevented, not by lack of time but inclination: my spare time being occupied mainly by taking it easy, and smoking pipes and chatting with any chance natives who happened along; or it might be, sneaking about in the thick bushy kloofs to get a shot at a buck. But I answered, somewhat lamely:

“Oh, as to that, it isn’t exactly a matter of time. The fact is, Miss Sewin, we get into certain habits of life, and can’t get out of them in a hurry. I suppose a knockabout like myself gets all the taste for the fine arts knocked out of him. And the art of laying out gardens is one of the fine arts.”

She looked at me, I thought, with something of interest in her wide eyes. Then she said:

“Ah, but, you knockabouts—your own word remember, Mr Glanton—” she interjected, with a smile, “are, or ought to be, among the most useful men a country like this can produce. You are constantly in touch with the savages by whom we are surrounded. You know their ways and their thoughts and all about them, and your knowledge cannot but be invaluable to your fellow-countrymen.”

I felt pleased. She had a way of what I will call for want of a better expression—smoothing you down the right way. I said:

“But these savages, Miss Sewin. Believe me, they are not half bad fellows at bottom if you take them the right way. You haven’t got to go very far down to find them so, either.”

“And we take them the wrong way, isn’t that what you mean?” she answered, with another of her somewhat disturbing smiles. “I believe you are quite right—in fact I know you are—and I am always saying so. But, here are the others. I hope you will keep on telling them the same thing, over and over again until they see it themselves, if it isn’t too late.”

“I will. But you? You yourself. Don’t you find this rough country and rough life a sadly different thing to what you had expected?” I said.

“Not ‘sadly’ different. On the contrary, it is full of interest. To begin with, these same savages interest me immensely. I should like to learn their language. Is it easy?”

“To tell the truth I don’t know whether it is or not. I didn’t *learn* it, myself. I sort of absorbed it. But I can tell you it

makes all the difference in the world if you can talk with them and understand them or not. If you can I can't imagine any people more easy to get on with."

"Then I will begin to learn it at once. You will help me, won't you, Mr Glanton?"

Great Heavens! What was this? I began to see all over the world, as if my head was screwed on all ways at once. Would I help her? Oh, wouldn't I! Here was a bond of union set up between us—one that would afford me ample pretext for riding over here very often: that would bring us together often and constantly. It seemed as if a new and very bright world had opened in front of me—and yet and yet—what an utter fool I was—I, Godfrey Glanton, prosaic knockabout trader in the Zulu, and not a particularly young one at that!

Chapter Four.

My Neighbour's Household.

"Ha, Glanton! Glad to see you!" cried the Major, shaking me heartily by the hand. "Why, I was beginning to wonder when we should see you again. Was afraid you had started again on some up-country trip, and by Jove, there are one or two things I want your opinion about. We'll talk of them bye and bye."

"All right, Major. Only too glad to be of use."

He was a fine specimen of the best type of old soldier—tall, straight, handsome, hearty and straightforward in manner—in short a gentleman every inch of him. I had a great liking for him, and for his own sake alone would have gone far towards smoothing his difficulties and straightening things out for him no matter how crooked they might be, thanks to his own wrongheadedness. His wife was a good counterpart of him—without his wrongheadedness—and quite free from the fads and fussiness apparently inseparable from most elderly ladies, which render their presence and company a matter for resigned toleration rather than any sort of pleasure or advantage. To such Mrs Sewin was a rare and remarkable exception. The youngest daughter, Edith, was outwardly a complete contrast to her stately sister, being shorter, and plump and fair-haired, but very pretty—and sunny-natured to a degree. In fact I believe that to most men she would have proved the more attractive of the two.

"Have a glass of grog, Glanton, after your ride," said the Major. "Well, and how's trade?"

"So so. Much as usual. I'm thinking of a couple of months' trip to the north of Zululand soon. I might pick up some good cattle in Hamu's and Majendwa's part, and Zulu oxen always find a good sale."

"Into Zululand?" repeated Falkner, who had just entered. "By Jove, Glanton, I'd like to go with you. Wouldn't I just."

I hope I didn't show that I wouldn't like anything of the sort. I may have, for I was never a good actor, except in dealing with savages.

"That wouldn't be impossible," I answered. "But what about the farm?"

I read "Hang the farm!" as plain as possible in his face, though he hadn't said it. What he did say was:

"Oh well. We might think out some plan so as to work it."

"You must have had some very exciting adventures among the savages in your time, Mr Glanton," said Mrs Sewin.

"The liveliest adventures I have ever had were among white men, and not among savages at all," I answered. "But there, you must excuse me filling the rôle of the up-country yarner."

"Mr Glanton is most provokingly and proverbially impossible to 'draw,' you know, mother," said Miss Sewin, with a laugh and a shake of the head.

"That's more than most fellows in his line are," guffawed Falkner, in a way that was rather unpleasant, and, I thought, intentionally so, as he helped himself to a glass of grog.

"Come and have a look round the garden, Glanton," said the Major. "We sha'n't get dinner for nearly an hour, and it'll help fill up the time. You girls coming?"

"Aïda, you go," said the youngest. "Mother and I will see about getting dinner ready."

Dusk was already beginning to fall, and there isn't much dusk in that latitude. The scents of evening were in the air, the myriad distilling perfumes from the surrounding bush no less fragrant to my nostrils than those of the sweet-scented flowers which represented the Major's favourite hobby; but this, you may be sure, I did not tell him. But to me it was an enchanted hour and an enchanted scene, as I furtively watched the tall graceful figure at my side, noting each changing attitude, from the poise of the well-set-on head to the delicate tapering fingers put forth to handle, or here and there pluck some blossom. The while I was listening to the old man's enthusiastic dissertations, trying not to agree in the wrong place; trying, in short, to look as if I knew something about it all, yet not altogether succeeding, I fear, as I became aware when I caught the glance of Miss Sewin's eyes, and the smile upon her sweet, half-averted face. Then the stars came out with a rush, and the jackals began to bay along the hillside in the gloom of the bush.

"Confound it!" grumbled the Major, looking upward. "It's dark already; pitch dark, by Jove! and Glanton hasn't seen half what I've been doing yet, since he was here last. You get no twilight at all in this infernal country. Well, I suppose we must go in."

Nothing could be more pleasant and home-like than that cheerful, lighted room, as we sat at table. We talked about the country and surroundings, the life and its drawbacks, and the Major waxed reminiscent on byegone sport in India, and his anecdotes thereon interested me though I fear the others had heard them more than once before. Falkner was inclined to be extra friendly and had discarded his usual offhand and supercilious manner, which I own was wont to try

my patience sorely, and questioned me repeatedly as to my projected trip into Zululand, to which I had incidentally referred. Afterwards the two girls played and sang—uncommonly well. Falkner too, sang a very good song or two, and altogether I found I was thoroughly enjoying myself, the said enjoyment being doubtless enhanced by an obtruding recollection of my lonely hut, away up the mountain, and evenings spent in my own company until such time as I should smoke myself to sleep.

"Mr Glanton, we would so much like to see your trading store," said Edith, the youngest girl, when the music was ended.

I answered that there was little on earth to see there, that it was a greasy, dusty place, hardly fit for ladies, and so on, but that such as it was they would be more than welcome.

"And you will show us some Zulus for the occasion?" added her sister, with one of those glances which made me resolve to assemble half Tyingoza's location if she set her heart upon it.

"Well, yes," I said. "Only you mustn't take me by surprise. It's a rough and tumble place, and I might be taken just at the very moment when I couldn't offer you a decent lunch."

But they declared that this was just what they wanted—to take me by surprise, and see exactly how I lived, and so on. The while a desperate idea had come into my head, but, would it bear carrying out?

"Look here," I said. "If you would really like to ride up there, it occurs to me I might show you something that would interest you—nothing to do with the store particularly. But I could collect a lot of Tyingoza's people and scare up a regular native dance. They do it well, and it's worth seeing, I can tell you."

"Why that would be charming," cried the youngest girl. "Aïda, we must go. Do you hear? Father, what do you think? Let's all go, and make a day of it."

"I was going to venture yet further, Major," I said. "I was going to suggest that you make a night of it. There's my hut—it's very cool and comfortable—and I have a capital tent waggon. If the ladies could make shift with such by way of sleeping quarters, why we could turn in under a blanket in the store. It isn't a luxurious bedroom, but I daresay, for one night, a couple of soldiers like yourselves could manage."

"Rather," cried Falkner enthusiastically. "That's a ripping idea of yours, Glanton. What d'you think, uncle? Shall we fix up a day? No time like the present."

"Well, I think the idea isn't a bad one, if we are not putting you out, Glanton. But—what about the farm? We can't leave it entirely to itself."

This certainly was a difficulty. I thought for a moment; then I said:

"I might be able to straighten that for you, Major. I will send you down a man—a native, one of Tyingoza's people, but as trustworthy as steel. You know, most of them are that way if put in a position of trust. Well you needn't be afraid of anything going wrong—stocklifting and that—while he's in charge. How's that?"

"Capital!" went up from the girls.

"You seem to 'straighten' everything for us, Mr Glanton," said the eldest, gratefully.

"Well this is a very small thing after all," I protested. "I'm only afraid you will find the quarters a bit rough."

But this they declared was nothing. It only remained to fix the day. They would enjoy it above all things, they repeated.

"You'll have the same room as last time, Mr Glanton," said Mrs Sewin, as she bade me good-night.

"Why, I was just thinking of going home," I protested.

But this was over-ruled, and that unanimously. The Major wanted to have a talk with me, and couldn't do it comfortably if I was in a hurry to be off all the time. Besides—what did it matter? Nobody would be wanting to do a deal during the night, so I might just as well remain where I was, and so on. Well, I didn't want much pressing, and it was obvious my welcome hadn't worn thin just yet.

"Let's take the grog out on to the stoep, uncle," said Falkner. "It's cooler there."

"What d'you think, Glanton?" said the Major, when we were comfortably seated outside, each with a glass of grog before him and a pipe of good Magaliesberg—than which there is no better tobacco in the world—in full blast. "Why is it I can't do anything with these damned fellows of yours? Now in India I could make any sort of native do anything I wanted, and no bother about it. He had to, don't you know."

"Exactly, Major, he had to and these haven't. Wherein lies all the difference."

"I believe I was a damned fool to come and squat here at all," he growled.

"I don't agree with you, Major," I said. "You've only got to try and understand them, and they're all right. I don't mean to say they're perfect, no one is, but make the best of them. To begin with, learn the language."

"Good Lord, I'm too old to begin learning languages."

"Not a bit of it," I said. "I knew a man once—he must have been about your age, Major, an old Indian, too, only he had been a civilian—who had gone stone blind late in life. But he had a hobby for languages, and I'm blest if he hadn't taken up this one among others. He had got hold of the Bible in Zulu, done up by missionaries of course, and began putting all sorts of grammar cases to me. I own he fairly stumped me. I told him I didn't know anything of Biblical Zulu—

had always found that in use at the kraals good enough. Then he had the crow over me. But you ought to have a try at it, certainly your nephew ought."

"By Jove, I believe I will," growled Falkner. "Only it'd be an infernal grind."

"Not much more grind than punching a boy's head because he can't understand you," I said, "especially when the weather's hot; and far more profitable. Still I can rather enter into your feelings. The feeling of helplessness when we can't make out what the other fellow is talking about is prone to engender irritability. I was not guiltless myself in that line when I first went up-country. You set to work. Miss Sewin was saying this evening that she intended to."

"Oh was she?" growled Falkner again, with renewed interest, and the glance he gave me was not at all friendly, I thought.

"Well, you take my tip, Major, and then I don't think you'll at all regret coming here. No, by Jove, I don't."

"You don't, eh? Well I'm getting up a first-rate garden certainly. And the shooting around here isn't bad of its kind."

I hugged myself, metaphorically. Less than ever, by the experiences of a few hours, did I wish these people to give up in disgust.

Chapter Five.

A Disappearance and a Revel.

"What is this about Nyakami?"

"U' Nyakami? Is he dead?" answered Tyingoza, pausing with his snuff-spoon in mid air.

"That is what some would like to know," I went on. "But they have not found him yet."

I had named, by his native name, a neighbour of mine, who farmed some way down the river. Though in actual fact he was rather too far off to be termed exactly a neighbour. His real and British name was Hensley, and he had disappeared.

Sounds strange, doesn't it, and it certainly was. People don't disappear in Natal like they do in London, or any other large and civilised city, least of all highly respectable and fairly substantial colonists, of which Hensley was one. But this man had, and the strangest part of it was that he had not only disappeared but had done so leaving no trace. Not only that, but no one could be found who could swear to having been the last to see him.

He lived alone, and was an ordinary type of the frontier stock farmer. He was fairly prosperous and there was no reason on earth why he should have taken himself out of the way. No reason on earth was there either why he should have been put out of the way. He was on good terms with the natives, could always get plenty of servants, and so on. No, there was no reason in the world for his disappearance, yet he had disappeared—how and when nobody seemed to have the faintest idea.

The news had reached me through native sources, as a large portion of my news did. Indeed it is hardly credible the quantity I used to learn about my neighbours in this way; some of whom would have been mightily disconcerted could they have guessed that I, or anybody else, had an inkling of anything of the sort. The Natal Mounted Police had been investigating, but neither they nor their native detectives had been able to lay hand on the slightest clue. The man might have been caught up to heaven at midnight for all there was to show what had become of him.

"Not found him yet?" echoed Tyingoza, when he had absorbed his snuff. "*Au*! he will find himself. Men are strange, Iqalaqala, especially white men. And this one—if he wants to disappear why should he not?"

"Wants to disappear? But this one has no reason to want anything of the kind. Some men might, but this one not. You know him, Tyingoza, as well as I. What do you think?"

There was a comical twinkle in the chief's eyes. He merely answered:

"Who can think in such a case?"

Obviously there was nothing to be got out of Tyingoza—as yet—so I left the subject. In fact I had a far more interesting subject on my mind just then, for this was the day the Sewins had fixed upon for their visit to me, and so I fell to discussing with the chief the arrangements which were to be made for their entertainment. He had promised that a goodly number of his people should muster, and I had promised them cattle to kill in proportion to the number that would require feasting. This ought to ensure a very good roll up indeed. The disappearance of Hensley was to me a very secondary matter to-day.

By the way, I was in a state of fidget absolutely unwonted with me; and my "boy" Tom simply gaped with astonishment at the thorough turn-out I made him give my hut; and when I fetched a roll of Salampore cloth to hang around the walls so as to conceal the grass thatching I could see that he was entertaining considerable doubts as to his master's sanity.

He would have entertained even graver doubts could he have witnessed a still further stage of imbecility into which I lapsed. I found myself looking in the glass—not for ordinary purposes of toilet, be it noted, and I have set out upon this narrative determined to spare none of my own weaknesses, but because I was anxious to see what sort of fellow I looked—and I don't know that I felt particularly flattered by the result; for, confound it, I was no longer in my first youth, and a face bronzed and roughened by twenty years of knocking about, struck me as nothing particularly attractive to the other sex. Yet it was only the roughness of weather and more or less hard times that had told upon it, for I had always been rather abstemious and had set my face like a flint against the wild roaring sprees that some of my friends in the same line were prone to indulge in. If I had not the "clean run" look of Falkner Sewin, my eye was every whit as clear and I had

a trifle the advantage of him in height, and held myself quite as straight. No, it was absurd to try and start comparisons with Sewin, who was quite ten years younger, and had never known any hardening experiences, so I turned from the looking-glass imprecating one Godfrey Glanton as a silly ass, who had much better trek away right up-country and stay there altogether. And this idea was the first intimation that I had returned to sanity again.

My guests arrived earlier than I had expected, somewhere in the middle of the afternoon to wit, and the first thing they did was to reproach me for having put myself out for them so as they called it.

“I warned you there was nothing particular to see, didn’t I?” I said, as I showed them the inside of the store.

“But I think there is,” declared Miss Sewin, gazing around at the various “notions” disposed along the shelves or hanging about from the beams. “And how tidy you keep it all. Ah—” as an idea struck her, “I believe you have had it all put ship-shape for the occasion. Confess now, Mr Glanton, haven’t you?”

“Well, you know, it’s a sort of general holiday, so of course things are a little more ship-shape than usual,” I answered.

“Ah, but the fun would have been to have taken you by surprise, when you were in the thick of it. How is it there are no natives here to-day?”

“They’ll roll up directly for the fun this evening. I expect quite a lot of them.”

“Are they hard at a deal?” she went on, still gazing with interest at the trade goods. “Do they haggle much?”

“Haggle? Rather! Haggle like any Italian. Only they’re much more difficult to bring down. But, won’t you come round now and have tea? I’ve had a waggon sail rigged up for shade because I thought you’d prefer it outside.”

The ladies were delighted, and I will own in candour that there didn’t seem to be anything wanting, if about four kinds of biscuits; and rolls, white and fresh, done on a gridiron; some very excellent tinned jam; butter and potted meats; tea and coffee, and for us men a decanter of first-rate Boer brandy—contributed a sufficient afternoon tea.

“So this is the ‘roughing it’ you warned us against, Mr Glanton?” laughed Mrs Sewin, who was pouring out. “Why, it is luxury, positive luxury.”

“But it’s a great occasion,” I answered. “Major, have a glass of grog after your ride.”

“Well, that’s no bad idea. Capital stuff this,” holding up his glass.

“So it is,” pronounced Falkner, tossing off his. “Here’s luck, Glanton. By Jove, you’ve got an uncommonly snug crib up here. Hanged if it don’t feel like turning Zulu trader myself.”

“And if Tyingoza came here rather often, and stuck here a little longer than you wanted, how long would it be before you started to kick him off the place?”

“Oh, not long, I expect,” answered Falkner equably, amid the general laugh at his expense.

“Quite so. Then from that, moment you might as well shut up shop.”

“Isn’t this Tyingoza the chief of the location?” asked Miss Sewin.

“Yes. He was here this morning.”

“Oh, I should like to see him.”

“You shall,” I answered. “He’s sure to be here to-night. If not I’ll send over for him the first thing in the morning. He’s a great friend of mine.”

Falkner guffawed. “Friend of yours! Oh, I say now, Glanton. A nigger!”

“All serene, Sewin. I’ve known quite as fine fellows in their way among ‘niggers’ as you call them—as among white men. Strange, isn’t it? But, fact, for all that.”

“Now I come to think of it,” said the Major, “I’ve noticed that the men I’ve met over here, who have large experience of natives, invariably speak well of them.”

I rejoiced that the old man was coming to his senses on that point, because there was less likelihood of him getting disgusted with and leaving the neighbourhood.

“You have a perfectly lovely view from here, at any rate,” said Miss Sewin, when he had debated the oft-threshed-out question a little further. “How black and jagged the Drakensberg peaks look over there. And so that is Zululand?” turning to the expanse beyond the Tugela.

“By Jove!” said the Major. “It strikes me we are pretty much at Cetywayo’s mercy, right on the border as we are.”

“If you’re never at the mercy of anybody worse, you won’t have cause for uneasiness, Major,” I said. “As long as he’s let alone he’ll let us alone. There isn’t a native chief in the whole of Africa who is less likely to molest us in any way.”

“And are these people round you Zulus, Mr Glanton?” went on Miss Sewin, her beautiful eyes wide open as she gazed forth upon the country that had awakened her interest.

“Yes. Those on the immediate border here, Tyingoza’s people, and two or three more of the large locations along the river. Further in they are made up of all sorts of the tribes originally inhabiting what is now Natal. Ah! Do you hear that?

Here come some of them at any rate."

"Yes. They are singing, and quite well too."

I looked at her as she stood listening; her beautiful face lit up with animation, and, I must admit, I was enjoying the position of host and entertainer to her.

"But now, if there was a war with Cetywayo," struck in the Major, "would these people go over to him or stand by us?"

"Well that would depend on how our forces behaved at first. Sentimentally their sympathies would be with him, but then a savage is pre-eminently a practical animal, Major, with a hard keen eye to the side on which his bread is buttered, and that would tell. Look now, here they come."

All eyes were turned with interest, as a body of natives emerged from the bush about a quarter of a mile from my store. They were a good bit got up, and wore feather adornments and tufts of cow-tails round leg and arm. They carried the *isihlangu*, or large war shield, instead of the small *irau*, or dancing shield, they usually moved about with, and the quiver of assegai hafts kept time with the tread of feet and the deep sonorous thunder of their marching song. In number they were about a hundred.

"That's all right," I said gleefully. "I told Tyingoza to turn them out in good form, and he has."

"Why, they're splendid," pronounced Miss Sewin, as they drew near, making a brave show with their multi-coloured shields, and the gleam of assegais in the afternoon sun, and I delighted to watch her animated face and kindling eyes, as the whole body marched up to where we stood, and halting suddenly with weapons lowered and right hand uplifted, chorussed forth one deep-voiced word of salute:

"*Amakosi*!" (Chiefs.)

I went forward and spoke to them. Most of them I knew personally or by sight. They were all young men and unringed, and in high glee at the prospect of an abundant beef feast. And it would be an abundant one, for were it to run to half my herd, I was determined to stint nothing to render the entertainment complete on this occasion.

Hardly had they withdrawn to the place I had pointed out and squatted themselves upon the ground than a sound of singing was heard from another quarter and soon a second company came in sight likewise bravely got up, and then another, till I reckoned there must be something over three hundred of them. The ladies were delighted, and pronounced it well worth coming to see: so was I, because they were.

"I say though," said Falkner, "to be serious, isn't this rather—well, injudicious, Glanton? These fellows are all fully armed you know, and we—"

I laughed.

"Look here, Sewin," I said. "Supposing you were taken to a review, in France or Germany say—would you feel any misgivings because the troops were fully armed?"

"That's all very well, but these are savages you know. And the ladies—"

"—Have no misgiving at all, Falkner," struck in Miss Sewin serenely. "If all the savages in Zululand were here, I, for one, would feel perfectly safe with Mr Glanton."

"Hullo, Glanton. Bow your acknowledgments," cried Falkner, in a tone whose would-be geniality could not disguise a sneer. "Well, I was not speaking on my own account."

"Of course you weren't, Sewin," I answered, anxious to avert any unpleasant feeling. "And now, if the ladies will excuse me for a little I must go and look out some cows for these fellows to kill. For the next hour they will exchange their picturesqueness for the decidedly reverse of the slaughter yard. By the way you might like to come along, Sewin."

He jumped at the suggestion, but the Major preferred to remain where he was. Mrs Sewin said they would get through the time getting out their things and arranging their quarters for the night.

"I should think it'll make a hole in your cattle kraal," he said as we strolled over.

"Not a big one. I sha'n't give them the pick of the herd of course."

We strolled round to the kraal. My cattle herd was there and we proceeded to turn out the half dozen beasts I had selected for slaughter. A number of my guests had crowded up. They had discarded their shields, but were handling assegais in a manner that was highly anticipatory.

"Stand back," I cried noting a desire to crowd up. "A few will be sufficient."

But all were anxious to make one of that few, and by the time the doomed animals had reached the appointed place, chosen for being well out of sight—and scent—of the house, a rush was made upon them. Half the number were down at once, deftly assegaied; the remaining three however careered away, two wounded, and streaming with blood—the other untouched. Then ensued something akin to a buffalo hunt. With yells and whoops the excited savages bounded in pursuit, but even their speed and agility was not enough to turn the terrified and maddened animals, and had not a fresh crowd raced forward to head them they would have got away into the bush. Now two were promptly transfixed with half a dozen deftly hurled assegais in each, but the last, hardly touched, charged like lightning through its encompassing destroyers, and came straight back to the kraal, and, incidentally, for Falkner Sewin, who had left me to follow on and see the racket.

"Look out!" I roared. "Look out, Sewin! Run, man, for your life!"

If he had taken my warning in time, all would have been well; but for some reason or other—I suspect cussedness—he did not. The cow, a red one, with sharp needle-like horns, now thoroughly maddened by the riot and the blood, and the sharp dig of more than one badly aimed spear, put down her head, and charged straight for Falkner. I snatched an assegai from a young Zulu who was standing by me watching the fun, and rushed forward, and none too soon, for now Falkner was in full flight; the savage animal, head lowered, and throwing the foam from her mouth, and "twilling" hideously, was gaining upon him at the rate of two steps to one. It was now or never. As she shot past me I let go the assegai. It was a tense moment that—between when the long shaft left my hand and half buried itself in the side of the cow. But the throw was a right true one. The keen, tapering blade had bitten right into the heart, and the maddened beast plunged heavily forward to lie in a moment, dead and still, and at the sight a great roar of applause went up from the excited savages, who while trooping back from their unsuccessful chase had been delightedly watching this its termination.

Chapter Six.

Further Festivity.

"Near thing that," I said.

"Near thing? By Jove, I believe you!" echoed Falkner, who had halted, considerably out of wind and temper; the latter not improved by certain scarcely smothered and half-averted laughs which escaped some of the spectators. "Why I do believe the infernal sweeps are having the grin of me," he added, scowling at them.

"We'll enter into the joke yourself, just as you would have done if it had been some other fellow. That would have struck you as funny, eh? and this strikes them. They don't mean anything by it."

"Oh well, I suppose not," he growled, and I felt relieved, for he was quite capable of kicking up some silly row then and there, which would have been unpleasant, if not worse.

"Let's go back," I suggested. "The noble savage engaged in the most congenial occupation of his heart, that of butchery, is not seen at his best."

"I should think not. Look at those fellows over there. Why they're beginning on the stuff raw. Nasty beggars!"

"There are certain tit-bits they like that way, just as we do our snipe and woodcock and teal—or say we do."

In truth the groups engaged upon each carcase were not pleasant to the eye—although thoroughly enjoying themselves—and we left them.

"I say, Glanton, though," he went on, "I believe I came devilish near getting badly mauled by that beastly cow. The nigger who ripped in that assegai did so in the nick of time. I'd like to give him half-a-crown."

"Hand over then, Sewin. Here's the nigger."

"What? You?"

"Me."

"But the beast was going full bat."

"Well, a cow's a good big target even at twenty yards," I said.

He whistled. "By Jove! *I* couldn't have done it."

For once I was able to agree with him.

We had dinner in the open, under the waggon sail which I had rigged up as shelter from the sun, and which now did duty to give shelter from the dew.

"I'm afraid it's all game fare to-night, Mrs Sewin," I said. "This is roast bush-buck haunch, and that unsightly looking pot there beside the Major contains a regular up-country game stew. I rather pride myself on it, and it holds five different kinds of birds, besides bacon, and odd notions in the way of pepper, etc."

"And that's what you call roughing it," was the answer. "Why, it looks simply delicious."

"By Jove, Glanton, we must get the recipe from you," said the Major when he had sampled it. "I never ate anything so good in my life."

Tom and another boy in the background, were deft when help was required, and I know that if anybody ever enjoyed their dinner my guests did on that occasion. And upon my word they might well have done so, for trust an old up-country man for knowing how to make the best of the products of the veldt; and the best is very good indeed. And as we partook of this, by the light of a couple of waggon lanterns, slung from the poles of our improvised tent, the surroundings were in keeping. On the open side lay a panorama rapidly growing more and more dim as the stars began to twinkle forth, a sweep of darkening country of something like fifty or sixty miles, reaching away in the far distance beyond the Blood River, on the left, and immediately in front, beyond the Tugela, the wooded river bank and open plains and rocky hills of Zululand. Then, suffusing the far horizon like the glow of some mighty grass fire, the great disc of a broad full moon soared redly upward, putting out the stars.

"Now this is what I call uncommonly jolly," pronounced the Major, leaning back in his chair, and blowing out the first puffs of his after dinner pipe.

"Hear—hear!" sung out Falkner. And then, warmed up into a glow of generosity by a good dinner and plenty of grog,

I'm blest if the fellow didn't trot out quite a yarn about the cow chevying him and my timely assegai throw; whereupon there was a disposition to make a hero of me on the spot.

"Pooh! The thing was nothing at all," I objected. "An everyday affair, if you're working with unbroken cattle."

Yet there was one face which expressed more than the others, expressed in fact unbounded approval, as it was turned full on me with that straight frank gaze, and I exulted inwardly, but then came a thought that dashed everything and was as a judgment upon my quite unwarrantable conceit. This was it. What if they are engaged, and that full, frank look of approval is one of gratitude that I should have saved—if not the life of the other—at any rate the certainty of him being badly injured? It is singular that no such idea had ever occurred to me before, but it did now, and seemed to lend significance to certain signs of resentment and ill-will which I had noticed on Falkner's part on occasions where his cousin was concerned. And the thought was a thoroughly disquieting one, I admit.

"Listen! Here they come," I said, holding up a hand. "The entertainment is about to begin."

The distant and deep-toned hum of conversation had reached us from where our dusky entertainers were enjoying their feast, and an occasional outburst of laughter. Now, instead, came the regular rhythm of a savage song, drawing nearer and nearer.

"I think we can't do better than let them perform just in front here," I went on. "The ground's open, and the moon almost as bright as day."

This was agreed to enthusiastically, and soon the singing grew louder and louder, and the whole body in their picturesque gear, came marching up, beating time upon their shields with sticks and assegai hafts. They halted in half moon formation and one man stepping out from the rest, gave the sign for silence. Then having saluted us with much *sibongo*, he led off, in a sort of chant, loud and clear at first, then rising higher and higher. The others took it up at a given point in response, and although the song did not run to many notes, it was soon thundered aloud in a harmonious wave of sound. When it had attained its highest pitch, at a sign from the *choragus* it ceased—ceased with such suddenness as to impart an impression that was positively uneasy.

"Dashed effective, by Jove!" pronounced the Major, breaking the spell.

"Why, it is beautiful—positively beautiful," declared Miss Sewin. "The harmony and the rhythmic waves of sound are perfect. Tell me, Mr Glanton, what was it all about?"

"Oh, it was merely a song of welcome, improvised over yonder while they were scoffing my cows."

"Really? Do you mean to say it was all impromptu?"

"Of course. That's the way these people do things."

"Won't they go over it again?"

"Oh, there's plenty more to come. Rather too soon for an encore yet."

While I spoke they were forming up again. This time they broke up into a hunting song. When it seemed to have gained its height, it suddenly ceased, and all darted away across the veldt till nearly out of sight in the moonlight.

"What the deuce are they up to now?" said Falkner, filling his pipe.

"You'll see. Listen. Now they are returning with the game."

Again the voices broke forth, now returning as I had said, and swelling higher and higher, in a long recitative uttered by some dozen, and replied to in rolling chorus by the whole body.

"They are recounting their exploits now—what game they have got, and how they got it," I explained, as the singing ceased.

"By Jove, are they?" cried Falkner. "Look here, Glanton, I've got an idea. How would it be to scare up a hunt to-morrow, and get a lot of these chaps to help? I'd like to see how they go to work in their own way. That would be worth seeing."

"Well, it might be managed. What d'you think, Major?"

"A capital idea. But—hang it, we haven't got our guns."

"Oh, as to that," I said, "you could use mine. There's a shot gun and a rifle, and a rifle and smooth-bore combined. That'll arm all hands."

"Well done, Glanton. You're a jewel of a chap!" cried Falkner, boisterously. "The very thing. But, I say. How about arranging it with them now. No time like the present, eh?"

The idea appealed to me exceedingly, not for its own sake, I fear, but because it would afford an opportunity of detaining my guests—or shall we say one of them—yet longer, perhaps even another night, for it would be hard if I could not manage to prolong the hunt until too late for them to return. Really Falkner Sewin was not without his uses in the world.

"I think it would be simply delightful!" interjected that "one of them." "We will be able to see some of it too, won't we, Mr Glanton?"

"Why of course, Miss Sewin. I'll send the boys up to some convenient spot with lunch and we'll make a regular picnic of it."

The idea was received with enthusiasm. Only Mrs Sewin somewhat faintly objected that they had a long way to go to get home afterwards. But this I over-ruled by hoping they would not find my poor accommodation so very trying that the prospect of another night of it—if the worst came to the worst—should prove entirely out of the question.

Just then a group of men detached themselves from the rest, and came over to us, to salute and ask how we liked the performance.

“This is Wabisa, the next biggest chief under Tyingoza,” I said, introducing the foremost, a tall, dignified head-ringed man. “Now, Miss Sewin, here is a real chief. Tyingoza could not come to-night, but will to-morrow morning.”

“I’m so glad,” she answered, looking at Wabisa with interest.

I gave them some roll tobacco which I had ready for them, and told my boys to make them some coffee. The while I arranged for to-morrow’s bush-buck hunt. There was no difficulty about it at all, even as I had expected. I could have as many boys as I wanted.

“They must hunt too, Wabisa,” I said. “The white *amakosi* want to see if the assegai is a better weapon than the gun.”

“*Ou*! That they shall see,” laughed the chief.

“Is there going to be any more dancing, Mr Glanton?” said the youngest girl.

“Yes. The best part. They’re going to give us the war dance now,” and I suggested to Wabisa that it was getting late, and the white ladies might be growing tired.

Of all native dances a war dance is the most catching, and this had not long started before even the old Major found himself beating time with his feet, while as for Falkner, it was all I could do to prevent him from rushing in among them to take his part. The chant now rose quickly to a ferocious roar, and as the dancers swayed and crouched, turning half round, then leaping erect, while going through the pantomime of striking an enemy, to the accompaniment of a strident death hiss, the whole scene was vivid and realistic enough to have rendered some people decidedly nervous. Then the thunderous stamping of six hundred feet, the beating of sticks on shields, and the shrilling rattle of assegai hafts—a sound not quite like any other I ever heard, and I’ve heard it often—add to this the rolling of fierce eyeballs, and the waving of tufted shields in the moonlight and you have a picture unrivalled for thrilling and at the same time exhilarating terror. A gasp as of involuntary relief went up from my guests as the thunder and racket ceased with a suddenness of silence that was almost appalling in contrast Miss Sewin was the first to speak.

“It is perfectly magnificent,” she declared. “I for one don’t know how to thank you, Mr Glanton, for giving us such a splendid entertainment.”

I was rarely pleased at this, and mumbled something—probably idiotic.

“I suppose it isn’t much to you,” she went on. “You must have seen it often, and the real thing too.”

“Well yes. I have, and done by more thousands than there are hundreds here. By the way, I’m giving them a little more beef for to-morrow morning so they’ll be in high trim and good humour for our hunt.”

“Oh, I’m afraid you are going to a great deal of trouble on our account,” she said.

“Isn’t it worth it—at least—I mean—er—it isn’t often one can afford anyone a new kind of pleasure in this worn-out world,” I added lamely. But I believe she read my original meaning for I could see a soft look come into the beautiful clear eyes in the moonlight, and there was a half smile curving her lips. We were talking a little apart from the others who had embarked on a voluble discussion of their own. And then it was voted time for bed, and the natives having dispersed, after a sonorously uttered farewell salute, the Major and Falkner and I had a final glass of grog, or so, and adjourned to our quarters in the store.

Chapter Seven.

Tyingoza’s Head-Ring.

There was no sign of life on the part of my guests, as I rolled out at early dawn and went down to the waterhole in the kloof for a splash. When I returned the Major and his nephew were sitting up on their blankets rubbing their eyes.

“Any chance of a tub, Glanton?” said the latter.

“There’s a waterhole down in the kloof, if it’s not too cold for you. Take the path that leads by Tom’s hut. You can’t miss it.”

“Right, I’ll chance the cold. Got a towel? Ah, thanks.”

“That fellow’s a great subject of anxiety to me, Glanton,” said the Major, after Falkner had gone out. “I feel in a sort of way responsible for him. He was in the Service for a few years, then chucked it suddenly, for no other reason than to go tea-planting in Ceylon with some infernal swindler who persuaded him to invest what he’d got, in a partnership, and then skinned him of the whole lot. His father was simply frantic with him.”

“I can imagine he would be.”

“So can I, after the expense and trouble he had been put to in getting this young fool into the Service at all, then to have him chuck it all up! He wouldn’t do anything more for him; shut the door in his face and told him to go to the devil. He didn’t go to the devil; he came to me.”

“I’m sure he chose the right alternative, Major,” I said, when I had recovered from the roar into which this way of putting it had sent me.

“Well, you see it’s a grave responsibility, and if he throws up this I don’t know what’ll become of him. He’s got nothing in the world but what he has invested in a little stock on my place, and as for getting him a bunk, why I haven’t influence enough to get him one as boot-black to a club.”

“Well, he mustn’t throw it up, that’s all,” I said.

“That’s what I tell him. But he’s so restless, swears the life’s slow here. Bad-tempered too, and always kicking up rows with the niggers. Yes, he’s a great anxiety to me.”

As to the last I thought as coming from Major Sewin it was a good deal of the pot calling the kettle black. For the rest his revelations as to Falkner’s prospects, or the lack of them, were not unpleasing to me, if only that the uncomfortable thought which had beset me last night could have had no foundation. This was mean but I suppose it was natural, and, as a set off, may be accepted the fact that I would willingly have done the youngster any good turn within my power. I felt flattered too that the old gentleman should discuss with me what was, after all, a family matter.

“I can readily imagine it,” I answered. “But he’ll have too much sense, I should think, to do anything so foolish. And then, too, Major, I should think the ladies’ influence would—”

“Ah, now, it’s just that which—”

But what “that” was I was not fated to know, for I heard my name called in Mrs Sewin’s voice, and had to hurry away, to find out what was wanted. Also, I thought the speaker had checked himself as though about to say too much.

“We never slept more comfortably in our lives than in that waggon of yours, Mr Glanton,” said the youngest girl, as we all met for an early breakfast. “Did we, Aïda?”

“No, indeed. The kartel—isn’t that what you call it—has all the elasticity of a spring mattress. Really, I shall never believe again in you up-country men’s stories of roughing it.”

“They’re true, all the same,” I answered, with a laugh. “For that reason we make ourselves comfortable when we can.”

“By Jove, Glanton, that waterhole of yours is dashed cold,” said Falkner, who came up, looking a fresh and healthy specimen of young England after his bath.

“Yes, but go and get dressed, Falkner,” said his aunt. “We’re just going to breakfast.”

The table was laid as before, under the waggon sail, upon which the not long risen sun was fast drying up the heavy dew. Away below, over the Zulu country, a thick white mist, in billowy masses of cloud, was rolling back, revealing distant rock and dark forest belt shimmering in sheeny patches of dew beneath the unbroken blue. All were in high spirits, especially Falkner, who had soon joined us, over the prospect of the coming hunt. With his faults, such as they were, he had the redeeming virtue in my eyes of being a keen sportsman.

We had done breakfast, and I was pointing out to Miss Sewin various points of interest in the landscape near and far, when we descried a tall figure coming towards us.

“Who is this?” she said, as the newcomer saluted. He was a fine, straight, warrior-like young fellow, and carried a small shield and a bundle of hunting assegais which he deposited on the ground.

“Ivuzamanzi, the son of Tyingoza—Ah, I’m afraid you’ll be disappointed Miss Sewin,” after a few words with him. “The chief sends word that he will not be able to come this morning, but his son will direct the hunting party instead. He will come up this evening if he can.”

“Well, I suppose I ought to be more anxious than ever to see him,” she said, “as he is so unapproachable.”

“Well, don’t prepare for any display of royalty,” I warned. “Tyingoza is just like any other highbred Zulu, in fact you wouldn’t know him from another unless you were told.”

Soon groups of natives began to straggle up, not in regular formation this time. They had discarded their adornments and carried only small shields, knobsticks and light, casting assegais. At their heels trotted a number of dogs, from the slinking mongrel, to the well-bred tawny or brindled greyhound; and indeed the snarling and fighting that presently arose among these, soon took up enough of their owners’ time to keep them apart. The process was simple by the way. If two or more dogs got fighting their owners simply whacked them with kerries until they desisted.

“Ah—ah, Ivuzamanzi,” I went on, chaffing him. “I had thought of fixing our mid-day resting place on the river bank below where Umzinyati flows in. Or, are the horns of Matyana’s calves long enough to reach across? What thinkest thou, son of Tyingoza?”

“*Ou*!” laughed the youth, bringing his hand to his mouth. “You are my father, Iqalaqala. But that day is yet to be paid for.”

His broken leg was very completely mended, and he showed no trace of a limp, even. I explained the joke to my companion.

“I didn’t know they fought like that among themselves,” she said. “Tell me, Mr Glanton. They are not likely to do anything of that sort to-day, are they? I mean, they might get excited.”

“No—no. Don’t be in the least alarmed about that. By the way, how are you getting on in your studies? Say something to Ivuzamanzi now—even if only two or three words.”

“No, I’m shy to. You’ll only laugh at me, or he will.”

“Not a bit of it. Now—go ahead.”

“Hallo! What nigger’s this?” bellowed Falkner, swaggering up. “He wasn’t here last night, was he?”

“No,” I answered rather shortly, disgusted at the interruption of this blundering ass upon our little understanding. “He’s the chief’s son, and he’s going to boss up the arrangements, so don’t be uncivil to him if you can help it, eh?”

“I’ll try not. But I say, Glanton, come and arrange about these guns you were speaking of, there’s a good fellow. It must be nearly time to start.”

Already, you see, he was beginning to take over the whole scheme. It was a little way he had—I have observed it too, in others of his kidney.

“Oh, there’s time enough,” I said, still shortly, for I don’t like to be hustled, and just then, and by Falkner Sewin, I liked it still less. And something of this must have imparted itself to his understanding for he answered unpleasantly:

“Oh well of course, if you’re so much better employed,” and he moved off in dudgeon. My companion coloured slightly and looked displeased.

“Isn’t your relative rather a queer tempered sort of fellow?” I asked, with a smile.

“Well yes, he is rather, but we are all so sorry for him that—I’m afraid he was rather rude to you, Mr Glanton, I must apologise for him.”

“No—no—no,” I said. “Not a bit of it. Don’t you think anything about that. I don’t.”

She changed the subject to something else, and I went on talking longer than I would otherwise have done. The interruption and its manner had annoyed me, and a good deal as a protest against being hurried I made up my mind not to hurry. Afterwards I had reason to regret my delay.

We strolled back to join the others, and the prospect of this companionship more or less throughout the day, to end in an evening similar to that of last night—with the native revels left out—soon restored my accustomed good humour. The natives were squatting about round the store in groups, conversing in their deep-toned voices. Then suddenly they all sprang to their feet as one man, uttering respectful salutations; and there, to my surprise, advancing leisurely towards us, came Tyingoza himself.

“It is the chief,” I explained for the benefit of my companion, “Tyingoza. He has changed his mind.”

“Oh, I am so glad,” she said, looking at him with interest. “I shall see him before we start I like the look of him. Why if we had started when Falkner wanted us to we should have missed him.”

Afterwards, I repeat, I had good reason to wish we had.

I have omitted to describe Tyingoza’s outward appearance. He was a man of between fifty and sixty, rather inclining to stoutness, which detracted somewhat from his stature, but his walk was straight and dignified, and he carried his shaven head, crowned by the shiny ring, well held back, as became a Zulu of birth and standing. His strong face, terminating in a short, crisp, grizzled beard, was a very pleasant one, and the expression of his eyes good-humoured and genial to a degree.

“Welcome, Tyingoza,” I said, going forward to meet him. “Here are they who would see thy young men hunt.”

The chief ran his eyes over the group.

“I see them, Iqalaqala,” he said, in the native idiom. “*Whau*! the game is rather scarce, but I hope they will be pleased.”

His eyes rested for a moment on Miss Sewin, and then on me, and I remembered his joke about the new hut. Then he sat down in his accustomed place against the front of the store, while the others sank back into their former attitudes at a respectful distance.

“What rum things those head-rings are, Glanton,” commented Falkner, who had been staring at Tyingoza as if he were some wild animal. “Looks for all the world like a thick stick of Spanish liquorice coiled round his head. What the deuce are they made of?”

“The dark gum of the mimosa, and other things,” I said, going on, in the Major’s interest, to translate all sorts of complimentary things which that fine old soldier had never dreamed of originating.

“Well, now we’ve seen him,” grumbled Falkner, “can’t you give him a gentle hint to move on, or, at any rate, that we want to. It’s high time we started, and he’s delaying us like blazes.”

“Can’t do anything of the sort,” I flung back in a quick aside. “It wouldn’t be etiquette to hurry him.”

“Etiquette! With a nigger!” jeered Falkner, going into the store to light his pipe.

Now the place of Tyingoza’s accustomed seat was right under a window, which was open. Seated as he was, with his back to the wall, his head came about a foot and a half below the sill of this. I talked with him a little longer and he was just expressing the opinion that it was high time for us to start, when I saw the head and shoulders of Falkner Sewin lounging through this window. He was puffing away at his pipe, looking somewhat intently down upon the chief’s head, and then, to my horror, and of course before I could prevent it, down went his hand. With an agility surprising in a man of his years and build Tyingoza sprang to his feet, and stood with head erect, gazing sternly and indignantly at Falkner, who, still half through the window, was examining minutely a piece which he had dug out of the chief’s head-ring, and

still held in his thumb nail, grinning like the stark, record idiot he was.

There was a second or two of tension, then the four score or so of natives who were squatting around, sprang to their feet as one man, and a deep gasp of horror and resentment escaped from every chest.

“Why what’s the row?” cried the offending fool. “The old boy seems a bit cross.”

“A bit cross,” I repeated grimly. “Why you’ve insulted him about as completely as if you’d hit him in the face.”

“Oh bosh! Here, I haven’t hurt his old bit of stick liquorice. Tell him to stick his head down and I’ll plaster the bit back in its place again, and give him a shilling into the bargain.”

The expression of Tyingoza’s face had undergone a complete change, and the indignant look had given way to one of the most withering contempt, as with a wave of the hand towards Falkner, in which there was a suggestion of pity, he said softly:

“*Hau! Sengaloku igcwane*.” (“It seems an idiot.”) Then, turning, he walked away.

Chapter Eight.

The Spoiling of the Hunt.

There was a tense, and, under the circumstances to anyone who knew, rather an awesome silence.

“This won’t do,” I said. “I must go after him and explain.”

“Don’t go. It doesn’t look safe.”

The protest came from Miss Sewin, for now an angry muttering had arisen among the young men, and the rattle of assegai hafts—this time in ominous earnest—mingled with the hoarse growl of deepening indignation. A very different face was upon things now to that of formerly. The head-ring of their father and chief had been insulted.

“It might not be for everybody, but it is for me,” I answered, quickly, as I hurried after the chief.

It was no easy task to placate Tyingoza. I pointed out to him that what had been done was the silly childish act of a foolish boy who had no sort of idea of what he was doing, and how sorry I was that such a thing should have happened, especially on my place, where he, Tyingoza, had always been so thoroughly welcome, and so forth. And now, would not he return with me and receive a present from me, and an apology from the boy, to show his people that there was no remnant of a cloud between us?

But it was all of no use. He relaxed as far as I was concerned. It was a pity that I had been obliged to have an idiot on my place, he said, but he could see that what had happened was no fault of mine. But he would not come back.

“There are my ‘dogs,’ Iqalaqala,” pointing to the groups of young men, now some distance behind us. “I sent them to hunt with your friends—they will do so. I am going home.”

I could not shake his determination, and he strode away. Our talk, as I said, had taken up some little time, and now as I neared the store I saw that I had returned none too soon.

For, seeing that their chief had not returned the angry mutterings of his incensed followers had risen to a threatening hubbub. All the savage was now aroused within them, and they crowded up to the store, clamouring for the man who had insulted their father’s head-ring. Assegais were flourished, dogs were adding their howls and yaps to the general racket, and altogether matters were taking a decidedly serious turn.

“What is this, children of Tyingoza?” I said, as I came up behind them—incidentally kicking away a large cur which had come for me open-mouthed. “The last words of the chief as he left me were—‘I have sent them to hunt with your friends—they will do so.’ But now I find you ready to spring upon them instead. What does it mean?”

“This, Iqalaqala. We want the ‘idiot’.”

The speaker was Ivuzamanzi. He had been out of the way during the incident, which was uncommonly lucky for Falkner Sewin. Now he was foremost in the agitation.

“But you cannot hold an ‘idiot’ responsible,” I urged, catching at a straw.

“Ah—ah! But this is not a real one,” answered the young warrior. “He must be beaten.”

“Not so. The chief is satisfied. He bade me tell you to go on with the hunt. Who are ye to shut your ears to his ‘word’?”

This told, for the clamour dropped into sullen mutterings as they consulted together. The while I walked through them and gained the store.

The Major was standing in the doorway, and I could see the faces of the two girls at the window light up with relief as I approached. They had thought I should be murdered in the midst of the excited and gesticulating group, but as a matter of fact I ran not the slightest danger, and this I hastened to assure them. I was glad to notice that Falkner had had the sense to keep himself out of sight, or, what was more likely, somebody else had had it for him.

“Ah, now we shall be all right,” said Mrs Sewin, who was seated on a pile of goods for want of a chair. “I must say these savages are rather alarming.”

“They’ll go home directly, Mrs Sewin. I’ve talked them into a better frame of mind.”

“Go home?” echoed Falkner. “But, confound it all—what about our hunt?”

“You won’t get one of them to stir in that now,” I said, “and if they did you wouldn’t be well advised to go with them.”

“Well, I think there’s considerable overweight of fuss being made because a silly old nigger puts his back up and walks off in a huff,” answered Falkner, sullenly.

“Look here, Sewin,” I said, fast beginning to lose my temper. “That ‘silly old nigger’ is one of the most influential chiefs in Natal. Added to which he’s a Zulu of high breeding, that is to say one of the proudest of men—and you’ve put upon him the biggest insult you could have thought out, and that in the presence of a number of his people—who moreover were sent up here by his orders to help your day’s amusement I say nothing of it having been done on my place—but, incidentally, your monkeyish and schoolboy prank has been the means of frightening the ladies somewhat.”

“Here, I say, Glanton. I don’t take that sort of talk, you know,” he answered, colouring up.

“Glanton’s quite right,” struck in the Major decisively, and with some sternness. “You’ve made an ass of yourself, and got us into a nice mess—which we don’t seem out of yet,” he added, as again the voices outside rose high.

I went out again. Ivuzamanzi came forward.

“We will not hunt with your friends, Iqalaqala. We are going home. As for the *igcwane*—let him look well on all sides of him.”

“For the first I think you are right son of Tyingoza,” I answered. “For the second—*gahle*! It is not wise to threaten men on the Queen’s side of the river—for such might lead to visits from the *Amapolise*.”

But he replied that he cared nothing for the police, and the others laughed sneeringly and agreed.

“See now,” said Ivuzamanzi, shaking his stick. “Will he, the *igcwane*, come out and fight? He looks big enough, and strong enough, for all that he is a fool.”

I found myself wishing the matter might be cleared up in this rough and ready manner; but for one thing the ladies were with us, for another I didn’t see how the two could fight on anything like even terms. Falkner couldn’t fight with native weapons, and Ivuzamanzi, like any other Zulu, of course had not the remotest idea how to use his fists. So it wouldn’t do.

“How can that be?” I put it. “He does not understand fighting in your way, and you do not understand fighting in his. You would both be ridiculous. Go home, son of Tyingoza, and talk with your father. You will find he has forgotten all about the affair and so must you. A mistake has been made and we all regret it.”

“*Ou*!” he grunted, and turned away. I thought enough had been said, to these young ones at any rate, so forbore to give them anything more in the way of entertainment lest they should think we were afraid of them. And soon, somewhat to my relief, and very much to the relief of my guests, they picked up their weapons, and with their curs at their heels moved away in groups as they had come.

“Well, we seem to have put you to no end of bother, Glanton, for which I can’t tell you how sorry we are,” said the Major. “And now we mustn’t put you to any more—so, as there is to be no hunt I propose that we saddle up, and go home.”

“Not until after lunch at any rate, Major,” I said. “I can’t allow that for a moment. As for bother it has been nothing but a pleasure to me, except this last tiresome business.”

I thought Miss Sewin’s face expressed unmistakable approval as I caught her glance.

“How well you seem to manage these people, Mr Glanton,” she said. “I—we—were beginning to feel rather nervous until you came up. Then we were sure it would all come right. And it has.”

Inwardly I thought it had done anything but that, but under the circumstances my confounded conceit was considerably tickled by her approval, and I felt disposed to purr. However I answered that talking over natives was an everyday affair with me, in fact part of my trade, and by the time we sat down to lunch—which was not long, for the morning was well on by then—good humour seemed generally restored. Even Falkner had got over his sulks.

“I say, Sewin,” I said to him as I passed him the bottle. “You were talking about going on a trading trip with me. It wouldn’t do to get chipping bits out of the chiefs’ head-rings on the other side of the river, you know. They take that sort of thing much more seriously over there.”

“Oh hang it, Glanton, let a fellow alone, can’t you,” he answered, grinning rather foolishly.

“By the way, Major, has anything more been heard about Hensley?” I said.

“Hensley? Who’s he? Ah, I remember. He’s been over at our place a couple of times. Why? Is he ill?”

“Nobody knows—or where he is. He has disappeared.”

“Disappeared?”

“Yes. Nobody seems to have the slightest clue as to what has become of him. He went to bed as usual, and in the morning—well, he wasn’t there. He couldn’t have gone away anywhere, for his horses were all on the place, and his boys say they had never heard him express any intention of leaving home.”

“Good gracious, no. We hadn’t heard of it,” said Mrs Sewin. “But—when was it?”

“About a fortnight ago. I didn’t hear of it till the other day—and then through native sources.”

“Oh, some nigger yarn I suppose,” said Falkner in his superior manner, which always ruffled me.

“Would you be surprised to hear that I obtain a good deal of astonishingly accurate information through the same source, Sewin?” I answered. “In fact there is more than one person to whom it relates, who would be more than a little uncomfortable did they guess how much I knew about them.”

“Oh, then you run a nigger gossip shop as well as a nigger trading shop,” he retorted, nastily.

“But what a very unpleasant thing,” hastily struck in his aunt, anxious to cover his rudeness. “Does that sort of thing happen here often?”

“I never heard of a case before.”

“Probably the niggers murdered him and stowed him away somewhere,” pronounced the irrepressible Falkner.

“Even ‘niggers’ don’t do that sort of thing without a motive, and here there was none. Less by a long way than had it been your case,” I was tempted to add, but didn’t. “No, I own it puzzles me. I shall take a ride over there in a day or two, and make a few enquiries on the spot, just as a matter of curiosity.”

“All the same it looks dashed fishy,” said the Major. “D’you know, Glanton, I’m inclined to think Falkner may have hit it.”

“Nothing’s absolutely impossible,” I answered. “Still, I don’t think that’s the solution.”

“But the police—what do they think of it?”

“So far they are stumped utterly and completely—nor can their native detectives rout out anything.”

“How very dreadful,” said Mrs Sewin. “Really it makes one feel quite uncomfortable.”

“He lived alone, remember, Mrs Sewin, and there are plenty of you,” I laughed, meaning to be reassuring. But I could see that a decidedly uncomfortable feeling had taken hold upon her mind, and tried to turn the conversation, blaming myself for a fool in having started such a subject at all on the top of the alarm the ladies had already been subjected to that morning. But they say there are compensations for everything, and mine came when just as they were preparing to start Mrs Sewin said to me:

“I have a very great favour to ask you, Mr Glanton, and I hardly like doing so after all your kindness to us since yesterday and what has come of it. But—would you mind riding home with us this afternoon. After what has just happened we should feel so much safer if you would.”

I tried to put all the sincerity I could into my reassurances that no one would interfere with them, but apart from my own inclinations a certain anxious look on Aïda Sewin’s face as they waited for my answer decided me.

“Why of course I will if it will be any help to you, Mrs Sewin,” I said, and then again a quick grateful look from the same quarter caused me to tread on air, as I went round to see to the saddling up of the horses—my own among them.

As we took our way down the well worn bush path I could see that the incident of the morning had not been entirely cleared off from the minds of the party. The ladies were inclined to be nervous, and if a horse started and shied at a tortoise or a white snail shell beside the path I believe they more than half expected a crowd of revengeful savages to rush out and massacre them on the spot. However, of course, nothing happened, and we got to the Major’s farm by sundown.

Then I had my reward.

“Will you come and help me water some of the flowers, Mr Glanton?” said Miss Sewin, after we had offsaddled and generally settled ourselves. “No—don’t say you are going back. Mother is very nervous to-night, and I know you are going to add to your kindness to us by sleeping here.”

Again I trod on air—and yet—and yet—I felt that I was acting like a fool. What on earth could come of it—at any rate to my advantage? Yet, again—why not?

“I want you to promise me something, Mr Glanton, will you?” Miss Sewin said, when dusk and the lateness of the hour had put an end to what was to me one of the most delightful half hours I ever remember spending, for we had spent it alone, she chatting in that free and natural manner of hers, I agreeing with everything, as the entrancement of listening to her voice and watching her grace of movement wound itself more and more around me.

“I think I may safely promise you anything, Miss Sewin,” I answered. “Well? What is it?”

“I want you to promise me not to quarrel with my cousin—no matter how rude and provoking he may be.”

“Is that all? Why of course I will.”

“Ah but—you may not find it so easy,” she went on, speaking earnestly, and her wide open glance full on my face. “I have been noticing his behaviour towards you of late, and admiring your forbearance. But as a personal favour to myself, don’t quarrel with him.”

“Oh, I still think that’ll be an easy promise to keep,” I said; and yet, the very fact that she was so anxious on the subject seemed to make the other way. Why was she?

She shook her head slightly and smiled, as though reading my thoughts.

“You see, we are all so friendly together, are we not?” she said. “And a man of your experience and good sense can afford to put up with a good deal from a mere boy who hasn’t much of either.”

“Why of course,” I answered easily, and reassured by her tactful explanation. Yet—was Falkner such “a mere boy” after all?

Chapter Nine.

Hensley’s next-of-kin.

It is a strange, and I suppose a wholesomely-humiliating thing that we are appointed to go through life learning how little we know ourselves. Here was I, a man no longer young, with considerable experience of the ways of the world, rough and smooth, and under the fixed impression that if there was one man in the said wide and wicked world whom I knew thoroughly, in and out, from the crown of his hat to the soles of his boots—or *velschoenen*, as the case might be—that man was Godfrey Glanton, trader in the Zulu. And yet I had lived to learn that I didn’t know him at all.

For instance the happy-go-lucky, free-and-easy, semi-lonely life that had satisfied me for so many years seemed no longer satisfying; yet why not, seeing that all its conditions prevailed as before? I had enough for my needs, and if I didn’t make a fortune out of my trade, whether stationary or from time to time peripatetic, I had always made a steady profit. Now, however, it came home to me that this was a state of things hardly the best for a man to live and die in.

Again why not? I had seen contemporaries of my own—men circumstanced like myself who had come to the same conclusion. They had left it—only to come to grief in unfamiliar undertakings. Or they had married; only to find that they had better have elected to go through the rest of life with a chain and ball hung round their necks, than strapped to some nagging woman full of affectations and ailments—and raising a brood of progeny far more likely to prove a curse to them than anything else; thanks to the holy and gentle maternal influence aforesaid. All this I had seen, and yet, here I was, feeling restless and unsatisfied because for several days the recollection of a certain sweet and refined face, lit up by a pair of large, appealing eyes, had haunted my solitary hours.

It was that time since I had seen my neighbours. I had heard of them through my usual sources of information, and they seemed to me to be getting along all right; wherefore I had forborne to pay another visit lest it might have the appearance of “hanging around.” And by way of combating an inclination to do so now, I made up my mind to carry out a deferred intention, viz., pay a visit to Hensley’s place.

Tyingoza had been over to see me a couple of times, but made no allusion whatever to Falkner Sewin’s act of boyish idiocy: presumably rating it at its proper standard. But, I noticed that he wore a new head-ring. However, I hoped that was an incident forgotten; and as I heard nothing to the contrary, and my trade ran on as usual, I made no further reference to it either to Tyingoza or anybody else.

I arrived at the scene of Hensley’s disappearance about mid-day. The homestead stood in a long, narrow valley, thickly bushed. Behind, and almost overhanging it, was a great krantz whose smooth ironstone wall glowed like a vast slab of red-hot metal. The place was wild and picturesque to a degree, but—oh so hot!

Two men in shirts and trousers were playing quoits as I came up. I didn’t know either of them by sight.

“Good day,” said one of them, knocking off his play, and coming up. “Off-saddle won’t you? Dashed hot, isn’t it?”

“Thanks. I’m Glanton, from Isipanga,” I said in answer to his look of enquiry.

“Oh. Glad to know you, Glanton. I’m Kendrew, from nowhere in particular, at least not just now, price of transport being too *sleg* for anything.”

“Oh, you ride transport then? How many waggons?”

“Three in good times—one in bad; none in worse—as in the present case. This is Sergeant Simcox, of the N.M.P.,” introducing the other man, whom I noticed wore uniform trousers and boots. “He’s been helping me to look for my poor old uncle, you know.”

“Oh, Hensley was your uncle, was he?”

“Rather. But I’m next-of-kin—so if he’s not found I take. See?” with a comprehensive wink and jerk of the head which took in the surroundings.

I couldn’t help laughing at his coolness. He was a tall, rather good-looking young fellow, all wire and whipcord, with a chronically whimsical expression. The police sergeant was a hard bitten looking customer, typical of his line in life.

“Now what do you think of the affair?” I said. “Did you know Hensley well?”

“Hanged if I did. He didn’t like me. Did you?”

“Not very. I used to ride over and look him up now and again. But I can’t imagine him doing anything mysterious. In fact I should say he’d be the last man in the world to do it.”

“*Ja*. I don’t know what to think of it. I’ve been running the place since I heard of the affair—luckily I wasn’t on the road just then so was able to. You’ll stop and have some scoff of course—you too, sergeant?”

“Wish I could,” said the latter, “but it’s against rules. Must get back to my camp.”

“Hang rules. Who’s to know? Glanton here won’t split.”

He was right, wherefore I forbear to say whether Sergeant Simcox made the third at that festive board or not.

We talked of trade and transport-riding and frontier matters generally, but surprisingly little of the matter that had brought me there. In fact Kendrew rather seemed to shirk the subject; not in any sort of suspicious manner let me explain, but rather as if he thought the whole thing a bore, and a very great one at that.

“You see, Glanton,” he explained, presumably detecting a surprised look on my face, called there by the exceedingly light way in which he was taking things. “You see it isn’t as if we had had a lot to do with each other. Of course I don’t for a moment hope that the poor old boy has come to grief, in fact I can’t help feeling that he may turn up any moment and want to know what the devil I’ve taken up my quarters at his place for, in this free and easy way.”

After a good dinner, washed down with a glass or so of grog, we went to look at the place where the missing man had slept. This didn’t help towards any theory. If there had been foul play, whoever had been concerned in it had removed all traces long ago.

“A good hound, requisitioned at first, would have done something towards clearing up the mystery,” I said.

“Yes, but you might as well have requisitioned a good elephant, for all you’d get either round here,” laughed Kendrew. “Well, I shall just give it up as a bad job and leave it to Simcox. That’s what he draws his pay for. I’ll just sit tight and boss up things so long. That’s my job.”

“I’d like to have a word or two with the boy who saw him last,” I said. “Alone I mean.”

“Think you can get him to talk, eh? Well perhaps you may—I’ve heard of you, Glanton, and what a chap you are for managing Kafirs. All right, stop on till this evening, the boy’s out herding now. Then you can *indaba* him to your heart’s content after supper. You’ll stay the night of course.”

But I urged that such was not in my programme, and in fact I had some business to attend to next day irrespective of mere retail trade in the store. So we compromised by my consenting to remain till evening. There was sufficient moon for me to ride home by even if it rose somewhat late. I suggested that we should ride out into the veldt in the afternoon and I could interview the boy there. He would talk more freely that way, and Kendrew agreed.

The boy was a quiet, decent looking youngster, and was herding his flock in most exemplary fashion. I asked him his name.

“Pecamane, ’Nkose!”

“Have I seen you before?”

“More than once, *Nkose*. At Isipanga, at the store. Then again, when we danced and ate beef.”

“Ah. You were there then? Who is your chief?”

“Tyingoza, *Nkose*.”

Kendrew had ridden on, leaving me alone with the boy.

“Well then,” I said, “if Tyingoza is your chief you will be safe in telling *me* the story of your master’s ‘who is no longer here.’”

“*Ou*! *Nkose*. The only story I have to tell is what I told to the *Amapolise*, and he who now sits here”—meaning Kendrew. “But it is no story.”

He was right there, in that like the tale of the empty bottle there was nothing in it. His master had given him some final orders after supper, and he had gone over to the huts for the night. He was employed in the stable then.

And no one had opened the stable?

No, it was locked, and his master had the key. They had been obliged to break open the door in the morning to get at the horses.

There you see, there was nothing in this story, but then I had never expected there would be. What I wanted was to watch the face and note the manner of its narrator. This I had done, and keenly, with the result that I felt convinced that the boy knew no more about Hensley’s disappearance than I did myself. Upon this the police sergeant subsequently waxed somewhat superior. He resented the idea that what had baffled the wit of the police and native detectives combined might stand the slightest chance of being cleared up by me. However I didn’t take offence, although my opinion of the abilities of his force was but medium, and that of the native detectives nowhere, though this applied more to their morality than ingenuity. It happened that I was in a position to know something of the methods of the latter in “getting up” cases.

“Well good-bye, Glanton,” said Kendrew, as we shook hands. “Devilish glad you came over in a friendly way. And, I say—mind you repeat the operation and that often. I like a jolly, good sort of neighbourly neighbour.”

I promised him I would, as I climbed into the saddle—and the great krantz seemed to echo back our cheery good-bye in ghostly refrain.

I liked Kendrew, I decided as I rode along. He struck me as a lively, cheery sort of fellow with lots of fun in him, and not an atom of harm. Decidedly as a neighbour he would be an improvement on his poor old relative, who although a good chap enough had always been a bit of a fossil. That’s one of the advantages of the up-country or frontier life, you take a man as you find him and no make believe, or stiffness or ceremony. If he’s a good fellow he is, and all the better. If he isn’t why then he isn’t, and you needn’t have any more to do with him than you want, or make any pretence about it.

In the solitude as I took my way through the thorns the recollection of Hensley came upon me again, and I confess,

as I thought upon it there, under the midnight moon—for I had started back rather later than I had intended—a sort of creepy feeling came over me. What the deuce had become of the man? If he had got a fit of mental aberration, and taken himself off, he would have left some spoor, yet no sign of any had been lighted upon by those who had again and again made diligent search. I looked around. The bush sprays seemed to take on all manner of weird shapes; and once my horse, shying and snorting at a big hare, squatting up on its haunches like a big idiot, bang in the middle of the path, gave me quite an unpleasant start. The black brow of the krantz cut the misty, star-speckled skyline now receding on my left behind—and then—my horse gave forth another snort and at the same time shied so violently as to have unseated me, but that my nerves were—again I confess it—at something of an abnormal tension.

A figure was stealing along in the not very distinct moonlight; a human figure or—was it? Suddenly it stopped, half in shadow.

“Hi! Hallo! Who’s that,” I sung out.

There was no answer. Then I remembered that with my mind running upon Hensley I had used English. Yet the figure was that of a native. It wanted not the blackness of it in the uncertain light; the stealthy, sinuous movement of it was enough to show that. Yet, this certainty only enhanced the mystery. Natives are not wont to prowl about after dark with no apparent object, especially alone. In the first place they have a very whole-hearted dread of the night side of Nature—in the next such a proceeding is apt to gain for them more than a suspicion of practising the arts of witchcraft—a fatal reputation to set up yonder beyond the river, and, I hesitate not to assert, a very dangerous one to gain even here on the Queen’s side.

The figure straightened up, causing my fool of a horse to snort and describe further antics. Then a voice:

“Inkose! Iqalaqala. Be not afraid. It is only Ukozi, who watches over the world while the world sleeps—ah—ah! while the world sleeps.”

I must own to feeling something of a thrill at the name. This Ukozi was a diviner, or witch doctor, whose reputation was second to none among the Natal border tribes—ay and a great deal wider—and that is saying a good deal. Now of course the very mention of a witch doctor should arouse nothing but contemptuous merriment; yet the pretentions of the class are not all humbug by any means, indeed I have known a good few white men—hard bitten, up-country going men with no nonsense or superstition about them—who never fail to treat a genuine native witch doctor with very real consideration indeed.

“Greeting, father of mystery,” I answered, with some vague idea that the meeting all so unexpected and somewhat weird, might yet be not without its bearings on the fate of Hensley. “You are bent upon *múti* indeed, when the world is half through its dark time and the moon is low.”

“M-m!” he hummed. “The moon is low. Just so, Iqalaqala. You will not go home to-night.”

“Not go home!” I echoed, meaning to humour him, and yet, in my innermost self, conscious that there was a very real note of curiosity that could only come of whole, or partial, belief in the question. “And why should I not go home to-night?”

He shrugged his shoulders impressively. Then he said:

“Who may tell? But—you will not.”

I tried to laugh good-humouredly, but it was not genuine. Yet was not the thing absurd? Here was I, letting myself be humbugged—almost scared—by an old charlatan of a witch doctor, a fellow who made a comfortable living out of his credulous countrymen by fooling them with charms and spells and omens, and all sorts of similar quackery—I, a white man, with—I haven’t mentioned it before—an English public school education.

“Here, my father,” I said, producing a goodly twist of roll tobacco. “This is good—always good—whether by a comfortable fire, or searching for *múti* materials under the moon.”

He received it, in the hollow of both hands, as the native way is. I saw before me in the moonlight what was not at all the popular conception of the witch doctor—a little shrivelled being with furtive, cunning looks, and snaky eyes. No. This was a middle-aged man of fine stature, and broadly and strongly built: destitute too of charms or amulets in the way of adornments. His head-ring glistened in the moonlight, and for all clothing he wore the usual *mútya*. In fact the only peculiarity about him was that he had but one eye.

“What has become of Nyamaki?” I said, filling and lighting my pipe.

“U’ Nyamaki? Has he gone then?” was the answer which, of course, was a bit of assumed ignorance.

“Now how can the father of wisdom ask such a question?” I said. “He—to whom nothing is dark!”

Ukozi’s face was as a mask. He uttered a single grunt—that was all.

“The whites will offer large reward to the man who finds him,” I went on.

“Will he who sits yonder”—meaning my recent entertainer—“offer large reward?” was the answer, a sudden whimsical flash illuminating the dark, impassive face.

“That I cannot say. But I should think it probable. And now you are seeking midnight *múti* so as to obtain such reward. Take care,” I went on, chaffing him. “To wander at midnight would not be safe *la pa*,” pointing in the direction of the Zulu country. “But here we are under the Queen.”

“The Queen! *Au*! Even the Queen cannot do everything.”

“She just about can though,” I answered decisively.

“Can she find Nyamaki?” he said, putting his head on one side.

This was a facer. I didn’t know what the deuce to answer. While I was hesitating he went on:

“*Au*! Well, Iqalaqala, turn back and make your bed with him yonder, for you will not go home to-night *Hamba gahle*.”

“*Hlala gahle*, father of mystery,” I answered lightly touching my horse with the spur.

You will think it strange I should make so light of his warning, yet as I resumed my way up the valley, no thought of material danger came into my mind as I pondered over it. I would show him that wise as he was, and great his reputation, yet he did not know everything. I would have the crow of him next time we met, when—

My horse had suddenly cocked his ears, then uttering a loud snort he stopped dead—so suddenly indeed that I as nearly as possible pitched over his head. Yet, there was nothing in sight.

The path, here rather steep, narrowed between high thick bush, just over which on either hand, rose two straight but entirely insignificant krantzes.

“He has seen a snake, a big mamba perhaps,” I decided. “Well, let the brute crawl away, as he’s sure to do if alarmed. Then we’ll get on again.”

But we didn’t. I shouted a little, and swished at the bushes with my whip. Then I spurred my horse forward again. The confounded animal wouldn’t budge.

“Here, this won’t do,” I said to myself feeling angry. Then I got off. If the fool wouldn’t go in the ordinary way perhaps he would lead. Would he? Not a bit of it; on the contrary he rucked back at his bridle so violently as nearly to tear it out of my hand. I got into the saddle again.

“Now you’ve got to go, damn it!” I growled, letting him have both rowels till I thought I could hear the bones squeak.

In response he first plunged violently, then kicked, then reared, finally slewing round so quickly as nearly to unseat me. And now I became aware of a strange sickly scent, almost like that of a drug—yet how could it be? Then, as it grew stronger, it took on a vile effluvium as of something dead. Yet; I had passed over that very spot but a few hours back, and nothing of the kind had been there then. The horse was now standing quite still, his head towards the way we had come, all in a sweat and trembling violently.

And now I own that some of his scare began to take hold of me. What did it mean—what the very deuce did it mean? What infernal witchcraft was this that could hold me up here on a path I had ridden several times before, on this identical horse too? Yet, here in the still ghostly midnight hour alone, the affair began to grow dashed creepy. I made one more attempt, and that a half-hearted one—then giving the horse the rein let him take his own way, and that way was straight back to Kendrew’s.

Some thought of making a *détour*, and passing the bewitched point by taking a wide sweep, came into my mind, but that would have involved some infernally rough travelling, besides the moon wouldn’t last much longer, and who could say whether the result might not turn out the same, for by now the witch doctor’s declaration had carried its full weight. So I was soon knocking Kendrew out of his first sleep, with literally a lame excuse to the effect that my steed had gone lame, and it was no use trying to get over two hours of rough road with him that night.

“All right, old chap,” sung out Kendrew, in a jolly voice, as he let me in. “Have a glass of grog first, and then we’ll take him round to the stable. You can turn in in any room you like.”

I hoped he wouldn’t notice that neither then nor on the following morning did my horse show the slightest sign of lameness. But I had made up my mind to say no word to him of what had occurred—and didn’t.

Chapter Ten.

Falkner Pugnacious.

“Well but—who are you? What’s your name? Ain’t ashamed of it, are you?”

“Ashamed of it? I’ll darned soon let you know if I am or not, and teach you to keep a civil tongue in your head into the bargain.”

Such was the dialogue that came to my ears very early on the morning following the events just recorded. The voices were right in front of my window and I chuckled, for I knew them both—knew one for that of my present host, the other for that of no less a personage than Falkner Sewin.

I repeat, I chuckled, for there was a side of the situation which appealed to my sense of humour. Falkner Sewin’s temper and dignity alike were ruffled. There was going to be a row. Falkner had long wanted taking down a peg. It was highly probable that the said lowering process would now be effected.

In about a moment I was at the window. The contending parties, by neither of whom was I observed, were drawn up in battle array. Falkner, who had apparently just arrived on horseback, had dismounted, and was advancing upon Kendrew in a sort of prize ring attitude. The latter for his part, simply stood and waited, his face wearing an expression of indifference that might be extremely provoking. No, I was not going to interfere—not yet. A little bloodletting would do Falkner no harm—or, for the matter of that, either of them.

“Come on,” sung out the latter. “Come on, can’t you. Not afraid, are you?”

“Not much. I’m waiting for you.”

Then they went at it—hammer and tongs. Falkner had science—I could see that—but Kendrew was as hard as nails, and a precious tough customer to handle, and made up for his lack of science by consummate coolness; and with an eye keen as a hawk's whenever he saw his chance, he confined himself so far to standing his ground, the while Falkner waltzed round him, for all the world like a dog on the seashore when yapping round some big crab which he doesn't feel quite equal to closing in upon. For a little while I watched these manoeuvres in a state of semi-choke for stifled laughter, till they got to work in earnest, and then, by Jingo, it was no child's play.

"Time!" I sung out stentoriously. "Haven't you two fellows pummelled each other enough?" I went on, appearing before the combatants. "What's it all about, any way?"

"Glanton—by the Lord!" ejaculated Falkner, startled, and, I fancied, looking a trifle ashamed of himself.

"What's it all about?" repeated Kendrew. "Well, you see, Glanton, I ain't naturally a quarrelsome chap, but when a man comes onto my place, and begins upon me in a God Almighty 'haw-haw' sort of tone as 'my good fellow' and doesn't even condescend to tell me who he is when asked, why it's enough to get my back up, isn't it?"

I thought it was, but I wasn't going to say so, and his allusion to "my place" made me smile.

"Look here," I said decisively. "This is all a misunderstanding. You didn't know each other, now I'll introduce you. Sewin, this is Kendrew, a very good fellow when you get to know him—Kendrew, this is Sewin, a very good fellow when you get to know *him*. Now shake hands."

And they did, but the expression upon each face was so comical that I could hardly keep from roaring, which would have upset the whole understanding; in that each would have felt more savage at being made ridiculous.

"Well, if I've been uncivil I'll not be above owning it," said Kendrew. "So come inside Mr—Sewin, and we'll have a drink and think no more about it."

"So we will," growled Falkner, partly through his handkerchief, for he had undergone the bloodletting which I had told myself would be salutary in his case. However there was no harm done, and having roared for a boy to off-saddle, Kendrew led the way inside, on conviviality intent.

"You're early here, Sewin," I said. "Where did you sleep?"

"Sleep. In the blessed veldt. I called in at your place, but as far as I could make out your nigger said you'd gone to Helpmakaar. So I thought I'd go down to the river bank and try that place you pointed out to us for a buck, then call back later and have a shakedown with you when you come back."

Here Kendrew interrupted us by bellowing to his boy to put on a great deal of beefsteak to fry, and to hurry up with it. "After a night in the veldt you'll be ready for breakfast, I should think," he explained heartily.

While we were at breakfast Falkner gave us a further outline of his doings. A mist had come up along the river bank, and in the result he had completely lost his bearings. Instead of taking his way back to my place he had wandered on in the opposite direction, tiring his horse and exasperating himself, as every high ridge surmounted only revealed a further one with a deep, rugged, bushy valley intervening. At last his horse had refused to go any further, and he had to make up his mind to lie by in the veldt and wait till morning.

"The rum part of it was," he went on, "I couldn't have been very far from here—and you'd think a horse would have known by instinct there was a stable in front of him. Well, I, for one, am choked off belief in the marvellous instinct of horses, and all that sort of rot. This brute wasn't tired either—he simply and flatly refused to go on."

"Where was that?" I said, now roused to considerable interest. "At least, I mean—was it far from here?"

"No. I just said it wasn't," he answered, a little testily. "It was just where the path dives through a pile of red rocks—you would know it, Glanton. It's like a sort of natural gateway. Well nothing on earth would induce that silly beast to go through there, and, d'you know, upon my soul I began to feel a bit creepy—remembering how the niggers have likely got a sort of grudge against me. So I thought after all, I'd better stay where I was and wait till morning—and—here I am."

"Well, it wouldn't have been anybody laying for you, Sewin. You may make your mind easy on that point," I said. "Possibly though, there may have been a snake, a big mamba perhaps, lying in the path just at that point—and your horse knew it. That'd be sufficient to hold him back."

"By Jove! I shouldn't wonder," he said. "Wish I could have glimpsed him though. A full charge of treble A would have rid this country of one snake at any rate."

Falkner's experience had so exactly corresponded with my own as to impress me. While I had been held up in this eerie and mysterious manner on one side of the pile of rocks, the same thing had happened to him on the other, and, so far as I could make out, at just about the same time. Well, we would see if anything of the sort should befall us presently when we passed the spot in the broad light of day. The while the two late combatants had been discussing the disappearance of Hensley.

"Rum thing to happen," commented Falkner. "Ain't you rather—well, uncomfortable, at times, here, all alone?"

"Not me. You see my theory is that the poor old boy went off his nut and quietly wandered away somewhere and got into some hole, if not into the river. Now I've no idea of going off my nut, so I don't feel in the least uncomfortable. In fact decidedly the reverse."

"Well but—what of the niggers?"

Kendrew let go a jolly laugh.

"They're all right," he said. "Let's go and look at your gee, Glanton. Hope he's still lame, so you can't get on, then we'll all three have a jolly day of it."

I, for one, knew we were destined to have nothing of the kind—not in the sense intended by Kendrew, that is—and I wanted to get home. Needless to say when my steed was led forth he walked with his usual elasticity, manifesting not the smallest sign of lameness.

“That’s dashed odd,” commented Kendrew, after carefully examining the inside of every hoof and feeling each pastern. “Oh, well, he’s sure to begin limping directly you start, so you’d better give him another day to make sure.”

But this I resisted, having my own reasons for making a start Falkner apparently had his too, for he was proof against the other’s pressing invitation to remain and make a day of it.

“Well after all, you might get to punching each other’s heads again, and I not there to prevent it,” I said, jocularly. “Good-bye, Kendrew.”

“Not half a bad chap that, after all,” said Falkner, as we rode along together.

“No. And if you’d wait to find that out before going for people you’d get along much better in these parts,” I answered. And then I improved upon the occasion to read him a considerable lecture. To do him justice he took it very well.

“Look,” he broke in. “It must have been just the other side of this that I got stuck last night.”

I had not needed my attention to be drawn to the spot, for already, as we were approaching it I had been noting the behaviour of my horse. It was normal. Beyond a slight cocking of the ears we might as well have been traversing any other section of our path; indeed it was as though the strange interruption of last night had been a matter of sheer imagination, but for one consideration. Of the extraordinary and overwhelming effluvium which had poisoned the air then, there was now no longer a trace, and this disposed of the theory that anything dead had been lying thereabouts. Had such a cause been responsible for it, the air would not have cleared so quickly. No—Ukozi had played some trick upon me for some reason of his own, but—what was that reason? Even a witch doctor does not play the fool without some motive.

“I believe your theory is the correct one, after all, Glanton,” interrupted my companion. “Depend upon it some big black beast of a mamba was stopping the way. Look. Here’s where I gave up.”

“So I see,” I answered, for we had now got through to the other side of the ridge of rocks.

“See? How?”

“Spoor. Look. The dust is all disturbed and kicked about. Here’s where your gee refused.”

“So it is. I see it now myself. What a cute chap you are, Glanton. Oh, and I say, Glanton—” after a momentary hesitation, “don’t let on to them at home about that little breeze I had with Kendrew down there, that’s a good chap.”

I promised. This was his motive, then, in resolving to return with me? But it was not.

“When are you going on that trading trip—into the Zulu country?” he went on.

“In two or three weeks’ time,” I answered.

“By Jove, but I would like to go with you. I’d like to make a little for myself. I want it all, I can tell you. But even that’s not the first consideration. I’d like to see those parts and gain some experience. You wouldn’t find me in the way, I promise you. I’d do every mortal thing you said—and keep out of ructions, if that’s what you’re afraid of.”

“What about the farm?” I answered. “Your uncle isn’t equal to looking after it single handed.”

“Oh, that might be arranged. That chap you sent us—Ivondwe—is worth his weight in gold—in fact I never would have believed such a thing as a trustworthy nigger existed, before he came.”

Now I have already put on record that the last thing on earth I desired was Falkner’s company on the expedition I was planning—and the same still held good—and yet—and yet—he was Aïda Sewin’s relative and she seemed to take a great interest in him. Perhaps it was with an idea of pleasing her—or I wonder if it was a certain anxiety as to leaving this young man at her side while I was away myself, goodness knows, but the fact remains that before we reached my place he had extracted from me what was more than half a promise that I would entertain the idea.

And this I knew, even then, was tantamount to an entire promise.

Chapter Eleven.

A Farewell Visit.

“Nyamaki has not returned?” queried Tyingoza, who, seated, in his accustomed place under the window of the store, had been taking snuff and chatting about things in general.

“Not that I have heard of,” I answered. “I was at his place but a day or two back. Will he return, Tyingoza?”

“And the young one—he who sits in Nyamaki’s place—does he think he will return?”

What was the object of this answer turned into another question? What was in Tyingoza’s mind? However I replied:

“He is inclined to think not. He thinks his relation has wandered away somewhere—perhaps into the river, and will

never be heard of again."

"Ah! Into the river! Well, that might be, Iqalaqala. Into the river! The ways of you white people are strange, *impela*!"

Tyingoza, you see, was enigmatical, but then he often was, especially if he thought I was trying to get behind his mind—as he put it. Clearly he was not going to commit himself to any definite opinion regarding the disappearing Hensley.

"Ukozi is in these parts," I went on.

"Ukozi? Ha! I have not seen him. Did he visit you here?"

"Not here," I answered, with intent to be as enigmatical as himself.

"Ukozi is a very lion among *izanusi*. Why do not the white people get him to find Nyamaki?"

"And the practice of an *isanusi* is not allowed by the white people. How then can they make use of such?" I said.

The chief shrugged his shoulders slightly, and there was a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

"It is as you say, Iqalaqala. Yet their *Amapolise* cannot find him. You white people know a great deal, but you do not know everything."

"Now, Tyingoza, I would ask: What people does?"

Then he laughed and so did I, and this was all I got out of my attempt at "pumping" Tyingoza. Yet, not quite all. That suggestion of his as to employing the witch doctor was destined to stick. Afterwards it was destined to come back to me with very great force indeed.

Now I began to shut up the store, early in the day as it was, for I meant to go over to the Sewins. It would be almost my last visit: for the preparations for my trip were nearly complete and in two or three days I proposed to start. Moreover I had received a note from the old Major, couched in a reproachful vein on behalf of his family, to the effect that I was becoming quite a stranger of late, and so forth; all of which went to show that my plan of not giving them more of my company than I thought they could do with—had answered.

"So you are going *kwa Zulu* directly?" said Tyingoza, as he took his leave. "And not alone. That is a pity."

He had never referred to Falkner's practical joke. Now, of course, I thought he was referring to it.

"Well, the boy is only a boy," I answered. "I will keep him in order once over there, that I promise."

Again his eyes twinkled, as he bade me farewell with all his usual cordiality.

Not much of this remark did I think, as I took my way down the now well worn bush path, but I own that the idea of employing Ukozi to throw light on the disappearance of Hensley, gave me something to think of—for as I have said before, I had reason to respect the powers claimed—and undoubtedly possessed—by many of his craft. I would put it to Kendrew. It was his affair not mine, and if anyone moved in the matter it should be he.

There was an ominous stillness about the Sewins' homestead as I approached, and I own to a feeling of considerable disappointment as the thought crossed my mind that the family was away, but reassurance succeeded in the shape of a large white dog, which came rushing furiously down the path, barking in right threatening fashion—only to change into little whines of delight and greeting as it recognised me. This was a factor in the Sewin household which I have hitherto omitted to introduce. He was one of the Campagna breed of sheep herding dogs, and was Aïda's especial property, she having discovered him as a puppy during a tour in Italy. He was a remarkably handsome beast, pure white, and was of the size and strength of a wolf, to which he bore a strong family likeness. He had honoured me with his friendship from the very first—a mark of favour which he was by no means wont to bestow upon everybody, as his mistress was careful to point out.

"Well, Arlo, old chap. Where are they all?" I said, as the dog trotted before my horse, turning to look back with an occasional friendly whine. As I drew rein in front of the stoep Falkner came forth, looking very handsome and athletic in his snowy linen suit, for it was hot.

"Hallo Glanton, glad to see you," he said, quite cordially, but in rather a subdued tone for him. "Come round and off-saddle. They'll be out in a minute, they're having prayers, you know. I slipped out when I heard your horse."

It was Sunday, and the Major, I remembered, made a point of reading the church service on that day: in the middle of which I had arrived.

"Tell you what, old chap," he went on. "I'm rather glad of the excuse. Beastly bore that sort of thing, don't you know, but the old people wouldn't like it if I were to cut."

"Only the old people?" I said.

"No, the whole bilin' of 'em. Life wouldn't be worth living for the rest of the day if I didn't cut in. So I do—just to please them all. See? Well, we'll go and smoke a pipe till they come out."

Falkner had pulled out quite a genial stop to play upon for my benefit—but then, I had agreed to take him with me on the trip. On the subject of which he now waxed eloquent. Would we certainly be on the road by Wednesday, and was there anything he could do, and so forth? I was able to reassure him abundantly on these points, and his exuberant delight was like that of a schoolboy on the eve of the holidays, causing me to think to myself rather sadly, that were I in his shoes, with a home like this, and the society of sweet, refined English ladies for my daily portion, I would not be in the least eager to exchange it for the roughness and ups and downs of a trading trip and the kraals of savages. But then after all, there was a considerable difference in our years, and my experience was a good deal behind me, whereas his

was not.

Soon the family came out, and I was received with all the accustomed cordiality, and rather more. Why had I not been near them for so long, especially as I was about to go away for quite a considerable time, and so forth? I began to feel self-reproachful, as I thought of my motive, but it was not easy to find an excuse, the usual "rather busy," and when I tried I could see Aïda Sewin's clear eyes reading my face, and there was the faintest glimmer of a smile about her lips that seemed to say plainly: "I don't believe a word of it."

"So you're going to take this fellow with you after all, Glanton," said the Major as we sat down to lunch. "Well, you'll have a handful, by Jove you will! I hope you'll keep him in order, that's all."

"Oh he'll be all right, Major," I said. "And the experience won't do him any harm either."

"Don't you go trying any more experiments at the expense of the chiefs' head-rings up there, Falkner," said Edith, the younger girl.

"Oh shut up," growled Falkner. "That joke's a precious stale one. I seem to be getting 'jam and judicious advice' all round, by Jove!"

"Well, and you want it—at any rate the advice—only you never take it," was the retort.

"Nobody ever does, Miss Edith," I said, coming to his rescue. "Advice is one of those commodities people estimate at its own cost—nothing to wit; and set the same value upon it."

"Now you're cynical, Mr Glanton," she answered, "and I don't like cynical people."

"That's a calamity, but believe me, I'm not naturally so. Why I rather set up for being a philanthropist," I said.

"You certainly are one, as we have every reason to know," interposed her sister.

I felt grateful but foolish, having no mind to be taken seriously. But before I could stutter forth any reply, which was bound to have been an idiotic one, she went on, tactfully:

"For instance that boy you sent us—Ivondwe. Why he's a treasure. Everything has gone right since he came. He can talk English, for one thing."

"Can he? That's an accomplishment I should never have given him credit for, and I don't know that it's altogether a recommendation. You know, we don't care for English-speaking natives. But you mustn't talk it to him, Miss Sewin. You must talk to him in the vernacular. How are you getting on, by the way?"

"Oh, indifferently. You might have given me a little more help, you know."

The reproach carried its own sting. Of course I might. What an ass I was to have thrown away such an opportunity.

"Yes, he's a first-rate boy, Glanton," said the Major. "I don't know what we should do without him now."

"You haven't started in to punch his head yet, eh Falkner?" I said, banteringly, rather with the object of turning attention from my share in this acquisition.

"The curious part of it is that Arlo won't take to him," went on Miss Sewin. "He's on perfectly good terms with the other boys but he seems to hate this one. Not that Ivondwe isn't kind to him. He tries all he can to make friends with him but it's no good. Arlo won't even take food from him. Now why is this?"

"I'm afraid that's beyond me," I answered, "unless it is that the instinct of a dog, like that of a horse, isn't quite so supernaturally accurate as we accustom ourselves to think."

This was a subject that was bound to start discussion, and animated at that—and soon I found myself in somewhat of a corner, the ladies, especially, waxing warm over the heretical insinuation I had made. Then the Major, drawing on his experiences as a cavalry officer, took my side on the subject of equine intelligence, or lack of it, and Falkner took up the impartial advocate line, and we were all very jolly and merry through it all, and certainly conversation did not lag.

Lunch over, the Major announced his intention of having forty winks, and the rest of us adjourned to the stoep, and roomy cane chairs.

"One thing I like about this country," pronounced Falkner, when he had got a cigar in full blast, and was lounging luxuriously in a hammock—a form of recumbency I detest—"and that is that provided you're in the shade you can always sit out of doors. Now in India you can't. It's a case of shaded rooms, and *chiks*, and a black beast swinging a punkah—whom you have to get up and kick every half-hour when he forgets to go on—till about sundown. Here it's glorious."

I was inclined to share his opinion, and said so. At the same time there came into my mind the full consciousness that the glorification here lay in the peculiar circumstances of the case—to wit the presence and companionship of these two sweet and refined girls. The elder was in creamy white, relieved by a flower or two, which set off her soft dark beauty to perfection; the other was garbed in some light blue gossamer sort of arrangement which matched her eyes and went wonderfully with her golden hair, and ladies, if you want anything more definitely descriptive I'm afraid you'll be disappointed, for what do I, Godfrey Glanton, trader in the Zulu, know about such awesome and wondrous mysteries? I only know—and that I do know—when anything appeals to me as perfect and not to be improved upon—and the picture which these two presented certainly did so appeal.

Outside, the blaze of sunlight—rich, full, and golden, without being oppressive or overpowering—lay slumbrous upon the sheeny roll of foliage. Here and there the red face of a krantz gleamed like bronze, and away on a distant spur the dark ring of a native kraal sent upward its spiral of blue smoke. Bright winged little sugar birds flitted familiarly in and out among the passion flower creeper which helped to shade the stoep, quite unaffected by our presence and conversation—though half scared temporarily as a laugh would escape Falkner or myself. Striped butterflies hovered among the

sunflowers in front, and the booming hum of large bees mingled with the shriller whizz of long-waisted hornets sailing in and out of their paper-like nests under the roof—and at these if they ventured too low, Arlo, whose graceful white form lay curled up beside his mistress' chair, would now and again fling up his head with a vicious snap. The scene, the hour, was one of the most perfect and restful peace: little did we think, we who sat there, enjoying it to the full, what of horror and dread lay before us ere we should look upon such another.

Chapter Twelve.

The Mystery of the Waterhole.

Suddenly Arlo sprang up, barking furiously.

"Shut up, you brute," growled Falkner, for this sudden interruption had, as he put it, made him jump. But the dog heeded him not, as he sprang up and rushed down the steps still giving vehement tongue.

"Be quiet, Arlo, do you hear!" ordered his mistress. "It's only Ivondwe."

The calm clear voice commanded obedience where Falkner's bluster did not. To the furious barking succeeded a series of threatening growls, not loud but deep. In the midst of which the innocent cause of the disturbance appeared, smiling, and as little perturbed by this sudden and rather formidable onslaught, as though it were a matter of an ordinary kraal cur.

To the physiognomist this Ivondwe was a remarkably prepossessing native—rather handsome in the good-looking style of his race. He had a pleasant, open countenance, good-humoured withal, and when he smiled it would be hard to equal his display of magnificent white teeth. Though somewhat past his first youth and the owner of a couple of wives he did not wear the head-ring; for he was fond of earning money in doing spells of work for white men, such as waggon driving, or the sort of job on which he was now engaged: and this being so he held, and perhaps rightly, that the ring would not be exactly in keeping. I had known him well for some time and had always had a high opinion of him.

Now he saluted, and addressing himself to Falkner, in very fair English, asked leave to go over to a neighbouring kraal after the cattle were in. There was a merrymaking there, on the strength of the wedding of someone or other of his numerous kinsfolk.

"So, Ivondwe," I said, in the vernacular, when he had got his answer. "So you speak with the tongue of the Amangisi, and I knew it not?"

He laughed.

"That is so, Iqalaqala," he answered. "Yet it is well for Umsindo, who is long since tired of talking to deaf ones. *Au*! How shall he talk yonder—*kwa* Majendwa?"

Umsindo, meaning a man who is given to swagger, was Falkner's native name, though he didn't know it.

"That we shall see," I said. "It may be that by then his tongue will have become loosened. But now, while he is away you must do well by these here. They treat you well, and their hands are very open—so open that soon you will be for building a new hut."

He laughed, and owned that such might indeed be the case. All the while the great white dog was walking up and down behind him, eyeing his calves and snarling malevolently.

"The dog," I went on. "He is very unfriendly towards you. Why?"

"Who may say? The dogs of the white people are seldom friendly to us, and our dogs are seldom friendly to the whites. And this dog is very white."

I got out a large native snuff tube I always carried, and gave him some.

"Come up to Isipanga before we start," I said. "I have a present there for him who should serve these faithfully."

"You are my father, Iqalaqala," and with this formula of thanks, he once more saluted and went his way.

"What have you been talking about all this time?" said Edith Sewin. "By the way isn't it extraordinary that Arlo won't take to Ivondwe? Such a good boy as he is, too."

"Perhaps he's a thundering great scoundrel at bottom," said Falkner, "and Arlo's instinct gets below the surface."

"Who's a thundering great scoundrel at bottom, Falkner?" said Mrs Sewin's voice in the doorway.

"Eh. Oh come now, aunt. You mustn't use these slang terms you know. Look, you're shocking Glanton like anything."

"You'll shock him more for an abominably rude boy who pokes fun at his elders," laughed the old lady. "But come in now and have tea. What a lovely afternoon it is—but a trifle drowsy."

"Meaning that somebody's been asleep," rejoined Falkner mischievously, climbing out of his hammock. "Oh well. So it is. Let's go for a stroll presently or we shall all be going to sleep. Might take the fishing lines and see what we can get out of the waterhole."

"Fishing lines? And it's Sunday," said Mrs Sewin, who was old fashioned.

"Oh I forgot. Never mind the lines. We can souse Arlo in and teach him to dive."

“We can do nothing of the kind,” said Arlo’s owner, decisively. “He came within an ace of splitting his poor dear head the last time you threw him in, and from such a height too. What do you think of that, Mr Glanton?” turning to me. And then she gave me the story of how Falkner had taken advantage of the too obedient and confiding Arlo—and of course I sympathised.

When we got fairly under way for our stroll—I had some difficulty by the bye in out-manoeuvring the Major’s efforts to keep me pottering about listening to his schemes as to his hobby—the garden to wit—the heat of the day had given place to the most perfect part of the same, the glow of the waning afternoon, when the sun is but one hour or so off his disappearance. We sauntered along a winding bush path, perforce in single file, and soon, when this widened, I don’t know how, but I found myself walking beside Miss Sewin.

I believe I was rather silent. The fact is, reason myself out of it as I would, I was not in the least anxious to leave home, and now that it had come to the point would have welcomed any excuse to have thrown up the trip. Yet I was not a millionaire—very far from it—consequently money had to be made somehow, and here was a chance of making quite a tidy bit—making it too, in a way that to myself was easy, and absolutely congenial. Yet I would have shirked it. Why?

“What is preoccupying your thoughts to such an alarming extent,” said my companion, flashing at me a smile in which lurked a spice of mischief. “Is it the cares and perils of your expedition—or what?”

“By Jove—I must apologise. You must find me very dull, Miss Sewin,” I answered, throwing off my preoccupation as with an effort. “The fact is I believe I was thinking of something of the kind—ruling out the ‘perils.’ Do you know, I believe you’ve all been rather spoiling me here—spoiling me, I mean, for—well, for my ordinary life. But—anyhow, the memory of the times I have known lately—of days like this for instance—will be something to have with one, wherever one is.”

I was stopped by a surprised look in her face. Her eyes had opened somewhat, as I had delivered myself of the above rather lame declamation. Yet I had spoken with quite an unwonted degree of warmth, when contrasted with my ordinary laconic way of expressing myself. “Good Lord!” I thought, “I seem to be getting sentimental. No wonder she thinks I’ve got softening of the brain.”

But if she thought so she gave no sign of anything of the sort. On the contrary her tone was kind and sympathetic, as she said:

“Strange how little we can enter into the lives of others. Now yours, I suppose, is lonely enough at times.”

“Oh, I’ve nothing to complain of,” I answered with a laugh, anxious to dispel any impression of sentimentality which my former words and tone might have set up. “I started on this sort of life young, and have been at it in one way or another ever since. It hasn’t used me badly, either.”

She looked at me, with that straight, clear glance, and again a little smile that was rather enigmatical, hovered around her lips. But before she could say anything, even if she had intended to, Falkner’s voice was raised in front.

“Wake up, Aïda, and come along. I’m just going to heave Arlo in.”

“No. You’re not to,” she cried hurrying forward.

The others had already reached the waterhole, and there was Falkner, on the rock brink, holding on to Arlo, grinning mischievously. The dog was licking his hands, and whining softly, his tail agitating in deprecatory wags. He wasn’t in the least anxious for the plunge—and speaking personally I should have been uncommonly sorry to have undertaken to make him take it against his will, but then Falkner was one of the family. Now there was a half playful scrimmage between him and his cousin, in the result of which Arlo was rescued from taking what really was rather a high leap, and frisked and gambolled around us in delight.

This waterhole or pool, was rather a curious one. It filled a cup-like basin about twenty-five yards across, surrounded by precipitous rocks save at the lower end, and here, overflowing, it trickled down to join the Tugela, about half a mile distant. It was fed from a spring from above, which flowed down a gully thickly festooned with maidenhair fern. Where we now stood, viz. at the highest point, there was a sheer drop of about twenty feet to the surface of the water—a high leap for a dog, though this one had done it two or three times and had come to no harm. The hole was of considerable depth, and right in the centre rose a flat-headed rock. It was a curious waterhole, as I said, and quite unique, and I more than suspected, though I could never get anything definite out of them, that the natives honoured it with some sort of superstitious regard. Incidentally it held plenty of coarse fish, of no great size, likewise stupendous eels—item of course mud-turtles galore.

“Hie in, old dog! Hie in!” cried Falkner.

But Arlo had no intention whatever of “hie-ing in,” being in that sense very much of an “old dog.” He barked in response and frisked and wagged his tail, the while keeping well beyond reach of Falkners treacherous grasp.

“Rum place this, Glanton,” said the latter. “I wonder there ain’t any crocs in it.”

“How do you know there are not?” I said.

“Oh hang it, what d’you mean? Why we’ve swum here often enough, haven’t we?”

“Not very. Still—it’s jolly deep you know. There may be underground tunnels, connecting it with anywhere?”

“Oh hang it. I never thought of that. What a chap you are for putting one off a thing, Glanton.”

“I never said there were, mind. I only suggested the possibility.”

He raised himself on one elbow, and his then occupation—shying stones at every mud-turtle that showed an unwary head—was suspended.

“By Jove! Are there any holes like this round Hensley’s place?” he said earnestly.

“Not any,” I answered. “This one is unique; hence its curiosity.”

“Because, if there were, that might account for where the old chap’s got to. Underground tunnels! I never thought of that, by Jove. What d’you think of that, Edith? Supposing you were having a quiet swim here, and some jolly croc grabbed you by the leg and lugged you into one of those underground tunnels Glanton says there are. Eh?” grinned Falkner, who was fond of teasing his cousins.

“I wouldn’t be having a quiet swim in it, for one thing. I think it’s a horrid place,” answered the girl, while I for my part, mildly disclaimed having made any such statement as that which he had attributed to me.

“Bosh!” he declared. “Why you can take splendid headers from the middle rock there. Oh—good Lord!”

The exclamation was forcible, and to it was appended a sort of amazed gasp from all who saw. And in truth I was not the least amazed of the lot. For there was a disturbance in the depths of the pool. One glimpse of something smooth, and sinuous, and shiny—something huge, and certainly horrible—was all we obtained, as not even breaking the surface to which it rose, the thing, whatever it might be—sank away from sight.

“What was it?”

“Can’t say for certain,” I said, replying to the general query. “It didn’t come up high enough to take any shape at all. It might have been a big python lying at the bottom of the hole, and concluding it had lain there long enough came up, when the sight of us scared it down again. I’m pretty sure it wasn’t a crocodile.”

“Tell you what, Glanton. You don’t catch me taking any more headers in there again in a hurry,” said Falkner. “Ugh! If we’d only known!”

“There is prestige in the unknown,” I said. “It may be something quite harmless—some big lizard, or a harmless snake.”

“Well it’s dashed odd we should just have been talking of that very sort of thing,” said the Major. “Let’s keep quiet now and watch, and see if it comes up again.”

We did, but nothing came of it. Indeed if I alone had seen the thing I should have distrusted my senses, should have thought my imagination was playing me false. But they had all seen it.

“I shall come down here again with the rifle and watch for an hour or two a day,” said Falkner. “Or how would it be to try bait for the beast, whatever it is—eh, Glanton?”

“Well you might try to-morrow. Otherwise there isn’t much time,” I answered. “We trek on Wednesday, remember.”

Now all hands having grown tired of sitting there, on the watch for what didn’t appear, a homeward move was suggested, and duly carried out. We had covered a good part of the distance when Miss Sewin made a discovery, and an unpleasant one. A gold coin which was wont to hang on her watch chain had disappeared.

“I must go back,” she said. “I wouldn’t lose that coin for anything. You know, Mr Glanton, I have a superstition about it.”

She went on to explain that she had it at the time we had seen the disturbance in the waterhole so that it must have come off on the way down, even if not actually while we were on the rocks up there. Of course I offered to go back and find it for her, but she would not hear of it. She must go herself, and equally of course I couldn’t let her go alone. Would I if I could? Well, my only fear was that Falkner would offer his escort. But he did not, only suggesting that as it was late it was not worth while bothering about the thing to-night. He would be sure to find it in the morning when he came up with a rifle to try and investigate the mystery of the pool. But she would not hear of this. She insisted on going back, and—I was jubilant.

I knew the coin well by sight. It was of heavy unalloyed gold, thickly stamped with an inscription in Arabic characters. But, as we took our way along the bush path, expecting every moment to catch the gleam of it amid the dust and stones, nothing of the sort rewarded our search, and finally we came to the rocks at the head of the pool.

“This is extraordinary and more than disappointing,” she said, as a hurried glance around showed no sign of the missing coin. “I know I had it on here because I was fingering it while we were looking at the water. I wouldn’t have lost it for anything. What can have become of it, Mr Glanton? Do you think it can have fallen into the water?”

“That, of course, isn’t impossible,” I said. “But—let’s have another search.”

I was bending down with a view to commencing this, when a cry from Aïda arrested me.

“Oh, there it is. Look.”

She was standing on the brink of the rocks where they were at their highest above water, peering over. Quickly I was at her side, and following her glance could make out something that glittered. It was in a crevice about five feet below, but as for being able to make it out for certain, why we could not. The crevice was narrow and dark.

“I think I can get at that,” I said, having taken in the potentialities of hand and foothold.

“No—no,” she answered. “I won’t have it. What if you were to fall into the water—after what we have just seen? No. Leave it till to-morrow, and bring a rope.”

This was absolutely sound sense, but I’ll own to a sort of swagger, show-off, inclination coming into my mind. The climb down was undoubtedly risky, but it would be on her account.

“As to that,” I answered with a laugh, “even if I were to tumble in, I should make such an almighty splash as to scare the father of all crocodiles, or whatever it is down there. By the time he’d recovered I should be out again on the other

side."

"Don't risk it," she repeated earnestly. "Leave it till to-morrow. With a long *reim* you can easily get down."

But I was already partly over the rock. In another moment I should have been completely so, with the almost certain result, as I now began to realise, of tumbling headlong into the pool below, when a diversion occurred. Arlo, who had been lying at his mistress' feet, now sprang up, and charged furiously at the nearest line of bush, barking and growling like mad.

Chapter Thirteen.

The Incident of the Lost Coin.

The dog stopped short, hackles erect, and fangs bared, emitting a series of deep-toned growls which to the object of his hostility should have been disconcerting, to put it mildly. But, somehow, he seemed disinclined to pursue his investigations to the bitter end. This was strange.

"What can it be?" was the thought in my own mind simultaneous with the voiced query of my companion.

Natives—Ivondwe excepted—were wont to hold Arlo in respect, not to say awe, upon first acquaintance. The one who now made his appearance, betrayed no sign of any such feeling, as he came towards us. Yet he was armed with nothing more reliable than a slender redwood stick. He came forward, deliberately, with firm step, as though no aroused and formidable beast were threatening him with a very sharp and gleaming pair of jaws, the sun glinting upon his head-ring and shining bronze frame, came forward and saluted. Then I noticed—we both noticed—that he had only one eye.

"Ha—Ukozi. I see you—see you again," I observed, in greeting.

"*Inkosikazi*!" he uttered, saluting my companion.

What struck me at that moment was the behaviour of the dog. Instead of rushing in upon the new arrival, and putting him vigorously on the defensive until called off, as was his way, he seemed concerned to keep his distance, and while still growling and snarling in deep-toned mutter I could detect in his tone an unmistakable note of fear. This too was strange.

"Who is he?" said Miss Sewin, as the newcomer placidly squatted himself. "Is he a chief?"

"Something bigger perhaps," I answered. "He's a witch doctor."

"What? A witch doctor?" her eyes brightening with interest. "I thought witch doctors were horrid shrivelled old creatures who wore all sorts of disgusting things as charms and amulets."

"Most of them do, and so would this one when he's plying his trade in earnest. Yet he's about the biggest witch doctor along this border, and his fame extends to Zululand as well."

"Ah!" as an idea struck her. "Now here's a chance for him to keep up his reputation. I wonder if he could find my coin."

As we both knew where it was—or indeed in any case—the opportunity seemed not a bad one. But I said:

"You must remember, Miss Sewin, that native doctors, like white ones, don't practice for nothing, and often on the same terms. What if this one should ask as the price of his services—no—professional attendance, shouldn't it be?—a great deal more than the lost article's worth?"

"Don't let him. But in any case I don't believe he has the ghost of a chance of finding it."

"Don't you be too sure," I said. And then, before I could open upon him on the subject Ukozi opened on me on another.

"Nyamaki is not home again, Iqalaqala?"

I was beginning to get sick of the disappearing Hensley by that time, so I answered shortly:

"Not yet."

"Ha! The Queen cannot do everything, then. You did not go home that night, Iqalaqala?"

"I did not. Your *múti* is great, Ukozi—great enough to stop a horse."

"*Múti*! Who talks of *múti*? I did but foresee. And Umsindo? He, too, did not reach Nyamaki's house that night?"

"No."

"What is in the water yonder?" he went on, bending over to look into the pool, for he had squatted himself very near its brink. "It moves."

Both of us followed his gaze, instinctively, eagerly. And by Jove! as we looked, there arose the same disturbance, the same unwinding of what seemed like a shining sinuous coil, yet taking no definite shape. Again it sank, as it had risen, and a hiss of seething bubbles, and the circling rings radiating to the sides, alone bore witness to what had happened.

"I declare it's rather uncanny," said my companion. "Does he know what it is? Ask him."

I put it to Ukozi. We had swum there several times, dived deep down too, nearly to the bottom, deep as it was, yet we had never been disturbed by anything. Only to-day, before his arrival, had we seen this thing for the first time—and that only once. He echoed my words, or part of them.

"Nearly to the bottom! But this place has no bottom."

"Now you forget, father of mystery," I said, knowingly. "It has, for we have sounded it, with a piece of lead at the end of a line."

He looked amused, shaking his head softly.

"Yet, it is as I say," he answered. "It has no bottom."

Rapidly I gave Miss Sewin the burden of our conversation, and she looked puzzled. The while, Arlo, crouching a few yards off, was eyeing the witch doctor strangely, uttering low growls which deepened every time he made a movement, and still, beneath the sound I could always detect that same note of fear.

"What is in the water down there, Ukozi?" I said. "Not a crocodile. What then?"

He was in no hurry to reply. He took snuff.

"Who may tell?" he answered, having completed that important operation. "Yet, Iqalaqala, are you still inclined—you and Umsindo—to continue swimming there, and diving nearly to the bottom—ah-ah! nearly to the bottom?"

He had put his head on one side and was gazing at me with that expression of good-humoured mockery which a native knows so well how to assume. I, for my part, was owning to myself that it would take a very strong motive indeed to induce me to adventure my carcase again within the alluring depths of that confounded *tagati* pool, for so it now seemed. Moreover I knew I should get no definite enlightenment from him—at any rate that day—so thought I might just as well try him on the subject of Miss Sewin's loss. But as I was about to put it to him he began:

"That which you seek is not down there."

"Not down there?" I echoed. "But, what do we seek, father of the wise?"

"It shines."

The thing was simple. He had found it and planted it somewhere, with a view to acquiring additional repute, and—incidentally—remuneration.

"I think we shall recover your coin, Miss Sewin," I said.

"Ah. He can find it for us then? If he does I shall become quite a convert to witch doctorism, for want of a better word."

"You will see. Now, Ukozi. Where is that which we seek?"

"*Au*! It shines—like the sun. To find it something else that shines will be necessary. Something that shines—like the moon."

I laughed to myself over this "dark" saying, and produced a half-crown—a new one.

"Here is what shines like the moon at full," I said.

He held out both hands, looked at it for a moment as it lay in the hollow thus formed, then said:

"Halfway between this and where you left the other white people is a redwood tree—of which two sticks point over the path. From the path on the other side, a slope of smooth rock falls away. Just below this—resting upright between two stones—one pointed, the other round—is that which you seek."

Briefly I translated this to my companion. Her reception of it showed a practical mind.

"What if he wants to send us off on a fool's errand while he climbs down to the crevice there and gets hold of the real coin?" she said.

"Well, of course, nothing's impossible. But, do you know, I believe him. I would in fact risk a considerable bet on it."

"Well, I am in your hands, Mr Glanton," she said. "You know these people thoroughly. I, not at all."

To tell the truth, I believed Ukozi's statement completely, so much so as not to think it worth while bothering about any thought of the responsibility I might be incurring. Otherwise I might have foreseen a reproachful manner, and a sinking in her estimation, if we found nothing. So I poured the contents of my snuff tube into Ukozi's hands and bade him farewell.

"I declare I feel quite excited over this," Aïda Sewin said, as we rapidly retraced our steps. "Look. Here is where we left the others—and—there's the slab of rock."

"Yes. It won't be a difficult scramble. Now Miss Sewin, you shall have the opportunity of verifying Ukozi's dictum yourself. So—you go first."

In a moment we were below the rock—a matter of ten yards' descent—and, in a small dry watercourse beneath we descried the glint of something. A cry of delight escaped her.

“Why, here it is. Just exactly as he described. Come and look, Mr Glanton.”

Sure enough at our feet, leaning almost upright between the two stones—the pointed one and the round—was the lost coin.

“But what was it we saw in the crevice?” she said, when the first astonishment was over. “That seemed to shine, too.”

“Probably a point of rock worn smooth. Well, Ukozi has again borne out his reputation.”

“Again? Why? Have you tried him before?”

Her eyes seemed to search my face. There was—or seemed to be—no prevaricating.

“Well, perhaps. Once. Or rather, he tried me. I’ll tell you about it some day. By Jingo, it’s getting dark, and I don’t like the look of the sky. The sooner we’re in the better.”

Great solid masses of cloud were banking up beyond the further ridge of the Tugela valley, and a low boom of thunder shivered the still air. A storm was coming up; probably a heavy one.

“How do you account for this kind of thing?” she said as we regained the path. “Could he have been passing here at the time I dropped the coin, and deliberately planned a sort of *coup de theâtre*?”

“In that case Arlo would have warned us of his presence. Yet he gave no sign.”

“Of course. And talking about Arlo, wasn’t it strange how he seemed not to mind that man’s presence? Why he can hardly be held in when a strange native comes about.”

“Yes. I noticed it. I suppose his instinct must have told him Ukozi was about to do us a good turn.”

She turned towards me, then shook her head.

“You are turning it off, Mr Glanton, I can see that. Yet there is something rather weird and inexplicable about the whole thing. You know, I was watching the witch doctor when the reptile or whatever it was came up in the pool, and it looked just as if he had raised it by some incantation. It is interesting very—but—rather eerie.”

“Oh they have their tricks of the trade, which they don’t divulge, you may be sure. The coin finding was really cleverly worked, however it was done; for, mind you, he came from quite the contrary direction, and, as a sheer matter of time, could have been nowhere near the place we found it in when we turned back.”

“It’s wonderful certainly, and I’m very glad indeed to have found my coin again. You must have seen some strange things in the course of your experience among these people, Mr Glanton? Tell me—what is the strangest of them?”

“If I were to tell you you wouldn’t believe me. Hallo! We’d better quicken our pace. I suppose you don’t want to arrive home wet through.”

The thundercloud had spread with amazing speed and blackness. The soft evening air had become hot and oppressive. Some self-denial was involved on my part in thus hurrying her, for I would fain have drawn out this walk alone with her, having now become, as you will say, Godfrey Glanton complete fool. Yet not such a fool as not to be blessed with a glimmer of common-sense, and this told me that, woman-like, she would not thank me for bringing her home in a state of draggled skirt and dripping, streaming hair, which would inevitably be the case did we fail to reach the house before the downpour should burst.

We did however so reach it, and there a surprise awaited, to me, I may as well own, not altogether a pleasant one, for it took the shape of Kendrew. Now Kendrew, as I have said, was a good fellow enough, yet this was the last evening I should spend here for some time. Kendrew was all very well at his own place or at mine—but somehow I didn’t want him here, at any rate not to-day, added to which he was a good-looking chap, and lively—a novelty too. There, you see—I am not above owning to my own small meannesses. It transpired moreover that I was the indirect agency through which he was there, for the first thing he said on seeing me was:

“There you are, Glanton. Thought I’d ride up and see how you were getting on, and when I got to your place they told me you had come down here. So I thought I’d come on and find you, and take the opportunity of making Major Sewin’s acquaintance at the same time. Nothing like getting to know one’s neighbours, and there ain’t so many of them, eh?”

“Glad you did,” I answered, shaking hands with him as heartily as ever. Yet at bottom, that “neighbour” idea struck unpleasantly. Kendrew as a neighbour was all very well, and I nailed him as such—for myself, but confound it, I didn’t want him getting too “neighbourly” here; and that, too, just as I was going away myself for a time. And then I realised, more fully than ever, what it meant to me to be fulfilling the rôle of a sort of little Providence to these people. Now Kendrew would lay himself out to do that during my absence, and in short, on my return I might find, to use a vulgar syllogism, that my own nose had been most effectually put out of joint.

They had taken to him already, and were on the best of terms—I could see that. Kendrew was one of those jolly, happy-go-lucky souls that people do take to on sight, and he had youth on his side. Moreover my misgivings were in no wise dispelled by the look of surprised whole-hearted admiration which came into his face at sight of Aïda Sewin. There was no mistaking this, for if there is one thing I pride myself on it is a faculty for reading every expression of the human countenance no matter how swift and fleeting such may be. Perhaps it is that constant intercourse with savages has endowed me with one of their most unfailing characteristics, but, at any rate, there it is.

“We’re going to have a storm,” said the Major, looking upward. “Aïda—Glanton—you’re only just in time. You too, Mr Kendrew. You’ll stay the night of course?”

Kendrew answered that he’d be delighted, and forthwith began to make himself at home in his free and easy fashion. He was not in the least afflicted with shyness, and had no objection whatever to being drawn on the subject of his

experiences. He had plenty of stories to tell, and told them well too, only perhaps it was rather mean of me to think that he need not so uniformly have made himself the hero of each and all of them. I don't know that I can plead in extenuation that when we sat down to table the fellow by some means or other contrived to manoeuvre himself into the chair next to Miss Sewin, a seat I had especially marked out for myself, and in fact usually filled. Added to which, once there, he must needs fill up the intervals between blowing his own trumpet by talking to her in a confoundedly confidential, appropriating sort of style; which I entirely though secretly resented. And I was on the eve of an absence! Decidedly events tended to sour me that evening—and it was the last.

"What's the matter? Did the old witch doctor tell you something momentous that you forgot to pass on to me? You are very silent to-night."

It was her voice. We had risen from table and I had gone out on to the stoep, "to see if the storm was passing off," as I put it carelessly. There was a chorus of voices and laughter within, Kendrew having turned the tables on Falkner in the course of some idiotic chaff.

"Am I?" I answered. "I get that way sometimes. Result of living alone, I suppose. No, Ukozi did not tell me anything stupendous. Amusing chap, Kendrew, isn't he?" as another chorus of laughter went up from within.

"He seems a nice sort of boy. And now—you start on Wednesday? Shall we see you again between this and then?"

"I'm afraid not, Miss Sewin. Tyingoza's nephew has disappointed me over the span of oxen he was going to hire me, and I shall have to spend to-morrow and the day after riding Heaven knows where in search of another span. Oxen—at any rate reliable ones—are precious scarce just now everywhere."

"I'm sorry. I—we—shall miss you so much, Mr Glanton—and you have been so kind to us—"

"That all?" I thought to myself bitterly. "Sort of 'make myself generally useful' blank that will create." Her next words made me feel ashamed of myself.

"But you will come and see us directly you return, won't you? I shall look forward to it, mind—and—I hate being disappointed."

Good Heavens! The voice, the gleam of white teeth in the little smile, the softening of eyes in the starlight! Had we been alone I believe I should have lost my head, and uttered I don't know what. But you can't say anything of that sort with a lot of people jabbering and laughing, and nothing between you and them but an open door and ditto window.

"You shall not be disappointed in that very unimportant particular at any rate," I answered. "And you are good enough to say you will look forward to it. Why I shall look forward to it every day until it comes."

This was pretty plain-speaking and no mistake, but I had been surprised out of myself. What she might have answered I can't even conjecture, for at that moment through a lull in the racket within, was raised a voice.

"Glanton? Yes. He's a good old buffer, Glanton. Why, what's become of him?"

Aïda Sewin's eyes met mine and I could see that she was bubbling over with the humour of the situation. We broke into a hearty laugh, yet not loud enough to reach those within.

"There. Now I hope you're duly flattered," she said. "A fresh unconsidered outburst like that must be genuine. We don't often hear so much good of ourselves even without being listeners."

"But consider the qualifying adjective. That, you know, is rather rough."

"Not necessarily. Only a term of good fellowship, I expect. No. You ought to feel brotherly towards him after that."

Somehow the whimsicality of it did avail to restore my good humour, or the words and tone of her utterances that went before may have had something to do with it. Had she been reading my thoughts as I sat silent among the rest? Well, what if she had?

The storm had passed us by and a haze of continuous lightning in the loom of a receding cloud together with an occasional mutter away over the further ridge of the Tugela valley was all that remained of it. She had moved towards the end of the stoep as though to obtain a nearer view of this.

"I have something on my mind, Miss Sewin," I began, "and it is this. You are good enough to say I have been of use to you all, needless to say how delighted I am to have been able to be. Well now, I shall be right out of the way for a time, and I am trying to puzzle out a plan of letting me know in case you might urgently want me."

I don't know what on earth moved me to say this. Why should they want me—urgently or otherwise? To my surprise she answered:

"It would be a great relief to my mind if you could. I don't know what you'll think of me, Mr Glanton, but there are times when our isolation frightens me, and then I think we never ought to have come here. And now you are going away, and Falkner, too. And—do you know, I have an uneasy feeling that I couldn't account for to save my life, but it's there, unfortunately. I believe it has something to do with the witch doctor, and that eerie affair down at the pool."

"As to that don't let it affect you. Ukozi is a clever specimen of a witch doctor but not a malevolent one. For the rest you are as safe here as you would be in any country part of England, and a good deal safer than in some."

The words "we never ought to have come here" alarmed me. What if when I returned I should find them gone? Oh, but—that wouldn't bear thinking of. So I did my best to reassure her, and to all appearances succeeded. Yet if I had known then—or had the faintest inkling of—what I afterwards knew—Well when I did it was too late.

Chapter Fourteen.

A Bad Beginning.

We crossed Umzinyati above where the Blood River joins it. This was something of a round but I didn't want to pass through Sirayo's section of the country; for it so happened I had had a bit of a breeze with him on a former occasion, and he would remember it; moreover his clan were a troublesome lot, and likely enough wouldn't stick at trifles—not the salt of Zululand by any means. So I elected to make a few days of easy trek outside the border, and then cross over into Zululand a good deal further north.

Old transport-riders will tell you there is no life so fascinating as that of the road. With all its hardships and drawbacks—drought, wet, waterless out-spans, mudholes into which wheels sink axle deep, bad and flooded drifts, involving hours of labour, and perhaps the borrowing of a brother trekker's friendly span—heat, cold—everything—yet the sense of being on the move, the constant change of scene, even of climate—has a charm all its own. This I can quite believe—because the waggon life off the road is even more fascinating still, in that the drawbacks are fewer, and you are more independent. You trek or outspan at your own sweet will, undeterred by any misgivings as to goods being delayed an inordinate time in delivery and the potential loss of future commissions in consequence. And you have time and opportunity to indulge in sport if there is any to be had, and there generally is when you are right off the roads, unless the country carries too thick a population.

These advantages held good of our then trek. I had a first-rate tent waggon of which mention has already been made. This, besides its load of the lighter kinds of trade goods was fitted up with a *kartel* and mattress, for bad weather accommodation—in fine weather we preferred sleeping on the ground. For the heavier kind, blankets and Salampore cloth, pots and kettles and so forth, I had loaded up a buckwaggon, constructed to carry anything up to twelve or fourteen thousand pounds weight. Thus we travelled—carrying our home along with us.

A surprise had come upon me almost at the last moment, and that was that by no possibility could I get any natives in our neighbourhood to cross the Zulu border. Those who had at first engaged to cried off. If I had been trekking with only one waggon I could have cut the knot of the difficulty by driving it myself, and making my body servant Tom—who would have gone to the ends of the earth with me, and to the devil after that—act as leader, but I had two. Ivondwe I knew would have gone, but I could not think of taking him away from the Sewins. The thing became seriously annoying. I appealed to Tyingoza. What was the matter with all the people? Were they afraid, and, if so, what of?

He was rather mysterious. There were rumours around that the Zulus were not well disposed towards white people, he hinted, especially those away on the northern border, where the King's authority was least strong. That being so those in the position of white men's servants would undergo risk—grave risk. But he would see what he could do, and in the result he found me one man who understood driving. This man, whose name was Mfutela, came from a kraal not far from Maritzburg. He was a ringed man, and brought with him his son, a youngster of about fifteen, to do leader. That would do. Things were brightening so far. I could drive one of the waggons myself, until such time as I had taught Falkner Sewin enough of the art to enable him to relieve me, and having thus decided I was all ready to start when—another turned up.

This fellow was something of a mystery, and was not keen on answering questions, but I gathered that his name was Jan Boom, at least that was the only name he would own to, and that he was a Xosa from the Cape frontier—far enough away in all conscience—who had drifted up to these parts. I suspected he had "drifted" out of gaol, and that before the time appointed to him for compulsorily serving the Government had expired; but with this I didn't concern myself at all. He was first-rate at working with oxen and that was all I cared about.

Falkner Sewin, contrary to my expectations, had given no trouble to speak of. He would grumble outrageously at first when I turned him out before it was light so as to be ready for the earliest possible trek, and on one occasion turned nasty. He hadn't come along as my servant, he fumed, and wasn't going to take orders from me. So I reminded him that it was no question of taking orders, but he had even gone so far as to promise to do all he was told. I pointed out further that I hadn't asked him to help me in any way, but that if he was going to do anything to hinder me why there was nothing to prevent him changing his mind and finding his way home again: we had not come so far that he would meet with any great difficulty in the way of this. He saw I meant what I said, and after sulking for half a day he climbed down, which was as well, for if there was one thing I intended it was to be skipper of my own ship. All the same he was destined to prove a mighty handful before I'd done with him.

We trekked easy the first few days, for the grass was not so green as it might have been, and I wanted to avoid pushing my oxen while the waggons were loaded at their heaviest, and so far had met with no adventures. The first was to come, and it came in this wise.

We had crossed the Blood River, and after an extra long morning's trek had outspanned on one of the small tributaries of that stream. We had not seen many people hitherto, and the demeanour of such as we had seen was strange; not exactly hostile, but sullen, and as different as possible to the light-hearted, good-humoured cordiality I had always found on previous trips into the Zulu country.

Perhaps this had something to do with the extra caution I laid upon Falkner, when having resolved to take advantage of our halt to ride over and visit a neighbouring chief with whom I had former acquaintance I saddled up with that intent. I took my boy Tom along, more because it enhances your prestige to move about attended than for any use I had for him, but Falkner couldn't come to any harm. Jan Boom the Xosa, spoke fair English, in case any of the natives should visit the outspan, and their speech require interpreting, and the other driver Mfutela, seemed a reliable man. Surely, one would think, there was no room for Falkner to get into any mischief here.

I was away about three hours. When I came in sight of the camp again, Tom, who was trotting by the side of my horse, said something that made me start.

I spurred forward. The outspan was hidden again by another rise in the ground. Topping this here is what I saw.

Standing forth, in an attitude of the noble art of self-defence, was Falkner Sewin. His fists were clenched, and his rolled up sleeves showed a really magnificent display of brown and corded muscle. Confronting him was a big Zulu, equally muscular, and armed with a formidable knobkerrie and a small shield. For "gallery" but with their backs to me, squatted in a semi-circle about thirty more Zulus.

Annoyed as I was, for the life of me I could not but feel interested. Both the contending parties were watching each

other intently and it was clear that so novel a mode of fighting had appealed to this warlike people to the extent of their allowing their adversary fair play instead of rushing him by weight of numbers. I had seen the same kind of thing among them before, notably on that occasion when Tyingoza's son had accepted the invitation to head a sort of flying invasion of the opposite side. But now, as then, they were destined to forget the strict rules of fair play when blood was up.

The Zulu was waltzing round Falkner, but the latter beyond turning to face him never moved, and his adversary seemed in no hurry to come within reach of those formidable fists. Then, goaded perhaps by the jeers of his comrades, who were tiring of a fight wherein no blows were struck, he feinted at his adversary's head, then quick as thought threw up his shield and made a terrific sweep at Falkner's leg beneath it.

But the latter was up to this stale dodge—indeed, I myself had put him up to it. Springing lightly aside, in time to avoid by a hair's-breadth a blow that would have shattered his kneecap and set him up with a highly respectable limp that would have lasted him for the term of his natural life, he shot out his right fist in such wise as to catch his assailant smack full on the side of the jaw. The big Zulu went down like a shot buck hit in full course.

"He's out!" cried Falkner. "John, tell 'em to put up their next man."

But before Jan Boom could render this injunction or not render it, the whole lot had sprung to their feet and a mighty hubbub ensued. They had seized their weapons, and were gesticulating and pointing at Falkner: in fact, working themselves up to a state of wild and dangerous excitement. It was as well, perhaps, that unseen by them I was near enough to interpose.

"Hold!" I roared. "Hold! What means this? And who are ye that rush into my camp with weapons in your hands?"

As I said, I had approached unseen, and now the very suddenness of my appearance availed to stay the tumult, for a moment. But only for a moment. "Who are we? *Au*! *Mlungu*! that is no matter. Your oxen have eaten up our corn and now you must make it good. You must make it good we say."

"*Umlúngu*" meaning simply "white man" was impudent, especially as I was sure some, if not all, of these knew me. At that moment I took in that they were all young men, of any age not much overtopping twenty, consequently at the most reckless and mischievous stage of human existence.

"Go—go," I answered. "Send your fathers here. I talk not with children."

The hubbub grew deafening and they drew in closer—growling, chattering in their fine deep voices, pointing viciously at us with their blades. My taunt had exasperated them to a dangerous degree. One fellow went so far as to dance out from among the rest and *gwaza* at me with his assegai, and all were brandishing theirs and closing in upon us nearer and nearer. I have always made a point of never being afraid of savages, but really when you get an irresponsible young ruffian lunging an eighteen-inch assegai blade within half that distance of your nose, and he backed up by thirty others, the situation begins to have its skeery side.

"Keep 'em steady a minute, Glanton, while I get out our 'barkers'," said Falkner. "That'll start 'em to the rightabout double quick."

"No. Better leave that. They're only blowing off steam."

But I wasn't easy: more, I realised that the situation was a confoundedly ticklish one. They were working each other up into a state of ungovernable excitement, and simply howling down whatever I was trying to say. If I had had my pistol on I believe I should have drawn it, but it was at that moment reposing in one of the waggon pockets, some twenty-five yards behind us. The same held good of Falkner's. He, characteristically, now brought matters to a crisis.

"Shut that silly jaw," he growled, seizing the wrist of a fellow who was doing *gwaza* with a big assegai close to his face, and, with the other hand hitting him a terrific blow right between the eyes, felling him.

Then I thought my last hour had come, but no—they fell back as though scared. Falkner's fighting powers had done us yeoman's service after all, was the thought that flashed through my mind—and then I saw that it was not so; that our respite was due to another cause.

Unseen by either party to the turmoil two Zulus had come up—and one of them I knew, and knowing him, felt devoutly thankful that he was a pretty considerable chief.

"Now I see men," I said, "men with rings on. Now I can talk. Greeting, Nonguza."

He answered me with scant cordiality. He was a tall, fine man, but his face was heavy and sullen, more than that, it was a cruel face. The glance he shot at Falkner especially was not benevolent.

"I see you, Iqalaqala," he said. "What is this, for my dogs seem to be barking over loud!"

I told him what I knew, which was little enough, and calling the waggon drivers we got at the rest of it. They had gone to look after the oxen, which were turned loose to graze, and had arrived in time to find a crowd of armed Zulus driving them off. Some had come for themselves, driving them up to the waggons, threatening them. It was then that Falkner Sewin had come out, and singling out the spokesman had challenged him to fight.

Nonguza called to two of the rioters, and ordered them to tell their story. It was soon told. They had found our oxen eating and trampling the corn of their father, Magebe, and had driven them off until their owners should pay for the damage.

Now Magebe proved to be the man who accompanied Nonguza, and on hearing this he became excited, and must needs rush off to ascertain what damage had been done. This Jan Boom pronounced to be next to nothing.

"They were hardly in the field at all, Baas," he said in an undertone, and excellent English. "Zulu nigger one damn great big liar."

The speaker being some shades darker in colour than any Zulu there present I could hardly restrain a laugh. Falkner couldn't. He guffawed outright. The chief looked angry.

"Steady, Sewin," I warned. "You're spoiling everything." Then to Magebe. "We had better all go and look what has been done. Then we can settle it."

The mealie crop was only just over the rise, so we were there very soon. I had told Falkner to come too, fearing he might get into more mischief if left behind: and yet it was almost as bad having him, for he eyed the two Zulus with a sort of resentful contempt, more than once expressing a desire to knock their qualified heads together.

Even as Jan Boom had said, the damage proved to be very slight; but Magebe, an old man and avaricious, set to work to make the most of it. Half his crop was ruined and so forth. I must pay him two oxen.

Of course I had no intention of doing anything of the sort, so we adjourned to the waggons again to talk it over. There the discussion became long and heated, notwithstanding the fact that I opened it by filling them up with a great deal of black coffee and sugar. Nonguza, who did most of the talking, and I felt sure would claim the lion's share of the spoil whatever it might be, was especially curt and offensive. I got sick of it at last.

"Here," I said, spreading a new green blanket on the ground, and piling upon it a couple of big butcher knives—which Zulus dearly love—some strings of black and white beads, a few brass buttons and a goodly length of roll tobacco. "This is more than twice the damage my oxen have done. So now, Magebe, take it, and I will send one of my drivers with these two," pointing to the two young Zulus who had explained matters, "and he will bring back the oxen."

But Magebe objected that this was not enough, no, not nearly enough.

"There it is. Take it or leave it. If you leave it, then we leave the Zulu country—walk out of it, for we cannot drag our waggons. Then, when the Great Great One—he who sits at Undini—is called upon to make good the loss of two spans of oxen, two waggons and the whole of their contents—to the Englishmen whose oxen were taken—were taken by Nonguza, the induna whom he sent to keep order here on the boundary, what will he say, that Lion—what will he do? Tell me that. What will he do?"

"I know nothing of your oxen, Umlúngu," said Nonguza, sullenly. "It is not I who have taken them."

"Not you? Ha! When an induna of the King is present, is he greater than only the head of a kraal—a large kraal certainly—or is he less? Tell me that, Nonguza?"

It was a good game of bluff to play, and I was about at the end of my patience. I held trumps and I knew my hand, for I knew perfectly on what errand this chief was there. Now he turned and gave an order to those who had lately been threatening us, and I knew that the game was won. Yet even then, as I noted the look of sullen vindictiveness that fled swiftly across the chief's face, I was not inclined to exult, for I was well aware that he would go a good way to be even with me yet, and in the then unsettled state of the border it would be strange if some opportunity of making himself disagreeable did not afford itself.

"Well, I'm sick of all this jaw with a couple of snuffy niggers, Glanton," growled Falkner. "What's going to be done?"

"Oh shut your silly head," I said, irritably, for of course an unconciliatory tone tells its own tale even though no word is understood. "I suspect your readiness to bash all and everybody is at the bottom of the whole bother."

"Well, if a brute comes at me brandishing a stick with a knob like a cricket ball I've got to do something, haven't I?" he answered, lighting his pipe and slouching away in the sulks.

I was in no better humour, to tell the truth, but laid myself out to do the civil to Nonguza, by way of smoothing his ruffled feathers. Then, as time went by, and I was beginning to feel a little anxious once more, to my intense relief my ears caught a well-known sound, the trampling of hoofs to wit, and lo—coming over the rise were my oxen, driven at a run by those who had taken them. I gave orders at once to inspan, returning a curt negative to Magebe's inquiries as to whether I would not stop and trade. I was going *kwa* Majendwa, I answered. There no mistake would be made as to who I was.

So we marched forth with all the honours of war, but as the whips cracked, and the spans tugged out in response I noticed that the cloud of armed Zulus watching us was increased by others coming over the ridge—part of Nonguza's impi—and thought we should be lucky if we escaped further trouble at the hands of these. It was a bad beginning to our trip—in the temper the people were evidently then in—yes, a bad beginning.

Chapter Fifteen.

Two of a Trade.

When Dolf Norbury learned that another white man was coming to Majendwa's country on trading intent, his first remark was that he was damned if he should. This statement he followed up with the use of absolutely unprintable language for the space of many minutes. His first act was to shy a bottle at the head of his informant, who ducked in time to avoid disastrous contact with the same, and then to make him exceedingly drunk with the contents of another bottle, not yet reduced to its last use—as a missile to wit. This by way of compensation.

The process had another effect, that of making the injured man talk. He for his part was a young Zulu of no particular account, and what he stated was perfectly true, he went on to declare. The white man was a trader known as Iqalaqala, and with him was another white man, a great fighter, who could knock men senseless with his fists even as one might do with a large and heavy stick. He who spoke knew, for he had seen it done—not once only, either. At this Dolf Norbury's language grew vehement and sultry again, and was interlarded by many aspirations after just one glimpse of the man who could knock *him* senseless or knock him anything else. Only just one glimpse, that was all. The next thing he did, by way of relieving his feelings was to start in and thrash the nearest of his native wives—of which he had several—she, unfortunately for her, being the one of least family standing, and therefore the least likely to raise resentment on the part of the relatives—or others, a thing which is bad for trade. Then he opened a bottle of "square face," took a very big drink,

and putting the bottle in a pocket or his leather coat went round to the chief's hut.

"I have news, Mawendhlela," he began, when he found himself inside. "But"—with a look at some others who were seated there—"it will keep."

Not long was it before these took the hint, and stole out, one by one. The chief's eyes twinkled as he noted the familiar bulge in the pocket of his visitor.

"*Au*! it is cold," he said, pretending to shiver, "and I am getting on in years and need warmth."

"This will give it you," said the white man, producing the bottle.

The chief's eyes sparkled as he watched the gurgling rush of the potent liquid into the calabash drinking vessel. Then he tossed off half of it with a gasp of contentment.

"That is indeed warm—yes, warm," he said.

"And good. But there will soon be no more."

"No more? Now why, Udolfu?"

"Because I am going—going away."

"Going away? Now that cannot be."

"It can and it is. There is no longer room for me here. There is a cow at hand who will give you more milk than I can, but not such milk as this—oh no!"

"Ha!"

"It is Iqalaqala who is the cow that lows at the gate. Iqalaqala does not trade in strong drink—neither will he bring you any guns or cartridges or powder and lead. His trade is the trade for women—beads, coloured cloth, and such."

"M-m! Why then, Udolfu, there is still room for you here, for Iqalaqala can do the women's trade and you can still do that for men—guns and cartridges—and drink like this—like this—which warms—ah, ah, which warms," added the chief finishing his allowance of "square face" and pushing his calabash meaningly towards the other.

"But I will not. There is no room for two here. I will have all the trade or none."

Mawendhlela's face fell. He was a man who liked his comfort and the enjoyment of a daily modicum of "square face" gin, or Natal rum had become essential to this. As a chief he was not unmindful of certain plain hints on the part of those very high up indeed in the councils of the nation, to the effect that those under them were required to obtain the weapons of the white man as far as this could possibly be done. Yet here was the man who supplied him with both, threatening to withdraw. He saw the loss of his beloved drink with dismay, and with even greater dismay he contemplated the disfavour into which he would fall with those in high quarters, if his people showed but a poor muster in the way of firearms. The while Dolf Norbury was reading his thoughts, and could gauge their drift exactly. He knew, too, that personally Mawendhlela and many of his people would gladly see the last of him—but, the above considerations were potent.

"We cannot both trade here," he repeated. "Iqalaqala must not be allowed to come. That's all."

"What can I do, Udolfu?" answered the chief helplessly. "Majendwa is a bull that roars louder than I, and he has the ear of the Great Great One himself. It is to Majendwa you must talk."

"Majendwa?" repeated the white man, with a scowl as though the very name was unpalatable to him—and, indeed, it was—"Majendwa? *Au*! his kraal is far enough away. But here, you are chief, you, Mawendhlela. And for some days the people have been talking of the coming of Iqalaqala! Well, he must not come."

They looked at each other for a little while in silence. Then the chief spoke.

"I can do nothing, Udolfu," he repeated. "But you—*au*! you white people can do everything. And I do not want a white man who only brings trade for women."

"Then you leave it to me?" said the trader, reaching over the square bottle and replenishing the calabash.

"It is nothing to me," said Mawendhlela, carefully extracting a cockroach which had fallen from the thatch into his liquor, and throwing it into the fire. "No more than that—" as the insect crackled up.

Dolf Norbury chuckled, and took a big drink himself. The life of another man, a fellow countryman—or, it might be of two men—was no more to him than that of the burnt insect. They understood each other.

It may be asked how I am able to reproduce a dialogue between two persons sitting together alone in a hut—alone mind—and I many miles away at the time. Well, passing over the question as to whether anyone ever really is alone—especially in a Zulu kraal—rather than that the veracity of this my narrative be in any wise impugned, I would remind the reader that at an earlier stage thereof I took him into confidence so far as to explain that I was wont to derive a considerable amount of information from native sources, and that such information was surprisingly accurate. So—there it is, you see!

The while we were trekking by slow and easy stages. There was a restlessness among the people as to which there could be no mistake. They were moving about in bands of ten or twenty instead of singly or in pairs, and fully armed, and now and then two or three men would come up hurriedly to the waggon, and hardly troubling to drop their weapons as

required by etiquette, would start on again after a few words of inquiry as to our destination. In short the country seemed about as settled as an ant's nest the top of which has just been kicked off; and more than one rumour had it that armed collisions had occurred with the grazing Boers beyond the Luneburg and Utrecht borders. Towards ourselves the behaviour of the people was rather offhand and independent, the young men especially being inclined to treat us to quite an unnecessary display of swagger. This was a source of anxiety to me, in that it involved a continuous strain upon my moral influence to keep Falkner Sewin from his favourite pastime of head punching, and this was difficult.

So far too, trade prospects seemed but poor. Formerly from each group of kraals we passed, people would have come eagerly forth to do a deal—now for ordinary trade goods they seemed to have no hankering. More than one headman would ask, talking "dark," if I carried *what they wanted*, and on assuring themselves that I did not, soon showed no further desire to trade. Now "what they wanted," done into plain English, meant firearms and ammunition, and this was a form of illicit trade from which I had always kept my hands clean. Not that the temptation was not great at that. The profits were ditto and the risk to one with my facilities, hardly worth considering, and the same held good of liquor selling, though as to this latter perhaps considerations of self interest lay behind my scruples, for it was in no wise to my interest to bear part in ruining this fine race among whom I lived, and from whom I drew a living.

For the rest, life was pleasant enough as we moved along easily—outspanning during the heat of the day for several hours—and then trekking on until dark. Then the night camp under the stars, when the savoury game stew—or if we couldn't get any game, the fried rashers of bacon, had been discussed, and pipes were in full blast—this constituted not the least pleasant moment of the day, as we sat and swapped yarns, to the accompaniment of the monotonous crunch-crunch of ruminating oxen tied to the yokes; or the occasional howl of a hyena, or the cry of some mysterious night bird coming up out of the surrounding blackness. All this my companion enjoyed immensely, as well he might. He did not so much enjoy the reverse side of the medal though, when a sudden thunderburst and a night of chilly, pelting downpour—which precluded all thoughts of a fire, or anything hot—drove us to huddle within the tent waggon, and browse upon biscuit and tinned stuff. However I had broken him in fairly well by that time, and he was disposed to take things as they came. Now and again he would try my patience by some outbreak of mulish cussedness, but I remembered his character and training, and had no difficulty in keeping myself in hand. Added to which I believe I entertained a sneaking softness towards the fellow if only that he constituted a connecting link with those I had left behind. Those? Well, to be candid, but—never mind.

We were approaching the mountainous regions of the north, and the bushy valleys and slopes of the lower country had been left behind. The air grew clear and sharp, and the nights had become downright chilly. Around, the hills rose in abrupt slopes, their sweep broken up into great terraces as it were, by tiers of smooth grey cliffs. To all appearance the country might have been uninhabited, but I knew better: knew that the great clefts which fell abruptly from the track contained teeming kraals, whose presence might easily remain unsuspected by the casual wayfarer: knew, too, that not a mile of our advance but was carefully watched and duly reported. In the Zululand of those days the passage of a white man's waggons was an event, and that from more than one point of view.

Chapter Sixteen.

To Blows.

"Here come men, *Nkose*, and I think that they come to cause us trouble," said Mfutela, shading his eyes to look up the road.

I followed his glance. A dark crowd was swarming over the ridge half a mile in front, and in the then rising sun I could make out the glint of assegai blades. That was nothing, since every man in Zululand at that time seemed to make a point of moving about with as many assegais as he could conveniently carry. But it was significant that at sight of us they should have halted for a moment, and then come forward at a run, shouting like mad.

"Is there to be no end to all these mischievous idiots and their larks?" I said, sourly and in English. And yet at the time I felt not altogether happy—things happen suddenly among savages. What if the tension on the Transvaal border had already brought on an outbreak.

"Hallo! What's the row?" sang out Falkner, from the tent waggon, into which he had dived to fetch something or other. "Any more fellows whose heads want punching—eh, Glanton?"

"No," I answered more sourly still. "Keep those itching knuckles of yours quiet for once—for Heaven's sake."

It was early morning as I have said, and we were in the act of inspanning. We had camped in an open valley, and in front lay a long acclivity of miry red track mapped out by ancient wheel ruts and rendered diabolical by a heavy rainfall during the night. It was at the head of this that the crowd had appeared, and looking at both I was all the less disposed to meet opposition with the good humour which is always advisable.

"Zulu nigga troublesome debbil," said Jan Boom, the Xosa, who was fond of airing his English, and his contempt for those of his own colour who "had none."

The new arrivals left us in no sort of doubt as to their intentions, for they charged straight for us, and waving their weapons roared out to us to stop.

"Tre-ek!" I yelled, seizing the whip from Mfutela, and letting out the long lash in a couple of resounding cracks which had the effect of making one fellow who was brandishing a war-axe within an ace of Tom's nose—who was leading—skip aside with some alacrity. Jan Boom, who was driving the other waggon, was quick to follow my example, and to the accompaniment of a cannonade of whip cracking and ear-splitting yells, the two spans tugged out laboriously over the heavy miry road.

So far as our disturbers were concerned, I kept silence, by way of showing that I considered them beneath my notice, until I saw that their mouthings and gesticulations as they kept pace with us on either side, were likely to *schrik* our two horses, leading on behind, to the point of nearly causing them to break their reims and rush away the devil knew where.

"Who are ye?" I shouted. "Who are ye that come bellowing down upon me like a pack of kraal curs? You are not children either, for I see among you men with rings. Go away."

But the ringed men, to my surprise, were among the most boisterous.

“Turn back, Umlungu,” cried one of them. “Turn back. It is the word of our father, Mawendhlela.”

Mawendhlela! The name set my misgivings at rest in a moment. Mawendhlela a chief by virtue of birth and possessions, a man who was no warrior but one of the few Zulus at that time who was addicted to gin, and disliked me because I had always steadfastly refused either to trade or give him any.

“Mawendhlela!” I echoed. “*Hau*! I go to a bull that roars louder than he. I go to Majendwa—to Majendwa I say. Now—go away.”

But this, to my surprise, they showed no inclination to do. On the contrary they closed up in such wise as to bring the front waggon to a standstill. Short of cutting a way through them there was no method of proceeding, and there were about a hundred of them, all bristling with assegais. I had my revolver on though it was not visible, and for all their numbers I made up my mind to shoot the first who should lay a hand upon my people or my oxen: for there are times when forbearance may be stretched to a dangerous limit. What would have happened next I won’t pretend to guess, but some sort of diversion must have occurred, for heads were turned, looking back over the way they had come. Then the crowd parted, precipitately too, some tumbling over each other’s heels in their alacrity to get out of the way, and through the lane thus opened there rode up at a furious pace, a man—a white man.

“Here, get out of this!” he bellowed, firing off a very blast of profanity. “Turn your blanked oxen round, and trek back—d’you hear? trek back a sight quicker than you came. D’you hear?”

“May I be permitted to ask why?” I said, sarcastically.

“No, you mayn’t and be damned to you. But I’ll tell you. Because I say so. That’s why. Because *I* say so. You’ve heard of me.”

“Don’t know that I have. Who might you be when you’re at home?”

“I’m Dolf Norbury. That’s who I might be. Dolf Norbury, d’you hear? I’ve got the trade up here, and I’m damned if I’m going to have any dirty winkler from Natal coming up here to make holes in it. Now—d’you hear?”

“Winkler” meaning a small shopkeeper, was meant to be offensive.

“Oh, so you’re Dolf Norbury, are you?” I said, pretending to be impressed.

“That’s right. I’m Dolf Norbury, and no man ever got the blind side of me and kept it. Now—clear.”

“Ah!” I said. “I’m Godfrey Glanton, and no man ever got the blind side of me and kept it. Now—clear.”

I thought he would there and then have tumbled down in a fit. It happened that I had heard a good deal about this Dolf Norbury, but had only seen him once, at Krantz Kop, and that some years before; on which occasion, however, he had been far too drunk to remember me now. He was a big, roaring, buffalo bull of a fellow of about fifty, who would be sure to gain ascendency among savages if he laid himself out to do so. He had Mawendhlela completely under his thumb, and that for a further reason than those which have just appeared, which was as well for himself, for the more respectable chiefs of Zululand would have nothing to do with him by this time. He would have been turned out of the country, or would have died suddenly, before this but that he had his uses; for he was a most daring and successful gunrunner among other accomplishments. With all his bounce he was not wanting in pluck, and could hold his own anywhere, and always had held it as some had found to their cost—he would add, darkly boastful. His record was uncertain, but he had an intimate acquaintance with the Transkein border and Pondoland: and talked the native dialects faultlessly; in short he was just the type that would drift into the position of “chief’s white man,” with all the advantages of self-enrichment which it affords—and these are not small if the thing is properly worked. The only thing certain about him was that for some time past he dared not show his face upon any square yard of ground under British jurisdiction—on pain of death in mid air, it was not obscurely hinted. In aspect he was heavy and powerful of build. His face, tanned to a red bronze, was half hidden in a thick and flowing beard just turning grey, but the jet black of his shaggy eyebrows had not begun to turn. Under them his eyes, black and piercing, glittered like those of a snake. Now they began to roll till you could see scarcely anything but the whites. He seemed on the verge of a fit.

“Don’t put yourself in a passion,” I said, for I had become cool in proportion to the other’s rage. “There’s no occasion for it, you know. Only I may as well tell you that I don’t take any man’s bounce, and the idea of you, or any other man coming along here to give me orders strikes me as a joke. See?”

“Joke does it?” he gasped. “You’ll find it a mighty dear joke.” Then followed more talk which it is impossible to reproduce on paper. “A joke does it? D’you know I’ve killed men for less than this—yes, killed more men than you’ve even fought. A joke eh? Now—you’ll see.”

He was just turning to the noisy crowd, who however had sunk into silence, and, with eyeballs strained, were watching developments, when Falkner, whose restraint had come to an end on seeing a white man, and therefore as he afterwards put it one who could stand up to him, instead of a lot of miserable niggers who couldn’t—lounged forward.

“Here, I say. You’ll hurt yourself directly, old man,” he drawled—I suspected purposely putting on his most offensive manner.

“Hurt myself will I—aw haw?” returned the other, imitating Falkner’s drawl. “Hurt myself will I, my blanked popinjay? But first of all I’m going to hurt you—I’m going to hammer you within an inch of your life, and I won’t promise to leave you that.”

He jumped off his horse, and Falkner winked at me, for this was just what he wanted.

“I say, you know, I can’t hit you. You’re too old,” he said, in a tone calculated to exasperate the other, and it had just that effect, for literally bellowing with rage Dolf came straight at him. At first Falkner undertook to play with him, but soon found that he had got his hands full, for the other had weight and was enormously strong, and although he was inferior in science his mad rushes were nearly as irresistible as those of a buffalo bull, which was just what he reminded

me of, with his eyes swollen and glaring, and his beard red and shaggy with blood. But he was uncommonly quick on his pins, and did not fight blindly by any means—indeed for some time I should have been sorry to have risked a large sum on either of them. It was a battle of giants.

I confess to watching the contest with a very keen interest. The Zulus standing around, were still as bronze as they craned eagerly forward to watch this, to them, absolutely novel form of battle. My people standing exactly where they had been, were no less interested spectators. At last I thought to detect a sign of weakening on the part of the enemy. Youth and science was beginning to tell against sheer strength. Norbury must have realised this, for shaking his head like a bull about to charge, he hurled himself forward for a final effort, striking out with terrific force. Falkner got it full on the forehead, but managed to keep up. The other staggered back, and then as he was about to make another rush I saw his right hand go behind him.

"Drop that!" I said sharply bringing round the butt end of my whipstick upon the wrist. With a howl of rage he complied literally, as the sheath knife which he had just drawn leapt from his hand. I put my foot on it just as Falkner, rushing in, knocked him fairly and squarely out.

"Two to one, you blanked cowards," he snarled, in between curses, as he picked himself unsteadily up, half stunned as he was. "That your idea of fair play, is it?"

"And this is your idea of fair play?" I said, holding up the knife. It had a good eight-inch blade and was ground like a razor. "Why you infernal murderer, did you think I was going to stand by and see you use it?"

"You're a liar," he answered. "I never pulled it. You knocked it out of its sheath yourself, just for an excuse to pack on to me two to one."

"Liar yourself," I said. "You'd pulled it all right. Now clear out, and by the Lord, if you try any dog tricks on us by way of being even we'll shoot, you understand. This is outside British jurisdiction, you know. So look out."

He gave me a look that was positively devilish, and which his battered and blood-smeared countenance did not soften, you may be sure.

"Look out yourself," he retorted furiously. "What sort of a man are you to come in and try to sneak another man's trade? I was here first, I tell you."

"That's all right. But you might as well have made sure I was trying to sneak your trade first. Instead of that you come charging up to me at the head of about a hundred armed scoundrels and start a game of bounce. Did you think I was going to turn my waggons, and trek back at your bidding, or at any man's bidding, because if so you got hold of the wrong pig by the ear, that's all. I hadn't intended to go near your old soaker's place—but now I shall please myself about it."

"Will you? All right. You were saying something just now about being outside British jurisdiction. Well, remember that. You're not out of this country yet remember, and while you're in it you'd better keep a bright look out. Dolf Norbury ain't the man to be bested all along the line—and I shouldn't wonder if he didn't begin now. So keep a bright look out, that's my advice."

"Oh all right. I'm not afraid," I sung out after him, for he had jumped on his horse and was now riding away without another word. "Tre-ek!"

The whips cracked, and the waggons rolled forward, now without opposition. The turbulent crowd had completely quieted down, and although they still kept pace with us it was with a subdued sort of air. The reason was easy to read. We had come off best in the affair—wherefore it was obvious to them that we must be greater than Dolf Norbury. Of their first annoyance I took no notice whatever, treating it as a matter of such small account as not even to be worth remembering; and soon they began to drop off by twos and threes, till at last there was only a handful left—to whom I administered a suitable lecture.

"Think that skunk'll give us any more trouble, eh, Glanton?" said Falkner, presently.

"Shouldn't wonder. Anyway we'll take his advice and keep a bright look out. He's more than capable of trying a long shot at us from behind, if he sees his chance."

"By Jove, but that's a tough customer. If he'd only had science I should have been nowhere with him. It's science that does it," he added complacently. "Ever learn boxing, Glanton?"

"No. Yet I've held my own in a scrap on an occasion or two."

"Well learn it. I can tell you it's worth while. You get the science that way. We used to go in strong for it in the regiment, but there's every chance of forgetting it here. These silly niggers can't use their hands at all."

"No, but they can use other things, and if you'll take my advice you'll keep yours off them. Keep them for fellows of the Dolf Norbury stamp."

It must not be supposed that friend Falkner had come off light in the scrimmage; for in truth a goodly share of punishment had fallen his way. Both his eyes were badly bunged up, and he had a knob like a walnut over one temple. He further owned to the loosening of a couple of teeth. In short his countenance presented an aspect that would not have endeared him to those of the opposite sex on sight, say his cousins whom he had left behind. But he had held his own like a man, and of his pluck there could be no question at all; and I own that he had gone up very considerably in my estimation since the time of our earlier acquaintance.

Chapter Seventeen.

Majendwa's Kraal.

A large, well-built Zulu kraal is to my mind a picturesque and symmetrical object with its perfect double circle of ring fences enclosing the yellow domes of the grass huts, and the large open space in the centre, dappled with many coloured cattle, or alive with the dark forms of its inhabitants. Such a kraal was that of the chief, Majendwa. It lay deep down in a large basin-like hollow; an amphitheatre, as it were, sparsely bushed and surrounded by high, terrace-like cliffs. On one side these rose up to a tall cone of considerable height.

The valley bottom and the slopes of the hills were covered with grazing herds, all sleek and round and shining, for the grass was abundant, and rains had been plentiful in these highlands.

“That looks promising,” I remarked to Falkner, as we gazed around upon this land of plenty. “I hope to take back a good few of these with us.”

“By Jove, yes,” he said. “I say, I wonder if there’s anything to shoot among those cliffs over there.”

“Not very much. An odd reebok or klipspringer is about all you’d get. However, we can try later on. Hallo! That looks uncommonly like Majendwa himself.”

Two tall Zulus were stalking along a path which should converge with ours a little way ahead. We had ridden on, leaving the waggons to follow, and the sound of their creaking and jolting was even now borne to our ears behind, as they wound down the rocky track which led into the hollow from that side, together with an occasional driving shout.

“Is it?” said Falkner, looking up with some curiosity. “By Jingo, he’s a fine-looking chap for a nigger, anyway.”

“Thought you’d worn through that ‘nigger’ string of yours, Falkner,” I said. “Don’t play on it for the benefit of Majendwa, that’s all.”

I may have seen as fine, but I never saw a finer specimen of a Zulu than Majendwa. Tall and straight, and for his age marvellously free from that corpulence which seems to come upon nearly all Zulus of rank or birth in middle life, every movement of his limbs showing great muscular strength the man’s frame was a model. His countenance even from a European standpoint was singularly handsome, the broad, lofty forehead and clear eyes conveying the idea of intellectuality and high breeding, in short he looked what he was, an aristocrat of his race. His greeting was dignified yet cordial.

“I see you, Iqalaqala,” he said, having waited for us to come up—“and am glad. It is long since you brought trade our way.”

I answered that my wandering days were over for the present, yet I could not altogether sit still, so had come straight up to the Abaqulusi to trade with them first. Then following their inquiring glance at my companion, I told them he was a neighbour of mine who had been an officer in the English army, causing them to look at him with redoubled interest.

“What’s it all about, Glanton?” struck in Falkner who was always impatient when I was talking and bound to cut in at the wrong time. “Who’s the other chap?”

“Muntisi, the chief’s second son. He’s got seven, but this and the eldest are the only two who wear the ring.”

“Well, I like their looks. Here, have some ’bacca, old chap,” pulling out his pouch.

Majendwa, who of course didn’t understand the familiarity of the address, received the tobacco, in his dignified way, with a slight smile and a glance of furtive curiosity at Falkner’s parti-coloured countenance, which had by no means shed all traces of his bout of fisticuffs with Dolf Norbury. Then he said:

“Come within, Iqalaqala. I will send men to show your people where to outspan.”

We walked on with them, leading our horses, for we had dismounted to greet them. As we drew near, the kraal, which had seemed deserted, sprang into life. Heads appeared above the thorn fence, watching the approach of the waggons in the distance, and from where the red topknots of women were grouped, a buzz and chatter of expectation went up.

“Hallo, Glanton. You’re never going to leave that there?” said Falkner, as I deliberately put down my rifle outside the gate before entering. “I’m hanged if I’ll leave mine.”

“But you must. It’s etiquette.”

“Oh blazes, but I don’t like it,” he grumbled, as he complied reluctantly. However Majendwa, whose ready tact had seen through his reluctance, told me we need not disarm there, and in fact we had better bring in our weapons, for there was nothing he enjoyed so much as inspecting firearms.

As we passed among the huts, I greeted several men whom I knew personally. Falkner the while staring curiously about him.

“I tell you what, Glanton. Some of these are devilish fine-looking girls,” he remarked. “Quite light coloured too, by Jove.”

I rendered this for the benefit of the chief that my companion observed that the women of the Abaqulusi were far better looking than any he had ever seen in Zululand, which evoked a laugh from those men who heard, and a delighted squeal from those of the sex thus eulogised. Then Falkner committed his first blunder.

We had gained the chief’s hut, and stooping down, I had entered the low door first, Falkner following. When halfway through he drew back.

“Dash it all!” he exclaimed, “I’ve dropped my matchbox.”

“Never mind. Come right through,” I warned. “Don’t stop on any account.”

But it was too late. He had already crawled back, and picked up the lost article.

“Why what’s the row?” he said, startled at my peremptory tone.

“Only that it’s awful bad manners with them to stop halfway through a door and back out again. It’s worse, it makes a sort of bad *múti*. It’s a pity you did it.”

“Oh blazes, how was I to know? Sort of ill luck, eh—evil eye and all that kind of business? Well, you can put that right with them.”

I tried to do this, incidentally explaining that he was a new arrival in the country and could not talk with their tongue yet, and of coarse was not familiar with their ways, that I hoped they would bear this in mind during the time we should spend at the kraal. But although the chief and his son took the incident in good part I could see they would much rather it had not happened. As regarded the offender himself one thing struck me as significant. Time was, and not so long ago either, when he would have pooh-poohed it, as a silly nigger superstition. Now he showed some little concern, which was a sign of grace.

Tywala, which is beer brewed from *amabele*, or native grown millet, if fresh and cleanly made, is an excellent thirst quencher on a hot day, and you never get it so well and cleanly made as in the hut of a Zulu chief. Of this a great calabash was brought in, and poured out into black bowls made of soft and porous clay.

“By Jove, Glanton,” cut in Falkner, during an interval in our talk. “This is something like. Why this jolly hut,” looking round upon the clean and cool interior with its hard polished floor, and domed thatch rising high overhead—“is as different as possible to the poky smoky affairs our niggers run up. And as for this tipple—oh good Lord!”

There was a squashing sound and a mighty splash. He had been raising the bowl to his lips, and that by the process of hooking one finger over the rim thereof. The vessel being, as I have said, of soft clay was unable to stand that sort of leverage, and had incontinently split in half, and the contents, liberal in quantity, went souse all over his trousers as he sat there, splashing in milky squirts the legs of Majendwa and three or four other men of rank who had come in to join the *indaba*. These moved not a muscle, but I could catch a lurking twinkle in the eyes of the chief’s son.

“Here, I say. Tell them I’m devilish sorry,” cried Falkner shaking off the stuff as best he could. “I’m not accustomed to these things, you know.”

I put it to them. They looked at Falkner, then at the shattered bowl, and as a Zulu is nothing if not humorous, one and all went off into a roar of laughter.

“Hallo! That’s better,” grinned Falkner looking up, as he tried to wipe off the liquid with his handkerchief. “Why these are jolly sort of fellows after all. I was afraid they were going to look beastly glum over it. Tell them I’ll get into their ways soon, Glanton. Meanwhile here’s their jolly good health,” taking a big drink out of a fresh bowl that was placed before him, only this time taking care to hold it with both hands.

Soon the cracking of whips and an increased buzz of voices without announced the arrival of the waggons, and we all went out to the place of outspan. The sun was sinking behind the high ridge which bordered the great basin, and the plain in front of the kraal was dappled with homing herds, and on these I looked with the eye of a connoisseur and especially on the little fat, black Zulu oxen, which always fetch a good price for trek purposes. The shrill shout and whistle of the boy herds, blended with the trample and mooing of the cows brought in for the evening milking—but the chief interest on the part of the denizens of the great kraal was centred around the waggons. However it was too late to unload for trade purposes that evening, so beyond getting out a few things for gifts to Majendwa and some of the principal men of the place, I left everything undisturbed.

“Here’s our hut, Falkner,” I said, presently, as we returned within the kraal. “We’re going to sleep here.”

“Sleep here?” he echoed. “Don’t know. I’d much rather sleep at the waggons. How about crawlers,” surveying doubtfully the interior, wherein Tom was depositing the few things we should require for the night.

“Oh, that won’t trouble us. Beyond a few cockroaches of the smaller sort a new hut like this is clean enough. You see Majendwa’s an old friend of mine, and he wouldn’t take it in good part if we didn’t sleep in his kraal, at any rate for a night or two. Now we’re going to dine with him. Look they’ve just killed a young beast in honour of our arrival.”

And dine with him we did, and Falkner himself was fain to own that the great slabs of grilled beef, cut from the choicest part, down the back to wit, which were presently brought in, flanked by roasted mealies, and washed down by unlimited *tywala* constituted a banquet by no means to be sneezed at. What though a clean grass mat did duty for a plate, and a skewer of wood for a fork, even he admitted that we might have fared much worse.

I did not talk much as to the state of the country with our entertainers that night—that I could get at better by degrees, and later. But they chuckled mightily as I described the scrap with Dolf Norbury.

“Udolfu!” Oh yes, they knew him well, used to trade with him at one time, but they didn’t want such whites as him in the Zulu country, they said. I could understand this the more readily, for I knew that he had tried on his bounce even to the verge of attempted blows with Ngavuma, Majendwa’s eldest son, who was from home just now, and for his pains had got a broad assegai into his ribs which had kept him quiet on the flat of his back for a matter of three or four months or so. So chatting—and translating for the benefit of Falkner—even he agreed we had got through an uncommonly jolly evening, and that the real Zulu was a real brick, by Jove! Then we turned in.

I have a knack of shutting my eyes and going sound off about thirty seconds after my head touches the pillow, or whatever does duty for one, and that night made no exception to my general practice. I heard Falkner fumbling about and cussing because he couldn’t get his blankets fixed up just as he wanted them, and so on; then I recollect my half-smoked pipe dropping from my mouth just as usual, and then I recollect no more, till—

I woke—not at all as usual when there was nothing to wake me. The moonlight was streaming in through the interstices of the wicker slab that constituted the door, throwing a fine silver network upon the floor of the hut. Striking a match I looked at my watch. It was just after one. But as the light flickered and went out I became aware of something else. I was alone in the hut. What the deuce had become of Falkner?

Raising myself on one elbow I called his name. No answer. I waited a little, then got up and crawled through the low doorway.

The moon was nearly at full, and I stood looking over the screen of woven grass which was erected in front of the door, leaving just room on each side for a man to pass. The scene was of wonderful beauty. The great circle of domed huts lying between their dark ring fences, the shimmering solitude of the moonlit plain, and beyond, the far amphitheatre of terraced cliffs rising to the twinkling stars. The calm beauty of it all riveted me, accustomed as I was to night in the open—do we ever get accustomed to such nights as this I wonder?—and I stood thinking, or rather beginning to think—when—

Such a clamour broke forth upon the sweet stillness of the night as though all the dogs in the kraal—no, in the world—had suddenly gone stark, staring, raving mad, and then in the light of the broad moon I saw Falkner Sewin clad in nothing but a short light shirt, sprinting as I feel sure he never sprinted before or since. Behind him poured forward a complete mass of curs, gaunt leggy brutes and as savage as they make them, given the conditions of night and a fleeing unwonted object. The ground was open in front of Majendwa's huts, so he had some start.

"This way!" I yelled, lest he should mistake the hut, then quick as lightning I was inside. So was he, in about a moment, and was on his back with both heels jammed hard against the slammed-to wicker slab that constituted the door, while the whole snarling mouthing pack was hurling itself against the same, snapping and growling, till finding they couldn't get in, the ill-conditioned brutes started to fight with each other. Then a man came out of an adjacent hut and shied knobsticks into the lot, dispersing them with many a pained yell. The while I lay there and laughed till I cried.

"If you could only have seen yourself, Falkner, covering distance in the moonlight and a short shirt," I managed to gasp at length. "Man, what the deuce took you wandering about at night? They don't like that here, you know."

"Oh damn what they like or what they don't like!" he growled pantingly. "I couldn't sleep—some infernal leggy thing or other ran over me—so thought I'd admire the view a little by moonlight. Then those loathly brutes came for me all at once. Here! give us hold of that fat flask we had the sense to bring along. I want a drink badly."

"So do I!" I said starting off to laugh again. "Well, you mustn't do any more moonlight patrols. It's *tagati*, as the Zulus say."

Chapter Eighteen.

A Grim Find.

Soon trade became brisk. I had the waggons partly off-loaded, and by dint of stretching a large sail across both of them formed an impromptu store in which the goods were piled. All day long the people crowded up, those who were not dealing enjoying the fun of witnessing the arts and dodges of those who were; just as an outdoor sale on the market square of a town will always attract a number of folks who have nothing else to do, and also, an equal number perhaps of those who have.

Cattle would be driven up; good ones, for I had given out distinctly that it was waste of trouble to bring anything but good ones,—and then the owners, squatting around, would spend an hour or so haggling, to go away firmly resolved not to deal, but they nearly always came back, and, meanwhile, others would take their places, and go through in all probability exactly the same process; for your Zulu at a deal is a born Jew, and will spend an astonishing amount of time haggling out of sheer love of haggling. He would go on for ever but for one consideration—the amount of goods is limited in quantity, and if one neglects to secure his share another does not. So for the first few days I sat tight, making up "lots" with green blankets and cooking pots, butcher knives—always in great request—and brass buttons, beads and Salampore cloth, which by the way, is not cloth at all, but a light gauzy fabric of dark blue, greatly in favour with the unmarried girls. All sorts of "notions" were in request, the veriest trifles as to market value, but highly prized up there; and as a thing is worth what it will fetch, why there comes in much of the trader's legitimate profit. I always held that no trade was too small to be refused, and I would accept curios, which were always in demand by down-country dealers in such things. Assegais however were extremely difficult to obtain, so much so indeed as to be practically outside articles of barter, and this was significant. Another thing not less so was the universal request, open or covert, for firearms and ammunition. It was not much use my explaining to them that they were better off without either, that a man can do much better with a weapon he understands than with one he does not. For some reason or other they were bent on having them.

However, in a short while I found myself in possession of quite a nice lot of cattle, the sale of which would leave me a very considerable profit over when expenses were cleared, so I was not dissatisfied. Then, all of a sudden, trade fell off, then ceased altogether. There was no apparent reason for it. I stood well with Majendwa, indeed I always erred in the right direction with regard to the principal chiefs when on trading ventures in their districts, holding that it is far better policy to be too liberal than too mean. But there was no blinking the fact that for some reason or other further trade was "off." No more were my waggons thronged from morning till night. Those from outlying kraals who had been the most eager, stopped away altogether, but now and then someone from close at hand would drop in for something, and even then the deal would be so insignificant as to remind me of my store at Isipanga.

I put the matter squarely to Majendwa, but it didn't seem to help. He admitted that for some reason or other my trade had stopped. What could he do? He could not order his people to deal. I agreed with him there, still I was puzzled. I had calculated to have easily cleared out all I had at his place. Yet I had done well enough so far, but when I proposed to move further northward, and get into Uhamu's country, Majendwa seemed for some reason or other unwilling that I should.

"You will do no better there, Iqalaqala," he said, "and, for the rest, it is not advisable. See, we are alone, and are talking beneath the bullock's skin. Again I say—do not go there. Return rather to your own country, even if you have to carry back some of the goods you have brought. Or, there may be those on your way who will relieve you of them."

I looked at him fixedly and a thought struck me. The phrase he had used might well bear two meanings. Had he intended it as a warning? Such might well have been the case.

Falkner the while had been amusing himself as best he could. He soon got tired of watching the barter, though at first it had afforded him some amusement, but I had laid a stern and uncompromising embargo upon any approach even to practical joking. So he would roam off with a rifle or shot gun, and although I was anxious lest he should get into some

mischief or other yet he seemed not to. Now he welcomed the idea of clearing out, when we talked things over. To my surprise he propounded an idea when I was telling him how our trade had come to a standstill.

"What if that sweep whose head I punched should be at the bottom of it?" he said. "Dolf Norbury, I mean?"

I thought there might be something in it. However if it were true, he was bound to have gone to work in some such way that it would be impossible to prove anything, and even if we did, it was hard to see what we could do.

"Do? Why call round and punch his head again, of course," he answered briskly.

"That wouldn't help us to recover our trade. Besides Dolf Norbury isn't the sort to let himself be caught that way twice running. This time it would be a case of shooting on sight."

"That's a game two can play at," said Falkner.

"Yes," I answered, "but in this case it's a game in which he holds all the hand. It's clear that he has some following, and we have a lot of cattle to drive. Well, while we were settling accounts with him his, or rather Mawendhlela's, rips would have no trouble in clearing these off to some part of the country where we should never see a hoof of them again."

"But would they have the cheek to do that?"

"Wouldn't they? And this is a time when neither the King nor any of the chiefs would be over-keen to interfere in a quarrel between two white men. Let them settle it themselves is what would be said and meanwhile we should have lost all we came up for."

"Damn!"

"I echo that sentiment most fervently, but it can't be helped," I said. "As it is I've a notion we shall have to round up our belongings extra tight till we are clear of the country."

"Oh well. Let's make the best of it and sit tight here a week or so longer, Glanton. I'm beginning to enjoy this shooting among rocks. These klip-springers are such cute little devils. It's more fun shooting them than it used to be markhor, and nothing like the fag."

Falkner was a capital shot with rifle and bird gun alike, and one of his good points was that he was a keen and thorough sportsman. That being the case he had been able to find game up here where one less keen would have given up in disgust, and it was a good thing, if only that it kept him out of mischief.

Jan Boom, the Xosa, was the only one who would hint at any reason for the falling off of our trade, but, as it happened, I was rather prejudiced against him by reason of his affectation of a certain air of superiority over those of his own colour, on the strength of his knowledge of English. In fact I rather disliked him, and therefore of course distrusted him. Subsequently I had reason to alter my opinion with regard to him: but that will keep. Out of Mfutela I could get nothing on the subject. Either he knew nothing or was too "close" to say: and when a native is "close" why it is rather less difficult to make an oyster open by whispering soft nothings to it than to get him to unfold.

One day Falkner and I started off to have a hunt among the krantzes beyond those which walled in the hollow. We took Jan Boom with us, and a couple of young Zulus to show us the short cut. It was a grey and lowering day, gloomy in the extreme, and every now and then a spot of rain showed what we were likely to expect, but Falkner was keen on sport, and I was getting hipped, besides, in those days I cared little enough for weather. We scrambled about all the morning among the rocks, with absolutely no luck whatever, and then I got sick of it, wherefore after we had lunched upon what we had brought with us I proposed to find my way back to the waggons. Falkner of course wanted to keep on, but I pointed out that my defection need cause no drawback to him, for I would leave him the boys and make my way back alone. So we separated and before we had long done so a distant report, some way above, showed that at any rate he was beginning to find sport.

I struck downward, rapidly making use of half obliterated cattle tracks, for the Abaqulusi were largely a mountain tribe, and there were outlying kraals among the heights as well as in the hollows. Following one of these paths I came suddenly upon a steep gorge, falling abruptly to the next slope some distance below.

This gully was in places almost chasm-like in its formation, and was indescribably wild and gloomy in the utter solitude of the grey afternoon. I had just crossed it where the path dipped, when, looking up, there stood a klipspringer gazing at me.

He was an easy hundred yard shot. Slipping from the saddle on the further side from him, I thought to myself that Falkner would not altogether have the crow over me when we got back. But—when I looked again, expecting to take a quick aim, by Jingo! the little beast had disappeared.

This was annoying, for now a disinclination to return empty handed had seized me. Quickly and noiselessly I made my way up to where he had been. It was as I had thought. He had been standing on a sort of pinnacle; and now, as I peered cautiously over, there stood the little buck, less than the first distance below.

He was outlined against the black and shadowed bottom of the gorge, and was gazing away from me. Now I would have him, I decided. In a second my sights were on him full—I didn't take long over aiming in those days—when I lowered the rifle with some precipitation. Right bang in a line with where the klipspringer had been standing—had been, observe, for the slight additional movement on my part had caused him to disappear again—was the form of a man.

It gave me a turn, for with lightning rapidity it flashed through my mind that nothing could have saved him. Then consternation gave way to curiosity. The form though that of a man was not that of a living one.

Down in the shadow of a dark hole, overhung by gloomy rocks, it sprawled in a constrained half upright posture against one of these. It was too far off and the light not good enough to be able to distinguish how it was secured in this position, but it seemed to be facing upward in a dreadful attitude of scared supplication. I would go down and investigate. But before I had taken many steps in pursuance of this resolve I stopped short.

For an idea had occurred to me. The body was that of a native, and it was obvious that life had been extinct for some time. What good purpose could I serve by investigating it further? I was in a savage country in which life was held cheap. The man whoever he might be, had quite likely been executed for some offence; the method of his death being in all probability designed to fit the offence. Clearly therefore it was no concern of mine, and accordingly I decided to forego further investigation. And then, as though to confirm me in the good policy of such decision something happened—something that was sufficiently startling.

A bullet pinged against a stone beside me, sending up a hard splash of splinters and dust, and, confound it, the thing had hit barely a yard from where I was standing.

“Hallo, Falkner!” I hailed, deeming the puff of smoke from among the rocks above and opposite must be his work. “Look out I’m here. D’you hear, man?”

But no answer came, not immediately that is. In a minute however, one did come, and that in the shape of another bullet, which banged up the dust just about the same distance on the other side of me. My first impulse was that Falkner was playing one of his idiotic practical jokes at my expense, but with the idea I seemed to feel sure that it was not Falkner—and that, in short, I had better withdraw from this very uncanny spot.

As I hastened to carry this judicious resolve into practical effect I won’t pretend that I felt otherwise than uncomfortable and very much so. Whoever it was up there could shoot—confound him! an accomplishment rare indeed among the natives of Zululand in those days. Clearly too the exact nicety with which both distances had been judged seemed to point to the fact that both shots had been fired by way of warning. That I had at any rate accepted such I trusted I had made clear to the giver of it, as I walked—I hoped without undue haste but rapidly—to where I had left my horse.

Nothing further occurred, although until clear of the heights I kept an uncommonly sharp look out. Once clear of them however, the incident left no great impression on my mind. I had unwittingly stumbled across something unusual and had been about to pry into what didn’t concern me, and it had been resented. The Abaqulusi were an independent and warlike clan who would be sure to resent such. I had received a hint, and a pretty forcible one, to mind my own business, and I concluded that in future I would mind it, at any rate while in these parts. That was all.

Chapter Nineteen.

Concerning a Letter.

Evening was closing in wet and gloomy. The lowering clouds swept along the high ground which shot in the great hollow, causing the cliffs to seem three times their real height in the ghostly murk. Added to this it was raw and cold, which had the effect of causing the inhabitants of the big kraal to hug their firesides. Here and there a form swathed in an ample green blanket might be seen moving from one hut to another, quickly to dive within the same, for your savage is a practical animal, and sees no fun in foregoing any of his comforts when no necessity exists for doing so—and the interior of the huts was warm and dry, and, without, it was neither.

I was alone at the waggons, Falkner not having yet returned. For this I was not sorry, for although Falkner and I had grown accustomed to each other, yet there were times when I could cheerfully accept a holiday from his presence.

Darker and darker it grew. The oxen were driven in and fastened to the trek chain for the night, and the boys, lying snug under the shelter they had rigged up by means of a large sail thrown over the buck waggon, leaving one side between the wheels open, were chatting in their rhythmical deep-voiced hum, and the fire they had built not far from the opening glowing more and more redly as the gloom deepened. Then their talk suddenly ceased, as out of the darkness appeared a tall figure, saluting.

“What have you there?” I said, as the new arrival began fumbling for something in his skin pouch.

“*Incwadi ‘Nkose*,” he answered.

I own to a thrill of excited expectation very foreign to my normally placid way of taking things, for *incwadi* is the word for a letter or a token of any kind. I could hardly restrain my eagerness to open the packet carefully sewn up in oilskin, which the man now handed me. Aïda Sewin, then, had availed herself of the means of correspondence which I had arranged, but—what if this were not addressed to me after all, but only to Falkner? and at the thought my anticipations fell. Still it would be good to hear, anyhow. The rather startling incident of a few hours ago was driven clean from my mind now.

I climbed into the tent waggon and lighted the lantern which hung from the tent, and you may be sure it didn’t take me long to unroll the oilskin wrapping. Two letters it contained—one for Falkner and one for myself—the latter in the handwriting I knew, and one that a reader of character from handwriting would assuredly not have reported upon unfavourably. Having once satisfied myself on the point, I believe I was in no hurry to open it. The pleasures of anticipation, you see, counted for something with me still.

Then came another phase in the above. I drew from the envelope several sheets rather closely written. Why, this was too much luck. I glanced quickly through them to ascertain that the whole of it was for me, but resolved not to anticipate the contents in any way. More than ever was I glad now that Falkner had not returned. I could well do without his somewhat boisterous company for the next half-hour, or even longer. Then I spread open the sheets before me, and by the somewhat dim light of the waggon lantern began to read.

“Dear Mr Glanton,—I am taking advantage of the arrangement you so thoughtfully made, and only trust this will not miss you during your wanderings. Mother is writing to Falkner at the same time. I hope you have been able to make him useful, and that he has behaved himself generally well. He is a good sort of boy at bottom, but gets far too much spoilt among us all, as you must have observed, though I believe I am the one who spoils him least. At any rate a little roughing it will do him no harm.

“Things are very much as usual. We see a good deal of Mr Kendrew, who comes over when he can and is a great

help."—"Oh, the devil he is!" said I to myself at this point. "Just what I foresaw, confound it!"—"But we miss you very much, and are hoping soon to welcome you back after a thoroughly successful expedition."

This was more comforting, I thought to myself, laying down the letter and conjuring up a recollection of the writer's words, that last evening. She would look forward to my return, she had declared—would be disappointed if I did not go to see them immediately. Confound it, what was the matter with me, that I sat dreaming and building castles in the air? The rain fell upon the canvas of the waggon tent with monotonous drip, and a puff of raw air through the flap of the tied-down sail caused the light of the hanging lantern to flicker—but I was no longer in the gloomy wilds of Northern Zululand, on a rainy, chilly, and altogether abominable evening. I was again in the starlight glow as on that evening, listening to the sweet tones of the writer's voice, and gazing at the beautiful, highbred face.

The letter went on, dealing now with everyday matter, in a bright, natural, chatty style. The Major was in great form and delighted with his garden and its development, thanks to some fine rains. The Scotts had been over to see them a couple of times—and here followed some banter at the expense of that worthy and neighbouring family, the head of which—originally a waggon-maker's journeyman—was, incidentally, addicted to too much grog, when he could get it—which wasn't often. At Major Sewin's he could get it, and became comical, but always harmlessly so. Things on the farm were going well, thanks to Ivondwe, who was worth his weight in gold, and—I could read between the lines—was practically running the place himself. Tyingoza had been over to see them too, and seemed completely to have forgotten Falkner's liberty with regard to his head-ring, for he had been exceedingly pleasant, and, through Ivondwe, had said a great many nice things about me—reading which I felt more than brotherly towards Tyingoza, and made up my mind then and there to present him with something of large and practical value when I should get up my next consignment of trade goods.

This had covered some three sheets, closely written, and there were still quite as many more. Decidedly Miss Sewin was a good correspondent. I had been going through her letter grudgingly, as if the turning of every leaf should bring the end near. The sail was lifted, and Tom's honest black face appeared, to ask some question. I curtly told him to go to the devil, and resumed my reading.

"And now," went on the letter, "I am coming to something that I feel I must tell you, and yet I hardly like to. It seems so ridiculous somehow when one comes to put it down on paper, though if you were here, and we could talk it over, well—it might not. You remember that last evening, and what we were talking about when I asked you if some plan could not be arranged under which I could write to you if I felt that we were in need of your aid or advice? The idea rather originated with yourself if you remember, in your usual kindness and forethought, so that consideration alone emboldens me to write what might otherwise seem to you only fanciful and foolish. You know, too, I am not inclined to indulge in that sort of thing, so you will, I am sure, bear with me. But I must begin.

"You remember that witch doctor, Ukozi, who came upon us suddenly at the waterhole that same last evening, when my coin was lost? Well, he has taken to coming here a great deal. At first my father used to get angry with him and want to drive him away; you know, quite in the old style, before you taught him—or tried to teach him—that the natives here were not to be driven like our people in India used to be. But Ukozi didn't seem to mind. He would go away chuckling, but the next day sure enough, there he was again. Then father suddenly swung round and seemed to take a fancy to him. He would talk to him by the hour—through Ivondwe interpreting—and when we wondered, would tell us that he was getting Ulcozi to teach him some of the native magic. Of course it seemed to us absurd, but if we said anything of the sort father would get angry, so the only thing was to let him go his own way. But when it came to his going out at night with the witch doctor and coming back at all hours thoroughly done up, why it seemed that the thing was going too far. He has become very mysterious too. Once he let drop that Ukozi was going to tell him all about the waterhole, and the strange thing that we saw there, and then he became more angry still and vowed that he wouldn't be interfered with—that here was a chance of learning something quite out of the common, and he was going to take it whatever happened. Nothing we can say or do seems to weigh with him in the least, and really, if it didn't sound too absurd, I should say that this witch doctor had got him right under his thumb. I asked Ivondwe about it quietly, but he was very nice, and said that the old *Nkose* was a wise man, yet there were things that his wisdom had not yet reached, and now he would like to learn them—that was all. There was nothing to trouble about. When he had learnt what Ukozi could—or would—teach him—and that was not much—then he would be the same as before. Now, Mr Glanton, you know these people, and I ask you what does it all mean? My father is altogether a changed man—how changed you would be the first to recognise if you could see him. What, too, is the object; for Ukozi, beyond getting something to eat, and tobacco now and then, does not seem to ask for anything by way of payment, and I always thought the native *isanusi* was nothing if not acquisitive? But he is always here. For want of a better expression he is getting upon my nerves, and not only upon mine. It seems as if we were somehow being drawn within an influence, and an influence the more weird and inexplicable that it is through an agency that we should traditionally hold as something inferior, and therefore quite absurd to take seriously. I mean a native influence.

"Shall I risk disgracing myself for ever in your eyes by owning that I am getting just a little bit frightened? Yes, frightened—I'm afraid there's no other word for it—and the worst of it is I don't in the least know what I am frightened of. It seems as if a something was hanging over us—a something awful, and from which there is no escape. You remember it was such a presentiment that made me say what I did the last time you were here, and you reassured me on the subject of the witch doctor at any rate. As to him, there is another strange circumstance. Arlo, too, seems to have come under his influence. Arlo who never could be got to take to any native, and now he is more obedient to this Ukozi than to any of us; yet it is the obedience of fear, for he whines and crouches when the witch doctor speaks to him. Here, you will allow, is a real mystery.

"There are other things I might say, but I think I have said enough. Again I hope you won't put me down as a weak-minded idiot frightened at her own shadow. This country, you see, is so new and strange to us, and our position is rather lonely; father, too, is ageing a good deal, so there is some excuse if we feel a little—well, nervous, at times. As it is I have put off writing to you until, as I reckon from what you said, your time in Zululand must be nearly up, and then only that you may not delay to come and see us immediately on your return.

"All send kind regards and are looking forward to welcoming you back, but none more so than—

"Yours very sincerely,

"Aïda Sewin.

"P.S.—I would rather you didn't mention anything of this to Falkner."

This letter was, to say the least of it, puzzling. Carefully I read it through again, and then it became obvious that the main drift of it was, if not exactly an after-thought, at any rate not in the writer's mind to communicate when she first began. Her contradictory accounts of her father pointed to this. I made an effort to put behind me for the present the feeling of exultation that I should be the one appealed to—the rock of refuge, so to say—for I wanted to think out the drift of the whole thing; and all my experience has gone to teach me that you can't think, of two things at once without only half thinking of both of them. The witch doctor's conduct was inexplicable viewed by the ordinary light of common-sense motive. But I had lived long enough among natives to know that I didn't really know them, which is paradoxical yet true. I knew this much, that underlying their ordinary and known customs there are others, to which no white man ever gains access except by the purest accident—customs, it may be, to all appearances utterly inconsequent or even ridiculous, but others again of darker and more sinister import. Such are denied by them with laughter, as too utterly absurd for existence, but they do exist for all that, and the confiding European is lulled completely, thrown off the scent. And now, putting four and four together, I wondered whether it was not somewhere in this direction that I must search for Ukozi's motive.

As for the Major's craze, that didn't trouble me overmuch, if only that I remembered that old gentlemen of the retired Anglo-Indian persuasion were prone to take up fads, from the Lost Ten Tribes craze to Plymouth Brethrenism. He had been struck by Ukozi's profession of occultism, and probably hipped by the isolation of his own surroundings, had thrown himself into it. I—and Falkner—would soon put that right, on our return.

And yet, and yet—as I again took up Aïda Sewin's letter in search it might be of a further sidelight, the very real note of concern, not to say alarm, which I read into it impressed me. It was as though I heard a cry from her to hasten to her assistance. Well, I would do so. As I have said, my trade with Majendwa's people had suddenly and unaccountably broken down, but I had acquired quite a respectable lot of cattle, all in excellent condition. I would have them all brought in on the morrow and trek the next day for home. And having come to this conclusion I heard the tramp of a horse outside, and Falkner's voice lifted up in a resounding hail, which had the effect of setting all the curs in the big kraal adjoining, on the stampede in such a fashion as to remind me of Falkner's sprinting match on the first night of our arrival.

Chapter Twenty.

Falkner Shows His Hand—And His Teeth.

I put the letter into my pocket, flung on a mackintosh and dived outside again. The rain was still coming down in a steady pour, and the cloud of vapour rising from the horse's heaving flanks steamed up redly against the firelight. Falkner was in high spirits. A reebok was tied behind his saddle and Jan Boom was carrying the carcase of a klipspringer, and a few unconsidered trifles in the way of partridges.

"You haven't been out for nothing?" I said, glancing at the spoil.

"Rather not. I've had a ripping day of it, but—trot out the grog, old man. Phew! it's cold. For the last hour I've hardly been able to feel my feet in the stirrups."

"Likely. Here, you'd better tumble into the waggon and get into dry togs. Then we'll have scoff. By the way, the post has come."

"Post? See here. Who are you getting at, Glanton? Post!"

"Not at anybody. Here's a letter, from your aunt I believe."

"By Jove! I thought you were humbugging. Oh well, that'll keep—till after scoff at any rate, and I'm starving."

I had made up my mind to say nothing to him of Aïda Sewin's letter unless his own communication should contain some reference to it. Soon he was in dry clothes, and the klipspringer was sizzling on the fire, which the boys had managed to shelter ingeniously with the aid of some stones and a bit of old sail. Then, in a trice, the grill being ready, we fell to with a will, seated on the edge of the *kartel*, our metal plates in our laps, and the rain splashing down upon the waggon tent, while we were warm and dry, if somewhat cramped, within.

"This is jolly and snug, and no mistake," pronounced Falkner, "and grilled klipspringer makes right radiant scoff. Here, put the bottle across—it's on your side. And I say, Glanton, I came across a devilish rum thing to-day—a devilish nasty thing. It turned me quite sick, 'pon my word it did. By the way, what were you blazing at soon after we parted? I heard a couple of shots."

"Oh, it was another klipspringer. But a mere snap, not a fair chance," I answered, not intending to let him into my secret experience. "What was it you came across?" I went on, feeling rather curious, for he had turned quite serious, as though impressed by some very unpleasant recollection.

"Why! it was about two hours away from here, or might have been rather more—this afternoon just after I'd boned that reebok—a nice clear shot he gave me—a longish one too. Well, away beyond the second line of krantzes over that side, we stumbled suddenly upon a small kraal, where they were none too civil—didn't seem the least glad to see us, to put it mildly. Well, we didn't stop, but as we moved on they objected to us going the way we wanted, and in fact the way we eventually came. I rather lost my temper, for they became beastly bumptious, you know, and at one time made as if they'd try to prevent us."

"You didn't get punching any of their heads, I hope," I interrupted, rather sharply.

"No, no. But upon my soul I felt inclined to. First of all they began lying about there being no road there, and so forth, but I knew they were lying, so made up my mind to go that way. Jan Boom didn't want to either—and those two boys who started with us wouldn't go any further, said we shouldn't want them any more, and that we could find our own way back now. Well, I was of the same opinion, so on we came. But at one time I began to think they had been right. It was awful the scramble we had over the rocks and boulders. Jan Boom had turned beastly sulky too, and kept wanting to go back himself, but I'm an obstinate beggar, you know, Glanton, and when once I've made up my mind to do a thing I'll do it—What are you grinning at?"

“Only, if you don’t mind me saying so, you ought to have remained in the service of your country. You’d have made a model leader of a forlorn hope, and, in the fulness of time, a model general.”

“Here, hang your chaff,” he growled, not knowing whether to be pleased or not. “I never quite know whether you mean what you say or are only pulling a fellow’s leg.”

“Well, go on.”

“Jan Boom, I was saying, had got so sulky that I more than threw out a hint I was likely to hammer him if he didn’t think better of it. We at last struck a gully which was rather an improvement on our way so far, but even it was beastly bad. It was a sort of dry watercourse, although if the rain kept on at this rate it would soon be a devilish wet one. Well, there was a path of sorts, though not easy to distinguish; now over the rocks now between them, a gloomy hole, I tell you, and most infernally depressing.”

“How depressing?” I interrupted, for I had never given Falkner Sewin credit for sufficient imagination to feel depressed by such a mere accident as surroundings.

“Well, it was. The cliffs seemed to meet overhead as if they were going to topple down on you, don’t you know, and there wasn’t a sound, except the wind howling round the rocks every now and then like a jolly spook. Then, all of a sudden my horse rucked back at his bridle—we were leading the horses, you know—so suddenly as nearly to pull me on my back—as it was I dropped my pipe on the stones and broke it—and before I had time even to cuss, by George, I saw a sight.

“We had got into a sort of caldron-shaped hollow, something like our waterhole at home would look like, if it was empty, and—by the Lord, Glanton, there, against the rock where the water should have fallen over if there had been any to fall, was the body of a wretched devil of a nigger—spread-eagled upright, and staring at us; in fact literally crucified—for we found that the poor beast was triced up to pegs driven firmly into cracks in the rock. Good Lord! it gave me a turn. In some places the flesh had all fallen away, showing the bones, and what remained was bleached almost white. Here, send the bottle along again. The very recollection turns me sick.”

“How long did he seem to have been there?” I said. “Could you form any idea?”

“Not well. Besides I was in too great a hurry to get away, and so was Jan Boom, I can tell you. What d’you think it meant, Glanton? Mind you, those devils up in the kraal must have known of it, because it occurred to me afterwards that that was their reason for not wanting us to go that way.”

“Very likely. The chap may have been planted there after he was dead, you know,” I answered—not in the least thinking so. “Some peculiar and local form of sepulture.”

“I don’t believe it,” rejoined Falkner quickly. “The expression of the face was that of some poor devil who had come to a most beastly end and knew it—and it haunts me.”

“Well, why didn’t you investigate further, while you were at it?”

“Didn’t feel inclined. But—I’ll tell you what, Glanton, we might go back there to-morrow. I’m sure I could find the way, and at any rate Jan Boom could. Then such an experienced beggar as you could see to the bottom of it perhaps. Eh?”

“I’ve no wish to do anything of the sort, in fact it would have been just as well if you had missed that little find to-day altogether. And I should recommend you to keep your mouth shut about it—to Tom for instance. You may rely upon it Jan Boom will. They have curious customs in these parts, and some of them they don’t in the least like nosed into and talked over. By the way, here’s Mrs Sewin’s letter I was telling you about.”

“By Jove, yes—I forgot. Well, I’ll like to hear something of them at home, if only to help me to forget that beastly thing. Let’s see what the old lady says.”

He read me out bits of the letter as he went on—just ordinary bits of home talk, but there was no word bearing upon the mystery set forth in his cousin’s letter. Suddenly he looked up.

“Hallo Glanton! So Aïda has been favouring you, I find.”

“Yes. A letter from your cousin came at the same time as this.”

“I say though, but you kept it devilish dark,” he said, nastily. In fact, his tone reminded me of the earlier days of our acquaintance.

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘devilish dark,’ Sewin, but I’m quite sure I don’t like the expression,” I answered shortly. “Let me remind you however that you’ve ‘had the floor’ ever since you came back, with that yarn of yours. Could I have got in a word edgeways?”

“Well, what news does she give you?” he jerked out, after an interval of silence, during which he had been viciously rapping his pipe against the heel of his boot as he sat.

“Just about the same as what you’ve been reading out to me.”

“That all?”

It was as much as I could do to keep my temper. Falkner’s tone had become about as offensive as he knew how to make it, and that is saying a great deal—this too, apart from the fact that I resented being catechised at all. But I remembered my promise to his cousin not to quarrel with him, and just managed to keep it; only then by making no reply.

There was silence again. By way of relieving it I sung out to Tom to come and take away our plates, and the relics of our meal. Falkner the while was emitting staccato puffs from his newly lighted pipe, and as I settled down to fill mine he

suddenly broke forth:

“Look here, Glanton, I’m a plain-speaking sort of chap and accustomed to say what I mean. So we’d better have it out now, once and for all.”

I didn’t affect ignorance of his drift. I merely nodded, and he went on. “Well then, I’ve noticed that you and Aï—my cousin—have been getting uncommon thick of late. I didn’t think much of it, but now, when it comes to her writing to you on the quiet, why I think it’s time to have some say in the matter.”

“In the first place the only persons entitled to have any ‘say in the matter’ as you put it are Major and Mrs Sewin,” I said. “In the next, you should withdraw that expression ‘on the quiet.’ It’s an insult—to your cousin.”

“Oh well, since you put it like that, I withdraw it,” he growled. “But as for—er—the matter in hand, well, I warn you you are poaching on someone else’s preserves.”

“Might I, as a matter of curiosity, ask who the ‘someone else’ may be?” I said, conscious at the same time of a wholly unaccustomed sinking of the heart.

“Certainly, and I’ll tell you. It’s myself.”

“That’s straight anyway,” I rejoined, feeling relieved. “Then I am to understand I must congratulate you—both—on an engagement?”

He started at the word “both.”

“Er—no. Not exactly that. Hang it, Glanton, don’t I put things plain enough? I mean I was first in the field, and it isn’t fair—in fact I consider it beastly dishonourable for you, or any other fellow, to come trying to upset my coach. Now—do you see?”

“I think I understand,” I said, feeling softened towards him. “But as regards myself, first of all you had better be sure you are not assuming too much, in the next place, you are just in the position of anybody else, and can’t set up any such plea as prior rights. See?”

“No, I’ll be hanged if I do,” he snarled. “I’ve told you how things stand, so now you’re warned.”

“I’m not going to quarrel with you,” I answered. “We are all alone here, with no chance of anybody overhearing us or at any rate understanding us if they did. Yet I prefer talking ‘dark’ as the Zulus say. Let’s start fair, d’you hear? Let’s start fair—and—now you’re warned.”

He scowled and made no answer. In fact, he sulked for the rest of the evening—and, to anticipate—long after that.

I went outside before turning in, leaving Falkner in the sulks. The rain had ceased, and bright patches of stars were shining between the parting clouds. The fire had died low, and the conversation of the boys had dropped too. I can always think best out in the open, and now I set myself hard to think over these last developments. By its date the letter must have been nearly a week on the road. Well, there was not time for much to have happened in between. Then what Falkner had just revealed had come to me as something of an eye-opener. I had at first rather suspected him of resenting me as an interloper, but subsequently as I noted the free and easy terms on which he stood with both his cousins—the one equally with the other—the last thing to enter my mind was that he should think seriously of either of them, and that one Aïda. Why, she used to keep him in order and treat him very much as a boy—indeed all her references to him when discussing him with me, even as lately as in the letter I had just received, bore the same elder sisterly tone, and I felt sure that while this held good, Falkner, in entertaining the hopes he had revealed to me, was simply twisting for himself a rope of sand. At the same time I felt sorry for him, and my not unnatural resentment of the very dictatorial tone which he had chosen to adopt towards myself cooled entirely. He was young and so boyish that every allowance must be made. At the same time I envied him his youth. As for me, well I hardly knew, but as my meditations ran on in the stillness and silence of the starlit night, clustering ever around one recollection, well I realised, and not for the first time, that life seemed very much to have been wasted in my case.

The one talent man in the parable recurred to my mind, and I will even own, I hope not irreverently, to a sneaking sympathy for that same poor devil. He might have lost his one talent, or fooled it away, instead of which, he at any rate kept it—and, after all there is a saying that it is more difficult to keep money than to make it. Now it seemed to me that I was very much in the same boat with him. I had kept my talent—so far—and was it even now too late to add to it, but—what the deuce had this got to do with Aïda Sewin, who formed the undercurrent of all the riotous meditations in which I was indulging? Well perhaps it had something.

Chapter Twenty One.

Dolf Norbury Again.

When two people, trekking together beyond the confines of civilisation fall out, the situation becomes unpleasant. If each has his own waggon, well and good, they can part company, but if not, and both are bound to stick together it spells friction. For this reason I have always preferred trekking alone.

Even my worst enemy could hardly accuse me of being a bad-tempered man, let alone a quarrelsome one. On the other hand I have never laid claim to an angelic disposition, and if I had the demeanour of my present companion would have taxed it to the uttermost, since we had each been betrayed into showing the other our hand. For my part I can honestly say the fact would have made no difference whatever in our mutual relations, but Falkner Sewin was differently hung. First of all he sulked heavily, but finding that this did not answer and that I was entirely independent of him for companionship, for I would talk to the Zulus by the hour—he threw that off and grew offensive—so much so that I felt certain he was trying to pick a quarrel with me. Had it been any other man in the world this would have concerned me not one atom, indeed he needn’t have tried overmuch. But here it was different. There was my promise to his cousin, and further, the consideration that Aïda Sewin was his cousin and thus very nearly related indeed. No, on no account must we come to blows, and yet the strain upon my temper became hourly more great.

I had not been able to trek when I had intended, by reason of something beyond the ordinary native delay in bringing in my cattle; in fact in one particular quarter I had some difficulty in getting them brought in at all. In view of the troubled state of the border this looked ominous. In ordinary times Majendwa's people like other Zulus, though hard men of business at a deal, were reliability itself once that deal was concluded. Now they were inclined to be shifty and evasive and not always over civil; and all this had come about suddenly. Could it mean that war had actually broken out? It might have for all we knew, dependent as we were upon those among whom we dwelt for every scrap of information that might reach us from outside. Otherwise their behaviour was unaccountable. But if it had, why then we should be lucky to get out of the country with unperforated skins, let alone with a wheel or a hoof to our names.

Even Majendwa's demeanour towards me had undergone a change, and that was the worst sign of all; for we had always been good friends. All his wonted geniality had vanished and he had become curt and morose of manner. I resolved now to take the bull by the horns, and put the question to Majendwa point-blank. Accordingly I betook myself to his hut, with that object. But the answer to my inquiries for him was prompt. The chief was in his *isigodhlo*, and could not be disturbed. This sort of "not at home" was unmistakable. I returned to the waggons.

Now an idea struck me. Was there more in that gruesome discovery of mine—and Falkner's—than met the eye? Was the fact that we had made it, first one of us and then the other, at the bottom of the chief's displeasure? It might have been so. At any rate the sooner we took the road again the better, and so I announced to Falkner that we would inspan at sunrise. His reply was, in his then mood, characteristic.

"But we haven't traded off the stuff yet," he objected. "I say. You're not in a funk of anything, are you, Glanton? I ask because I rather wanted to stay on here a little longer."

I turned away. His tone was abominably provoking, moreover I knew that he would be glad enough to return, and had only said the foregoing out of sheer cussedness.

"You have your horse," I said. "If you like to remain I'll leave Jan Boom with you, and you can easily find your way back."

"Want to get rid of me, do you?" he rapped out. "Well you won't. Not so easily as that. No—you won't."

To this I made no answer. At sunrise the waggons were inspanned. Then another difficulty cropped up. The boys who were to have driven the herd of trade cattle, at any rate as far as the border, did not turn up. In disgust I was prepared to take them on myself with the help of Mfutela. Falkner had learnt to drive a waggon by this time and now he must do it. His reply however when I propounded this to him was again characteristic. He was damned if he would.

The knot of the difficulty was cut and that unexpectedly, by the appearance of the chief's son, and with him some boys.

"These will drive your cattle, Iqalaqala," he said.

"That is well, Muntisi," I answered. "And now son of Majendwa, what has come between me and the chief that he holds my hand no more? Is there now war?"

We were a little apart from the others, and talk in a low slurred tone that natives use when they don't want to be understood.

"Not war," he answered; "at any rate not yet. But, Iqalaqala, those who come into a chief's country should not come into it with too many eyes."

"Ha!" I said, taking in the quick glance which he shot in Falkner's direction, and with it the situation. "Too many eyes there may be, but a shut mouth more than makes up for that. A shut mouth, *impela*!"

"A shut mouth? *Au*! Is the mouth of Umsindo ever shut?"

This, it will be remembered, was Falkner's native name, meaning noise, or bounce, and the chief's son was perpetrating a sort of pun in the vernacular.

"But it will be this time, never fear," I answered. "Farewell now, son of Majendwa. I, who have seen more than men think, know how not to talk."

I felt really grateful to Muntisi, and made him a final present which he appreciated.

"You need not mistrust those I have brought you," he said. "Only for others you cannot have too many eyes now until you reach Inncome," he added meaningly.

Nothing of note happened and we trekked on unmolested in any way, travelling slow, for the trade cattle were fat and in excellent condition, which of course I didn't want to spoil. Then befel an incident which was destined to give us trouble with a vengeance.

We had got into sparsely inhabited country now, and were nearing the border. One afternoon Falkner and I had struck off from the track a little to shoot a few birds for the pot—by the way Falkner had in some degree condescended to relax his sulks, being presumably tired of his own company. We had rejoined the track and had just put our horses into a canter to overtake the waggons when Falkner threw a glance over his shoulder and said:

"What sort of beast is that?"

I turned and looked back. It was a dark afternoon and inclining moreover to dusk, but I could make out something white glinting through the bush, rather behind us, but as if running parallel to our way. The bush grew in patches, and the thing would be alternately hidden or in the open again.

"Here goes for a shot, anyway," said Falkner, slipping from his horse. He carried a rifle and smooth-bore combination gun, and before I could prevent him or perhaps because I tried to, he had loosed off a bullet at the strange beast. A

splash of dust, a good deal short of the mark, leaped up where it struck.

“The line was good but not the distance,” he grumbled. “I’ll get him this time,” slipping in a fresh cartridge.

“Much better not,” I urged. “We don’t want to get into any more bother with the people by shooting their dogs.”

He made no answer, and I was glad that the bush thickened where the animal had now disappeared.

“Let’s get on,” I said. “It’s nearly dark.”

He mounted and we had just resumed our way, when not twenty yards distant, the creature came bounding forth, frightening our horses by the suddenness of his appearance. There was nothing hostile, however, in his attitude. He was wagging his tail, and squirming and whimpering in delight, as a dog will do when he has found a long-lost master, or at best a well-known friend. I stared, hardly able to believe my own eyesight. The large, wolf-like form, the bushy tail—why there could be no duplicate of this ever whelped at a Zulu kraal, that was certain.

“Arlo,” I cried. “Arlo, old chap. What are you doing in these parts, eh?”

The dog whined with delight, squirming up to us, his brush going like a flail. In a moment we were both off our horses.

“It’s Arlo right enough,” said Falkner, patting the dog, who never ceased whimpering and licking his hands. “The question is how did he get here? Eh?”

“Stolen most likely, but it couldn’t have been long ago, for Miss Sewin made no mention of his loss in her letter to me—and it’s hardly likely she’d have forgotten to mention such an important event if it had happened then.”

Somehow I could not help connecting Ukozi with this, and felt vaguely uneasy. What had been happening of late? Had the dog been stolen with any deeper motive than his own intrinsic value—to get him out of the way for instance and clear the road for the carrying out of some sinister and mysterious scheme on the part of the witch doctor?

“Of course,” assented Falkner, “we’ll take him home with us now, at all events. What a devilish lucky thing I happened to look back and see him.”

“Yes, and what a devilish lucky thing you happened to look wrong and miss him,” I answered, for I own to a feeling of petty jealousy that he should be in a position to claim the credit of having found the dog.

“Oh-ah! But a miss is as good as a mile,” he said, with a hoarse laugh. “By Jove, but won’t Aïda be glad when I bring him back to her. Won’t she just?”

“I should think so. Well we’ll have to keep a bright look-out on him till we get home.”

“How the deuce they managed to steal him beats me, I own,” went on Falkner. “Arlo was the very devil where niggers are concerned. Won’t let one of ’em come within fifty yards of him.”

This would have puzzled me too, but for what Aïda’s letter had told me—as well as for what I had witnessed myself up at the waterhole. There was at any rate one “nigger” of which the above held not good. More than ever did I connect Ukozi with the matter.

“Well, we’ve got him back,” I said, “and it’ll be our own fault if we don’t keep him.”

The dog trotted along contentedly behind our horses, wagging his tail in recognition if we spoke a word or two to him. The waggons were outspanning for the night when we reached them—according to instructions, but Arlo went straight up to Tom, whom of course he knew fairly well, wagging his tail, in a sort of “how-d’you-do” manner. He condescended likewise to approve of Jan Boom, who being a Xosa was, of course, a sworn dog fancier, but the others he just tolerated.

We inspanned before daylight, intending to make a long trek, and that evening to cross the Blood River and outspan for the night on the other side. In the then state of the border I should not be sorry to be out of the Zulu country. The trip had not been a signal success, and I began to think of it as possibly the last I should make. I thought too, of other possibilities, even as I had thought when taking my midnight up and down walk beneath the stars—a custom I had before turning in, when the weather permitted, as it generally did. The country was sparsely inhabited, as I have said, and beyond passing three or four small kraals we saw nobody.

We had started upon our afternoon trek. In another hour we should strike the drift and have crossed the border. Then one of the boys Muntisi had given me to drive the cattle came up with the pleasant news that a large body of men, armed too, was coming rapidly on behind, on our track.

I don’t know why this should have caused me uneasiness yet it did. No war had broken out as yet—this I had ascertained from such Zulus as we had fallen in with on the way. I gave orders to push on the waggons, and the cattle. Then getting out a powerful binocular I rode up to a point whence I knew I could command a considerable sweep.

The ground was open on all sides, a thin thread of mimosa along some slight depression being the only sort of cover it afforded. Cresting a rise about three miles distant I made out a dark mass moving forward along our track, and that at a rapid rate.

At any other time this would have caused me little if any anxiety, but now we had had bother enough in all conscience. I didn’t want any more of it, but that the crowd behind was in pursuit of us there was no room for doubt. It was an armed band, for by the aid of the glasses I could make out the glint of assegais and the war shields that were carried.

I returned to the waggons but saw that the pace was as good as the oxen could be put to. The cattle were ahead, going well, but the drift was a good deal further on than I should have wished it to be. Of course there was no physically defensive advantage on the other side over this one, still a boundary is a great moral force; certainly was then while the

boundary dispute was awaiting the award of the commission.

“We’ll get out the rifles and cartridges, Sewin,” I said—“and have them handy, but we won’t show them. Also sling on your revolver, on the same terms. There’s a crowd coming on fast on our track—what the deuce for I can’t make out. Still it’s as well to be prepared for emergencies.”

“Oh rather,” he assented, brisking up at the prospect of a row. “I think it’s about time we read Mr Zulu a lesson.”

Chapter Twenty Two.

A Solomon—in the Zulu.

Suddenly Arlo, who had been trotting along placidly beside the waggons stopped short, looking backward, and emitting low growls, which soon changed to a deep-toned, booming bark. We followed his glance. The Zulus were on the crest of the ridge about half a mile behind. I at once gave orders to the drivers to resume their normal pace. Further flight—as flight—was useless and impolitic.

“Put the dog into the tent waggon and tie him there,” I said to Falkner. “He knows you better than he does me, and might give me trouble. We don’t want him damaged at any rate.”

Even Falkner found it by no means easy to work his will with the now infuriated animal, which with hackles erect was facing in the direction of the impending aggression, making the air resound with his roaring bark; and only he managed it by his characteristically drastic methods in the shape of a double *reim* well laid on. As it was I thought the dog would have pinned him. However he managed to get him into the tent waggon and securely tied. Hardly had he rejoined me when the whole crowd was upon us, shouting and roaring as they surrounded the waggons, bringing them to a standstill.

“I see you!” I said, coldly sarcastic. “Well, and what is it you want now?”

For I had recognised several who had taken part in the former riot, what time Dolf Norbury had appeared upon the scene.

“Want? What we want is the dog—the white dog,” came the reply. “The dog which you have stolen, Abelungu.”

“The white dog. The dog which we have stolen,” I repeated sarcastically. “But the dog belongs to our people on the other side—and we are taking him back. If he has been stolen it is from them.”

“From them. Ha! That is a lie, Umlungu. Give us the dog, or we will take him and everything you have got besides.”

“I think not,” I said. “But as I cannot talk with a number at once, I must talk with one. Where is that one?”

The clamour redoubled but of it I took no notice. I filled my pipe deliberately, and handed the pouch to Falkner.

“What are they saying?” he asked. I told him.

“Well, we ain’t going to give up the dog,” he said. “I’ll see them damned first,” and in his excitement he appended a great deal more that it is not expedient to reproduce.

“I’m with you there,” I said. “And now,” relapsing into the vernacular, as a ringed man came forward—he was an evil-looking rascal, and I recognised him as having been among those who had troubled us before. “And now to begin with—who claims him?”

“Udolfu.”

“Udolfu? Well how long has he had him, and where did he get him?”

“That is nothing to you, Umlungu. He is Udolfu’s dog, and we are come for him. So give him to us.”

“Do you think you could take him yourselves and alive?” I said banteringly, for the savage and frenzied barks of Arlo within the waggon pretty well drowned our talk.

“We will take him, I say. Bring him out.”

“Bring him out—bring him out,” roared the crowd, brandishing assegais and rapping their shields, in an indescribable clamour.

“*Hau*! *Umfane*! I will cut thee into little pieces,” cried one fellow, seizing my boy Tom by the throat and brandishing a big assegai as though he would rip him up.

“Have done!” I said pulling my revolver and covering the savage. “See. We hold plenty of lives here.”

Falkner too had drawn his and was eagerly expecting the word from me to let go.

“Hold!” roared the spokesman, in such wise as to cause the aggressive one to fall back. “Now, Umlungu, give us the dog.”

“First of all,” I said, “if the dog belongs to Udolfu, why is not Udolfu here himself to claim him? Is he afraid?”

“He is not afraid, Umlungu,” answered the man, with a wave of the hand. “For—here he is.”

A man on horseback came riding furiously up. With him were a lot more armed Zulus running hard to keep pace with

him. In a twinkling I recognised we were in a hard tight place, for the number around us already I estimated at a couple of hundred. He was armed this time, for he carried a rifle and I could see a business-like six-shooter peeping out of a side pocket. It was our old friend, Dolf Norbury.

“Hallo, you two damned slinking dog thieves,” he sung out, as the crowd parted to make way for him. “Here we are again you see. Not yet within British jurisdiction, eh?”

There was a banging report at my ear, and lo, Dolf Norbury and his horse were mixed up in a kicking struggling heap.

“I don’t take that sort of talk from any swine, especially outside British jurisdiction,” growled Falkner, hurriedly jamming in a cartridge to replace the one he had fired.

There was a rush to extricate the fallen man, and ascertain damages. It turned out that he had not been hit but his horse was killed. He himself however seemed half stunned as he staggered to his feet. Then up went his rifle but the bullet sang high over our heads in the unsteadiness of his aim.

“Put up your hands!” I sung out, covering him before he could draw his pistol. “Hands up, or you’re dead, by God!”

He obeyed. Clearly he had been under fire enough.

“Go in and take his pistol, Sewin,” I said, still covering him steadily. “If he moves he’s dead.”

It was a tense moment enough, as Falkner walked coolly between the rows of armed savages, for to drive half a dozen spears through him, and massacre the lot of us would have been the work of a moment to them, but I realised that boldness was the only line to adopt under the circumstances. Even then I don’t know how the matter would have ended, but some sort of diversion seemed to be in the air, for heads were turned, and murmurs went up. Still no weapon was raised against us.

“I’ve drawn his teeth now, at any rate, the sweep!” said Falkner with a grin, as he returned and threw down the discomfited man’s weapons. “I say Dolf, old sportsman,” he sung out banteringly. “Feel inclined for another spar? Because if so, come on. Or d’you feel too groggy in the nut?”

But now I had taken in the cause of the diversion. The opposite ridge—that between us and the river—was black with Zulus. On they came, in regular rapid march, hundreds and hundreds of them. They carried war shields and the large *umkonto* or broad stabbing spear, but had no war adornments except the *isityoba*, or leglet of flowing cow-hair.

Those of our molesters who had been most uproarious were silent now, watching the approach of the newcomers. Dolf Norbury sat stupidly staring. The roaring bark of Arlo tied within the waggon rose strangely weird above the sudden silence.

“I say,” broke out Falkner. “Have we got to fight all these? Because if so, the odds ain’t fair.”

For all that he looked as if he was willing to undertake even this. Whatever his faults, Falkner Sewin was a good man to have beside one in a tight place.

“No,” I said. “There’s no more fight here, unless I’m much mistaken. This is a King’s impi.”

It was a fine sight to see them approach, that great dark phalanx. Soon they halted just before the waggons, and a shout of *sibongo* went up from the turbulent crowd who had been mobbing and threatening us but a little while since.

The two chiefs in command I knew well, Untúswa, a splendid old warrior and very friendly to the whites, and Mundúla, both indunas of the King.

“Who are these?” said the first, sternly, when we had exchanged greetings. “Are they here to trade, Iqalaqala?”

“Not so, Right Hand of the Great Great One,” I answered. “They are here to threaten and molest us—and it is not the first time some of them have visited us on the same errand. We are peaceful traders in the land of Zulu, and assuredly there are many here who know that this is not the first time I have come into the land as such.”

A hum of assent here went up from the warriors in the background. Those I had thus denounced looked uncommonly foolish. Still I would not spare them. It is necessary to keep up one’s prestige and if those who are instrumental in trying to lower it suffer, why that is their lookout, not mine.

“He is a liar, chief,” interrupted Dolf Norbury, savagely. “These two have stolen my dog and I and my people have come to recover him. Before they came in to try and steal my trade. That is where we quarrelled before.”

Untúswa heard him but coldly. As I have said, Dolf Norbury was not in favour with the more respectable chiefs of Zululand at that time. Quickly I put our side of the case before this one.

“This I will look into,” he said. “It is not often we have to settle differences between white people, especially Amangisi (English). But the Great Great One, that Elephant who treads the same path as the Queen, will have order in the land—wherefore are we here,” with a wave of his hand towards his armed warriors; from whom deep-toned utterances of *sibongo* went up at the naming of the royal titles. “With the matter of the trade, I have nothing to do. But, Iqalaqala, Udolfu says you have stolen his dog, though had it been his lion he had said, I think he would have uttered no lie, for in truth we could hear his roars while yet far away,” added the old induna with a comical laugh all over his fine face. “Now bring forth this wonderful beast, for we would fain see him.”

“Get out the dog, Sewin,” I said. “The chief wants to see him.”

“Yes, but what the devil has all the jaw been about? It’s all jolly fine for you, but I’m not in the fun,” he growled.

“Never mind. I’ll tell you presently. Leave it all to me now. You’ve got to, in fact.”

Falkner climbed into the waggon, and in a moment reappeared with Arlo, still holding him in his improvised leash. At sight of him the warriors in the impi set up a murmur of admiration.

"Loose him," said Untúswa.

I translated this to Falkner, and he complied. The dog walked up and down, growling and suspicious.

"See now, Udolfu," said Untúswa, who had been watching the splendid beast with some admiration. "This is your dog. Now call him, and take him away with you."

"Arno!" called Norbury. "Here, Arno, old chap. Come along home. Good dog."

But the "good dog" merely looked sideways at him and growled the harder.

"*Arno*. D'you hear? Come here, sir. Damn you. D'you hear!"

The growls increased to a sort of thunder roll.

"*Whau*!" said Mundúla. "That is a strange sort of dog to own—a dog that will not come, but growls at his master when he calls him instead."

"I have not had him long enough to know me thoroughly," said Dolf. "Those two, who stole him from me, have taught him better."

"Call him in the other direction, Falkner," I said.

This he did, and the dog went frisking after him as he ran a little way out over the veldt, and back again, both on the best understanding with each other in the world.

"*Au*! the matter is clear enough," pronounced Untúswa. "The dog himself has decided it. He is not yours, Udolfu. Yet, Iqalaqala, may it not be that those with whom you last saw the dog may have sold him?"

"That is quite impossible, leader of the valiant," I answered. "From those who own him no price would buy him. No, not all the cattle in the kraals of the Great Great One. Further, he has not even got the sound of the dog's name right," and I made clear the difference between the "l" and the "n" which the other had substituted for it.

"*Au*! That is a long price to pay for one dog, fine though he is," said Untúswa with the same comical twinkle in his eyes. "Well, it is clear to whom the dog belongs. You," with a commanding sweep of the hand towards the riotous crowd who had first molested us, "go home."

There was no disputing the word of an induna of the King. The former rioters saluted submissively and melted away. Dolf Norbury, however, remained.

"Will the chief ask them," he said, cunningly, "why they had to leave Majendwa's country in a hurry, and why they are bringing back about half their trade goods?"

"We did not leave in a hurry," I answered, "and as for trade goods, the people seemed not willing to trade. For the rest, we have plenty of cattle, which are even now crossing Inncome, driven by boys whom Muntisi the son of Majendwa sent with us."

"That is a lie," responded Norbury. "They had too many eyes, and looked too closely into what did not concern them. They had to fly, and now they will carry strange stories to the English about the doings on the Zulu side."

This, I could see, made some impression upon the warriors. However, I confined myself simply to contradicting it. Then Norbury asked the chief to order the return of his weapons.

"I need no such order," I said. "I am willing to return them, but—I must have all the cartridges in exchange."

He was obliged to agree, which he did sullenly. As he threw down the bandolier and emptied his pockets of his pistol cartridges he said:

"Glanton, my good friend—if you value your life I warn you not to come to this section of the Zulu country any more. If it hadn't been for this crowd happening up, you'd both have been dead meat by now. You can take my word for that."

"Oh no, I don't," I answered. "I've always been able to take care of myself, and I fancy I'll go on doing it. So don't you bother about that. Here are your shooting-irons."

"What about my horse? You've shot my horse you know. What are you going to stand for him?"

"Oh blazes take you and your impudence," struck in Falkner. "I'm only sorry it wasn't you I pinked instead of the gee. Outside British jurisdiction, you know," he added with an aggravating grin. "Stand? Stand you another hammering if you like to stand up and take it. You won't? All right. Good-bye. We've no time to waste jawing with any blighted dog-stealer like you."

The expression of the other's face was such that I felt uncommonly glad I had insisted on taking his cartridges; and at the same time only trusted he had not an odd one left about him. But the only weapon available was a string of the direst threats of future vengeance, interspersed with the choicest blasphemies, at which Falkner laughed.

"You came along like a lion, old cock," he said, "and it strikes me you're going back like a lamb. Ta-ta."

I talked a little further with the two chiefs, and then we resumed our way, they walking with us as far as the drift. As to the state of the border Untúswa shook his head.

“See now, Iqalaqala,” he said. “One thing you can tell your people, and that is that any trouble you may have met with in the land where the Great Great One rules has not been at the hands of his people but at those of your own.”

This was in reference to all sorts of reports that were being circulated with regard to the so-called enormities of Cetywayo, and the hostility of his people; and the point of it I, of course, fully recognised.

I made the chiefs a liberal present, out of the remnant of the things we were taking back with us. We took leave of them at the drift, and the whole impi, gathered on the rising ground, watched us cross and raised a sonorous shout of farewell. Under all the circumstances I was not sorry to be back over the border, but I decided to trek on a good bit before outspanning lest Dolf Norbury should yet find means to play us some bad trick.

And then—for home!

Chapter Twenty Three.

“Welcome Home!”

I envied Falkner as he parted company with me, for he wanted to go straight home, and my store was all out of his way in the other direction. We had returned by the same route as that by which we had gone, skirting the border and re-crossing by Rorke’s Drift; and no further incident worthy of note had befallen us.

“See here, Falkner,” I said, as he would have left me in cool offhand fashion. “We’ve made this trip and taken its ups and downs together, and more than once I’ve had reason to be glad that you were along. But if we haven’t got on as well as we might during the last part of it, really I can’t see that it is altogether my fault. Nor need we bear each other any ill-will,” and I put out my hand.

He stared, then shook it, but not cordially, mumbling something in a heavy, sullen sort of way. Then he rode off.

It had been a temptation to accompany him, and he had even suggested it, but I saw through his ill-concealed relief when I declined. I had plenty to attend to on first arriving home again, and it struck me that neglect of one’s business was hardly a recommendation in the eyes of anybody.

Yes, I had plenty to attend to. The waggons had to be off-loaded and kraals knocked into repair for holding the trade cattle, and a host of other things. I paid off Mfutela and his son, and sent them back well contented, and with something over. But Jan Boom, when it came to his turn, seemed not eager to go.

Then he put things plainly. Would I not keep him? He would like to remain with me, and I should find him useful. There were the trade cattle to be looked after, to begin with, and then, there was nothing he could not turn his hand to. He would not ask for high wages, and was sure I should find him worth them—yes, well worth them, he added. Had he not been worth his pay so far?

I admitted readily that this was so, and the while I was wondering why he should be so anxious to remain? There seemed some meaning underlying the manner in which he almost begged me to keep him, and this set me wondering. Going back over our trip I could not but remember that he had proved an exceedingly willing, handy and good-tempered man, and my earlier prejudice against him melted away.

“I will keep you then, Jan Boom,” I said, after thinking the matter out for a few minutes.

“*Nkose*! There is only one thing I would ask,” he said, “and that is that you will tell me when three moons are dead whether you regret having kept me on or not.”

I thought the request strange, and laughed as I willingly gave him that promise. I still held to my theory that he had broken gaol somewhere or other, and had decided that he had now found a tolerably secure hiding-place; and if such were so, why from my point of interest that was all the better, if only that it would keep him on his best behaviour.

All the morning of the day following on my return I was busy enough, but by the early afternoon felt justified in starting to pay my first visit to the Sewins.

As I took my way down the bush path I had plenty of time for thought, and gave myself up to the pleasures of anticipation. Those last words: “You will come and see us directly you return. I shall look forward to it,” were ringing in a kind of melody in my mind, as my horse stepped briskly along. And now, what would my reception be? It must not be supposed that I had not thought, and thought a great deal, as to the future during the couple of months our trip had lasted. Hour after hour under the stars, I had lain awake thinking out everything. If all was as I hardly dared to hope, I would give up my present knockabout life, and take a good farm somewhere and settle down. If not—well I hardly cared to dwell upon that. Of Falkner in the light of any obstacle, strange to say I thought not at all.

From one point of the path where it rounded a spur the homestead became momentarily visible. Reining in I strained my eyes upon it, but it showed no sign of life—no flutter of light dresses about the stoep or garden. Well, it was early afternoon, hot and glowing. Likely enough no one would be willingly astir. Then a thought came that filled my mind with blank—if speculative—dismay. What if the family were away from home? The stillness about the place now took on a new aspect. Well, that sort of doubt could soon be set at rest one way or another, and I gave my horse a touch of the spur that sent him floundering down the steep and stony path with a snort of surprised indignation.

We had got on to the level now and the ground was soft and sandy. As we dived down into a dry drift something rushed at us from the other side with open-mouthed and threatening growl, which however subsided at once into a delighted whine. It was Arlo—and there on the bank above sat Arlo’s mistress.

She had a drawing block in her hand and a colour box beside her. Quickly she rose, and I could have sworn I saw a flush of pleasure steal over the beautiful face. I was off my horse in a twinkling. The tall, graceful form came easily forward to meet me.

“Welcome home,” she said, as our hands clasped. “I am so glad to see you again. And you have kept your promise

indeed. Why we hardly expected you before to-morrow or the day after."

"It was a great temptation to me to come over with Falkner yesterday," I answered. "But, a man must not neglect his business."

"Of course not. It is so good of you to have come now."

"Good of me! I seem to remember that you would look forward to it—that last night I was here," I answered, a bit thrown off my balance by the manner of her greeting. That "welcome home," and the spontaneous heartiness of it, well it would be something to think about.

"Well, and that is just what I have been doing," she answered gaily. "There! Now I hope you feel duly flattered."

"I do indeed," I answered gravely.

"And I am so glad we have met like this," she continued, "because now we shall be able to have a good long talk. The others are all more or less asleep, but I didn't feel lazy, so came down here to reduce that row of stiff euphorbia to paper. I have taken up my drawing again, and there are delightful little bits for water-colour all round here."

The spot was as secluded and delightful as one could wish. The high bank and overhanging bushes gave ample shade, and opposite, with the scarlet blossoms of a Kafir bean for foreground, rose a small cliff, its brow fringed with the organ pipe stems of a line of euphorbia.

"Lie down, Arlo," she enjoined. "What a fortunate thing it was you were able to recover him. I don't know how to thank you."

"Of course you don't, because no question of thanking me comes in," I said. "I would sooner have found him as we did, than make anything at all out of the trip, believe me."

"And your trip was not a great success after all, Falkner tells us?"

"Oh we did well enough, though I have done better. But to return to Arlo. The mystery to me—to both of us—was how on earth he ever managed to let himself be stolen."

"Ah. That dreadful witch doctor must have been at the bottom of it. I only know that one morning he—Arlo not Ukozi—had disappeared, and no inquiry of ours could get at the faintest trace of him. His disappearance, in fact, was as complete as that of that poor Mr Hensley."

"Old Hensley hasn't turned up again, then?" I said.

"No. Mr Kendrew is getting more and more easy in his mind. He's a shocking boy, you know, and says he's too honest to pretend to be sorry if he comes into a fine farm to end his days on," she said, with a little smile, that somehow seemed to cast something of a damper on the delight of the present situation.

"Confound Kendrew," I thought to myself. "Who the deuce wants to talk of Kendrew now?"

"Tell me, Mr Glanton," she went on, after a slight pause. "You got my letter I know, because Falkner has told us how he got the one mother wrote him. Did you think me very weak and foolish for allowing myself to get frightened as I did?"

"You know I did not," I answered, with quite unnecessary vehemence. "Why I was only too proud and flattered that you should have consulted me at all. But, of course it was all somewhat mysterious. Is Ukozi about here now?"

"We haven't seen him for some days. Do you know, I can't help connecting his non-appearance with your return in some way. He must have known you would soon be here. Father is quite irritable and angry about it. He says the witch doctor promised to let him into all sorts of things. Now he pronounces him an arrant humbug."

"That's the best sign of all," I said, "and I hope he'll continue of that opinion. When elderly gentlemen take up fads bearing upon the occult especially, why, it isn't good for them. You don't mind my saying this?"

"Mind? Of course I don't mind. Why should I have bothered you with my silly fears and misgivings—at a time too when you had so much else to think about—if I were to take offence at what you said? And it seems so safe now that you are near us again."

What was this? Again a sort of shadow seemed to come over our talk. Was it only on account of some imaginary protection my presence might afford that she had been so cordially and unfeignedly glad to welcome me?

"I think you may make your mind quite easy now," I said. "This Ukozi had some end of his own to serve, possibly that of stealing the dog, which he knew he could trade for a good price in Zululand, and probably did. I suppose Falkner gave you a full, true and particular account of how we bested the precious specimen who claimed him."

She laughed.

"Oh, he's been bragging about that, and all your adventures—or rather his—up there, in quite his own style."

"Well, there was nothing for either of us to brag about in the way we recovered Arlo," I said. "If the King's impi hadn't happened along in the nick of time I own frankly we might never have been able to recover him at all. It was a hundred to one, you understand."

Again she laughed, significantly, and I read into the laugh the fact that she did not quite accept Falkner's narratives at precisely Falkner's own valuation.

"How did Falkner behave himself?" she went on.

“Oh, he was all right. He was always spoiling for a fight and on one occasion he got it. I daresay he has told you about that.”

“Yes,” she said, with the same significant laugh. “He gave us a graphic account of it.”

“Well he has plenty of pluck and readiness, and a man might have many a worse companion in an emergency.”

“It’s nice of you to say that. I don’t believe he was a bit nice to you.”

“Oh, only a boy’s sulks,” I said airily. “Nothing to bother oneself about in that.”

“But was that all?” she rejoined, lifting her clear eyes to my face.

“Perhaps not,” I answered, then something in her glance moved me to add: “May I tell you then, what it was that caused our differences, who it was, rather?” And I put forth my hand.

“Yes,” she said, taking it. “Tell me.”

“It was yourself.”

“Myself?”

“Yes. Do you remember what you said that last evening I was here? I do. I’ve treasured every word of it since. You said I was to come and see you directly I returned, and that you would look forward to it.”

She nodded, smiling softly.

“Yes. And I have. And—what did you answer?”

“I answered that I would look forward to it every day until it came. And I have.”

“And is the result disappointing?”

“You know it is not.”

I have stated elsewhere that I seldom err in my reading of the human countenance, and now it seemed that all Paradise was opening before my eyes as I noticed a slight accession of colour to the beautiful face, a deepening of the tender smile which curved the beautiful lips. Then words poured forth in a torrent. What was I saying? For the life of me I could not tell, but one thing was certain. I was saying what I meant. Then again her hand reached forth to mine, and its pressure, while maddening me, told that whatever I was saying, it at any rate was not unacceptable when—

Arlo, who had been lying at our feet, sprang up and growled, then subsided immediately, wagging his tail and whining as he snuffed in the direction of the sound of approaching footsteps.

“Hallo, Glanton,” sung out a gruff voice. “You taking lessons in high art? They’re wondering where you’ve got to, Aïda. They’re going to have tea.”

“Well, tell them not to wait. I’ll be in directly when I’m ready.”

“Oh no. No hurry about that,” answered Falkner with an evil grin, flinging himself on the ground beside us, and proceeding leisurely to fill his pipe. “We’ll all stroll back together—eh, Glanton?”

I am ashamed to remember how I hated Falkner Sewin at that moment. Had he heard what I had been saying, or any part of it? But he had thrust his obnoxious presence between it and the answer, and that sort of opportunity does not readily recur, and if it does, why the repetition is apt to fall flat.

He lay there, maliciously watching me—watching us—and the expression of his face was not benevolent, although he grinned. He noted his cousin’s slight confusion, and delighted to add to it by keeping his glance fixed meaningly upon her face. Then he would look from the one to the other of us, and his grin would expand. There was a redeeming side to his disgust at the situation from his point of view. He was annoying us both—annoying us thoroughly—and he knew it.

She, for her part, showed no sign of it as she continued her painting serenely. Further exasperated, Falkner began teasing Arlo, and this had the effect of wearying Aïda of the situation. She got up and announced her intention of returning to the house.

And Falkner, walking on the other side of her, solaced himself with making objectionable remarks, in an objectionable tone, knowing well that the same stopped just short of anything one could by any possibility take up.

Chapter Twenty Four.

“The Answer is—Yes.”

Nothing could exceed the warmth and cordiality of the reception I experienced at the hands of the rest of the family. I might have been one of themselves so rejoiced they all seemed at having me in their midst again—all of course save Falkner. But among the feminine side of the house I thought to detect positive relief, as though my return had dispelled some shadowy and haunting apprehension. There was something about the old Major, however, that convinced me he was cherishing an idea in the back ground, an idea upon which he would invite my opinion at the earliest opportunity. And that opportunity came.

“Let’s stroll down and look at the garden, Glanton,” he began, presently. “I want to show you what I’ve been doing

while you were away."

And without giving anyone an opportunity of joining us, even if they had wanted to, he led the way forth.

I listened as he expatiated upon the improvements he had been making, even as I had listened many a time before, but it struck me his explanations were a little incoherent, a little flurried, like the speech of a man who is not talking of that which lies uppermost in his mind. He continued thus until we had reached the furthest limit of the cultivated ground, where a high bush fence shut this off from possible depredations on the part of bucks or other nocturnal marauders. It was a secluded spot, and there was no sign of any of the others intending to join us.

"Try one of these cigars, Glanton," he began, tendering his case. Then, after one final look round to make sure we were not only alone, but likely to remain so, he went on: "Let's sit down here and have a quiet smoke. There's something I want to get your opinion about. You know this witch doctor chap, Ukozi?"

"Of course I do. What has he been up to?"

"Up to? Oh, nothing. But the fact is I have taken a liking to the fellow. He interests me. He's been showing me some queer things of late—yes, devilish queer things. And he's promised to show me some more."

"What sort of queer things, Major?" I struck in.

"All sorts. Well, the finding of Aïda's lost coin was a queer enough thing in itself. Now wasn't it?"

"Yes. But—it's mere conjuring. You'd probably be surprised to know how the trick was done."

"No doubt. But—do you know?" This somewhat eagerly.

"No, I don't. I doubt though, whether it's worth knowing. Well, Major, you've got bitten with a sort of inclination towards occultism, and Ukozi comes in handy as a means of showing you a thing or two. Isn't that it?"

"Well yes. But—Glanton, I seem to have heard you admit that these fellows can do a good deal. Yet, now you make light of this one?"

"To speak frankly, Major, I think the less you have to do with him, or any of his kidney, the better. By the way, how the dickens do you manage to talk to him? Have you learnt?"

"Oh, I work that through Ivondwe. That's a treasure you've found for us, Glanton. Yes sir, a real treasure. He takes all the bother and anxiety of the place clean off my hands."

"That's good," I said. But at the same time I was not at all sure that it was. I recalled to mind what Aïda had said in her letter with regard to "an influence" under which they seemed to be drawn, this old man especially. No, it was not good that he should be on such terms with natives, and one of them his own servant. For the first time I began to distrust Ivondwe, though as yet I was groping entirely in the dark. For one thing, I could see no adequate motive. Motive is everything, bearing in mind what an essentially practical animal your savage invariably is; and here there was none.

"Well?" said the Major expectantly, impatient under my silence. The truth was I found myself in something of a quandary. Old gentlemen—notably those of the Anglo-Indian persuasion—were, I knew, prone to exceeding impatience under criticism of their latest fad, and for reasons which scarcely need guessing never was there a time when I felt less inclined to incur the resentment of this one.

"I can only repeat what I said before, Major?" I answered. "Candidly I think you'd better leave Ukozi, and his occultism, alone."

"But it interests me, man. I tell you it interests me. Why shouldn't I be allowed to make interesting investigations if I have a mind to? Answer me that."

"Look here," I said. "I know these people, Major, and you don't. I have a good many 'eyes and ears'—as they would put it—scattered about among them, and I'll try and find out what Ukozi's game is. He hasn't started in to fleece you any, you say?"

"No. That he certainly hasn't."

"All the more reason why he needs looking after. Well now don't you have anything more to say to him, at any rate until you hear from me again."

"He won't give me the chance. I haven't seen him for quite a long time. He's never been away for so long a time before."

In my own mind I could not but connect Ukozi's sudden absenteeism in some way with my return.

"Here come the others," went on the Major. "And Glanton," he added hurriedly, "don't let on to the women about what I've been telling you, there's a good fellow."

I was rather glad to be spared the necessity of making or avoiding any promise. It was near sundown, and as they joined us for a stroll in the cool of the evening I thought to catch a significant flash in Aïda's eyes, as though she were fully aware of the burden of her father's conversation with me. Falkner was away at the kraals, for it was counting in time, and I for one did not regret his absence.

Yes, it was a ray of Paradise that sunset glow, as we walked among the flowers in the dew of the evening, for although we two were not alone together yet there was a sweet subtle understanding between us which was infinitely restful. Falkner's interruption, however unwelcome, had not been altogether inopportune, for it had occurred too late; too late, that is, to prevent a very real understanding, though precluding anything more definite. That would come with the next opportunity.

“The usual storm,” remarked Mrs Sewin, looking up, as a low, heavy boom sounded from a black pile of cloud beyond the river valley. “We get one nearly every day now, and, oh dear, I never can get used to them, especially at night.”

“Pooh!” said the Major. “There’s no harm in them, and we’ve got two new conductors on the house. We’re right as trivets, eh, Glanton?”

“Absolutely, I should say,” I answered. We had completed our stroll and had just returned to the house. It would soon be dinner time and already was almost dark.

We were very merry that evening I remember. The Major, glad of someone else to talk to, was full of jokes and reminiscences, while I, happy in the consciousness of the presence beside me, joined heartily in the old man’s mirth, and we were all talking and laughing round the table as we had never talked and laughed before. Only Falkner was sulky, and said nothing; which was rather an advantage, for his remarks would certainly have been objectionable had he made any. Then suddenly in the middle of some comic anecdote, came a crash which seemed to shake the house to its very foundations, setting all the glasses and crockery on the table rattling. Mrs Sewin uttered a little scream.

“Mercy! We’re struck!” she gasped.

“Not we,” returned the Major. “But that was a blazer, by Jingo!”

“Pretty near,” growled Falkner.

“Oh, it’s horrid,” said Mrs Sewin, “and there’s no getting away from it.”

“No, there isn’t,” I said. “If you were in London now you might get away from it by burrowing underground. I knew a man there whose wife was so mortally scared of thunder and lightning that whenever a storm became imminent she used to make him take her all round the Inner Circle. She could neither see nor hear anything of it in the Underground train.”

“That was ingenious. Did you invent that story, Mr Glanton?” said Edith Sewin, mischievously.

Another crash drowned the laugh that followed, and upon the ensuing silence, a strange hollow roar was audible.

“The river’s down, by Jove!” growled Falkner.

“No. It isn’t the river. It’s a tremendously heavy rain shower,” I said, listening.

“Let’s go outside and see what it looks like,” he went on pushing back his chair.

We had done dinner, and this proposal seemed to find favour, for a move was made accordingly. We went out we four, for Mrs Sewin was afraid to stir and the Major remained in with her. Nearer and nearer the roar of the rain cloud approached, though as yet not a drop had fallen over us. Again the blue lightning leaped forth, simultaneously with another appalling crash, cutting short a wrangle which had got up between Falkner and Edith Sewin, and ending it in a little squeal on the part of the latter. But already I had seized my opportunity, under cover of the racket.

“That question I was asking you to-day when we were interrupted,” I whispered to my companion. “It was not answered.”

Then came the flash. In the blue gleam, bright as noon-day, I could see the beautiful, clear cut face turned upwards, as though watching the effect, with calm serenity. Through the thunder roar that followed I could still catch the words.

“The answer is—Yes. Will that satisfy you?”

And a hand found mine in a momentary pressure.

Thus amid black darkness and lightning and storm our troth was plighted. An ill omen? I thought not. On the contrary, it seemed appropriate to my case; for in it much of a hard but healthy life had been passed amid rude exposure to the elements, and that I should have secured the happiness—the great happiness—of my life amid the battling forces of the said elements seemed not unfitting.

The vast rain cloud went whooping along the river-bed, gleaming in starry sparkle as the lightning beams stabbed it, but not a drop fell upon us. The storm had passed us by.

Chapter Twenty Five.

The Witch Doctor Again.

From the moment that Aïda Sewin and I had become engaged life was, to me, almost too good to live. As I have said, I was no longer young, and now it seemed to me that my life up till now had been wasted, and yet not, for I could not but feel intensely thankful that I had kept it for her. I might have been “caught young,” and have made the utter mess of life in consequence that I had seen in the case of many of my contemporaries, but I had not, and so was free to drink to the full of this new found cup of happiness. And full it was, and running over.

Of course I didn’t intend to remain on at Isipanga. The trading and knockabout days were over now. I would buy a good farm and settle down, and this resolve met with Aïda’s entire approval. She had no more taste for a town life than I had myself. The only thing she hoped was that I should find such a place not too far from her people.

“The fact is I don’t know how they’ll ever get on without you,” she said one day when we were talking things over. “They are getting old, you see, and Falkner isn’t of much use, between ourselves. I doubt if he ever will be.”

This made me laugh, remembering Falkner’s aspirations and the cocksure way in which he had “warned me off” that

night in Majendwa's country. But I was as willing to consider her wishes in this matter, as I was in every other.

Falkner had accepted the situation, well—much as I should have expected him to, in that he had sulked, and made himself intensely disagreeable for quite a long time. I was sorry for him, but not so much as I might have been, for I felt sure that it was his conceit which had received the wound rather than his feelings. Which sounds ill natured.

Tyingoza was not particularly elated when I broke the news of my intended departure.

"So you are going to build a new hut at last, Iqalaqala," he said, with a chuckle.

"I am, but not here."

"Not here?"

"No. I am going to leave trading, and raise cattle instead."

"The people will be sorry, Iqalaqala, for we have been friends. *Au*! is it not ever so in life? You hold a man by the hand, and lo, a woman takes hold of his other hand, and—he holds yours no more."

"But in this case we still hold each other by the hand, Tyingoza," I said. "For I am not going into another country nor does the whole world lie between Isipanga and where I shall be."

"The people will be sorry," he repeated.

It was not long before Kendrew found his way over.

"Heard you were back, Glanton," he said. "Well and how did you get on with Sewin up-country?"

"Middling. He has his uses, and—he hasn't."

"Well, I shouldn't find any use for him for long. It's all I can do to stand that dashed commandeering way of his, and 'haw-haw' swagger, as it is. Been down there since you got back? But of course you have," he added with a knowing laugh. "I say though, but doesn't it seem a sin to bury two splendid looking girls in an out-of-the-way place like this?"

"Don't know about that. At any rate I propose to bury one of them in just such an out-of-the-way place," I answered. "I believe it's the thing to offer congratulations on these occasions, so congratulate away, Kendrew. I'll try and take it calmly."

"Eh—what the dev— Oh I say, Glanton—You don't mean—?"

"Yes, I do mean. Compose yourself, Kendrew. You look kind of startled."

"Which of them is it?"

"Guess," I said, on mischief intent, for I detected a note of eagerness in his tone and drew my own conclusions.

"The eldest of course?"

"Right," I answered after a moment of hesitation intended to tease him a little longer.

"Why then, I do congratulate you, old chap," he said with a heartiness in which I thought his own relief found vent. "I say though. You haven't lost much time about it."

"No? Well you must allow for the hastiness of youth."

And then he fired off a lot more good wishes, and soon suggested we should ride over to the Sewins together as he was so near. And reading his motive I sympathised with him and agreed.

Two months had gone by since my engagement to Aïda Sewin and they had gone by without a cloud. If I were to say that a larger proportion of them was spent by me at her father's place than at my own, decidedly I should not be exaggerating. But we learnt to know each other very thoroughly in that time, and the more I learnt to know her the more did I marvel what I had done to deserve one hundredth part of the happiness that henceforth was to irradiate my life. Truly our sky was without a cloud.

I had found a farm that seemed likely to suit me. It was now only a question of price, and the owner was more than likely to come down to mine. The place was distant by only a few hours' easy ride, and that was a consideration.

"Everything seems to favour us," Aïda said. "You know, dear, it is such a relief to me to know that we need not be far away from the old people after all. I would of course go to the other ends of the earth with you if necessity required it, but at the same time I am deeply thankful it does not. And then, you know, you needn't be afraid of any of the 'relations-in-law' bugbear; because they look up to you so. In fact we have come to look upon you as a sort of Providence. While you were away, if anything went wrong, father would fume a bit and always end by saying: 'I wish to Heaven Glanton was back. It would be all right if Glanton were here!' mother, too, would say much the same. So you see you will have very amenable relations-in-law after all."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that in the least," I answered. "As a matter of fact, as you know, I don't think your father was at all well advised in coming out here to set up farming at his age and with his temperament. But now he is here we must pull him through, and we'll do it all right, never fear. But Aïda, if it was a wrong move on his part think what it has resulted in for me."

"And for me," she said softly.

I have set out in this narrative deliberately to spare the reader detailed accounts of love passages between myself and this beautiful and peerless woman whose love I had so strangely won; for I hold that such are very far too sacred to be imparted to a third person, or put down in black and white for the benefit of the world at large. Suffice it that the most exacting under the circumstances could have had no reason to complain of any lack of tenderness on her part—ah, no indeed!

This conversation took place during a long walk which we had been taking. Aïda was fond of walking, and, except for long distances, preferred it to riding; wherein again our tastes coincided. She was observant too and keenly fond of Nature; plants, insects, birds, everything interested her; and if she saw anything she wanted to look at she could do it far better, she said, on foot than on horseback. So we had taken to walking a good deal. This afternoon we had been to a certain point on the river which she had wanted to sketch, and now were returning leisurely through the bush, picking our way along cattle or game paths. Arlo, for once, was not with us. Falkner had taken him in the other direction. He wanted to train him as a hunting dog, he said, and now he had gone after a bush-buck.

The glory of the slanting sun rays swept wide and golden over the broad river valley as the sinking disc touched the green gold line of the further ridge, then sank beneath it, leaving the sweep of bush-clad mound and lower lying level first lividly clear, then indistinct in the purple afterglow. Birds had ceased to pipe farewell to the last light of falling day, and here and there along the river bank a jackal was shrilly baying. But if the light of day had failed, with it another lamp had been lighted in the shape of a broad moon approaching its full, its globe reddening into an increasing glow with the twilight darkening of the sky.

“We shall pass by the waterhole,” I said. “You are not afraid.”

“Afraid? With you? But it is an uncanny place. We have rather avoided it since that time we first saw that weird thing in it. But we have been there since in the daytime with Falkner, and father, and whatever the thing may have been we have never seen it since.”

“Well, we’ll have a look at it in this grand moonlight. Perhaps the bogey may condescend to appear again.”

“Hark!” exclaimed Aïda suddenly. “What is that?” Then listening—“Why, it’s a lamb or a kid that must have strayed or been left out.”

A shrill bleat came to our ears—came from the bush on the further side of the hole to us, but still a little way beyond it.

“Couldn’t we manage to catch it?” she went on. “It’ll be eaten by the jackals, poor little thing.”

“Instead of by us,” I laughed. “Well, it doesn’t make much difference to it though it does to its owner. Wait—Don’t speak,” I added in a whisper, for my ears had caught a sound which hers had missed.

We stood motionless. We were on high ground not much more than twenty yards above the pool, every part of which we could see as it lay, its placid surface showing like a dull, lack-lustre eye in the moonlight. In the gloom of the bush we were completely hidden, but through the sprays we could see everything that might take place.

Again the bleat went forth shrilly, this time much nearer. But—it ceased suddenly, as if it had been choked off in the middle.

A dark figure stood beside the pool, on the very brink, the figure of a man—a native—and in his hands he held something white—something that struggled. It was a half-bred Angora kid—the little animal whose bleat we had heard. I could see the glint of the man’s head-ring in the moonlight; then for a moment, as he turned it upward, I could see his face, and it was that of Ukozi, the one-eyed witch doctor. An increased pressure on my arm told that my companion had seen it too. I dared not speak, for I was curious to see what he was about to do. I could only motion her to preserve the strictest silence.

The witch doctor stood waving the kid—held in both hands by the fore and hind feet—high over his head, and chanting a deep-toned incantation; yet in such “dark” phraseology was this couched that even I couldn’t make head or tail of it. It seemed to call upon some “Spirit of the Dew” whatever that might be, and was so wrapped up in “dark” talk as to be unintelligible failing a key. Then, as we looked, there arose a splashing sound. The surface of the pool was disturbed. A sinuous undulation ran through it in a wavy line, right across the pool, and then—and then—a mighty length rose glistening from the water, culminating in a hideous head whose grisly snout and sunken eye were those of the python species. This horror glided straight across to where the witch doctor stood, and as it reached him its widely-opened jaws seemed to champ down upon his head. Not upon it, however, did they close, but upon the body of the white kid which he had deftly placed there, quickly springing back at the same time. Then it turned, and as it glided back, the wretched little animal kicking and bleating frantically in its jaws, it seemed as if the hideous brute were rushing straight for us. Aïda’s face was white as death, and I had to repress in her a panic longing to turn and fly. My firm touch however sufficed to calm her, and we crouched motionless, watching Ukozi on the further side. The serpent had disappeared from our view.

The whole thing was horrible and eerie to a degree. The witch doctor now was in a species of frenzy, walking up and down, with a half-dancing movement, as he called out, thick and fast, the *sibongo* of the serpent. It was a nasty, uncanny, heathenish performance, and revolted me; although through it there shone one redeeming—even humorous—side. We had sat and watched it while Ukozi was blissfully ignorant of our presence. He, the great witch doctor, had no inspiration or inkling that he was being watched! One day I would twit him with it.

Not long, however, did he stay there, and on Aïda’s account I was glad to see the last of him. Had I been alone I might have gone after him and asked the meaning of the performance. As it was, she had better forget it. For a time we sat there in the dead silence of the moonlight.

“What does it mean?” she whispered, when we had allowed Ukozi sufficient time to make himself scarce.

“Oh, some Mumbo Jumbo arrangement all his own,” I answered. “Well that certainly is a whacking big python—the very biggest I’ve ever seen. If I had anything in the shape of a gun I’d be inclined to try and sneak the brute wherever he’s lying.”

“Wouldn’t it be in the water then?”

“No. Lying up somewhere under the banks. In hot weather they’re fond of lying in a waterhole, but on a cool night like this—not. I must come and stalk the brute another night though; and yet, do you know, it seems strange, but I don’t like interfering with anything that bears a sort of religious significance to anybody. And the snake does come in that way with Zulus.”

She thought a moment. Then:

“You remember, dear, how I told you that one of the things this man was going to show father was the mystery of the waterhole. Now supposing that horror had suddenly seized him?”

An uncomfortable wave swept through me. The fact is that no white man, however well he is known to natives, ever gets really to the bottom of the darker mysteries of their superstitions, which indeed remain utterly unsuspected in most cases, so well are they concealed. Who could say what might underlie this one! However I answered:

“I don’t think there would have been danger of that sort. Ukozi would have shown him the performance we have witnessed, as something very wonderful. As a matter of fact it isn’t wonderful at all, in that it resolves itself into a mere question of snake charming. Ukozi has half trained this brute by feeding it periodically as we have seen. That’s all. Hallo!”

Well might I feel amazement, but the exclamation had escaped me involuntarily. We had come round the pool now, and here, very near the spot whereon Ukozi had gone through his strange performance—instinctively we had kept a little back from the water—an odour struck upon my nostrils, and it was the same sickly overpowering effluvium that had filled the air when my horse had refused to proceed on that memorable night I had intended to ride back from Kendrew’s.

“What is it?” exclaimed Aïda, with a start.

“Nothing. Nothing at all. I’ve frightened you, and you are a little wound up already by that uncanny performance,” I answered.

“Frightened? No. I don’t believe I could be that when I’m with you. I always feel so safe. Otherwise it would seem strange that this witch doctor whom we have not seen for so long, and in fact whom we thought had left this part of the country, should have been here right in our midst all the time.”

“He may not have been. He may only just have returned,” I said. “Worthies of his profession are inclined to be somewhat sporadic in their movements. Meanwhile if I were you, I wouldn’t say anything about what we’ve just seen until I’ve had time to make a few inquiries.”

She promised, of course, and as we took our way homeward in the splendour of the clear African night we thought no more of the uncanny episode we had just witnessed, except as something out of the common which had lent an element of unexpected excitement to our walk.

Chapter Twenty Six.

Into Empty Air.

I had completed my purchase of the farm, and was well satisfied with my bargain. It was a nice place, and the homestead was in good repair and very picturesquely situated, commanding a beautiful view. Aïda would revel in it. The veldt was good, and so were the faculties for stocking water. Game too was plentiful, though the dark bushy kloofs intersecting a high *rand* on one side of the place gave promise of the more undesirable kind from the stock-raiser’s point of view—such as leopards and wild dogs and baboons. However it would be hard if I couldn’t manage to keep the numbers of these down, and if they took toll of a calf or two now and then, why one could take toll of them in the way of sport—so that the thing was as broad as it was long.

Yes, I was well satisfied, and as I rode homeward I fell castle building. The place would be a Paradise when I should take Aïda there. It was too marvellous. How could such a wealth of happiness come my way? There was no cloud to mar it. Even as the vivid, unbroken blue of the sky overhead so was this marvel of bliss which had come in upon my life. There was no cloud to mar it.

I was not rich but I had enough. I had done myself exceedingly well in the course of my ventures, and was beyond any anxiety or care for the future from a pecuniary point of view. I had always lived simply and had no expensive tastes. Now I was beginning to reap the benefit of that fortunate condition of things. I could afford the luxury of castle building as I cantered along mile after mile in the glorious sunlight.

I had not seen Aïda for three whole days, it was that time since the uncanny episode of the waterhole. Now I was treasuring up the anticipation of our meeting, the light of glad welcome that would come into her eyes, only a few hours hence, for I would call in at my own place to see that things were all right, and get a bit of dinner, and ride on immediately afterwards. So, mile upon mile went by and at last shortly after mid-day I walked my horse up the long acclivity that led to my trading store.

As I gained the latter I descried a horseman approaching from the other direction, and he was riding too—riding as if he didn’t want to use his horse again for at least a week. By Jove! it was Kendrew, I made out as he came nearer, but—what the devil was Kendrew in such a cast-iron, splitting hurry about?

My boy Tom came out as I dismounted. I hardly noticed that he hadn’t got on the usual broad grin of welcome.

“Where is Jan Boom?” I asked.

“He is out after the cattle, *Nkose*,” answered Tom, rather glumly I thought. But I paid no attention to this, because Tom had taken it into his head to be rather jealous of Jan Boom of late, as a newcomer and an alien who seemed to be rather more in his master’s confidence than he had any right to be—from Tom’s point of view.

“Well, wait a bit,” I said. “Here comes another *Nkose*, Nyamaki’s nephew. You can take his horse at the same time.”

Kendrew came racing up as if he were riding for his life.

“You back, Glanton?” he cried, as he flung himself off his panting, dripping steed. “Well, that’s a devilish good job. I say. What does this mean?”

“What does what mean?”

“Man! Haven’t you heard? They sent for me post-haste this morning. Knew you were away.”

“Quit jaw, Kendrew, and tell me what the devil’s the row,” I said roughly, for some horrible fear had suddenly beset me.

“Miss Sewin. She’s disappeared,” he jerked forth.

“What?”

I have an idea that I articulated the word, though speech stuck in my throat I felt myself go white and cold, and strong healthy man that I was, the surroundings danced before my eyes as though I were about to swoon. I remember too, that Kendrew ground his teeth with pain under the grip that I had fastened upon his shoulder.

“What do you say? Disappeared?” I gasped forth again. “How? When?”

I heard him as through a mist as he told me how the afternoon before she had gone for a walk alone with her dog. It was towards sundown. She had not returned, and a search had been instituted, with the result that her dog had been found dead not very far from the waterhole, but of her no trace remained. “My God, Glanton,” he ended up. “Buck up, man. Pull yourself together or you’ll go clean off your chump. Buck up, d’you hear!”

I daresay I had a look that way, for I noticed Tom staring at me as if he contemplated taking to his heels.

“I’m on my way down there now,” said Kendrew.

I nodded. I couldn’t speak just then somehow. I went into the house, slung on a heavy revolver, and crammed a handful of cartridges into my pocket. Then I remounted, Kendrew doing likewise, and so we took our way down that rocky bush path at a pace that was neither wise nor safe.

“Is that all they have to go upon?” I said presently, as soon as I had recovered my voice.

“That’s all—I gather from the old man’s note. I say, Glanton, what can be behind it all? It seems on all fours with my old uncle taking himself off. I’m beginning to think now there’s some infernal foul play going on among the niggers round us.”

I was thinking the same. At first a thought of Dolf Norbury had crossed my mind, but I dismissed it. Ukozi was behind this, somewhere. The proximity to the waterhole associated him in my mind with the outrage. His beastly performance with the snake!—was he training it to seize human beings, in the furtherance of some devilish form of native superstition? Oh, good Heavens no! That wouldn’t bear thinking about. But Aïda—my love—had disappeared—had disappeared even as Hensley had. He had never been found; the mystery of his disappearance had never been solved. And she! Had she been hideously and secretly done to death? Oh God! I shall go mad!

When we arrived, the Major and Falkner had just returned, and their horses were simply reeking. They had scoured the whole farm, but utterly without result. As for Mrs Sewin and Edith their grief was pitiable—would have been only it was nothing by the side of mine.

“How was the dog killed?” was my first question, ignoring all greeting. I had resolved to waste no time in grief. I had now pulled myself together, and was going to do all that man was capable of to find my loved one again.

“That’s the strange part of it,” said Falkner gruffly. “There’s no wound of any kind about the beast, and he hasn’t even been hit on the head, for his skull is quite smooth and unbroken. But, there he is—as dead as the traditional herring.”

“You didn’t move him, did you?”

“No. He’s there still.”

“Well let’s go there. I may light on a clue.”

“You’d better not come, uncle,” said Falkner. “You’re played out, for one thing, and there ought to be one man on the place with all this devilish mystery going about.”

“Played out be damned, sir,” retorted the Major fiercely. “I’d tire you any day. I’m going.”

The dead dog was lying right in the path, just beyond where we had found the lost coin on that memorable day. The first thing I looked for were traces of a struggle, but if there had been any they were now completely obliterated by hoof marks and footmarks made by Falkner and the Major when they first made the discovery.

“The dog died before sundown,” I said, after a momentary examination.

“How do you know that?” asked Falkner.

“Because the ground underneath him is perfectly dry. If he had been killed or died later it wouldn’t have been. It would have been damp with dew. Look—Ah!”

The last exclamation was evoked by a curious circumstance as I moved the body of the dead animal. A strange odour greeted my nostrils. It was as the odour of death, and yet not altogether, and—it was the same that poisoned the air on the occasion of my horse refusing to go forward on that night at Kendrew's, and again here, almost on this very spot three nights ago when we had come away from witnessing Ukozi's uncanny performance at the pool. Some dark villainy underlay this, and that the witch doctor was connected with it was borne in upon my mind without a doubt.

I examined the dead dog long and carefully, but could read no clue as to the manner of his death, unless he had been poisoned, but this I thought unlikely. One thing was certain. Never in life would he have allowed harm or violence to reach his mistress. Poor Arlo! At any other time I should have been moved to genuine grief for his loss; now that loss was not even felt.

Quickly, eagerly, I cast around for spoor, beyond the radius of the disturbed part of the ground. All in vain. No trace. No trampled grass or broken twig, or displaced leaf, absolutely nothing to afford a clue. The thing was incomprehensible. It was as if she had been caught up bodily into the air.

The ground here was a gentle declivity, moderately studded with bush. It was not rocky nor rugged, and was entirely devoid of holes or caves into which anyone might fall.

Suddenly every drop of blood within me was set tingling. I had found a trace. Where the ground was stony, just above the path I discovered an abrasion, as though a boot, with nail heads in the soles, had scraped it.

It was very faint, but still—there was no mistaking it. It was a genuine spoor. And it led on and on, utterly undiscernible to the Major or Falkner, hardly visible to Kendrew at times, but plain enough to me. And now hope beat high. We would find her. We had only to follow on this spoor which we had struck, and we would find her. Heaven knew how, but still! we would find her. She might have met with an accident and be sorely in need of help, but—still we would find her, and this—even this—after the blank, awful realisation of her loss, akin, as it was, to the disappearance of Hensley—contained relative comfort.

The others were watching me with mingled anxiety and curiosity as, bent low over the ground, I followed these faint indications. The latter were tolerably perceptible now to a practised eye, though to no other, and I kept upon them steadily. Then a ghastly fear smote me again upon the heart. The spoor was leading straight for the waterhole.

What did it mean? She would not have gone there—voluntarily. After the spectacle we had witnessed that night nothing on earth would have induced her to revisit the uncanny place alone, even by daylight. Yet the dreadful thought had already forced itself upon my mind, that there, if anywhere, would the mystery be solved.

In silence, eager, intensified, we pursued our way; for the others would not speak lest they should distract my mind from its concentration. Thus we came out upon the waterhole.

The spoor had led us straight to the high brow of cliff overhanging the pool—the spot upon which we had all stood that afternoon when we had first seen the mysterious monster which had disturbed the water. And—what was this?

All the soil here, where it was not solid rock, had been swept with branches. There was the pattern in the dust, even if stray leaves and twigs scattered about had not gone towards showing that, beyond a doubt. The object was manifest—to efface all traces of a struggle.

Heavens! my brain seemed to be turning to mud with the drear despair of each fresh discovery. The witch doctor's promise to show the old man the mystery of the waterhole came back to my mind. I put together the words of *sibongo* to the snake I had heard him chanting. Ukozi had been preparing a way towards a sacrifice to his demon. He had accustomed the great python to seizing its victim as he brought it—and he had always brought it, so small, so insufficient, in the shape of the kid we had seen him give it, as to excite the appetite of the monster rather than to gratify it. He had been practising on Major Sewin's curiosity, so that when the time should be ripe he would bring him to the edge of the pool, where all unsuspecting he would be seized by the monster and never be seen or heard of again. And now, and now—this unspeakably horrible and revolting fate, instead of overtaking the old man, had overtaken Aïda, my love, the sun and Paradise of my life, instead. She had been substituted for him, as the easier, possibly the more acceptable victim.

But, Ukozi! Whatever might happen to me I would capture and revenge myself upon him in a manner which should out-do the vengeance of the most vindictive and cruel of his own countrymen. I would spend days and nights gloating over his agony, and afterwards it should be talked about with fear and shuddering among the whole population of the border—ay, and beyond it I would do it; how I knew not, but, I would do it. All hell was seething in my brain just then—all hell, as I thought of my love, in her daintiness and grace; the very embodiment of a refinement and an elevating influence that was almost—no, entirely—divine, sacrificed horribly to the revolting superstitions of these savages, whom I had hitherto regarded as equalling in manly virtues those who could boast of centuries of so-called civilisation at their backs. And yet—revenge—could it bring back to me my love—my sweet lost love?

Chapter Twenty Seven.

The Dive of the Water Rat.

We stood there—we four—gazing into each other's livid faces. Then the Major broke down. Sinking to the ground he covered his face with his hands and sobbed. I broke fiercely away. I could not stand for a moment doing nothing, so I set to work to go right round the pool and see if I could find any further trace. But the search was a vain one.

"The next thing is, what are we going to do?" said Falkner when we had rejoined them. "We don't propose to spend the rest of the day staring at each other like stuck pigs, I take it?"

"We ought to drag the hole," I said, "but we haven't got the necessary appliances, nor even a draw net. Can any of you think of some expedient?"

"We might get a long pole, and splice a couple of meat-hooks to the end somehow," said Falkner, "and probe about with that. Only, the cursed hole is about a mile too deep for the longest pole to get anywhere near the bottom in the

middle."

"*Amakosi*!"

We started at the interruption. So intent had we been that not one of us had been aware of the approach of a fifth—and he a native.

"Ha, Ivondwe!" I cried, recognising him. "What knowest thou of this, for I think thou couldst not have been far from this place at sundown yesterday?"

He answered in English.

"Do the *Amakosi* think the young missis has got into the water?"

"They do," I said, still keeping to the vernacular. "Now, Water Rat, prove worthy of thy name. Dive down, explore yon water to its furthest depths for her we seek. Then shall thy reward be great."

"That will I do, Iqalaqala," he answered—greatly to my surprise I own, for I had been mocking him by reason of his name.

"And the snake?" I said. "The snake that dwells in the pool. Dost thou not fear it?"

I had been keenly watching his face, and the wonder that came into it looked genuine.

"Why as to that," he answered, "and if there be a snake yet I fear it not. I will go."

He stood looking down upon the water for a moment; he needed to lose no time in undressing, for save for his *mútya* he was unclad. Now he picked up two large stones and holding one in each hand, he poised himself at a point about ten feet above the surface. Then he dived.

Down he went—straight down—and the water closed over him. We stood staring at the widening circles, but could see nothing beneath the surface. Then it suddenly dawned upon us that he had been under water an abnormally long time.

"He'll never come up again now," declared Falkner. "No man living could stick under water all that time," he went on after a wait that seemed like an hour to us. "The beast has either got hold of him, or he's got stuck somehow and drowned. Oh good Lord!"

For a black head shot up on the further side of the hole, and a couple of strokes bringing it and its owner to the brink, he proceeded calmly to climb out, showing no sign of any undue strain upon his powers of endurance.

"Thou art indeed well named, Ivondwe," I said. "We thought the snake had got thee."

"Snake? I saw no snake," he answered. "But I will go down again. There is still one part which I left unsearched."

He sat for a moment, then picked up two stones as before. He walked round to an even higher point above the water, and this time dived obliquely.

"By Jove, he must have come to grief now," said Falkner. "Why he's been a much longer time down."

As we waited and still Ivondwe did not reappear, the rest of us began to think that Falkner was right. It seemed incredible that any man could remain under so long unless artificially supplied with air. Then just as we had given him up Ivondwe rose to the surface as before.

This time he was panting somewhat, as well he might. "There is no one down there," he began, as soon as he had recovered breath.

"No one?"

"No one. All round the bottom did I go—and there was no one. *Au*! it is fearsome down there in the gloom and the silence, and the great eels gliding about like snakes. But she whom you seek must be found elsewhere. Not under that water is she."

Was he going on the native principle of telling you what you would most like to know? I wondered. Then Falkner began kicking off his boots.

"Here goes for a search on my own account," he said. "Coming, Glanton? If there's nothing to hurt him, there's nothing to hurt us. We'll try his dodge of holding a couple of stones. We'll get down further that way."

Ivondwe shook his head.

"You will not get down at all," he said, in English.

"I'll have a try at any rate. Come along, Glanton."

I am at home in the water but not for any time under it. Half the time spent by Ivondwe down there would have been enough to drown me several times over. However I would make the attempt.

The result was even as I expected. With all the will in the world I had not the power, and so far from getting to the bottom, I was forced to return to the surface almost immediately. Falkner fared not much better.

"It must be an awful depth," he said. "I couldn't even touch bottom, and I'm no slouch in the diving line."

“Where ought we to search, Ivondwe?” I said in the vernacular, “for so far there is no more trace than that left by a bird in the air? It will mean large reward to any who should help to find her—yes, many cattle.”

“Would that I might win such,” he answered. Then pointing with his stick, “Lo, the *Amapolise*.”

Our horses began to snort and neigh, as the police patrol rode up. I recognised my former acquaintance, Sergeant Simcox, but the inspector in command of the troop was along.

“I’ve just come from your house, Major Sewin,” he said after a few words of sympathy, “and I left a couple of men there, so you need be under no apprehension by reason of your ladies being alone. Now have you lighted upon any fresh clue?”

“Eh? What? Clue?” echoed the old man dazedly. “No.”

So I took up the parable, telling how I had found spoor leading to the waterhole and that here it had stopped. I pointed out where the ground had been smoothed over as though to erase the traces of a struggle.

“Now,” I concluded, “if you will come a little apart with me, I’ll tell you something that seems to bolster up my theory with a vengeance.”

He looked at me somewhat strangely, I thought. But he agreed, and I put him in possession of the facts about Ukozi in his relations with Major Sewin, and how Aïda had consulted me about them during my absence in Zululand, bringing the story down to that last startling scene here on this very spot three nights ago.

“Well you ought to know something about native superstitions, Mr Glanton,” he said. “Yet this seems a strange one, and utterly without motive to boot.”

“I know enough about native superstitions to know that I know nothing,” I answered. “I know this, that those exist which are not so much as suspected by white men, and produce actions which, as you say, seem utterly without motive.”

“If we could only lay claw on this witch doctor,” he said, thoughtfully.

“Yes indeed. But he’ll take uncommonly good care that we can’t.”

“Meanwhile I propose to arrest this boy on suspicion, for I find that he couldn’t have been very far from where Miss Sewin was last seen, at the time.”

“Ivondwe?”

“That’s his name. It may only be a coincidence mind—but you remember old Hensley’s disappearance?”

“Rather.”

“Well this Ivondwe was temporarily doing some cattle herding for Hensley at the time, filling another man’s place. It certainly is a coincidence that another mysterious disappearance should take place, and he right at hand again.”

“It certainly is,” I agreed. “But Ivondwe has been here for months, and I’ve known him for years. There isn’t a native I’ve a higher opinion of.”

“For all that I’m going to arrest him. It can do no harm and may do a great deal of good. But first I’ll ask him a few questions.”

Inspector Manvers was colonial born and could speak the native language fluently. I warned him of Ivondwe’s acquaintance with English in case he should say anything in an aside to me.

To every question, Ivondwe answered without hesitation. He had been looking after the cattle, yonder, over the rise, at the time, much too far off to have heard or seen anything. Had he been near, the dog would have kept him off. The dog was always unfriendly towards him.

“Where is Ukozi?” asked the inspector. The question was met by a deprecatory laugh.

“Where is the bird that flew over our heads a few hours ago?” asked Ivondwe. “I would remind the chief of the *Amapolise* that the one question is as easy to answer as the other. A great *isanusi* such as Ukozi does not send men before him crying aloud his movements.”

“That we shall see,” said the inspector. “Meanwhile Ivondwe, you are arrested and must go with us.”

“Have I not searched the depths of yonder pool?” was Ivondwe’s unconcerned remark. “Ask these.”

“Well, you are a prisoner, and if you make any attempt to escape you will be shot without challenge.” Then turning to me. “Now I think we had better continue our search down to the river bank. I need hardly tell you, Mr Glanton, how I sympathise with you, but we must not lose hope yet. People do strange and unaccountable things at times—generally the last people in the world who would be likely to do them. We shall find Miss Sewin yet.”

“Have you found Hensley yet?” I said bitterly.

He looked grave. The cases were too startlingly akin.

“The old gentleman had better be persuaded to go home,” he said, with a pitying glance at the Major, who was sitting in a state of utter collapse. Kendrew volunteered to effect this. He could join us afterwards, he said.

For the remaining hours of daylight we searched, leaving not a square yard of ground uninvestigated for a radius of

miles. But—we found nothing—not even the remotest trace or clue.

I suppose, if I lived to be a thousand I should never forget the agony of that day. Mile after mile of our patient and exhaustive search, and still—nothing. The sickening blank as we returned, obliged to give it up for that day, only to renew our efforts with the first glimmer of returning light!

The moon rose, flooding down over the dim veldt. I recalled that last time when we two had wandered so happily over this very same ground. No presentiment had we then, no warning of mysterious danger hanging over us. How happy we had been—how secure in each other's love—and now! Oh God! it was too much.

"Look here," I burst forth roughly. "What's the good of you people? Yes, what the devil's the good of you? What do you draw your pay for anyway? If you had unearthed the secret of Hensley's disappearance this one would never have come about. Your whole force isn't worth a tinker's twopenny damn and the sooner it's disbanded and sent about its silly business the better."

The police inspector was a thoroughly good fellow, and a gentleman. He didn't take any offence at this, for he knew and respected the agony I was undergoing. We were riding a little ahead of the patrol, and therefore were alone together.

"Look here, Glanton," he said. "Abuse us as much as ever you like and welcome if only it'll relieve your feelings. I don't resent it. You may be, in a measure, right as to Hensley. We all thought—and you thought yourself if you remember—that the old chap had got off the rails somehow, in an ordinarily natural if mysterious way. But now I'm certain there's some devilish foul play going on, and the thing is to get to the bottom of it. Now let's keep our heads, above all things, and get to the bottom of it. This is my idea. While we go on with our search to-morrow, you go and find Tyingoza and enlist his aid. He's a very influential chief, and has a good reputation, moreover you're on first-rate terms with him. I believe he could help us if anybody could. What do you think?"

"I have thought of that already," I answered gloomily. "But an *isanusi* of Ukozi's repute is more powerful than the most powerful chief—at any rate on this side of the river. Still it's a stone not to be left unturned. I'll ride up the first thing in the morning. No, I'll go before. I'll start to-night."

But I was not destined to do so. On returning to the house I found that both the Major and his wife were in a state of complete prostration. They seemed to cling to the idea of my presence. It was of no use for me to point out to them that the police patrol was camped, so to say, right under their very windows, not to mention Falkner and Kendrew in the house itself. They would not hear of my leaving that night. Edith, too, begged me to fall in with their wishes. A refusal might be dangerous to her father, she put it. Utterly exasperated and amazed at the selfishness, as I deemed it, of the old people, I seemed to have run my head against a blank wall.

"Look here, Edith," I said. "They are simply sacrificing Aïda by throwing obstacles in my way like this. What am I to do?"

"This," she answered. "Fall in with their wishes, till they are asleep. They will sleep, if only through sheer exhaustion, and if they don't I'll take care that they do, through another agency. Then, carry out your own plan and God bless you in it."

"God bless you, for the brave resourceful girl you are," I rejoined. "Manvers and I have been knocking together a scheme, and nothing on God's earth is going to interfere with it. Well, we'll make believe—but, at midnight I'm off, no matter what happens."

"That's right, Glanton," said Kendrew, who had entered with an opportuneness that under other and less interested circumstances I should have regarded as suspicious. "Edith and I will take care of the old birds, never fear."

Utterly heartsick, and though unconsciously so, physically weary by reason of the awful strain of the last twelve hours, I only sought to be alone. I went into the room I always occupied and shut myself in. Sleep? Yes, I would welcome it, if only as a respite. I don't know whether it came or not.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

What Jan Boom Told.

It seemed as though I had slept five minutes when I started wide awake, listening. There was a faint sound of scratching upon the window pane. Then it ceased, to be followed by a succession of gentle taps.

Noiselessly I got out of bed, and drawing my revolver from its holster, stood listening once more. There was no mistake about it. Somebody was trying to attract my attention.

Even then—in that tense moment, the drear anguish of yesterday surged like a wave through my mind; but, upon it a gleam of hope. What was this fresh mystery, for, of course, it was in some way connected with the suggestion of tragedy—with the mysterious disappearance of my love?

There were no curtains, only blinds. Softly, noiselessly, I slipped to the window and displaced one of these, just sufficiently to leave a crack to be able to see through. The moon was shining, bright and clear, and all in the front of the house was illuminated almost as though by daylight I made out a dark figure crouching under the window, and held the revolver clenched and ready as I put up the sash.

"Who?" I said, in the Zulu.

"*Nkose*! It is I—Jan Boom."

"Yes. And what do you want?"

"*Nkose*! Try and slip out of the house, unseen I want to talk. But others may be waking too. Do it. It concerns her whom you seek."

I knew the ways of a native in such a matter, wherefore without hesitation, I put up the window as noiselessly as I could, and was out in a moment. Bearing in mind the strange and mysterious times upon which we had fallen I didn't leave the weapon behind me in the room either.

"You are alone?" I said.

"I am alone, *Nkose*. Come round behind the waggon shed—or, better still, into the openness of the bush itself. There can we hold our *indaba*."

"Good. Now—lead on."

As I walked behind the Xosa, I was all aglow with eagerness. What had he discovered—or, had he discovered anything? Could I trust him? I remembered my first dislike of him, and how it had faded. What could he know of this last outrage? What part had he borne in it, if any? And if none, how could he be of any assistance?

"Well, Jan Boom," I said when we were safe from possible interruption. "You know of course that the man who is the one to enable me to recover the *Inkosikazi* unharmed, will find himself in possession of sufficient cattle to purchase two new wives, with something to spare?"

"I know it, *Nkose*, and you—you also know what I said to you when I wanted to remain and work for you," he answered significantly.

I did remember it. His words came back to me, though I had long since dismissed them from my mind. The plot was thickening.

The Xosa took a long and careful look round, and if my patience was strained to bursting point I knew enough of these people to know that you never get anything out of them by hurrying them. Then he bent his head towards me and whispered:

"If you follow my directions exactly you will recover the *Inkosikazi*. If not you will never see her again."

"Never see her again?" I echoed with some idea of gaining time in order to collect myself.

"Has Nyamaki ever been seen again?" said Jan Boom.

"Do you know where she is?"

"I know where she will be to-morrow night."

To-morrow night! And I had been expecting instant action.

"Look here," I said, seizing him by the shoulder with a grip that must have hurt. "Has she been injured in any way? Tell me. Has she?"

"Not yet," he answered. "No—not yet. But—if you fail to find her, and take her from where she is, to-morrow night—she will die, and that not easily."

This time he did wince under my grip. In my awful agony I seemed hardly to know what I was doing. The whole moonlit scene seemed to be whirling round with me. My love—in peril! in peril of some frightful and agonising form of death! Oh Heaven help me to keep my wits about me! Some such idea must have communicated itself to the Xosa's mind, for he said:

"*Nkose* must keep cool. No man can do a difficult thing if his head is not cool."

Even then I noticed that he was looking at me with wonder tinged with concern. In ordinary matters—and some out of the ordinary—I was among the coolest headed of mortals. Now I seemed quite thrown off my balance. Somehow it never occurred to me to doubt the truth of Jan Boom's statement.

"Where is this place?" I asked.

"That you will learn to-morrow night, *Nkose*, for I myself will take you there—if you are cautious. If not—!"

"Look here, Jan Boom. You want to earn the cattle which I shall give as a reward?"

"Cattle are always good to have, *Nkose*!"

"Well what other motive have you in helping me in this matter? You have not been very long with me, and I cannot recall any special reason why you should serve me outside of ordinary things."

"Be not too curious, *Nkose*!" he answered, with a slight smile. "But, whether you fail or succeed to-morrow night, my life will be sought, for it will be known how you came there."

"Have no fear as to that, Jan Boom, for I will supply you with the means of defending your life six times over—and you, too, come of a warrior race."

"That is so, *Nkose*. I am of the Ama Gcaleka. Now talk we of our plan. To-morrow you will return home, starting from here after the sun is at its highest. Up to the time of starting you will help in the search in whatever direction it is made. But if you show any sign or give reason to suspect you know it is all being made in vain, it will mean the failure of our plan, and then—"

“Not on my account shall it fail then,” I said. “Tell me, Jan Boom. Is Ukozi at the back of this?”

“His eyes and ears are everywhere,” was the reply, accompanied by a significant glance around. “When you ride homeward to-morrow, your horse will be very lame.”

“Very lame?” I echoed in astonishment.

“Very lame. You yourself will lame it. So shall Ukozi’s eyes be deceived. For a man who has just returned home does not ride forth immediately on a horse that is very lame.”

I saw his drift—and it was ingenious.

“You will give out that you are tired of a useless search, that you are exhausted and intend to sleep for three days, and you will pretend to have drunk too much of the strong waters. So shall Ukozi’s eyes be deceived.”

“But Jan Boom, you and Tom are the only people on the place,” I urged.

“U’ Tom? *Hau*! Ukozi’s eyes and ears are everywhere,” was the enigmatical answer.

“And if my horse is lame how shall I use him?”

“You would not use him in any case,” was his answer. “The sound of a horse’s hoof travels far at night, that of a man’s foot, not. We walk.”

“Walk? Why then the place must be quite near.”

“Quite near it is, Iqalaqala,” slipping into rather an unwarrantable familiarity in addressing me by my native name, but this didn’t exercise me you may be sure. “Quite near, but—nowhere near the snake pool. Quite the other way. You will take the nephew of Nyamaki with you.”

“Ah! And—what of Umsindo?”

“Ha! Umsindo? He is a good fighting bull—but then he is a blundering bull. Yet we will take him, for his strength will be useful. For, we will take Ukozi alive.”

“That will not be easy, Jan Boom. And then—just think, how much easier it will be to kill him.”

“Yet we will do it. We will take him alive. You were asking but now, *Nkose*, what other motive I had in helping you,” he answered, with a dash of significance.

“Ah!”

“So we will take Ukozi alive. Is that to be?”

“Most certainly, if possible. But will it be possible? He is sure to fight. He will have people with him of course.”

“Two, at the most. We had better take them alive too, if we can. It will make things worse for Ukozi. But to no one living save to the two we have named will you by word or hint give knowledge of what I have told you. To do so will mean certain failure.”

I promised.

“Tell me now about this place, Jan Boom, and how you learned of its existence,” I said, for now in my feverish impatience I would rather talk for the remainder of the night than go in to shut myself up with my thoughts throughout its hours of silence.

“I will do better, *Nkose*, I will show it you,” he answered. “*Whau*! if we succeed in what we are to do—and we must if the three of you only keep strictly to my directions—why then I may tell you; and with it a tale so strange that you, or other white people, will give it half belief or perhaps not any. Now I must go. There is still some of the night left, and it is important that none should know we have talked or even that I have been away from Isipanga. Return as silently as you came, and to-morrow, well before the sun goes down ride up to the house on a very lame horse.”

“And with the other two?”

“With the other two. *Nkose*!” With which parting salute he was gone.

I waited a little, listening. No sound disturbed the dead silence save here and there the ordinary voices of the night. Then I regained my room.

Sleep was of course out of the question, and now I set to work deliberately to marshal my thoughts and bring them to bear on the situation. I felt no misgiving as to the Xosa’s good faith—the fact that he had agreed to my being accompanied by two tried and trusted comrades seemed to prove that. Though had he stipulated that I should have gone alone, I should, while prepared for any emergency, unhesitatingly have accepted the conditions. Again, the reward was quite enough to tempt a man of his courage, especially as he came of a totally different race, added to which the corner of curtain which he had just lifted was sufficient to show that he bore a grudge against the witch doctor, not to say a very pretty feud. How and why this should be, passed my understanding, but I knew enough of natives and their ways to know that I didn’t know them, as, indeed, I believe no white man ever really does.

And the motive of this outrage? Clearly, it was due to some dark superstition, as I had suspected from the very first. She had not been injured up till now, would not be unless we failed to arrive in time. There was unspeakable comfort in this, for I felt confident the Xosa was sure of his facts. But what stages of horror and despair must she not have passed through since her mysterious capture? Well the villainous witch doctor should pay a heavy reckoning and those who had

helped him; and, thinking of it, I, too, was all eagerness he should be taken alive; for a great many years of hard labour—perhaps with lashes thrown in—which should be his reward, would be a far worse thing to him than a mere swift and easy death.

Then followed a reaction. What if Jan Boom had miscalculated and we arrived too late after all? A cold perspiration poured down me at the thought. “She will die, and that not easily,” had been his words. That pointed to torture—oh good God! My innocent beautiful love! in the power of these fiends, and sacrificed to their hellish superstitions, and I helpless here! I seemed to be going mad.

No. That wouldn’t do. I was letting my imagination run away with me in the silence and the darkness, and above all I wanted cool-headedness and strength. I must make up my mind to believe the Xosa’s word and that all would yet be well. By this time the next night she would be with us again safe and sound.

Then I fell to wondering what sort of hiding-place could be found within a walk—an easy walk apparently—of my dwelling, and it baffled me. I could think of none. Moreover the surroundings had been scoured in search of the missing Hensley, and nothing of the kind had come to light. And then the first signs of dawn began to show, and I felt relieved, for now at any rate, one could be up and doing.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

What we Found.

I have seen a good many astonished natives in my time but never a more astonished one than my boy Tom that evening after supper, when staggering to my feet and lurching unsteadily I bade him in thick and indistinct accents to go into the store and fetch some new blankets for my two guests to sleep on. When on his return, I cursed him roundly, and threw an empty bottle at his head, taking good care however that it shouldn’t hit him, then subsided on to the floor to all outward appearances in the last stage of helpless intoxication, poor Tom must have thought the end of the world had come. This, of course, was part of the programme as drawn up between myself and Jan Boom.

In every other particular I had scrupulously observed it even to the severe laming of my unfortunate horse. Poor beast! but then what were the passing sufferings of a mere animal, when issues such as this were in the balance! I had got through the morning joining in the pretended search, and it was while thus engaged that I found an opportunity of imparting to the other two our plan of rescue.

“By the Lord!” exclaimed Kendrew, “I never heard such an extraordinary thing in my life.”

“The thing is, can we swallow it?” was Falkner’s remark. “These niggers are such infernal liars.”

“Well. I’m going to follow it up, even if I go alone,” I said.

“Who the devil said you were going alone, Glanton?” he answered gruffly. “Look here, we rather hate each other, but you can’t say that up there in Zululand, for instance, I ever backed down.”

“Certainly I can’t, Sewin,” I said. “What I can say is that in any sort of scrap there’s no man I’d rather have alongside than yourself. And as for hating each other, it’s only natural you should hate me I suppose, but I’ve never returned the compliment.”

“Well we’ll knock hell out of someone to-night anyhow,” he said. “Now let’s have all particulars of the scheme.”

I gave them, exactly as I had had them from Jan Boom.

“The thing is to keep it up,” I said. “That’ll be the stiffest part of all—to keep it up. We mustn’t go about looking as if we had found her already. Native eyes and ears are sharp, and native deductions are swiftly drawn.”

This was agreed upon, and we continued our mock search more strenuously than ever. We dared not even let fall so much as a hint to the old people. Pitiable as it was to witness their distress, yet it was better that this should continue a little longer rather than that our success should be imperilled, as certainly would have been the case had we let slip the slightest inkling that there was ground for hope.

“Has Ivondwe made any revelation?” I asked the police inspector, later on as we were about to start. “Not a word. Would you like to talk to him, Glanton? You might get something out of him.”

“Not to-day. To-morrow perhaps. Only keep him doubly guarded. He’ll certainly escape if he can.”

“He’ll be a bigger magician than Ukozi if he does. He’s handcuffed in a hut, with four of my men guarding him, two inside and two out. And the two out are just dead shots with rifle or pistol, although they do belong to the poor old police,” he added meaningly.

“All right. Now I’m off to try and work the native intelligence department.”

“And I hope to God you may succeed,” had been the fervent answer. “Good-bye.”

So here we were, only awaiting our guide in order to set forth. The other two had also simulated inebriation, but only to a slight extent. We had a business-like revolver apiece and plenty of cartridges, but no guns. Another significant item of our outfit comprised several strong, new *reims*. At last, after further waiting, which seemed an eternity, Jan Boom appeared.

There was mirth lurking in his face as he explained that he had come over at Tom’s instance. Tom should have come to see if anything more was wanted before he turned in for the night, but he was afraid. His master seemed bewitched, he declared. He and the other two white men were all drunk, but his master was the most drunk of all—yes, by far. His

master drunk!

At any other time we would have roared over the absurdity of the situation, and Tom's very justifiable amazement. Now Jan Boom was directed to tell him to turn in, and then come back. He came back, but took rather long about it. "Now *Amakosi*!" he said. "We will start, but no word must be spoken save in the faintest of whispers, and only then if it cannot be avoided."

"What if Tom should take into his head to come here again?" I asked.

"He will not, *Nkose*, I have tied him up so that he can neither move nor speak."

"Good," I said.

The night seemed very dark as we set forth, for the moon had not yet risen, and the starlight was insufficient to render our march easy, as we followed the elastic stride of our silent guide. Our excitement was intense, as we threaded the thickness of some bushy kloof by narrow game paths known to our guide and lit upon in the darkness with the unerring instinct of the savage. Every now and then a rustle and patter, as something scurried away, and once some large animal, alarmed, started away with a sudden and tremendous crash which it seemed must have been heard for miles. Not one of us dared break the Xosa's enjoinment to strict silence, and thus we proceeded. How long this lasted we could only guess, but it seemed that we were hours traversing the interminable tortuousness of bushy ravines, or scaling the side of a slope with such care as not to disturb a single stone. At last Jan Boom came to a halt, and stood, listening intently.

In the gloom we could make out nothing distinct. We were facing a dark mass of thick bush, with a rugged boulder here and there breaking through, as if it had fallen from a stunted krantz which crowned the slope not very much higher above. It took some straining of the eyes to grasp these details. When we looked again our guide had disappeared.

"What does it mean, Glanton?" whispered Falkner. "What if this is another trap and we are going to be the next to disappear? Well, we sha'n't do it so quietly, that's one thing."

Then through the silence came Jan Boom's voice, and—it seemed to come from right beneath our feet.

"Down here, *Amakosi*. Iqalaqala first."

"Down here?" Yes—but where? Then I saw what was a hole or cavity, seeming to pierce the blackness of a dense wall of bush. Without a moment's hesitation I obeyed, and finding Jan Boom's outstretched hand I dropped into what was curiously like a sort of deep furrow. The others followed, and lo—something closed behind us. We were in pitch darkness, and a moist and earthy smell gave out a most uncomfortable suggestion of being buried alive.

"Now walk," whispered the Xosa. "Let each keep hold of the one in front of him. But—before all—silence!"

In this way we advanced, Jan Boom leading, I keeping a hand on his shoulder, Kendrew doing ditto as to mine, while Falkner brought up the rear. The place was not a cave, for every now and again we could see a star or two glimmering high above. It seemed like a deep fissure or crevasse seaming the ground, but what on earth it was like above I had no idea.

We walked lightly and on our toes in order to ensure silent progress. A few minutes of this and the Xosa halted. The fissure had widened out, and now a puff of fresh air bore token that we were getting into the light of day, or rather of night, once more. Nor were we sorry, for our subterranean progress was suggestive of snakes and all kinds of horrors. I, for one, knew by a certain feel in the air that we were approaching water.

A little further and again we halted. A patch of stars overhead, and against it the black loom of what was probably a krantz or at any rate a high bluff. The murmur of running water, also sounding from overhead, at the same time smote upon our ears.

It was getting lighter. The moon was rising at last, and as we strained our gaze through the thick bushy screen behind which we had halted, this is what we saw.

We were looking down upon a circular pool whose surface reflected the twinkling of the stars. On three sides of it ran an amphitheatre of rock, varying from six to twenty feet in height. At the upper end where the water fell into it in a thin stream, the rock dipped to the form of a letter "V." All this we could make out in the dim light of the stars, for as yet the face of the rock was in dark shadow. And yet, and yet—as I gazed I could descry a striking resemblance to our own waterhole except that this was more shut in.

"Remember," whispered the Xosa, impressively. "There is to be no shooting. They are to be taken alive."

We promised, wondering the while where "they" were. A tension of excitement, and eagerness for the coming struggle was upon all three of us. For me I rebelled against the agreement which should deter me from battering the life out of the black villains who had brought my darling to this horrible place. What terrors must she not have endured? What ghastly rites of devil worship were enacted here?

Foot by foot the light crept downwards, revealing the face of the rock as the moon rose higher and higher. Then a violent nudge from Falkner, at my side—but I had already seen.

The water was pouring down upon the head of what had once been a human being. Now it was a dreadful, glistening slimy thing, half worn away by the action of the running water. It was fixed in a crucified attitude, facing outwards, bound by the wrists to a thick pole which was stretched across horizontally from side to side of the pool, the feet resting upon a rock ledge beneath. It needed not the agonised stare upon that awful upturned face—or rather what once had been a face—to tell in what unspeakable torture this wretched being had died. To my mind and to Falkner's came the recollection of our gruesome find that grey afternoon in the northern wilds of Zululand.

Two more bodies, one little better than a skeleton, were bound similarly on each side of the central one. As we gazed, spellbound with horror, we saw that which pointed to one of these being the body of a white man.

Now a dark figure appeared on the brink above the central victim, appeared so silently and suddenly as to lend further horror to this demon haunted spot. We watched it in curdling horror as it stooped, then reached down and cut the thongs which held first one wrist then the other. The body thus released toppled heavily into the pool with a dull splash that echoed among the overhanging rocks. Then it disappeared.

The figure, straightened up now, stood watching the troubled surface for a moment. Standing there full in the moonlight I thought to recognise the face. It was that of one of Tyingoza's people whom I knew by sight, but could not fit with a name. Then he turned to clamber back, crooning as he did so, a strange weird song. It was not very intelligible, but was full of *sibongo* to the Water Spirit, who should now delight in a fresh victim, a rare victim, one by the side of which all former sacrifices were but poor. Then would the land have rain again—would drink all the rain it needed.

Now the blood seemed to rush to my brain as though to burst it. A red mist came before my eyes, and my heart seemed to hammer within me as though it would betray our place of concealment without fail. For I realised who this new victim—this rare victim—was to be, the victim who was to take the place of the ghastly shapeless horror which we had seen disappear beneath that awful surface. A warning touch from Jan Boom brought me back to recollection and sanity again.

Through our concealing screen we saw the man who had released the corpse drop down the rock. Another had joined him, and now the two crouched down in the shadow with an air of eager expectancy as though waiting for something or somebody. One held in his hand a coiled thong. Then we heard voices, one a full, sonorous, male tone talking in the Zulu; and another, rich, musical, feminine—and it I recognised with a tightening of the heart. Both were approaching, in such wise as would bring the speakers almost within touch of us.

And the two fiends, the one with the coiled thong, and the other, crouched—waiting.

Chapter Thirty.

The Latest Victim.

There she stood—Aïda, my love. I could see every line of the sweet pale face, turned full towards me in the moonlight, but it wore a half-dazed look as that of one who walks and talks in her sleep. But it bore no sign of fear.

"This is the third night, *Inkosikazi*, and it is time to restore you to your own people," Ukozi was saying. "You will tell them that we have not harmed you, but that your presence was necessary for three nights, to render perfect our *múti*."

She looked as if she but half understood him, and nodded her head. They were but a few paces from us, and where they had emerged from we could not make out. Their backs were toward the horrid remains, and also toward the two crouching figures.

"So now we are ready. Come."

This was clearly a signal, for the two crouching figures sprang up and forward to seize her. The first went down like a felled bullock, under a judiciously planted whack from Jan Boom's knobkerrie as we leapt from our concealment. Falkner had grappled with the witch doctor, but Ukozi was a muscular and powerful savage, and it taxed all his younger foeman's athletic resources to hold him. He writhed and struggled, and the two were rolling over and over on the ground. Then Jan Boom seizing his chance, let out again with his formidable knobkerrie, bringing it down bang in the middle of Ukozi's skull. He, too, flattened out. The third, held at the point of Kendrew's pistol, had already surrendered.

"Better tie them up sharp before they come to," said Falkner. "Here goes for Mr Witch Doctor anyhow."

All this had happened in a moment. In it I had borne no active part, my first care and attention had been given to Aïda. It was remarkable that she showed but little surprise at the sight of me.

"Is that you, dear? And you have come to take me home? I am rather relieved, for I was beginning to get a little frightened I believe. But—what is it all about? These people have done me no harm."

"No—thank the Lord and we four," said Falkner grimly. "Not yet, but we were only in the nick of time. There—you evil beast. You can come to now, as soon as you like."

This to the fellow whom Jan Boom had first stunned and whom he had just finished tying up in the most masterly manner. The Xosa had effected the same process with the third, under cover of Kendrew's pistol.

"Don't look round, Aïda," I said. "There's a sight it'll be as well for you not to see. In fact I'll take you away as soon as Jan Boom is ready to show us the way out."

But Jan Boom was apparently not ready. He stood glaring down upon the prostrate and unconscious witch doctor with an expression of vindictive hatred upon his countenance that was positively devilish.

"Not killed," he muttered in his own tongue. "No—no—not killed. That were too sweet and easy for him."

"Ha-ha, Jan," guffawed Falkner. "You were so keen on capturing the brute alive, and now you've killed him yourself."

"He not dead," answered the Xosa in English. "Zulu nigga's skull damn hard. He come to directly."

"Well it wasn't much of a scrap anyway," grumbled Falkner. "Are there any more of them?"

"Only two women up there at the huts," said Aïda. "But I don't understand. They've done me no harm."

"No, exactly. You don't understand, but we do," answered Falkner grimly. "And, now, by the way, where are the said huts?"

“Up above there. You go by the way you saw me come in. Through that passage.”

Now we saw a narrow passage similar to the one we had entered by. It seemed to lead upward.

“Quite sure it’s all there are?” he said.

“Yes. There are only a couple of huts there, and I don’t think there’s any way out, that side. Oh—What is that?”

The words came out in a sort of shriek. As ill luck would have it she had turned and caught sight of the remains of the other two victims. She covered her face with her hands.

“Oh take me out of this horrible place. Now I begin to see,” and she shivered all over.

“Be brave now, darling,” I whispered. “We will go at once. I didn’t want you to see that, but—it’s only a way they have of burying their dead,” I added under a swift inspiration that a lie of that sort was highly expedient, and even then I don’t think she more than half believed me.

Jan Boom the while, together with Kendrew, had been acting in a thoroughly practical manner, by way of rendering the situation more secure. They had tied the three prisoners together by the leg, in addition to their other bonds, and this was as well, for the pair who had been stunned were showing signs of returning consciousness. Then we held a council of war. It was arranged that Jan Boom was to return with Aïda and myself to my place, thence he was to take one of the horses and ride straight on to Major Sewin’s and return with the police. The while Kendrew and Falkner would remain, and mount guard over the prisoners.

“Mind you sing out loud enough when you come back, Jan,” said Falkner meaningly. “Because we are going to blow the head off the very first nigger that happens to poke his nose in upon us through either of those holes, and that without warning too.”

The Xosa grinned broadly.

“No fear, I’ll sing out, sir,” he said in English. “But you look after Ukozi. Witch doctor damn smart nigga. Plaps he get away.”

“If he does he’s welcome to,” rejoined Falkner, poking the muzzle of his pistol against the shaven head of the principal prisoner, who having now recovered consciousness was staring stupidly about him. “Eh, my buck? But we won’t cheat the hangman in your case, no fear.”

I was unspeakably glad on Aïda’s account, to find ourselves through the horrid tunnel-like way by which we had entered, and out in the wholesome night air again. She seemed none the worse for her adventures, and was wonderfully plucky. She never could feel anything but safe with me, she declared.

The way was much easier now in the clear moonlight than when we had come, under the light of the stars, and as we walked she told me as well as she was able, what had befallen her on the afternoon of her solitary walk. When I chided her for undertaking a solitary walk she answered that she could not imagine harm overtaking her with so powerful a protector as Arlo.

“I don’t know why,” she went on, “but I felt a half unconscious inclination to go over that way we came together that evening before you went. Suddenly I discovered that Arlo was no longer with me. I called him but he didn’t come. This was strange, so I turned back, still calling him. Then I saw him lying as if he was dead, and bending over him were two natives. They started up at the sound of my voice, and I recognised Ivondwe and the witch doctor.”

“Ivondwe? Ah!” I interrupted, for a new light had now struck me. “Yes. Go on.”

“They called to me to come—and I advanced, dreadfully concerned about poor Arlo, and then I don’t know how it was, whether some instinct warned me, or whether it was a look I saw pass between them, but—I acted like an idiot. I turned and ran. You see, I lost my head completely.”

For answer I pressed the hand that rested on my arm closer to my side.

“Well, and what then?” I said.

“As soon as I began to run they came after me. As I say—I had lost my head completely, and hardly knew where I was going. Then, suddenly, I found myself on the brink of the waterhole; in fact I had nearly fallen into it. I turned, and the two were right upon me. ‘Why had I run away?’ they asked. ‘There was surely nothing to be afraid of. Surely I knew them both well enough. My dog was lying there dead and they had been trying to see what they could do for him.’

“I was unaccountably frightened, and dreadfully out of breath after the run. I felt half faint. Then just as I began to think I had behaved like a fool something was thrown over my head from behind, something that seemed saturated with some particularly overpowering and nauseous drug. Then I became unconscious, and only recovered when I found myself at the place we have just come from—or rather in a small kraal in a hollow just above it.”

“And you have been there all the time. Aïda, you are sure they have not injured you?”

“Oh yes. On the contrary they were quite deferential, the witch doctor especially. He told me my presence was necessary for a certain time on account of an important rain-making ceremony he was engaged in. After that I should be taken home again. Well I thought it advisable to make a virtue of necessity, and conciliate them. I even began to enter into the adventure of the thing, and supposed I was going to witness some quaint and rare native superstition. Another thing. The drug that at first overpowered me had left a strange effect—I believe it is a little upon me still. It was a sort of half drowsy apathetic feeling, as if it was too much trouble to think about anything. The women there took care of me, great care; they were Ukozi’s wives they said. Well, this evening he came to me and said the moon was right, and with my help, he had accomplished all he wanted, and it would soon rain abundantly. The time had come to take me home and he would guide me there. Do you know, he can talk English quite well?”

“No—by Jove I didn’t. He’s kept it remarkably dark hitherto. Yet he wasn’t talking English when you appeared.”

“No he wasn’t. I’ve got to understand them rather well by this time. Well, then you all burst out upon us and here I am.”

“Thank God for that!” I said fervently. “There’s another, too, of whom the same holds good, Jan Boom here.”

The Xosa, who was walking a little ahead of us, paused at the sound of his name and waited for us.

“*Nkose*,” he said, speaking in the vernacular. “Did you promise to tell me before three moons were dead, whether you were sorry you had kept me in your service or not?”

“That I did, Jan Boom, and you know the answer. Nor will you find me forgetful—*impela*!”

“*Nkose*!” he ejaculated and walked on.

“I have yet to get the whole mystery out of him,” I said in a low tone, “but for that I must wait his own time.”

There was another “time” for which I meant to wait. Not yet would I reveal to Aïda the horrible fate to which the repulsive superstition of the witch doctor had consigned her. That she would learn in due course. At present I wanted her to recover completely from the effects of her experience.

It was close upon dawn when we reached my place, and as I attended to the refreshment and comfort of my love, after her trying and perilous experience, it was as a foretaste of the future. Her people would be here as soon as they could possibly arrive, meanwhile she was under my care. And she needed sleep.

Tom, now cut loose from his night’s bonds, but none the worse, came up looking very sulky and foolish, and muttering vengeance against the Xosa, who for his part cared not a straw for such. A judicious present however soon altered that mood, and I believe he would have been quite willing to undergo the same treatment over again on the same terms, and bustled about making himself generally useful with renewed zest.

Ah, how fair arose that morning’s dawn. All that I held precious—my whole world as it were—lay peacefully sleeping within that hut, and while I kept guard outside, half fearing lest again that priceless gem should be stolen from its casket, an overwhelming rush of intense thankfulness surged deep through my heart. What had I done—what could I ever do—to deserve such a gift, now valued, if possible, a hundredfold by reason of the awful agony and blank of a temporary loss?

Far down in the river-bed lay waves of fleecy mist, and the rising sun gilded the heights with his early splendour. Birds piped and flashed among the dewy bush sprays, and the low of cattle and bark of a dog from a distant kraal floated upward. All was fair and bright and peaceful—and within—my love still slept on, serene, quiet, secure.

Chapter Thirty One.

The Brotherhood of the Dew.

Aïda looked none the worse for her adventures as she came forth into the clear freshness of the morning. The lethargic effect of the drug seemed to have left her entirely, and she was quite her old self, bright, sunny, fascinating as ever. But scarcely had we begun to talk than we saw three persons approaching on horseback.

“They haven’t lost much time coming for you,” I said, as I made out the rest of the family. “And I wanted you all to myself a little longer.”

“You mustn’t say that, dear,” she answered, with a return pressure from the hand I was holding. “They are perhaps just a little bit fond of me too.”

“Hallo, Glanton,” sung out the Major, breathless with excitement, as he rode up. “What the dickens is this cock and bull yarn your fellow has been spinning us. I can’t make head or tail of it and I didn’t stop to try. Anyhow, there’s my little girl again all safe and sound. She is safe and sound? Eh?”

“Absolutely, father,” answered Aïda, for herself. And then there was a good deal of bugging and kissing all round, and some crying; by the way, it seems that the women, dear creatures, can’t be brought to consider any ceremony complete unless they turn on the hose; for they turn it on when they’re happy, just as readily as when they’re not. For instance—there we were, all jolly together again—what the deuce was there to cry about? Yet cry they did.

I had breakfast set out in the open on the shady side of the store, with the broad view of the Zulu country lying beneath in the distance, and they declared it reminded them of that memorable time when the *contre temps* as to Tyingoza’s head-ring had befallen. And then when Aïda had given her adventures once more in detail, through sheer reaction we were all intensely happy after the dreadful suspense and gloom of the last three days. At length it was I who proposed we should make a move down, for it would be as well to be on hand when the others returned with the police and the prisoners.

“By Jove, Glanton, but you were right when you advised me to have nothing to do with that rascally witch doctor,” said the Major, as we rode along. “One consolation. I suppose he’s bound to be hung. Eh?”

“That depends on how we work the case,” I said. “And it’ll take a great deal of working.”

Hardly had we returned than the others arrived, bringing the three prisoners, and two more in the shape of the women of whom Aïda had told us. These however were kept entirely separate from Ukozi and his companions. No conversation between them was allowed.

Ukozi was sullen and impassive, but the younger prisoners glared around with a savage scowl which deepened as it rested on Falkner. He for response only grinned.

“All right my bucks,” he said. “There’s a rope and a long drop sticking out for you. By George, but this has been a ripping bit of fun for one night.”

“That’s all right,” I said rather shortly. “But you might remember that the reason for it hasn’t been fun by any means.”

“No, not for you, that’s understood,” he sneered, turning away, for he was still more than a little sore over my success.

“Glanton, I’ve something devilish rum to tell you.”

The speaker was Kendrew. “Come out of the crowd,” he went on. “Yes, it just is rum, and it gave me a turn, I can tell you. First of all, that nest of murderers we tumbled into, is bang on the edge of—if not within—my own place. Yes, it is my own place now—beyond a shadow of doubt. For we’ve unearthed something there.”

“You don’t mean—” I began, beginning to get an inkling.

He nodded.

“Yes, I do. The furthest of those two poor devils stuck up there against the rock—ugh!—was poor old Hensley—my old uncle.”

“Good lord!”

“Yes indeed. I was able to identify him by several things—ugh, but it wasn’t a nice job, you understand. But the mystery is not how he couldn’t be found at the time, but how the deuce such a neat little devil hole could exist on the place at all, unknown to any of us. Why, you can’t get in—or out of it—at all from the top, only through the hole we slipped in by. It’s like a false bottom to a box by Jove. Yes—it’s rum how such a place could exist.”

I thought so too. So now poor old Hensley’s disappearance stood explained; and the explanation was pitiable. He had been beguiled—or forcibly brought—to the hell pit of cruelty where these demons performed the dark rites of some secret superstition, and there horribly done to death by the water torture. When I thought of the one who had been destined to succeed him, and who by the mercy of Providence had been snatched from their fiendish hands just in the nick of time, a sort of “seeing red” feeling came over me, and had they been in my power, I could have massacred all four of the prisoners with my own hand.

“Let’s see if we can get anything out of them, Kendrew,” I said. “Manvers won’t mind.”

But Inspector Manvers did mind—at first. Then he agreed. They would be started off for the Police Camp that night; however, as they were here we could talk to them.

We might just as well have saved ourselves the trouble. Ivondwe, who had been kept apart from the others, smiled sweetly and wondered what all the bother was about. He could not imagine why he had been seized and tied up. However that would soon come right. Government was his father, but it had made a mistake. However he, as its child, could not complain even if his father had made a mistake. It would all come right.

The witch doctor simply refused to speak at all, but the young men jeered. One of these I seemed to recognise.

“Surely I have seen thee before?” I said. “Where?”

“*Kwa ’Sipanga*?”

“I remember. Atyisayo is thy name. ‘Hot water.’ And I warned thee not to get into any more hot water—as the whites say.”

He laughed at this—but evilly, and no further word could I get out of either of them.

But if they would reveal nothing there was another who would, and that was Jan Boom. Him I had refrained from questioning until we should be all quiet again.

The police, with the exception of three men, who had been detailed to remain on the spot and keep their eyes and ears open, started off that same evening with their prisoners. Later, Jan Boom came to the house and gave me to understand he had something to tell me. The family had just gone to bed, and Kendrew and I were sitting out on the stoep smoking a last pipe.

“*Nkose*, the time has now come,” he said, “to tell you what will sound strange to your ears. I would not tell it before, no, not till the *Amapolise* had gone. The *Amapolise* are too fond of asking many questions—foolish questions—asking them, too, as if they thought you were trying to throw sand in their eyes when all the time you are trying to help them. Now is that encouraging to one who would help them?”

I readily admitted that it was not.

“So now, *Nkose*, if you will come forth with me where we shall not be heard—yes, the nephew of Nyamaki may come, too—for my tale is not for all ears, you shall hear it.”

We needed no second invitation. As we followed him I could not but call to mind, in deep and thankful contrast, his revelation of two nights ago—made in the same way and on the same spot.

“You will have heard, *Amakosi*,” he began, “of the tribe called Amazolo, or the People of the Dew, which flourished in Natal before Tshaka’s impis drove the tribes of that land into the mountains or the sea.

“It was out of this tribe that the principal rainmakers came. So sure and successful were they in making rain that they were always in request. Even Tshaka, the Great, came to hear of them, and was never without some of them at his Great

Place, Dukuza, but as to these, well—he was ever sending for a fresh supply. But he, that Elephant, and Dingane after him, protected the Amazolo, so that they became looked up to and respected among all peoples.

"Now Luluzela, the chief of that tribe, was jealous of the first rain-making doctor, Kukuleyo, for it had come to this—that Luluzela was chief of the Amazolo but Kukuleyo was chief of him. So Luluzela waited patiently and watched his chances, for he dare not strike the rain doctor openly because Dingane favoured him, and had anything happened to him would soon have demanded to know the reason why. One day accordingly, knowing some of the mysteries himself, he ordered Kukuleyo to bring rain. The cattle were dying for want of water, and the crops were parched. The people would soon be dying too. But Kukuleyo answered that the moment was not propitious; that anything he did then would anger the *izituta* instead of propitiating them, and that when the time was right a sacrifice must be offered; not of cattle but of something quite beyond the ordinary. The chief jeered at this, but said the rain doctors might offer any sacrifice they chose."

"'Any sacrifice they chose?'" echoed Kukuleyo with emphasis.

"Yes. Any sacrifice they chose," repeated the chief, angry and sneering. But if rain did not come within a certain time why then Kukuleyo and all those who helped him should suffer the fate which had always been that of impostors.

"Soon after this, clouds began to gather in the heavens, and to spread and fly like vultures when they scent death afar. In a roaring thunder-rush they broke, and the land, all parched and cracked and gaping, ran off the water in floods. There was rejoicing, and yet not, for it had all come too quickly and violently, washing away and drowning the cattle which it should have restored to life, and covering the cornlands with thick layers of unfruitful sand. The people murmured against Kukuleyo and his rainmakers, the chief waxed fierce, and threatened. But his answer was firm and quiet. 'Lo, I have brought you rain.'

"Still, good followed, for when the worst had passed the worst, and the water was run off, the land was green again, and all things grew and thrived and fattened. But—then followed consternation on other grounds. The chief's son, Bacaza, had disappeared.

"He had disappeared, suddenly and in mystery. No trace was left. He might have gone into empty air. At first Luluzela was angry, then alarmed. He sent for Kukuleyo.

"But the rain doctor's face was like rock. What had he to do with the disappearance of people? he said. He was a rainmaker. He was not trained in unfolding mysteries. The chief of the Amazolo had better send for an *isanusi* if he wanted this one unfolded.

"And then, *Amakosi*, a discovery was made. Bacaza, the son of the chief was found—what was left of him that is. He was spread out beneath the falling water above a lonely pool, and was so arranged that the constant flow of water falling upon the back of his head and neck, slowly wore him to death. But it took days of awful agony such as no words could tell."

"How do you know that, Jan Boom?" I said, moved to an uneasiness of horror by the vivid way in which the Xosa was telling his story, for his eyes rolled and he passed his hand quickly over his face to wipe off the beads of perspiration. Clearly the recollection was a real and a terrible one to him.

"I know it, because I have been through it," he answered. "For a whole night, and part of a day I have been through it. *Hau*! it is not a thing to look back to, *Amakosi*. But let me tell my tale. When Luluzela heard what had been done he sent for Kukuleyo, intending to put him and his rainmakers to a slow and lingering death by fire. But Kukuleyo was no fool. He appeared armed, and with a great force at his back, so that that plan could not be carried out. For some time they looked at each other like two bulls across a kraal fence, then Kukuleyo said:—

"'Did not the chief of the Amazolo bid us offer any sacrifice we pleased, in order to obtain the desired rain?'

"'Eh-hé, any sacrifice we pleased,' echoed his followers, clamorously.

"'Why then, have I not taken the chief at his word?' went on Kukuleyo, defiantly. 'Nothing less than his son would satisfy the *izituta*, and his son have we offered. And—has it not rained? Ah! Ah! "Any sacrifice we pleased," was the word,' he went on mockingly. 'The word of the chief.'

"But Luluzela did not wait to hear more. With a roar of rage, he and those that were with him, hurled themselves upon the rainmakers. But these had come prepared, and had a goodly following too, all armed, many who were dissatisfied with Luluzela's rule—where is there a chief without some dissatisfied adherents?—and who had benefited by the rain. Then there was a great fight, and in it the chief was slain, but Kukuleyo came out without a scratch. This led to other fighting, and the tribe was broken up, some wandering one way, some another. But ever since then the Amazolo have been in request. The scattered remnants thus drifted, but whenever a severe drought occurred some of them were sure to be found. With them they took the tradition of the sacrifice of Luluzela's son."

"But," I said. "Do they sacrifice someone every time rain is wanted?"

"Not every time, *Nkose*. Still it is done, and that to a greater extent than you white people have any idea of. And it would have continued to be done if Ukozi had not conceived the idea of turning to white people for his victims. Hence the disappearance of Nyamaki. This time it was intended to seize Umsindo, but he is a great fighting bull, and would not only have injured others, but would most certainly have got injured himself; and it is essential that the victim who is put through *ukuconsa* as it is called, shall be entirely uninjured. So they chose the *Inkosikazi* instead."

"But, Jan Boom," put in Kendrew. "How on earth did they manage, in the case of my uncle, to spirit him away as they did—and leave no trace?"

"That I cannot tell you, *Nkose*. You must get that from Ukozi, if he will tell."

"Here is another thing," I said. "Even if Ukozi belongs to this tribe, Atyisayo and Ivondwe do not. They are of Tyingoza's people."

"That is true, *Nkose*. But the thing is no longer confined to the Amazolo. It has become a close and secret

brotherhood, and all may belong. They are called *Abangan 'ema zolweni*, the Comrades—or Brotherhood—of the Dew. And—it is everywhere. You remember what we found in Majendwa's country? Well that was a victim of *ukuconsa* and it surprised me, because I had not thought the custom had found its way into Zululand."

"And what of the pool here, and the big serpent, and Ukozi feeding it with the kid?" I asked, for I had already told him about this.

"The snake embodies the Water Spirit," he said. "It is customary to feed such with offerings."

"Was there then a snake in the other pool which we found?" I asked, feeling a creepy, shuddering horror run through me at the thought of the indescribably ghastly fate which had hung over my darling and from which we had only just been in time to save her, thanks to the shrewd promptitude of this staunch fellow, whom I had begun by disliking and mistrusting.

"That I cannot say, *Nkose*. But I think not. The water torture goes on for days, and the victim is left just as he is until he falls off or room is made for a fresh one, as we saw them so make it there."

"But you. How was it you were doomed to it, and how did you escape?" asked Kendrew.

"That is a long story, and it will I tell another time. I was living in Pondoland then, not far on the other side of the Umtavuna. Ukozi did that, but now I shall have revenge. Tell me, *Amakosi*, will not your people have him lashed before they hang him? If so I should like to see that."

It was little wonder that this savage should give way to the intensity of his vindictive feeling. We white men both felt that mere hanging was too good for these fiends. But we were obliged to assure him that such was very unlikely.

"When we returned from the Zulu country," he went on, "I began to put things together. I remembered what we had found up there, and what with Ukozi being in these parts and the sudden disappearance of Nyamaki, a little while before, I felt sure that the Brotherhood of the Dew was at work. I asked you to keep me with you, *Nkose*, because I saw my way now, by striking at it, to revenge myself upon Ukozi for the torture he had made me undergo. *Whau*! and it is torture! That of the fire cannot be worse. I knew that the Brotherhood would be strong, because among the people here there are so many names that have to do with water—from Tyingoza and his son downwards—"

I started. Yes, it was even as he said. There were many names of just that description. But Tyingoza! Could that open-mannered, straightforward chief for whom I had always entertained the highest regard, really be one of that black, devilish murder society!

"Moreover," he went on, "I knew whence they would draw their next victim. I, too, have eyes and ears, *Nkose*, as well as yourself," he said, with a whimsical laugh, "and I used them. The *Abangan 'ema zolweni* were strong in numbers, but otherwise weak. Their brethren were too young and—they talked—ah—ah—they talked. Hence I was able to follow Atyisayo to where I guided you. The rest was easy."

"Well, Jan Boom," I said seeing he had finished his story. "You will find you have done the very best day's work for yourself as well as for others that you ever did in your life."

"*Nkose* is my father," he answered with a smile. "I am in his hands."

Neither Kendrew nor I said much as we returned to the house. This hideous tale of a deep and secret superstition, with its murderous results, existent right in our midst, was too strange, too startling, and yet, every word of it bore infinite evidence of truth. Well, it proved what I have more than once stated, that no white man ever gets to the bottom of a native's innermost ways, however much he may think he does.

Chapter Thirty Two.

The Last Penalty.

Inspector Manvers was a shrewd as well as a smart officer, and it was not long before he had obtained from the two frightened women who had been made prisoners, sufficient information to warrant him in making several additional arrests. These, which were effected cleverly and quietly, included no less a personage than Ivuzamanzi, the son of Tyingoza. This would have astonished me, I own, but for Jan Boom's narrative; besides after the defection of Ivondwe I was prepared to be astonished at nothing.

An exhaustive search was made of the gruesome den of death, and in the result the identity of poor Hensley was established beyond a doubt, as his nephew had said. The police spared no pains. They dragged the bottom of the waterhole with grappling hooks, and brought up a quantity of human bones, and old tatters of rotted clothing. It was obvious that quite a number of persons had been done to death here.

"The *Abangan 'ema zolweni* were strong in numbers but otherwise weak. Their brethren were too young, and—they talked." Such had been Jan Boom's dictum, and now events combined to bear it out. Two of the younger prisoners, fearing for their lives, confessed. This example was followed by others, and soon ample evidence was available to draw the web tight round the witch doctor, Ivondwe, Ivuzamanzi and Atyisayo, as prime movers in the whole diabolical cult. And then, that there could be no further room for doubt, Ukozi himself confessed.

I own that I was somewhat astonished at this. But since his incarceration the witch doctor's spirit seemed completely to fail him, which was strange; for a native, especially one of his age and standing, does not, as a rule, fear death. But fear, abject and unmistakable, had now taken hold of this one. He trembled and muttered, and at times it seemed as if his mind would give way. Then he declared his willingness to make a statement. Perhaps his life would be spared.

But he was given to understand he need entertain no hopes of that kind if he should be convicted at the trial. Even then he persisted. He wanted to throw off the load, he said, for it lay heavy on his heart.

His statement was consistent with that of all the others, moreover it tallied with all that Jan Boom had told me. The

part of it that was peculiar was the manner in which they had been able to remove their victims so as to leave no trace. This had been done by means of muffled shoes. The drug administered had the effect of putting them into a kind of trance. They had all their faculties about them, save only that of volition, but afterwards they would remember nothing. Nyamaki had been easily removed because he lived alone. He, like Major Sewin, the witch doctor had gradually imbued with a taste for the occult. After that all was easy. It had at first been intended to entrap the Major, then his nephew, but for the reasons that Jan Boom had already given me, this plan was abandoned. Then it was decided to seize his eldest daughter. Such a sacrifice as that could not fail to move the Spirit of the Dew, and to bring abundant rain.

No, she had in no way been injured. To have injured her would have been to have rendered the whole rite invalid. As for Ivondwe, he had gone to the Major's with the object of forwarding the plan when it was ripe. He was almost as great among the Brethren of the Dew as Ukozi himself. Ivuzamanzi? Yes, he, too, was among the foremost of them. Tyingoza belonged to the Brotherhood, but he had been enrolled unwillingly, and had never taken part in any of their deeper mysteries: nor indeed, did they come within his knowledge.

Thus ran Ukozi's confession. When it was read out at the trial it created a profound sensation, as, indeed, did the whole case in the columns of the Colonial Press, which clamoured for a signal example to be made of the offenders. And the Court by which they were tried was of the same opinion.

When those who had turned Queen's evidence had been sifted out—of course with the exception of Ukozi—there was still a round dozen for trial. The Court-house at Grey Town was crammed. Natives especially, had mustered in crowds, but so far from there being any turbulence, or tendency to rescue, these were, if anything, considerably awed by the very circumstances of the case itself. Most of them indeed had never heard of the *Abangan 'ema zolweni*, and a new and stimulating matter of discussion was thus supplied to them.

The confession of Ukozi, and of the others of course went far to simplify the trial. Still, the fairness and impartiality for which British jurisprudence is famous, was fully extended to the accused. I personally can bear witness to a good hour in the box, most of which was spent in cross-examination for the defence. The same held good of Kendrew and Falkner, the latter of whom by the way, drew down upon himself some very nasty remarks from the Bench, by reason of having stated in answer to a question as to whether he had not expressed a wish to see these men hanged—that he would cheerfully see every nigger in Natal hanged if he had his way, and they had their deserts. But he didn't care. As he confided to me afterwards, what did it matter what an old fool in a gown said when he knew he couldn't have his head punched for saying it.

Aïda, too, was called upon to go through the ordeal, and of course she did it well. In fact a murmur of appreciation ran through the native section of the audience when she emphatically agreed with the defending counsel's suggestion, in cross-examination, that she had not been ill-treated in any way. There was, too, a great cloud of native witnesses. Jan Boom, in particular, had a long and trying time of it, but the Xosa was a man of parts, and a good bit of a lawyer himself in his way. There was no shaking his evidence on any one single point. Thus, as I have said, in spite of his confession, Ukozi and his fellow accused were given every chance.

The indictment, so far, was confined to the murder of Hensley. Had it broken down—which of course was inconceivable—the prisoners would have been re-indicted for the murder of the native victims, of two, at any rate, whose identity could have been easily established. Failing necessity, for the sake of their relatives, in view of possible danger involved to these, it was not deemed expedient to include them in the formal ground of indictment. The verdict of course, could only be "Guilty." The four—viz. Ukozi, Ivuzamanzi, Ivondwe and Atyisayo—were brought in as principals—the others as accessories—some before, some after the fact.

Never shall I forget the scene in court, as they were asked whether they had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon them. It was just sundown, and an angry storm had been raging outside for fully an hour. Growling, cracking peals of thunder had interrupted the judge's summing up, and now, during a lull, the glare of a wet sunset came in through the windows, and a few heavy drops of rain still fell like stones on the corrugated iron roof during the tense silence. They stood in the dock those twelve dark figures, some leaning eagerly forward over the rail, their eyeballs protruding in the climax of the moment's excitement, others impassive and statuesque. Amid the public was a subdued, hush. The native public especially seemed turned to stone.

In answer to the appeal the bulk of the prisoners shook their heads. They had nothing to say, they declared, and then subsided into stolid silence. But when it came to the turn of Ivondwe, he harangued the Court at some length. The white man, he said, professed to be the protector and tolerator of all religions. Now this, for which they stood there, was part of the black man's religion—or at any rate a section of it. Why then, was not that tolerated too? Ivuzamanzi, when it came to his turn, answered with heat, that he was the son of a chief—that he was a Zulu of the tribe of Umtetwa; that he cared nothing for a set of preaching whites and their stupid laws; that he only wished he had crossed the river long ago, and gone to *konza* to Cetywayo. There he would have been in a warrior land where the head-ring of his father and chief could not have been insulted with impunity by a swaggering *igcwane* like the one who sat yonder—pointing to Falkner—who, however, perhaps fortunately, didn't understand what was being said until the interpreter had rendered it, and then it was too late to kick up a row. Then he might have joined one day in driving the whites into the sea, where sooner or later they would all be driven. He was the son of a chief and could die like one. He was not going to lie down and howl for mercy like a miserable cheat of an *isanusi*.

This with a savage glare at Ukozi.

The latter said not much. He had confessed. He had done what he could to put right what had been done. His life was in the hands of the Government.

The judge drew on the black cap, and proceeded to pass formal sentence.

The twelve prisoners before him, he said, after a long and painstaking trial extending over several days, had been convicted of the most heinous crime known to the law, that of murder, the penalty of which was death. They had only been indicted for, and found guilty of one murder, but there was ample evidence that many others had lain at their door. This murder then, was the outcome of one of the vilest, most benighted forms of superstition that had ever disgraced our common humanity, whether black or white. As for urging, as one of the prisoners had done, that such murder was part of the black man's religion—or anybody's religion—why he could only say that such a statement was a slander upon the honest, straightforward, native population of the Colony, of whose good and trustworthy qualities he personally had had many years of experience. It was a relic of the blackest and most benighted days of past heathenism, and it was clear that a bold attempt had been made on the part of the prisoner Ukozi, to revive and spread it in the midst of a peaceful and law-abiding native population living contentedly under the Queen's rule and under the Queen's laws. Once these terrible superstitions—and their outcome of foul and mysterious murder—took root, there was no seeing where they

would end, therefore it was providential that this wicked and horrible conspiracy against the lives of their fellow subjects had been brought to light, and he would especially urge, and solemnly warn, his native hearers present in court to set their faces resolutely against anything of the kind in their midst. Not for one moment would it be tolerated, nor would any plea of custom, or such a travesty of the sacred name of religion, as had been brought forward by one of the prisoners, be even so much as considered in mitigation of the just doom meted out by the law to all who should be found guilty of such an offence.

Sentence of death was then formally passed upon the whole dozen.

There were many influential natives among the audience in court. These, I could see, were impressed, and in the right direction, moreover I gathered from their comments, which I overheard as they dispersed, that to many of them the existence of the Brotherhood of the Dew came as a revelation. And the comments were diverse and instructive.

"*Au*!" one man remarked. "There is but one among the twelve who wears the head-ring, and he is the one that shows fear."

The death sentence in the case of all but three was subsequently commuted to various terms of imprisonment. Those three were Ukozi, Ivondwe and Ivuzamanzi. As for the latter, Tyingoza had got up a large deputation to the Governor, begging that his son's life should be spared, but without avail. Ivuzamanzi had taken an active part in this new outlet of a destructive superstition, and it was felt that as the son of an influential chief, he of all others should be made an example of.

I don't know how it was—call it morbid curiosity if you like—but anyhow I was there when these three paid the last penalty. I had visited them in the gaol once. Ivondwe had talked as if nothing had happened, about old times and what not. The witch doctor was cowering and piteous. Could *I* do nothing to save him. He would remember it to the end of his days, and would tell me many things that would be useful to me. I told him plainly I could do nothing, but in consideration did not add that I would not if I could, for if ever miscreant deserved his fate he did. I gave them some tobacco however, poor wretches, and that was all I could do for them. Ivuzamanzi was stormily abusive, so I did not waste time over him. Yet for him, I felt pity, as one led away, and—was not he the son of my old friend?

It had been decided that the execution should, contrary to custom, be a public one. It was reckoned that the opportunity would be a good one for striking terror among the natives, as an example of the fate that would certainly overtake, sooner or later, all who should indulge in similar practices. Rightly it was argued that a terrible superstition of this nature, fostered by a secret society and finding its logical outcome in barbarous and abominable forms of murder, needed to be sternly stamped out.

On a grey and cloudy morning Ukozi, Ivondwe and Ivuzamanzi were led forth to die. There had been rain in the night, which had left a raw chill in the air; while the wind sang mournfully as it drove the low clouds along the hill tops. A pit had been dug in front of the gaol, to serve as a drop, and over this the gallows had been erected. From an early hour natives had been coming in by twos and threes, and now a crowd of several hundreds of them had assembled. Their demeanour however was neither turbulent nor defiant, on the contrary it was remarkably subdued, and they conversed in awed undertones. With a view to any possible demonstration a full troop of Mounted Police was disposed around the scaffold, with bandoliers filled, and all ready for action, but the precaution was unnecessary. The temper of the dark crowd was one of subdued awe as it contemplated the preparations for this grim and unaccustomed method of exit from life; in short just the very effect intended to be produced by making the execution a public one.

A hollow murmur ran over the crowd like a wave as the gaol doors swung open and the prisoners appeared, pinioned. Their demeanour was varied. That of Ukozi showed, unmistakably, fear—shrinking fear. At sight of the scaffold something like a tremor ran through the frame of the witch doctor, and he half stopped instinctively, while his lips moved in piteous protest. Ivondwe was as impassive as a statue; but the chief's son walked with his head thrown back, his tall form erect, and a bitter scowl of hate and defiance upon his face. Then his glance met mine.

"That is the man through whom I am here," he roared. "Are there none present to whom I may bequeath my vengeance?" And he glared around.

"Yet I saved thy life once, son of Tyingoza," I answered, speaking so that all could hear, and this I did with a purpose.

"Walk on, Ivuzamanzi, and die like the son of a chief," said the sheriff to him in a low tone. And he obeyed.

The Indian hangman and his assistant did their work quickly and well, and the three disappeared from view, hardly a quiver in the ropes showing that they had met death instantaneously, and in infinitely more merciful fashion than the lingering and horrible manner in which they had meted it out to so many unsuspecting victims sacrificed to their abominable and devilish superstition; and as I thought of one who came within an ace of adding to the number of such victims I could feel no pity for them now, which may have been wrong, but if it is I can't help it.

In pursuance of the policy which had decreed that the execution should be public, the natives were allowed to come forward in batches and view the bodies if they wished. Many did so come forward, and the sight of the three hanging there, still and motionless, with the white caps drawn over their heads and faces, seemed to impress them deeply, judging from the remarks they made as they went away. Moreover I have reason to believe the effect was salutary and lasting. The pomp and awe and mystery of it appealed to them powerfully.

I had a reason for answering Ivuzamanzi, otherwise I would not have seemed to wrangle with a man on the very steps of the scaffold. For, be it remembered, he was the son of a powerful chief, and his words might be in the highest degree dangerous to myself, and I had no hankering to be marked out as the object of a vendetta. But I knew that natives have a strong sense of justice, and the fact that I had once saved his life being made known, would go far towards taking the sting out of his denunciation.

"He feared," said a native voice at my elbow.

I turned quickly, though I knew the voice. It was that of Jan Boom.

"He feared," repeated the Xosa. "He feared death. His heart melted to water within him. *Silungile*! Now am I

avenged.”

Chapter Thirty Three.

Conclusion.

For all the brave way in which Aïda had taken her grisly experience—and the full gruesomeness of her peril and narrow escape had been borne in upon her, especially during the trial and the revelations it had evolved—an impression had been left upon her mind which rendered the life to which she had been looking forward, and its associations, distasteful to her for the present. So after our marriage, which took place a month later than the dark and tragical circumstances I have just recorded, we decided to start for a prolonged tour of a year or more in Europe.

That time was a halcyon time for me, falling in no whit short of what I had always pictured it in anticipation. We did not hurry ourselves. We took things easily, and thus were spared all the worry and flurry of those who do not. In consequence we were able to enjoy to the full the pick of the Old World in all that was beautiful or interesting, and after my twenty years of up-country knocking about, and generally roughing it, everything enjoyed in such association was both.

The farm I had bought for our joint occupation I was able to dispose of at a trifling loss, and my trading store I sold at some profit; which made things not merely as broad as they were long, as the saying goes, but broader. But before we started on our tour it transpired that Edith Sewin and Kendrew had managed to compass a very mutual excellent understanding—it might have occurred to me at the time of our anxiety and grief that Kendrew had displayed quite an unusual familiarity in his references to my sister-in-law elect, but I suppose in the all-absorbing anguish of my own loss I had no mind to give to any such trivial detail. But as we were to be away a long time, the artful dog took advantage of the circumstance to hurry forward his own ambition. It would never do, he urged—they both urged—for the presence of her only sister to be wanting at Edith’s marriage, and in the result if there was not a double wedding, at any rate there were two within a very short time of each other. Well, we were all glad. Kendrew was a good fellow—a thoroughly good fellow—and the farm he had inherited through poor old Hensley’s murder was a right good one. He was going to throw up transport-riding and work it, he declared, and he did.

The old people, reft thus of both their daughters, decided to leave the frontier and settle just outside Durban; an excellent climate and country for those who have spent most of their lives in India. The farm was turned over to Falkner; who, by the way, soon blossomed into a remarkably able and energetic colonist. His sheer brutal pluck won him the very real and undiluted respect of the natives, and after not more than three attempts had been made upon his life, these came to the conclusion that “Umsindo” was really great, and one whom, taking him all round, it was no disgrace or disadvantage to serve; for with all his faults he was open-handed, and this tells. He was a very devil, they declared, but one that it was better to be with than against, and so he prospered. But he soon found a better outlet for his pugnacity than mere head punching, for the Zulu War broke out, and of course Falkner must be in the thick of it. He served all through, in a corps of Irregular Horse, and performed fine feats of daring on more than one occasion and notably during the disastrous rout on the Hlobane Mountain, for which he ought to have got the V.C. but didn’t, and is a happy man proportionately in that he cherishes a grievance. By a curious irony of Fate too he was instrumental in saving the life of no less a personage than our old antagonist, Dolf Norbury, for soon after the invasion of Zululand, that worthy, having quarrelled with his friend and ally Mawendhlela, found himself run very hard by that gin-loving potentate’s followers. He had made a desperate fight for it, and had shot down quite a number. Still there were numbers left, when Falkner, happening along with a patrol, rescued him only in the bare nick of time. Afterwards he told me that he had invited him to try, just in a friendly way, another “scrap” for the conqueror, but Dolf wasn’t taking any. He’d rather light out for over the Swazi border, he said, if it was all the same to his rescuer and quondam enemy. It was—and so they parted, this time in a kind of rough friendliness.

Of the “Brotherhood of the Dew” I have been able to get no further information. Whether the Zulu War had created a far-reaching diversion, or that the hanging of Ukozi and Co. had conveyed the impression that it was unhealthy to carry on its operations in a white man’s country I can’t say for certain, but nothing more was heard of it, in Natal at any rate. Aïda’s experience of it however, had left such an impression upon her that she had a rooted aversion to returning to live anywhere near the scene of its former operations, so we decided to settle down upon a farm in one of the most healthy and picturesque parts of the Eastern Districts of the Cape Colony. There Jan Boom is our most reliable and trusted factotum; Jan Boom, now the owner of three wives—with power to add to the number—and much cattle—the result of the priceless service he rendered us in the past.

Priceless service! Yes indeed, for although a good many years have gone by since the events happened of which I, Godfrey Glanton, have striven to set forward a clear account—remember literature is not an up-country man’s strong point—still they have been years of unbroken happiness. And still they remain, in proof whereof, I invite any reader of this narrative who may find himself in my part of the world, to come and judge for himself. I am easily found, and I promise him a cordial welcome, and—if he is fond of the gun—something not bad in the way of sport.

The End.

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