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Chapter One.

The Power of the Dog.

Old Tyardt van der Walt, head of the family of that name, came of good Netherlands stock. His grandfather had emigrated from Holland with his family in the middle of the Eighteenth Century and settled at the Cape. He bought a farm in the Stellenbosch district and there commenced life anew as a wine farmer. The family consisted of his wife, a son and several daughters—all of whom married early. At his death the farm descended to his son Cornelius from whom, in course of time, another Tyardt inherited it.

The last-mentioned Tyardt forsook the settled and fertile environs of Stellenbosch and trekked forward to seek his fortune in the unknown and perilous wilderness. A story is told as to the reason for this migration which, though it has no direct bearing on the story which is to be recorded in this volume, is interesting enough in itself to merit relation.

There was, it is said, a gruesome legend connected with the van der Walts. It dated from the times of William the Silent and was to the following effect:—The head of the van der Walt family of that period lived in the town of Maestricht. He was a man of solitary habits. In his youth his wife had deserted him for another. He had been passionately attached to her, and he never recovered from the blow, but lived the rest of his days in solitude.

Years afterwards, when he was quite an old man, a son of the man who had wronged him—a young and zealous Lutheran preacher, came to live in his vicinity. This preacher was in the habit of visiting in disguise families of his co-religionists in the Provinces where the Spaniards held complete dominion. He had a dog that had been trained to convey cypher messages from place to place. Van der Walt betrayed this preacher to the authorities, with the result that he was captured and sentenced to be burnt alive. The betrayer was among those who crowded round the stake to gloat over the agonies of the victim. The dog had followed its master and, seeing his evil case, set up a piteous howling. The Spaniards, judging the heretic to be a wizard, and the dog his familiar spirit, caught the unhappy animal and bound it among the faggots at its master's feet. Just as the pile was lit the preacher lifted up his voice and cried aloud:—

"Gerrit van der Walt,—for thy black treachery to a servant of the Lord, thou shalt die in misery within a year and a day. Thy soul shall wander homeless for ever and shall howl like a dog as the harbinger of misfortune whenever it is about to fall upon one of thy blood."

It has been declared on respectable authority that from and after the death of Gerrit, which took place under miserable circumstances within the period named by his victim, a dog which was never seen would howl around the dwelling of any van der Walt about to die, for the three nights previous to the passing of his soul. Thus a new terror was added to the death-bed of any member of the family.

The following account of the last occasion when this warning howl was heard is firmly believed by the few surviving descendants in the direct line. It is taken from an old manuscript which purports to date from the year in which the incidents related are alleged to have taken place.

Towards the end of the last century, Tyardt's father, Cornelius van der Walt, lay ill in bed, but no one imagined that his illness was likely to be fatal, until one night after supper the dreaded howl was heard under his window. The sick man, filled with terror, arose to a sitting posture in his bed, and called Tyardt, who was his eldest son, before him.

"If that dog be not shot by you before the day after to-morrow," he said, "I will make my will anew and dispossess you of everything that the law will allow me to leave to others."

Next day Tyardt brooded long and deeply over the occurrence. He did not love his father, so the old man's death

would have caused him no regret, but he knew that the threat would be carried out.

There was an old and tattered family Bible on the loft, with a strong and heavy metal clasp. This clasp Tyardt broke into fragments about the size of ordinary slugs, and with them he loaded his gun, using portions of the leaves as wadding.

As soon as night fell he stole quietly out and posted himself among the branches of a small tree which grew just in front of the window of the room in which his father lay.

The night was pitch dark; a damp fog had rolled in from the sea and covered everything. Tyardt had not long to wait before a long, low howl, which curdled his blood with dread, arose from just beneath him. Terrified as he was, he thought of the property at stake, so he hardened his will to the purpose and carefully cocked his gun.

There could be no mistaking the exact locality from which the howling came; it was almost at his feet. He fired, and a horrible, half-human yell followed the report of the gun. Then came a sound of scuffling upon the ground. Soon a light was brought from the house, and then Tyardt descended from the tree.

Beneath lay the huddled, bleeding figure of an old man of hideous aspect, clad in a garb unknown at the Cape but which, it was afterwards thought, suggested some wood-cuts in an old book brought out by the last-deceased van der Walt from Holland. A sheet was thrown over the horror, and the trembling family sat up, waiting for, but dreading, the light of day. It was not until after the sun had arisen that they ventured to go out and visit the scene of the tragedy,—but no trace of the body could be seen; nor was there any sign of the blood which had so much horrified the beholders on the previous night.

There appeared to have been no doubt as to the main facts having occurred; slaves, servants, and, in fact, every member of the household except the sick man, had seen the body. The mystery was never solved; no body was ever found; no one from the neighbourhood was missed, nor, so far as could be ascertained, had any man resembling the description of the body ever been seen in the neighbourhood.

Cornelius van der Walt died during the following night, but without altering his will. Tyardt, however, took the matter so much to heart that he became a changed man. He came to hate the neighbourhood, and, leaving the farm in the hands of his mother and a younger brother, he set his face to the northward. He purchased two wagons, packed them with his goods, and, with his young wife and three small children, plunged into the unknown wilderness. After having passed some distance beyond the farthest outposts of civilisation, he at length halted high up near the head of a valley where the Tanqua River gorge cleaves the southern face of the Roggeveld mountain range. Here he built a homestead and took possession of the ground surrounding it for some miles. From the large numbers of elands which haunted the hills he named his new home “Elandsfontein.”

For some time he was left to enjoy the solitude for which his nature craved; but he lived long enough to feel himself inconveniently crowded when neighbours established themselves at distances of from fifteen to twenty miles from him on each side. However, he still drew comfort from the thought that beyond the mountain chain which frowned down upon his homestead on the northward, the vast, unoccupied desert lay—and appeared likely to lie for ever unappropriated. Moreover, it was certainly convenient to have the assistance of the aforesaid neighbours in hunting Bushmen, with whom the surrounding mountains were infested.

The occurrence of the night before his father’s death affected the character of Tyardt van der Walt permanently. For years he could never bear to be alone in the dark;—he suffered from the dread that the horrible creature he had shot would re-appear to him. This man, who did not know what fear of any material thing meant, was for long an abject slave to dread of the supernatural, and fell into a state of piteous terror if a dog howled within his hearing after dark.

It is said that his death was, after all, caused by the howling of a dog. During one of his periodical fits of nervous depression he felt unwell and, under his wife’s persuasion, went to his bed one day a few hours before the usual time. That night a dog howled on the hill across the valley; the sick man, as soon as he heard it, turned his face to the wall, saying that his summons had come. He refused to take any nourishment, and died in the course of a few days.

Strange,—that the crime of over two centuries back should have sent its baleful influence across the ocean wastes and the desert sands to drag a man who was blameless in it to his doom.

No stouter-hearted men than those of the van der Walt stock ever took their lives into their hands and faced, with unflinching eye, the dangers of the desert which they helped so mightily to reclaim. It is, however, an extraordinary fact that no member of this family in the direct line could ever hear the howling of a dog after nightfall without being reduced to abject terror.

Chapter Two.

How the Brothers Quarrelled.

Tyardt van der walt left a widow, two sons—Stephanus and Gideon—who were twins, and three daughters. As is usual among the Boers, the daughters married early in life; they have nothing to do with this story.

The beginning of the quarrel between the twin-brothers dated from years back—from the time when they went down with a wagon load of game peltries and other produce to Stellenbosch and there fell in love, instantaneously and unanimously, with Marta Venter, their fair-haired cousin, whom they met in the street, coming from Confirmation class. Stephanus, the elder twin, had a slightly looser and glibber tongue than Gideon; besides, he was probably not

so much in earnest as the latter; so, other things being equal, his suit was practically bound to prosper. When, after advantageously selling their load in Cape Town, the brothers inspanned their wagon and started for home, Stephanus and fair-haired Marta were engaged to be married and the darkened heart of Gideon was filled with a love which, in spite of many shocks and changes, never wholly died out of it.

The wedding took place at the next *Nachtmaal*, Gideon managing, by means of some pretext, to avoid being present. Soon afterwards old Tyardt cut off a portion of the farm and handed it over to his married son, who thereupon built a homestead and began farming on his own account.

It was some time before Gideon could bring himself to meet his sister-in-law without embarrassment; however, an accidental event cleared the way for what appeared to be a complete reconciliation. One day, when the brothers happened to be camped with their wagons on the southern bank of the swollen Tanqua River, waiting for the flood to subside, Stephanus, against his brother's advice, ventured into the current and was swept away. Gideon dashed in to the rescue and saved his brother's life at the risk of his own. After this the old friendly relations were, to all appearances, firmly re-established.

These brothers strikingly resembled each other in both disposition and appearance. Both were large, handsome, keen-featured men, with flashing black eyes and choleric tempers. There was only one slight difference apparent: under strong excitement or deep feeling Gideon became morose and taciturn,—Stephanus excited and talkative.

Shortly after old Tyardt's death the quarrel broke out afresh. The portion of the farm assigned to Stephanus was secured to him by will; the remaining extent was bequeathed to Gideon. The shares of the daughters in the estate were paid out in stock. Elandsfontein was a large farm and was naturally divided into two nearly equal parts by a deep kloof running almost right through it. In dry seasons this kloof contained no water, but on the side which had been assigned to Stephanus there was a small spring situated in a rocky depression which was filled with scrubby bush. From this a pure, cool stream flowed. Immediately after issuing from the scrub this stream lost itself in a swamp; near its source, however, it had never been known to fail in the most severe drought.

Although the spring was about a hundred paces from the dividing line, a clause had been inserted in the will of old Tyardt, in terms of which the water was to be held as common property between the owners of the farm; thus stock from Gideon's land were to be allowed to drink at the spring whenever circumstances required.

Within a very few years after old Tyardt's death the land was smitten by a heavy drought and the Elandsfontein spring soon proved unequal to the demands made upon it from both sides. Then strife of the most embittered description resulted between the brothers. The dispute was the subject of a law suit before the Supreme Court at Cape Town, but no satisfactory settlement was arrived at. As a matter of fact—owing to the clumsiness with which the will was drawn—no settlement was possible without concessions on both sides, and neither brother would concede so much as a hair's breadth.

The feud between the brothers became a scandal to the neighbourhood; in fact they could hardly meet without insulting each other grossly. On several occasions they had come to blows. The climax was reached when, in response to a formal call, they appeared before the court of elders of the Dutch Reformed Church at Stellenbosch. After due enquiry had been made into the causes of the quarrel the brothers were called upon to tender hands to each other in token of reconciliation. This they both refused, in insulting terms, to do. Then the sacred and highly respectable precincts of the vestry became the scene of an unseemly brawl, and the brothers were formally excommunicated.

Some time before this, and shortly before matters became hopelessly embittered, Gideon had married Aletta du Val, the daughter of a neighbouring farmer. There was little love on Gideon's side, for he had never got over his first passion for his fair-haired cousin.

One fateful morning in early summer Gideon placed the saddle upon his horse, took down from the rack his long-barrelled "roer," his bandolier of greased bullets and his powder-horn, and started for a ride along the western boundary of his farm.

His flock of flat-tailed sheep were kraaled at an outpost which was in charge of a Hottentot herd, and he wished to count them. This flock was in the habit of drinking every morning at the stream which had caused so much strife, for the weather had been dry for some months, and the rivulet which sometimes ran in the dividing kloof had long since disappeared.

The day was hot, but not oppressively so. Every now and then a breeze sweet with suggestion of the distant western ocean would breathe refreshingly over the arid land, acting like a tonic on all who inhaled it.

The tulip-like cups of the sweet-scented gethyllis blossomed out in rich masses from the hot sand on the wayside, the wild notes of the chanting falcon seemed to fill the sky as the birds circled round the highest points of the cliffs that flanked the valley; the hoarse call of the sentinel baboons echoed from the black bluffs.

On reaching the kraal Gideon found that the sheep had been turned out earlier than usual. Then he rode to the spring and found it evidenced by the spoor, which lay thick about the water's edge, that the flock had already been watered. Wondering at the reason for this manifestation of activity on the part of the usually-lazy Hottentot herd, he lit his pipe and stood for a moment or two enjoying the cool shade which surrounded the spring, after the heat of the ride.

A slight sound caused him to turn his head and then he saw old Gert Dragoonder, the herd, step out from the cover behind him. Gert had been on the point of falling asleep when his master's arrival had startled him.

After ascertaining from the Hottentot that the flock of sheep were grazing safely behind the big bluff—well away from

the dividing line—Gideon handed over to him his horse and told him to take the animal up to the sheep kraal and fasten it to a bush. The sea-breeze was freshening and he meant, when the air became cooler, to take a turn on foot among the rocks high up on the mountain side, in the hope of getting a shot at a rhebok. Gideon lay back under a bush and finished his pipe; then he turned upon his side and fell asleep.

He awoke to the sound of a foot step and opened his eyes. Before him, on the other side of the spring, he could see Stephanus, who had just dismounted from his horse. The animal began to graze, its bridle hung and trailed upon the ground as it wandered on, cropping the herbage, until it crossed the dividing kloof. When the animal had passed well over the boundary Gideon arose stealthily, seized his gun and hurried towards the horse with the intention of seizing it. But Stephanus, who now noticed his brother for the first time, rushed forward and grappled with him, and the two fell struggling to the ground.

Stephanus, being slightly the stronger of the two, managed to get Gideon under; then he twisted the gun from his adversary's grasp, sprang away to one side and looked back with a mocking smile.

Stephanus cocked the gun and again looked at Gideon who, having risen to his feet, was trembling and livid with rage. Stephanus knew that he had the law on his side; it had been laid down in the judgment of the court that although Gideon had the right to drive his stock to drink at the spring, he had no right to approach it for any other purpose. Up to this not a word had been spoken; Gideon was foaming with impotent fury; Stephanus, feeling that he was master of the situation, had managed to keep his anger within bounds.

"See the Jackal caught in his own trap," he tauntingly shouted. "*My* Hottentot wants an old gun to shoot baboons with; this one will just do."

"You are nothing but a bastard jackal, yourself," yelled Gideon in reply. "You are very brave because you have my gun in your hand; put it down and I will take that dirty beard of yours to stuff my saddle with—if it would not give the horse a sore back."

Stephanus, now in a transport of ungovernable fury, flung the gun away from him,—into the scrub,—and sprang towards his brother. But the gun, after crashing through the branches, went off, and Gideon fell to the ground with his shoulder torn open by the bullet.

Stephanus, his anger now completely gone, and feeling as if the events of the past few minutes had completely wiped out the black rancour which had darkened so many years, knelt at the side of his unconscious brother and cut away the coat and shirt from the neighbourhood of the wound. Then he tried to staunch the flowing blood with strips of cloth which he tore from his own garments.

The wound was a terrible one; the bone had been splintered, and portions of it were visible at the spot where the bullet had emerged. Stephanus made balls of moss which he tied up in linen rags and bound over the gaping mouths of the hurt. Then he fetched water in his hat from the spring and flung it into the pallid face of the sufferer, who thereupon slowly began to revive.

When Gideon opened his eyes they rested upon his brother's face for a few seconds without recognition, and then an expression of the most bitter hatred dawned upon his countenance and gradually distorted his features until they became almost unrecognisable. The sound of approaching footsteps was heard, and immediately afterwards Gert Dragoonder appeared. The Hottentot had seen Stephanus approach the spring and then, after a short interval, heard the shot, so he returned to see what had happened. When Gideon saw Gert, he raised himself painfully on the elbow of his uninjured arm and gasped out in a voice horrible to hear:—

"Gert—come here—you are my witness—the man, there—my brother—he shot me.—There lies my gun in the bush—he threw it there to hide it—I shall die of this.—Go to the Field Cornet—He tried to murder me—I am already a dead man.—He must hang—"

Here he fell back once more in a faint Stephanus turned to the Hottentot who, thinking that his master was dead, was stealing away with the keenest terror depicted on his countenance.

"Here, Gert,—take my horse and ride to the homestead—tell your mistress to send men with poles and sacks, and to send for Uncle Diederick at once. Wait,—when you have told the mistress, ride off yourself on my horse as fast as you can for Uncle Diederick."

Uncle Diederick was an old Boer who lived about half a day's journey away,—to the westward, and who had a reputation which extended all over the country side as a bone-setter and herbalist.

The Hottentot galloped off, and Stephanus again turned to the wounded man, who by this time had recovered consciousness. When Gideon's glance again fell upon his brother's face, his features, already twisted by the agony which he endured, took on an expression of diabolical malice, fearful to behold. Stephanus spoke gently to him once or twice, asking if he were comfortable, but Gideon closed his eyes and maintained an obstinate silence.

After about an hour had elapsed a party of people from the homestead arrived, carrying poles, skins and sacks. Out of these a litter was soon formed. When Gideon was lifted from the ground he groaned in anguish and half-swooned. Again he rallied, and his eyes, blazing with hate, fell again upon his brother.

"Remember"—he gasped—"if I die, he shot me.—There lies my gun—he threw it there to hide it—"

Gideon insisted on the gun being sought for and removed from the scrub before he was borne away, groaning and cursing, upon the improvised litter. Stephanus attempted to accompany him, but was driven away with imprecations.

Stephanus returned to the spring and sat down on a stone, his head bowed over his clasped hands. He sat in this posture for some time; then he arose, stood erect for a few moments and fell upon his knees. The crisis of his life had come upon him; he stood upon that spiritual eminence from which men see good and evil and must distinguish one from another as clearly as one distinguishes night from day. The tangled sophistry which his mixed motives weave to blind the wrong-doer, who often would fain do right if he but knew how, was cut by the sword to which the Apostle of the Gentiles likened the Word of God. It was his Day of Judgment; he was the judge, the accuser and the accused.

When Stephanus van der Walt arose from his knees he felt that his sins had fallen from him as the slough falls from a snake when the sun of Spring wakens it from its winter sleep. His heart was burning with a deep and fearful joy,—his brain was braced with giants' strength to a sublime resolve.

In the exaltation of his newly acquired faith Stephanus knew for a certainty that Gideon would not die of the accidentally inflicted wound, and he thanked God for the agony that would purge his brother's soul of its share in the mutual sin.

Then, with head erect and springing steps he wended his way homewards.

Chapter Three.

Blind Elsie.

Stephanus had two children, both daughters. Sons had been born to him but they died in infancy. His elder daughter, Sara, was seventeen years of age at the time of the encounter at the spring; Elsie, the younger, was eight. She had been blind from her birth.

Sara was comely to look upon. Tall and dark, with strongly marked features, she resembled her father in appearance to a remarkable degree. Little Elsie took after her mother; she was of fair complexion, with long locks of dead-gold hair which took a wonderful depth of colour in certain half-lights. Her eyes were very strange and in no way suggested blindness. They were of a deep steel-blue colour, but in the lights which made her hair wonderful an amber tone would shimmer up through the blue and give forth startling gleams and flashes. This peculiarity was especially noticeable when the child was under the influence of strong excitement.

Elsie was a silent child and possessed a calm and happy nature. Her faculty for finding her way about in the utter darkness in which Fate had hopelessly placed her was almost miraculous. Strangers, seeing her eyes and noticing the sure and fearless way in which she went abroad, would often doubt the fact of her blindness, but, as a matter of fact, she was incapable of perceiving even the faintest glimmer of light.

The soul of this blind child with the sweet inscrutable face, expressed itself in a passionate love for her father, and from the day upon which it came home to the strong, dour, hate-preoccupied man that this being who seemed the very incarnation of sunlight was doomed to walk in darkness all her days, he had wrapped her in a protecting love which was almost the only influence that kept him human, and which was the salvation of his better nature.

Her touch—the mere flicker of her fragile, pink fingers upon his rugged forehead or his brown hand—would cool, for the time being, his hottest resentment; the renewed hatred born of an encounter with his brother would sink abashed before the unconscious glance of her deep, sightless eyes. When she crept upon his knee and laid her yellow head against his breast it was as though the Peace of God were knocking at the door of his heart.

Elsie possessed intelligence far in advance of her age and circumstances. It seemed as though she never forgot anything that befel her or that she had heard. With a strange, uncanny intuition she would piece together with extraordinary correctness such fragments of disjointed information as she acquired, and thus gain an understanding of matters almost as soon as she became aware of their existence. The blind child's position in the household was a peculiar one. Over her father, neither her mother nor her sister had any influence. Of late years an almost hopeless estrangement had grownup between Stephanus and his wife. Sara loved her mother, but for her father she felt little else than fear. He was passionate and violent with all except Elsie; with her he was invariably gentle and reasonable.

Thus it came to pass that Elsie became, as it were, the arbiter of the domestic destinies; neither her mother nor her sister ever attempting to direct her. For several years she had been a law unto herself as well as to the household. Few children could have stood this and remained unspoilt; in Elsie's case strength seemed to come with the strain.

When Stephanus returned home after the encounter with Gideon he found the blind child waiting for him under a large mulberry tree. This was her accustomed trysting-place; here Elsie would sit for hours when her father was away, waiting, with the pathetic patience of the blind, for his return.

She advanced to meet him, guided by the sound of his footsteps, and took his hand.

"Father,—why are you so late—and where is your horse?"

"Late," he repeated, musingly—"yes, it is late, but not too late."

The child's intuitive sense prevented her from questioning further. The two walked silently towards the house. Elsie was puzzled; for the first time she was conscious of something in her father which she not only could not understand—but which filled her with wonder and dread.

At supper Stephanus, contrary to his wont, ate but little. None of the others spoke to him. It was the custom of the household for all to refrain from speech in Stephanus' presence whenever the feud reached one of its crises. Supper over Stephanus arose and left the room. Elsie followed him; she took his hand and led him to the mulberry tree, at

the foot of which a rough bench had been made out of the débris of a superannuated wagon. Stephanus sat down and Elsie seated herself upon his knee. Then she passed her hands softly over his face, as though reading his features with her finger tips.

“Father—you are not angry—but what has happened? I cannot read your face.”

“Angry—no, my child; I shall never more be angry.”

“Strange—you seemed to have changed to-day; your voice has got so soft and your hand throbs. Your face”—here she again passed her hands softly over his features—“feels happy—although you are not smiling.”

“My child,—one does not smile when one is happiest. Yes I am happy, for God has forgiven me my sins and whitened my heart.”

“*Do* you no longer hate Uncle Gideon?”

“No, my child—all that is past.” Elsie sat silently nestled against her father’s side until long after the others had gone to rest. The soft touch of the night wind made the leaves of the mulberry tree whisper as with a thousand tongues. To Stephanus they seemed as the tongues of angels welcoming him to his place among the saved. To blind Elsie they sang that the feud which had made her father’s life full of trouble was at an end; that he and she were happy together under the stars which she had never seen. Happiness seemed to descend upon her like a dove. Its poignancy fatigued her so that she sank to sleep.

Chapter Four.

Uncle Diederick.

Uncle Diederick lived in a structure known in South Africa as a “hartebeeste house.” Such a structure suggests a house of cards in its most rudimentary form—when one card is laid against another and thus an edifice like roof without walls is formed.

The house looked indeed like a roof with a very high pitch, from under which the walls had sunk away until it rested on the ground. Thickly thatched, and closed by a vertical wall at the end opposite the door, it was very warm in cold weather and, in spite of the want of ventilation, fairly cool in the heat of summer.

The end farthest from the door was fitted up with shelving, and the shelves were loaded with bundles of dried plants and jars, filled with tinctures, infusions and decoctions. In front of the shelves stood a table and a bench,—the former bearing an ordinary pair of grocers’ scales, and an immense volume which the sage always referred to before prescribing. This volume was a translation into Dutch of a collection of herbalistic lore published in Italy in the Sixteenth Century; it was looked upon by Uncle Diederick’s numerous customers with almost as much respect as the Bible.

Uncle Diederick, judging from the extent of his practice, ought to have made a fortune,—and he probably would have done so had he been paid for his services in cash instead of in kind. He was really a useful personage and saved many a life. His absorbing taste for medicine and surgery—joined to his undoubted natural ability, would have made him a successful if not an eminent practitioner had he had the necessary training.

When a boy he had obtained possession of an old book upon anatomy, and from this he gained a fair general knowledge of the human frame. Later he acquired a manual of simple surgery and another of household medicine (as practiced in the Eighteenth Century), and upon these was founded his professional eminence. These books were kept strictly in the background, their size and binding not being impressive, but the old Italian herbal was invariably referred to in the presence of the patient before diagnosis was completed.

Even at this day every Boer woman in the outlying districts who has reached the age of forty, considers herself competent to treat all of the ills that flesh is heir to. Her pharmacopoeia is a limited one, consisting, as it does, of some seven or eight drugs, all more or less violent in their effects upon the human organism. In her choice of these in prescribing she is guided solely by her intuitions. A century ago the number and quantity of drugs at her disposal was more limited, and therefore the mortality from this cause was less than at the present day.

But Uncle Diederick was a quack of a different class. He knew well enough that in a large number of cases the best chance of recovery lay in leaving Nature quite to herself. Like Paracelsus, however, he had to live down to the prejudices of his age. Many a bulky bottle of nasty but innocuous mixture did he prescribe to amplitudinous *tanta* or corpulent *oom*, whose only complaint was the natural result of too much exercise of the jaw-bones and too little of the arms and legs.

The old women looked upon Uncle Diederick with jealousy, but they could not help admitting that in surgery, at all events, he was far their superior. In the case of a broken limb or a wound from a Bushman’s poisoned arrow he was the first person thought of,—if the accident occurred within a radius of a hundred miles of his dwelling. Many a miserable sufferer has been brought to the “hartebeeste house” from distances that entailed a week’s travelling over wretched roads in a jolting wagon.

In medicine Uncle Diederick did not by any means stick to the orthodox pharmacopoeia; he supplemented the few crude drugs in general use by a number of decoctions and infusions of different herbs, the properties of which he had learnt from Hottentots and captive Bushmen,—with whom he often managed to make friends.

As the effect of these remedies was quite equal in violence to that of those in common use, and as there was an

added element of mystery about them, Uncle Diederick's treatment was generally popular. The Boer does not believe in any medicine which is not administered in large doses and which does not act as a kind of physiological earthquake upon the invalid.

Uncle Diederick was a widower with an only daughter. He had lost his wife soon after marriage, and, contrary to the general custom, had not remarried. Jacomina, his daughter, was a comely damsel of seventeen, whose keen and practical interest in her father's pursuits boded a terrible future for her prospective husband and family. It was she who presided, like another Medea, over the brewing of the decoctions; it was she who neatly bound up and carefully stored away the different kinds of dried herbs from which these decoctions were made. In fact she knew almost as much as her father did about the healing art. Where she shone brightest, however, was in collecting payment for her father's services.

Many suitors had laid their hearts at Jacomina's substantial feet, while she, on her part, cherished a passion for the handsome, melancholy Adrian van der Walt, Gideon's son. Adrian likewise admired her, but his diffidence kept him from definitely telling her so, or doing more than gaze at her in deep but hopeless admiration whenever he thought himself unobserved in her company. For many months Jacomina had put forth all her arts to bring Adrian to the proposing point, but his unconquerable shyness always stood in the way of the desired result. At a distance Adrian was brave enough, but in the presence of his beloved his courage fled. On several occasions he had pretended to be ill in order to have an excuse for visiting the "hartebeeste house," when the nasty decoctions he received from the hands of Jacomina tasted as sweet as nectar.

One day Uncle Diederick was sitting just inside the door of his dwelling engaged in the commonplace occupation of mending his saddle. From the road behind the kopje at the foot of which he dwelt came the rattle and rumble of an approaching wagon. He at once hid the saddle in a corner under a sheep skin, went over to his table, opened the herbal volume and began poring over its pages. It was thus that he was usually found by his patients. Jacomina was on the watch. Shortly after the wagon came in sight she put her head in through the doorway.

"Pa,—it is Aunt Emerencia's wagon; she is sure to be coming for some more medicine for her *benaudheid*."

Aunt Emerencia descended from the wagon through the back opening of the tent by means of a short and strongly built ladder and, leaning heavily on a stick, approached the "hartebeeste" house. She was a stout woman with a very pale face, the flesh of which seemed loose and flabby. Jacomina felt the strongest animosity towards the visitor, who was a widow and was suspected of harbouring matrimonial designs upon Uncle Diederick.

After a friendly but breathless greeting Aunt Emerencia sat down on a stool and, being fatigued and warm from the exertion of walking up the slope from the wagon, pulled off her *cappie* and began fanning herself with it. After a few minutes Uncle Diederick came forward briskly. He sat down, asked Jacomina to go and brew some coffee, and then, in his most sprightly manner, began talking to and complimenting his visitor.

"No, no,—Uncle," she replied, deprecatingly, to some flattering remarks on his part,—"Although I may be looking well, I am very, very sick. Being on my way to Brother Sarel's I thought I would outspan here and get some medicine."

"That's right—I am glad to see you, even though you are not well.—But a cup of coffee will do you good."

"Yes,—I will be glad to drink a cup, Uncle. I have brought you a couple of pumpkins which you will be glad to have; they are from some new seed which Jan Niekerk got from Stellenbosch last year."

Jacomina, afraid to leave her father for long alone with the suspected siren, kept darting in and out between the stages of the coffee-making.

"Jacomina, my child," she said in a wheezy aside, "call to the *schepsel* and tell him to bring in two of the biggest pumpkins." Then she turned to Uncle Diederick:

"Uncle, I am sick, very sick. After I eat my heart goes just like an old churn—and I dream—*Alle Wereld*, how I dream. Last night I dreamt that Nimrod built the Tower of Babel on my chest."

Just then a small Hottentot came staggering in with two immense pumpkins, which he laid on the floor; then he went and stood just outside the door. Uncle Diederick cast a careless eye upon them, smiled almost imperceptibly, and then began very deliberately, to light his pipe.

"Are these not beautiful pumpkins?" asked Aunt Emerencia.

"They are fairly large; but I am surprised at Nephew Jan taking the trouble to bring that kind of seed all the way from the Cape. There is plenty of the same kind here."

"Truly?" she said in a tone of injured surprise. Then she called to the Hottentot, who, mindful of previous experiences, had remained close at hand.

"Here, *schepsel*,—bring in a bottle of that honey from the front chest. Yes, Uncle,—you would not believe how I have suffered since I finished that last medicine I had from you. This bottle of honey is from the bees' nest Piet took out from the *Dassie's* Krantz last week."

The honey was placed alongside the pumpkins. Uncle Diederick did not even take the trouble to glance at it. He went on silently puffing at his pipe.

"Don't you like honey, Uncle?"

“Yes,—but it is very plentiful this year, and I am tired of it.”

Aunt Emerencia groaned audibly.

“*Schepsel*,—fetch that new pair of *veldschoens* from the side-bag.”

“Yes,” she continued, addressing Uncle Diederick—“and you would not believe what a pain I get here, just below my breast. These drops I got from Aunt Susannah did me no good whatever.”

In the meantime Jacomina was busy trying on the *veldschoens*, which turned out to be by no means badly made. Uncle Diederick continued smoking, calmly and silently.

“Do they fit, my child?” he asked without turning his head.

“Yes, Pa,—they fit well.”

At once Uncle Diederick laid down his pipe and began attending to his patient. He felt her pulse; he thumped, prodded and sounded her until she groaned and grunted. She was a woman who, for nearly thirty years, had eaten and drunk largely, and who never took the least exertion that she could avoid. Her malady, from which she chronically suffered, was simply indigestion in an acute form.

“Here, Aunt,—take half a cupful of this whenever you feel bad.”

He took down from the shelf a large black flask, which had originally contained gin, and handed it to the invalid, who grasped it greedily.

“Uncle,—these *veldschoens* are a beautiful pair.—This bottle holds so few doses and I get sick very often.”

Uncle Diederick had returned to his seat and his pipe. He took not the slightest notice of what Aunt Emerencia said. She, knowing by experience that there was no chance of screwing another bottle out of the physician, arose with the apparent intention of taking her departure. But first she tried another move.

“*Alle Wereld*,” she said in anguished tones, putting her hand to her side at the same time—“here is the pain again; can you not give me a dose now, Uncle?”

“Yes, Aunt,—certainly. Jacomina, bring me a corkscrew and a cup.”

These implements were soon brought and placed upon the table. Uncle Diederick took the corkscrew and approached the sufferer.

“Come, Aunt—give me the bottle and I will open it for you.”

“But, Uncle,—I do not like to open the bottle whilst on the road. It is so liable to spill.”

Uncle Diederick returned to his chair, the inscrutability of his visage somewhat modified by a palpable wink. Aunt Emerencia, after a few supplementary groans, stated that she felt a little better and would defer taking a dose until another bad attack came on. Then she took her ponderous course back to her wagon.

The sun was nearly down when the clattering hoofs of a galloping horse was heard on the road. A few minutes afterwards Gert Dragoonder dismounted, and, without waiting to remove the saddle from his smoking horse, hastened to the door of the “hartebeeste house.”

“Well, *schepsel*,” said Uncle Diederick, “it is easy to see that you have been riding your master’s horse. For how far has the Devil been chasing you?”

“Baas must hasten,” replied the Hottentot, breathlessly, “or it will be too late. My master has got a bullet in the shoulder and he has bled plenty.”

“A bullet in the shoulder—that’s bad. What an accident! Let’s see,—to which of the loving brothers do you belong?”

“Baas Gideon is my baas. But it was not an accident; baas Stephanus shot my baas with his own gun.”

Uncle Diederick gave a long, low whistle. “Well, I always said it would come to murder between those two. Here, Danster,—saddle up my horse. Is the bone broken?”

“The bone is coming out in big lumps,” said Gert, with the exaggerative rhetoric of his race, “he has lost about a bucketful of blood and there is a hole in his shoulder you could put your fist into. Baas must make haste and bring his very best medicine.”

“H’m.—If all that is true, it is the Field Cornet that they should have instead of me. However, I suppose I must go.”

By this time the horse had been driven into the little kraal at the side of the homestead. Uncle Diederick went to the shelf and took down a few bottles, bundles of dried herbs and bandages. Then he selected from a camphor-wood chest a few home-made splints and rough surgical appliances. All these he packed carefully into his saddle-bags. After bidding a very matter-of-fact farewell to Jacomina, and telling the Hottentot to rest his horse for the night and return home quietly next day, he started on his long, lonely ride.

Chapter Five.

The Triumph of Gideon.

Gideon, suffering great agony, had been carried home and laid upon his bed. He adhered firmly to the false accusation which he had brought against his brother, and the whole world, or that portion of it which knew the van der Walts, believed in Stephanus' guilt.

The Field Cornet, who lived only some twenty miles away, was sent for, and arrived during the night. He took down the wounded man's statement in writing and then went over and arrested Stephanus. When the written statement was read over in Stephanus' presence to the wounded man, he adhered to it still and, having by that time somewhat rallied from the shock, gave a supplementary account of what had transpired in such clear, circumstantial and deadly detail, that all present were convinced of its truth. Stephanus maintained absolute silence. Uncle Diederick did his duty as well, and probably as successfully, as if he had been a member of the Royal College of Surgeons. After removing every splinter of bone and carefully cleansing the gaping wound, he laid a cooling, antiseptic compost of herbs all over the injured parts. As Gideon's constitution was perfectly clean and healthy, he made a rapid recovery. The shoulder joint was, however, so seriously injured, that the arm was henceforth of little use.

Marta and Sara were thrown into terrible distress by the arrest of Stephanus. Elsie, taking her impressions of the situation from her father's mental state, retained her serenity, but was puzzled at the turn things had taken.

Stephanus remained quite unmoved when the Field Cornet announced that he would have to make him a prisoner and take him to Cape Town, there to await his trial.

A day's delay, to enable him to put his affairs in order, was all that he asked for. This was granted, so he counted his sheep and cattle, assembled his servants,—whom he made promise to serve their mistress faithfully during his absence,—and wrote to the husband of his eldest sister to ask that his nephew, a lad of seventeen, whose services had recently been offered to him, might be sent to assist in managing the farm. The letter was sent off by a special messenger, as his brother-in-law lived only a little more than a day's journey away.

The Field Cornet having acquainted Marta with the main facts of the case, she shared in the general belief in her husband's guilt.

On the evening before Stephanus' departure for prison, the family sat down to their last meal together, and at its conclusion Stephanus did a thing which he had left undone for years past: he called upon those assembled to kneel down and pray. Then he offered up a petition that God might forgive him his many misdeeds and grant him and all present patience to bear whatever punishment might be justly meted out to him.

Elsie then took his hand and the two went out to the seat under the mulberry tree, where they sat until half the night was spent. Few words passed between them, and the parting which was to take place on the morrow was hardly referred to.

The unhappy women broke down completely at the leave-taking in the grey of the early morning. Stephanus maintained his composure until it came to bidding farewell to Elsie. The child clung to him convulsively, and her clasp had to be detached by force. Then the father's anguish was terrible to behold.

The trial took place at the criminal sessions of the Supreme Court in Cape Town, some four months afterwards. The prisoner's family went down in their wagon to be present at it.

Gideon gave his false evidence with composure, and Gert Dragoonder, the Hottentot, corroborated him strongly. Stephanus pleaded "not guilty," but otherwise made no defence. When the court found him guilty not a muscle of his face betrayed the least emotion. After the judge had sentenced him to be imprisoned for ten years with hard labour, he quietly remarked that he had been justly punished. When he was removed from court it was noticed by those present who knew him that his step had a spring and his eyes a brightness which had never been noticed before.

Gideon enjoyed one wild moment of exultation when his brother was led away to a living grave. Then he turned to leave the court-room, from which the people were emerging in a struggling crowd,—the trial just concluded having closed the proceedings for the day. In the vestibule he stood aside to let the congested crowd flow past. A woman whose bent head was concealed in a long "cappie," and who led a young girl by the hand, was forced against him. The child, frightened by the crowd, seized his hand and held it fast. When the crush slackened he turned, looked down, and found himself gazing into the glowing, sightless eyes of little Elsie, the blind girl he had damned his soul to orphan. Then he glanced up and met the eyes of the woman whom he loved still, although he had not seen her face for years. There was something different to the reproach he expected in her look; he seemed to read in it an appeal for forgiveness of the wrong which she imagined her husband had done him, and to see the flicker of a love answering his own, which filled him with dismay. The mute appeal in her eyes was worse than any reproach could have been, and the fact that his perjury had made her worse than widowed seemed to crush him to the earth.

In another moment Marta and Elsie had followed the last of the crowd and Gideon found himself alone. Then the nobility of the mien of the man whom, innocent, he had sent forth to a doom more sorrowful than death came back to his mind with such dread distinctness that it excluded everything else.

Suddenly it seemed all unreal;—could it be a dream? No—there was the court-room—he could see it through the open doorway before which he was standing. He stepped forward on tip-toe and looked in. Involuntarily his eye sought the prisoners' dock—the spot where his twin-brother had stood with rapt, unmoved face and heard the pronouncement of his doom. His strained brain easily conjured up the figure in all its menacing nobility, and before the vision he felt abased to the dust.

Had there been another human creature present, Gideon would have cried aloud a confession of his sin, but he stood alone with the hideousness of his own transgression.

Then a reaction set in and he staggered from the room grasping wildly at the shred of comfort which lay in the realisation of the fact that the man whom he had hated through so many bitter years had now been taken out of his life. A strange duality was set up in his consciousness:—it seemed as though the man he had seen undergoing sentence, although still his brother, was no longer the Stephanus who had used him so despitefully. Thus his mind was buffeted hither and thither by a gusty storm of conflicting emotions.

So the long-looked-forward-to triumph of Gideon van der Walt sank foully smouldering upon its own ashes, and he entered into that hell out of which there is seldom redemption.

Chapter Six.

Gideon and Marta.

Night had almost fallen when Gideon reached his homestead on the seventh day after the trial. He had been, throughout the whole journey, a prey to the keenest misery. In the short and broken sleep which visited his distracted brain the image of Stephanus as he had last seen him, haunted his dreams. The dauntless mien and the noble courage with which his brother had met his doom; the puzzled, pathetic expression upon the face of the blind child; the belated revelation of love combined with a terrifying appeal for forgiveness which he had read in the face of the woman for whom his passion had never died, swept over the field of his consciousness like clouds across a storm-swept sky. He felt no remorse for what he had done; on the contrary, his inability to enjoy the revenge he had long panted for, was the cause of redoubled resentment against his enemy.

After greeting his family with forced cheerfulness, Gideon drank a cup of coffee and at once retired to bed, saying that he felt fatigued after his long journey. His wife, Aletta, was not deceived by his demeanour, but there was that in his face which caused her to forbear asking any questions.

Next morning Gideon tried to avoid everybody, and it was not until midday that Aletta contrived to satisfy her painful suspense in regard to the result of the trial. He was then standing at the back of the wagon-house with bent head and an air of painful preoccupation. He did not hear her approaching footsteps. When she laid a hesitating hand upon his arm he started as though he had been struck, and looked at her with troubled eyes.

“Gideon,” she said in a low and hurried tone—“tell me about Stephanus.”

“The wolf is in a trap,” he said with a savage laugh—“for ten long years he will have to bite the door before it opens.”

“Ten years”—repeated Aletta in an awed whisper—“*poor* Stephanus; I did not think it would have gone so hard with him.”

“Aletta,” he broke out wrathfully, “are you taking the part of this wolf—this jackal in a man’s skin, against me?”

“No—no—Gideon,—I do not take his part;—but ten years is such a long time.—And I was thinking of Marta and the children; they will never see him again.”

“And a good thing too. The murdering wild beast should have been hanged.”

In reality the wives of the brothers had, all through the weary course of the feud, been inclined to take the parts of their respective brothers-in-law against their husbands. Each, brought into daily contact with the black rancour displayed by her husband, had thought that the feeling could not possibly be so bad on the other side.

Weary as had been the days to Aletta and Adrian, those which followed were wearier still. A black cloud seemed to brood over the household. No one ever smiled. Each avoided the eyes of the others as though fearful of what the eyes might read or reveal. At each cheerless meal the silent, invisible presence of Stephanus seemed to take its seat; in the brightest sunlight its shadow seemed to darken the house.

More than once Aletta had been on the point of suggesting that advances might be made to Marta in her loneliness, but Gideon had lately got into the habit of bursting into such fury on the slightest provocation, that Aletta was afraid of irritating him and held her peace.

Gideon, also, had more than once thought of going to visit his sister-in-law, but the dread of again meeting what he had read in her eyes on the day of the trial held him back. It was currently known that Marta was in bad health and that Uncle Diederick had been called in to prescribe for her more than once.

Thus the weary days dragged on through three weary years, but the stricken household kept no count of time. In material things Gideon prospered. Each season the years came with unusual regularity, and his flocks and herds increased until he became rich among his fellows.

One day two figures were seen approaching from the direction of Stephanus’ homestead. They turned out to be those of the blind girl, Elsie, and a very diminutive Bushman lad named Kanu, who had grown up on the farm. Kanu had been captured as a child, years before, in the course of an exterminating raid upon some Bushman depredators at their stronghold in an almost inaccessible part of the Roggeveld Mountains.

Kanu was about sixteen years of age. From her early childhood he had devoted himself to the service of the blind girl; at last his devotion had grown to positive worship. In Kanu’s company Elsie would wander far and wide, over mountain and plain, in perfect safety.

The Bushman had picked up a smattering of Dutch, but still spoke his own tongue fluently, for there were a number

of semi-domesticated Bushman servants on the farm—captives from different raids. Such raids were, no doubt, sometimes rendered necessary by the plundering propensities of the pygmy sons of Ishmael, but there was another side of the question:—where Bushmen were plentiful the Boers did not, as a rule, find it necessary to purchase slaves.

The blind child was led by her guide to the front door of the house, which stood open. The day was hot and the family were sitting at table, trying to hurry through their dismal midday meal. Elsie crossed the threshold without knocking and stood at her Uncle's side. Her hair hung below her waist in a rich, yellow mass, and her eyes gleamed as they always did under the influence of excitement, and in appropriate light. The three sitting at the table sat and gazed at her in silent and startled surprise.

"Uncle Gideon," she said in a clear, piercing voice.

"Well," said Gideon in a voice of forced roughness, "what do you want?"

"My mother bids me tell you that she is dying, and that you must come to her at once."

Gideon rose to his feet, his face twitching. Elsie slowly turned, held out her hand for the guiding twig which Kanu extended to her, and stepped swiftly forth.

Within the space of a few minutes Gideon sprang on a horse and galloped off in the direction of the homestead where the woman he loved lay dying. Marta sent one of the servants to fetch a span of oxen, and soon followed her husband, in a wagon.

When Gideon arrived at Marta's homestead he could at once see that directions had been given as to the details of his reception. As he ascended the steep flight of steps which led to the *voorkuis* the door swayed open and revealed the weeping figure of Sara, his niece. Walking on tip-toe she beckoned to him to follow her, and led the way to an inner room, the door of which stood ajar. Gideon entered, every nerve in his body tingling with apprehension. Sara softly closed the door behind him, and then he heard her retreating footsteps upon the clay floor of the passage.

The dying woman lay propped up in bed, her cheeks flushed and her lips parted in a smile of loving welcome. She looked, for the moment, not more than twenty years of age. Her face carried Gideon back to the spring morning of long ago, when he met her for the first time, walking under the budding oaks of the Stellenbosch street. With a last, pathetic effort of coquetry, the poor remnant of her once-beautiful hair was spread over her shoulder. Her hand appeared for an instant from under the bed-clothes; it looked like the hand of a skeleton in a livid glove.

Gideon stood for a space looking into the smiling eyes of the woman whom he loved and sunning himself in their dying glow. The soiled years seemed to shrivel away like a burnt-up scroll, the past lived again in a borrowed glamour of lost joy that had never existed and his withered heart expanded like a rose in summer.

With a long-drawn sigh he sank to his knees at the side of the bed and pressed his lips hurriedly upon the tress of silky hair; then he drew hurriedly back, startled at his own temerity. Marta turned her head slightly until she could see his face. Her eyes became softer with the dew of happiness and a smile hovered upon her lips. Then she spoke:

"Listen—I am dying;—will you take my children and care for them?"

Gideon could not speak; he nodded his head and she proceeded:

"I only knew you loved me when it was too late... I waited for you to speak—then they said that you loved someone else—"

Gideon's brain was busy recalling the long-past. Every obscure detail of the days of his brother's courtship and his own bitter disappointment came back to him with strange distinctness. How had the misunderstanding arisen; who was to blame?—"Stephanus always hated you and I loved you all the time—Aletta need not know—I only tell you now that I am dying—"

Gideon tenderly took the wasted hand and laid it against his rugged cheek.

"My children—I love them—Let them not suffer for their father's sin—"

"Wait, Marta," said Gideon in a strained and trembling voice, "I must tell you—"

"There is nothing to tell—I know it all.—He got to know I loved you and he tried to kill you.—Forgive him, if you can, for my sake—"

"Wait, Marta,—I must tell you the truth—you are wrong—I must tell you the truth, even if it kills us both."

The dying woman's lips became compressed, and the colour began to fade from her cheeks. Gideon tried to move so that her eyes, full of startled interrogatory and the pain of apprehension, might not rest upon his face whilst he made his confession, but they followed and held his spell-bound. Then in a hoarse, broken murmur he said:

"Stephanus shot me by accident—I accused him falsely—because I hated him all my life."

When he ceased speaking he drooped his head and hid his face among the bed-clothes next to Marta's shoulder. A slight shudder went through the woman's frame and then she ceased to breathe. Gideon kept his head bowed for a long time. When, by a torturing effort he lifted it, he saw a dead, ashen face lying on the pillow at his side,—the face of an old woman who seemed to have died in sharp agony.

When Gideon left the chamber of death he moved like a man in a dream. Mounting his horse mechanically he allowed the animal to stray homewards at a walk. He met the wagon in which Aletta was hurrying to the death-bed as fast as the team of oxen could bring her, but he passed it without recognition.

The pathway led past the spring, the scene of the three-years' past tragedy. The day was hot and the horse turned, aside to drink as was its wont. It was not until the animal paused and bent its head to the water that the rider recognised the locality. He was quite calm and the environment in which he found himself seemed appropriate to his mood. He dismounted when the horse had finished drinking, led it away to a spot where it could graze, a few paces distant, and then returned to the water-side.

He went over the whole scene anew. There was the spot where he had sat sleeping; he stepped over and sat there again, in the same attitude. There Stephanus had approached through the bushes; yonder was the place where the struggle for possession of the gun had taken place and where he had ignominiously sunk to the ground beneath his brother's superior strength. A little to the right was the green tussock upon which Stephanus, after wrenching the gun from his grasp, had stood and looked insulting defiance at him. He recalled the face which bore such a detestable resemblance to his own, and remembered its look of triumphant hate. He recalled the taunting words that Stephanus had uttered and his own insulting reply. Again he felt the sickening torture of the crashing bullet tearing through flesh and bone. Involuntarily he lifted quickly the half-crippled limb; a torturing twinge shot through it and almost made him scream.

His thoughts swung back—searching among the mists of old memory for a clue to the one that had wrecked his life by telling falsehoods about him to the woman he loved, and who, he now knew for the first time, had loved him. Who could it be? None but the brother whose life he had been fool enough to save and who had always been his evil genius.

The scene he had just lived through was too recent for him to take in its full significance. He knew that he had caused Marta's death by his confession—which he now bitterly regretted having made, and he wondered if they should meet in the next world whether she would hate him for what he had done. He had left the house of death with the full intention of confessing his transgression and expiating it in the fullest manner. It was not that he had made any resolution to this effect, but rather that a full confession, with its consequences, seemed to be the only possible outcome of what had happened.

Now, however, he determined to maintain silence. It was not that he dreaded the consequences of a confession to himself—his life was too full of misery for him to dread that—but rather that his somewhat waning hate of his brother had been reinforced by Marta's words, and he could not bring himself to abate a jot of that brother's bondage. Had it been possible to confess his sin without benefiting Stephanus by so doing, he felt that he would have told his tale to the first human creature he met, were it only a Bushman.

He had saved his brother's life; it was not much, after all, to demand ten years of that life for the exigencies of his revenge. Stephanus, of course, deserved his punishment richly. What business had he to interfere with the gun at all? Every despiteful act,—every provocative detail, every maddening annoyance to which Stephanus had subjected him during the long, hate-blackened years of the feud, came back and grinned at him.

He found himself wondering whether anybody had been listening at the door when he made his confession, and the sudden dread of this contingency took precedence of every other consideration for the time. Well,—if he had been overheard he would abide by the result and make a full confession; if not his lips should remain sealed.

After the funeral, which Gideon attended with outward calmness, Aletta remained at the homestead for a few days arranging for the removal of the two girls. Uncle Diederick, who had been called in professionally, but had arrived on the scene after Marta's death, said a simple prayer over the grave which was dug on the hill-side just behind the homestead. Sara was convulsed with grief, but Elsie hardly shed a tear. She and her mother had always been strangers; now the blind child's utter ignorance of convention kept her from feigning a grief she did not feel. Gideon's mind was now so far relieved, that he had no longer the fear of anyone having overheard his confession.

Uncle Diederick arranged to come and live at Stephanus' farm and manage it for the benefit of the two children, until Stephanus' release from prison. Accordingly, the "hartebeeste house" was abandoned—Jacomina having, in the meantime, carefully packed up all the drugs, herbs and surgical appliances in boxes and skin bags, and placed them in the wagon.

Thus, within a week of Marta's death Uncle Diederick and his daughter were settled in their new dwelling. For months afterwards weary invalids from a distance continued to arrive at the "hartebeeste house" and to learn to their dismay that the physician had departed and left no address.

Chapter Seven.

How Gideon Wandered, and how Elsie Overheard his Prayer.

At the period at which the action of this story is laid the only settled parts of the Cape Colony lay well to the south of the rugged mountain chain, the eastern portion of which is called the "Roggeveld" or "Rye land." It was in a valley which cleft the range that the farm of the van der Walts was situated.

The Boer has ever been intolerant of near neighbours; he likes to feel that the utmost expanse his glance can sweep over is his, to use or neglect as suits him. He has a great objection to any habitation being within sight of his homestead.

For centuries the government tried to prevent the expansion of the Colony to a distance from the central authority at Cape Town, but the efforts were as useless as though one were to try to control quicksilver on a slanting board with the hand. The enactment of the most stringent laws was of no avail to prevent the more adventurous spirits from seeking their fortune in the vast, mysterious hinterland. Such men looked upon the heathen as their inheritance and on the wilderness as their portion.

Steadfast in his narrow faith, tenacious as steel to his limited purpose, valiant as any crusader that charged the Saracens on the plains of Palestine, the primitive Boer was of the texture of the strongest of the sons of the earth.

Such a typical Boer was Tyardt van der Waldt, the father of Stephanus and Gideon. He had come to this lonely valley down which the yet-unpolluted Tanqua stream flowed through its waving sedges,—far beyond the camp of the boldest pioneer. His wagon was his castle of strength; he trusted in the Lord of Hosts, and he kept his powder religiously dry. He found hill and valley stocked with the great beasts of the desert, and on the blood of these he slaked his nature's needs, thanking God for the draught. Upon the mountain side roamed the noble eland; in the thorny copses the stately koodoo herded,—wild cattle with which Providence had stocked the pasture for his use. Here was his Canaan. More fortunate than Moses, he possessed it,—whilst vigour yet thrilled his foot and hand.

At night the deep-rumbling growl of the marauding lion would be heard in the scrub below the cattle-kraal, and the trembling touch of wife and children as they clung to him, made the strong man rejoice in his strength. Every considerable mountain-cave harboured his Amalekite, the Bushman,—and him he hewed in pieces before the Lord whenever opportunity offered.

To the Northward of the Roggeveld the wide and usually waterless plains of what is yet known as Bushmanland stretched away indefinitely. Arid as these plains are, and apparently always have been, they supported an enormous amount of animal life. Many of the larger fauna of South Africa can exist for an indefinite time without drinking; some, such as the gemsbok or oryx, can dispense with it altogether, owing to the instinct which teaches them to dig for succulent tubers in the arid sand dunes, from the surface of which every vestige of vegetation may have disappeared.

Many a time had Tyardt van der Walt trekked over the mountain chain with his wagon and penetrated a few days' journey into the waste. Then he would return with a load of game of kinds different from those found among the mountains. A sense of danger, which is the salt of life to some natures, lent zest to these expeditions. This danger was by no means imaginary; the bones of many an adventurous Boer have been gnawed by the jackals of Bushmanland.

Gideon had, as a boy, accompanied his father upon some of the later of these expeditions. Now, when his load of unrecognised remorse hung heavily upon him, he sighed his tired soul towards the vast and vague unknown which lay, rich in the glamour of the unknown and the mysterious, beyond the frowning mountain rampart. There, he had come to think, Peace must surely have her habitation; into that solitude the ghosts of men and things could not follow. He put his wagon in order, loaded it with provisions and ammunition enough to last for several months, and went forth into the wilderness.

Aletta, reminiscent of disasters, opposed the idea, but Gideon was not to be withheld from his purpose. The mind of the unhappy wife, in whose heart love for her husband still dwelt, in spite of half a lifetime of neglect, was full of apprehension. Many were the current tales of Boers who had gone northward upon hunting trips, as her husband was now about to go, and who never again had been heard of. Lured by the fugacious verdure upon the shining track of some vagrant thunderstorm which had filled the "pans" with water, and made them look like silver shields strewn upon some tourney-field of the gods, they had ventured farther and farther, forgetting that the thirsty sun was busy behind them, drinking up the moisture and cutting off their retreat. Other narratives told of cheerful camp-fires with men sitting around them, tired after a long day's hunting. Suddenly would come a silent flight of deadly arrows. Then would the fires be hurriedly quenched, and a volley fired at random into the darkness in the vain hope of smiting a foe as subtle as a serpent, as nimble as a swallow and as noiseless as a ghost. Afterwards the homeward struggle of a few desperate survivors,—those still unwounded trying to alleviate the agony of their dying comrades, well knowing that their every step would be doggedly followed by an implacable enemy, seeking a fitting opportunity of inflicting further slaughter by the same cruel means.

However, after Gideon's departure, life at Elandsfontein took on a deep peacefulness. The reaction from the constant dread of violence on Gideon's part was such a relief that something like happiness seemed as though it were about to dawn upon the stricken home.

Aletta learned, to her surprise, that the domestic relations in Stephanus' household had never been satisfactory. Bit by bit she learned from Sara things which threw a strange light upon Marta's home life. It appeared that for the past two years Marta had not been right in her mind. She had been in the habit of sitting silent and alone for days together, not answering when spoken to, and refusing to eat. Ever since her husband's conviction she had manifested the strongest objection to his name being mentioned. This had naturally had the effect of estranging Elsie completely from her. Even Sara, to whom the mother had formerly been passionately attached, had recently been treated with indifference.

The two girls now seemed to find in the woman who had always hitherto been lonely, what they had missed in their own mother. Aletta had always felt the greatest pity for Stephanus; knowing, as she did, the provocation he had sustained, and the rancour Gideon had shown. A sympathetic bond was thus set up between the three, and the ever-present sorrow was shorn of some of its more painful features.

Insensibly Elsie became the centre of the household. She was now twelve years of age. In spite of the fact that her intellect as well as her intuitions had developed to a strange and almost unnatural extent, her stature and features were still those of a very young child. With her pallid and spiritual countenance, and her yellow hair hanging in a thick

mass below her waist, the blind girl with the wonderful eyes startled and impressed all who saw her, and seemed, in her rugged surroundings, like a being from another world.

Elsie's aunt and sister seemed to take a pride in decking out her strange beauty with whatever they could obtain in the way of simple finery, such as infrequent wandering hawkers brought to the lonely homestead. Even in those days traders used to wander over the land with wagons loaded with simple necessaries, and there always was a box full of such things as women take delight in, the contents of which were looked upon almost with awe by the simple daughters of the wilderness. The best material in the simple stock would be purchased for Elsie's dress;—the brightest ribbon for her hair.

Kanu, the Bushman, was still her guide as she wandered about at will. He would have long since followed the fashion of his kind and fled back to the wilderness that gave him birth had it not been for his attachment to Elsie. One characteristic of the blind child was that she was utterly fearless. She seemed to dread nothing. One thing alone seemed to cause her any uneasiness:—the hoarse roaring of the baboons with which the black rocks that crowned the mountains on either side of the Tanqua valley abounded. She seemed to read a menace in the guttural tones, and a pained expression could be noticed upon her face whenever they were heard.

Gideon returned safely after an absence of four months. His expedition had been successful in some respects; he had slaughtered much game; he had brought back all his cattle and horses. But the peace he had gone to seek had eluded him. In the daytime, whenever the divine rage of the chase was upon him, he would almost forget the past,—but at night, which is the season in which those who love the desert feel the full force of its mysterious and almost rapturous calm, the memory of his sin hovered over him like a bat and kept sleep and rest from his tired soul. Sometimes he would seem to catch glimpses of the sad face of the Peace-Angel hovering pityingly afar,—desiring but unable to succour him from his tormentor.

After he had spent a month or two at the farm Gideon again became violently restless. Elsie's presence seemed to cause him keen discomfort. When he spoke, as he seldom did whenever he could maintain silence, the sightless eyes of the child would train themselves upon his face, until the guilty man found himself overcome by a sense of inquietude which drove him away from the range of the accusing look.

A party of restless spirits visited Elandsfontein on their way northward in search of adventure and large game. Gideon at once made up his mind to join them. He had been wishing for another opportunity of getting away, but had dreaded going again alone. The shadow of the feud had caused an estrangement between himself and the neighbouring farmers such as made it impossible for him to join any of the hunting parties got up from time to time among his acquaintances. But these people were strangers; the occasion offered the very opportunity he had sought. The hunters were poor, their cattle and horses were of inferior quality and their stores were meagre. Gideon was rich, and his joining the expedition suited the strangers as well as it suited him. So Gideon van der Walt once more set his course towards the wilderness, in the vain hope of finding the footsteps of Peace.

Nearly a year elapsed before he returned; he looked then at least five years older than when he had started. He had penetrated farther into the wilderness than any European had previously done, and his course could almost have been followed from the whitening bones of the game he had slaughtered. But the boundless desert had proved to be as close a prison to his guilty soul as the valley where stood his home. He had quarrelled with his companions and came home alone. But almost immediately the old restlessness fell upon him, and he longed anew for the wastes. This time, however, he would go alone. He blamed his companions for most of the dissatisfactions of his last excursion. It was springtime when he returned; he would go forth once more when the first thunderstorms trailed over the desert. Perhaps Peace dwelt farther away than he had yet reached. He would find her dwelling even if to do so he had to traverse the length of the continent, and reach that Egypt of which he had read in the Bible, where the Lord loosed the Children of Israel from their bitter bondage.

A few days before Gideon's projected departure Elsie and Kanu were resting in the shade close to the spring in the kloof, after a long ramble on the mountain side. It was afternoon and the sun smote hard upon the drowsy earth.

"I see the Baas coming this way again," said the Bushman. "I wonder why he comes here so often."

Elsie, although no doubt of her father's guilt had ever formulated itself in her mind, had developed an instinctive distrust of her uncle. Perhaps it was because he had done what she had never experienced from another—persistently avoided all communication with her.

"It is a strange thing," continued Kanu, in a whisper, "but I saw him coming from here yesterday with the tears running from his eyes."

It was Elsie's habit to sit, silent, motionless and absorbed in her thoughts, for long periods. In her present situation she was completely concealed by the fringe of thick scrub which grew around the margin of the spring. The Bushman instinctively crept into concealment close behind her and lay with every keen sense alert and a glint of curiosity in his bright, restless, suspicious eyes.

The heavy, tired foot-fall of Gideon thudded nearer and nearer until he stood,—motionless, with folded arms and downcast head, at the side of the still, clear pool. His intent look seemed to pierce the dark and limpid depths as though searching for a sign. He stood thus for several minutes; then he dropped heavily upon his knees and covered his face with his hands.

Then issued from the lips of Gideon van der Walt a prayer such as one might imagine being uttered from the heart of a lost soul upon whom the brazen gates of the Pit have closed for ever. His petition was that God might give him forgetfulness and sleep,—just a little slumber when he laid himself down and folded his hands upon his breast in the night time.—Just a little forgetfulness of the past when the sun sank and all the world except himself lost itself in happy dreams or happier unconsciousness.

Then he poured out his guilt in words which, although broken and incoherent, left no possible doubt as to their significance. He bargained with his Maker: His brother's life,—the life which he had saved,—was it not, in a sense, his to dispose of? And although Stephanus had not done the deed for which he was suffering punishment, had he not, by his heinous hate protracted through long years, deserved the heaviest chastisement that it was possible for him to receive?

From all this storm of agonised and incoherent sophistry, only one clear idea reached the understanding of blind Elsie,—the innocence of her father—the knowledge that he was suffering cruel punishment for a crime he had never committed. Until now she had never doubted her father's guilt. Knowing the provocation he had received, she had made excuses for him, and her very soul had moulded itself on the conception that he was suffering just retribution for a broken law. The conviction of her father's guilt had never diminished her love for him. On the contrary, its effect was to heighten her affection to the most exalted pitch. And now,—to know that he was innocent. The clash of joy and indignation in Elsie's brain was such as almost to make her swoon.

Gideon arose from his knees and wandered slowly away with bent head and set face. He felt that his prayer had not been answered. Every outburst of this kind had seemed to rivet anew the shackles which bound him to his load.

Elsie and Kanu sat still until the sun sank, and then arose. Mechanically the blind child put forth her hand for the guiding willow-wand which she knew would be stretched out for her grasp. As the pair walked slowly towards the homestead the dusk was glooming down. Elsie's brain was in a whirling turmoil when she set forth. Only one thought stood fast, and that was as moveless as a rock in a stormy sea: To save her father—that was the task to which her mind set itself. But how? For the first time she bitterly regretted her blindness. Poor, ignorant child, shut up in a cavern of formless darkness,—what could she do? But before half the homeward road had been traversed, the turmoil of her mind had ceased and her thoughts had crystallised around a purpose as hard as steel.

At the supper-table it was noticed that the blind child's face was paler and more set than usual, and that the lustre of her eyes was like red, molten gold,—but no word escaped her lips. It surprised Aletta and Sara to find that Elsie did not reply when spoken to, but she had been so long a law unto herself that no particular notice was wont to be taken of her peculiarities.

Supper over, she did not, as was her wont, go at once to her bed in the little room at the end of the front "stoep," where she was in the habit of sleeping alone, but sat in the "voorhuis" until all the others had gone to rest. This was only "one of Elsie's ways," which were different from other people's. To her the darkness had no more terrors than the day.

Next morning no trace of either Elsie or Kanu could be found. This circumstance was only rendered remarkable by the fact that her bed had not been slept in, and that a warm cape of brayed lambskin which she was in the habit of wearing in cold weather, as well as a loaf of bread from the "voorhuis" cupboard and a large piece of mutton from the kitchen, had disappeared.

Search was made, but no trace of the missing ones could be found. Word was passed on from farm to farm,—from one lonely squatter's camp to another, until the whole country side for hundreds of miles was on the alert. The mountain haunts of the Bushmen were ransacked—with the usual accompaniment of slaughter and pillage,—the secret places of the desert were searched,—but without success. Had Kanu been found he would have been shot at sight—so great was the indignation against him. Poor Kanu was tried, found guilty, and sentenced for the crime of kidnapping; fortunately, the defendant made default.

Thus another fold of shadow was added to the gloom which wrapped the stricken household. Gideon, whose mind was ever on the alert upon the devious planes of thought, speculated upon the mystery through the preconception that it contained some element which had been lost sight of. Knowing Kanu as he did he could not conceive that the Bushman would have harmed Elsie. An idea took root in his brain which bore a sudden fruit of deadly fear. Setting spurs to his horse he left the search-party on the hill-side and galloped down to the spring at the margin of which he had made his wild confession. Under a thick curtain of shrub a few yards from where he had knelt he found the undergrowth crushed down as though someone had recently sat upon it, and, close by, where a mole had thrown up a heap of loose earth, was the print of a small foot, freshly indented. The discovery turned him sick with horror.

In a few minutes, however, he laughed at his ridiculous fears. Nevertheless, a speculation which, he persuaded himself over and over again was quite preposterous, kept persistently coming back and grinning at him,—even after it had been driven away over and over again with contumely, by his better understanding.

The days came and went with dreary monotony. One by one the search-parties returned from their fruitless seekings. After hurried preparations Gideon again set face towards the burning northern deserts, and resumed his vain quest for the habitation of Peace.

Chapter Eight.

Elsie's Quest.

The excitement consequent upon the battle of Blauwberg and the conquest of the Cape by England had just died down, and the inhabitants of Cape Town were involuntarily coming to the conclusion that the English were not such stern tyrants as they had been led to expect.

Juffrouw du Plessis and her two daughters were sitting in their garden behind the oleander hedge, through an opening in which they could look out over the lovely expanse of Table Bay. The cottage, embowered in oak trees and with the north front covered by the soft green foliage of an immense vine, was built upon one of the terraces which

lead up to the foot of Table Mountain, and which have, long since, been absorbed by the expanding city.

Behind the cottage the frowning crags of the massive mountain had hidden their rigour beneath the “Table Cloth” of snowy cloud, whose tossing, ever-changing folds and fringes were flung like foam into the blue vault of the sky by the boisterous “South-Easter” which had given it birth. But in spite of the turmoil overhead, no breath of rude air disturbed the halcyon quiet which seemed to have spread a wing of wardship over the dwelling.

An old slave who, notwithstanding his wrinkled skin and frosted hair, was still of powerful frame, was working with great deliberation among the flowers,—where large cabbage-roses lifted their heads high over violet-bordered beds that were sweet with mignonette and gay with pinks. The Juffrouw was of Huguenot descent and showed her French origin in the alertness of her movements and the sensibility of her features. She was the wife of a merchant who carried on a flourishing business in the city.

“Mother,” suddenly said Helena, the younger girl, “while you were out this morning I met a blind girl with the longest and yellowest hair I have ever seen.”

“A blind girl.—Where was she?”

“On the footpath behind the house.”

“And where did she come from?”

“I do not know; she would not tell me. I think she must be mad, for she said she was going to talk to the Governor and she asked me where he lived.”

“What an extraordinary thing.”

“Yes. She was walking with a little Hottentot man, who was leading her by means of a stick. She said they were both very hungry, so I gave them some bread and milk. I left them sitting at the side of the path, eating, and when I went back to look for them they were gone.”

Elsie and Kanu sat at the side of a stream in a deep ravine in the western face of the Drakenstein Mountain range. Around them was a mass of dense scrub which was gay with lovely flowers. The child drooped wearily as she sat with her swollen feet in the cool, limpid water. Her cheeks were faintly flushed, her lips parted, and her eyes shone with strange brilliancy. It was the morning of the sixth day after they had stolen away from Elandsfontein. Kanu looked gaunt with hunger. Famine seemed to glare out of his hollow eyes. In spite of the proverbial toughness of the Bushman, he was almost in the last stage of exhaustion. A belt made of twisted bark was tightly bound around his waist, and a bundle of grass and moss, rolled into a ball, was forced between it and his body, over the abdomen.

“Kanu,—how much farther do you think Cape Town is?” asked Elsie in a tired voice.

“I have heard the people say that the town lies under a big mountain with a flat top,” replied the Bushman,—“I can see such a mountain far away across the sand-flats. We will reach it to-morrow night if your feet do not get too sore.”

The child drew up her feet from out of the water and passed her fingers gently over them. Even this slight touch made her wince. She threw back her head with a movement of impatience. Her eyes were swimming in tears. Beside her, on the grass, lay a pair of tattered *veldschoens*.

“Kanu,—do you think we will reach there in time to see the Governor to-morrow night?”

“I do not know; we might not be able to find his house in the dark,—and perhaps he goes to bed early.”

“But, Kanu,—everyone must know the Governor’s house, so you can knock at the first door we pass and ask where it is.”

“Yes,—we can try.”

“But, Kanu,—I *must* get my father out of prison at once when we arrive. I am sure the Governor will come from his house and open the door as soon as I tell him,—even if he is in bed and asleep when we get there.”

“I do not think you will see Baas Stephanus to-morrow night,” replied the Bushman, after a pause.—“I heard from a man who had been there that the prison is not in Cape Town but in a place they call an island, in the sea.”

Elsie hid her face in her hands and burst into a passion of tears. She had held out against hunger and fatigue, against exposure to chilling rain and scorching sun, her thoughts strained to the conception of “Cape Town” as an objective. Often, when she was swaying with exhaustion, the words “father”—“Cape Town”—murmured half under her breath, would brace her flagging sinews. And now it was bitter to hear that her father was not in Cape Town after all, but farther off still. She had set her heart on meeting him immediately after her arrival. The Governor was sure to be a good, pitiful man;—otherwise the great king across the sea, who now owned the whole country, would not have sent him to rule the land. As soon as ever she had told her tale, he would tell one of his soldiers to take her down at once to the prison, which he would open with a big key. Then her father would look round and, seeing his little blind daughter, would know that she had saved him,—which was more than people with good eyesight had been able to do.

Over and over again the poor little child had rehearsed the scene of the meeting in her mind. The groove was well worn, and she followed the details accurately, step by step. She knew the feel of the big key; she had asked the kind Governor to let her hold it, and then that she might carry it down to the prison, instead of the soldier,—but the

Governor said that he could not do this because it was against the law to let anyone have the key unless he were a soldier carrying a big gun. Then the long walk down the street,—and how the soldier walked too slow, and how she knew without being told the direction of the prison. Everything was quite clear until the key grated in the lock, as the key did in the lock of the barn at home,—and the heavy door swung back on its hinges. At this point imagination died in a swoon of bliss.

However, Kanu comforted her with the assurance that the island was close to Cape Town; he was quite sure his informant had told him it could be seen from the city. But she had to surrender the hope of seeing her father immediately after her arrival, and she felt that her former conception of the meeting and its prelude would have to be somewhat modified. She had rehearsed the scene so often that it had become utterly real to her; to alter it now gave her the keenest pain.

Kanu's woodcraft had stood Elsie in good stead on the journey, but it was all he could do to procure food sufficient to enable the child to bear up against the terrible hardships incidental to such an undertaking. The Heavens had been propitious, in so far that but little rain had fallen, but the cold had been severe in the rugged mountain tracts they were obliged to travel through. Water had been scarce at times and cooking had always been difficult.

For these poor wanderers had to avoid frequented ways, and, even thus, to travel only by night, Kanu knew well enough that if they were seen by any European they would be stopped and sent home. So every morning at daybreak they camped in the most suitable spot to be found in their vicinity. Here, on a bed of soft moss or grass, carefully prepared for her by the tender hands of her savage guide, Elsie would slumber through the day, while Kanu foraged for food, and, after ascending some eminence, surveyed the country with reference to the night's course of travel.

Kanu's adventures were sometimes alarming. Once he came face to face with a Boer who was evidently in a bad temper, for he unslung his gun and, without a word of challenge, fired. Kanu only saved himself by dropping behind a rock. Then he fled, incontinently, before his natural enemy had time to reload. More than the Boers he dreaded his own kind. The wild men had been so often treacherously deceived by tamed specimens of their own race who, after gaining their confidence, betrayed them to the Boers, that any stranger with the taint of civilisation upon him was liable to be put to death with horrible tortures.

In his own native desert Kanu would have had no difficulty in finding enough of bulbs, roots, lizards and other local products wherewith to satisfy the needs of his own appetite, but the farther south his steps trended the more unfamiliar the flora and minor fauna became. Even the little of this description of produce he found was of no use to Elsie; for her he had to steal, and it was in doing this that he ran into greatest danger.

His habitual method of plundering was to locate a flock of sheep or goats, crawl around the bases of hills and up and down gullies until he got close to it, and then hang on its skirts until an opportunity offered for seizing and stifling a lamb or a kid.

On the day before reaching the kloof where Elsie had the bitter disappointment of hearing that her father was not at Cape Town after all, but at some island beyond it, Kanu had, after waiting nearly all day for his opportunity, captured a lamb from a flock which was crossing the gully in which he lay waiting. This lamb had loitered behind with its mother,—the shepherd being, at the time, engaged in beating up stragglers in another locality. Kanu carried the prey into a deep, forest-filled hollow. Here he lit a fire of dry wood, which gave off no smoke, and roasted the toothsome carcase whole. Reserving the entrails for his own share, he stripped the roasted flesh from the bones and carried it back to Elsie, who was almost fainting with hunger.

Being now so near their goal and in a country of well-defined roads and many travellers, who did not appear to take much notice of one another, Kanu consented to make a start whilst it was yet daylight, so the strange pair emerged from their concealment and moved slowly down the rugged side of the mountain. When they reached the sandy flat at its foot they set boldly out towards the great mountain whose snowy cowl shone white as a snowdrift under the clear October sky.

They walked on until deep into the night. Elsie, buoyed up by her purpose and almost unconscious of her swollen feet, would still have pressed forward. She declared that she felt no fatigue, but Kanu insisted on her lying down and then she fell into a deep sleep which lasted until dawn.

As the light grew Kanu was astonished to find that the mountain looked nearly as far off as ever. The unfamiliar atmosphere—close to the level of the sea had deceived him. This day turned out to be the most fatiguing of all. The sun smote fiercely upon the red sand and water was scarce and brackish when obtained. However, when the sun sank they were nearly at the foot of the mountain. The soft, steady breeze brought up the thunder of the surf from the Muizenberg beach, and filled the soul of the Bushman with dismay at the unaccustomed sound. He had never been near the sea, so the thrilling diapason of the moving waters was full of terrors.

"Kanu, are you sure that this is the mountain that Cape Town is under? Tell me, what it is like."

Elsie had dropped in the road from sheer fatigue, and Kanu had borne her to a small copse, only a few yards away.

"The side of the mountain is black with trees but its top is white with a cloud that never moves."

"Yes,—that is the mountain," said the child in a tone of relief; "my father told me that it always had a white cloud upon its top."

Then her head drooped and she fell asleep.

Kanu tightened his belt and mounted guard. In the desert, among the haunts of the fiercest beasts, he would have

lain down after a few simple precautions, and felt perfectly safe. Here, near the dwellings of Christians, he felt—and with reason—uneasy. There was a small quantity of meat left, and the smell of it assailed his nostrils, made keen as those of a pointer by famine. How he longed for that meat,—for only one bite. The savage in his breast seized him as it were by the throat every now and then and tried to hurl him at the morsel. But it was Elsie's, he told himself,—all she had to sustain herself with on the morrow, when there would be still a long walk before her. At length he fell into a troubled sleep, and dreamt of sumptuous banquets for some delightful seconds.

Another tug at the belt. Well, it would soon be morning, and then this great, powerful, beneficent Governor whom Elsie knew of and talked such a lot about, would surely give them something for breakfast.

When day broke the mist had drawn away from the mountain, the huge bulk of which stood out, robed in purple and edged with the gold of the unarisen sun. Elsie slept long and deeply, and woke to a passionate flood of accusing tears when she found that the sun was already high.

As they walked along the well-beaten road they met other sojourners. The savage instinct in Kanu prompted him to hide in the bushes whenever he saw anyone approaching; but, when he found that of the many passers-by none attempted to interfere with them, he merely bent his head and hurried furtively past. No houses were yet in sight, except two square structures high up on the shoulders of the mountain. These were the watch-houses from which, in yet older times, the approach of the Indian Fleet was wont to be signalled to the Castle. The Bushman devoutly hoped that the Governor did not live in either of these, for he knew that Elsie, weak as she was, would never be able to make the ascent.

Anon they reached the shores of Table Bay, and the wide expanse of water filled the Bushman's soul with deep awe. The scent of the sea stung the flagging blood of the spent child to new vigour; the "whish-whish" of the wavelets and the wild, strange cries of the sea-birds—perhaps they had flown across from the island where her father was waiting for her—spoke to her strained ear in tones of sweetness and mystery, which thrilled through her to the very depths of her being. Her fatigue and her lacerated feet were forgotten; she seemed to tread on air.

At length Kanu gave a sudden exclamation;—the goal of their terrible endeavours was at last in sight. There, shimmering in the soft, opaline haze, lay the lovely city, its white flat-topped houses embowered in trees, whilst the bright green slopes surrounding softened the contrast between its peaceful beauty and the mighty embodied desolation which seemed to prop the sky above it.

Elsie did not speak, but her face lit up and her eyes flashed with almost unearthly gleams. She felt that she was now at length, after all her sore travail, about to meet her father—her father who, innocent, had been torn from her and cast into prison among the vilest of men. Sweetest of all was the thought that she, in her own weak hands, was bearing to him the precious gift of freedom. In imagination she was already passing her hands over his face, as she had been wont to do when she wanted to read his mood, and smoothing out the lines of suffering. The bliss was almost painful in its intensity.

"Kanu,—Oh, Kanu—we are nearly there; are we not?"

"Yes,—but I never thought there were so many houses in the whole world. It would take half an hour on a fresh horse to get to the farthest I can see."

"Kanu,—I suppose the Governor lives in the biggest house; don't you think so?"

"Yes,—but there are so many big houses that I do not know where to look for the biggest."

The Bushman had been on the point of asking more than one of the people whom they had passed, in the street to direct them to the Governor's house, but he had invariably lost courage at the last moment. In those days there was little traffic in the Cape Town streets except in the late afternoon, when many carriages were to be seen. During the heat of the day all, gentle and simple, retired for the siesta. Thus the wanderers reached the centre of the city without attracting any attention, and without meeting anyone but a few slaves, who were out executing errands.

At length they paused before what Kanu felt sure must be the Governor's house. It was a large building, several storeys high, and had a lofty, spacious "stoep" surrounded by heavy iron railings, which overlooked the street. The big windows were flanked by bright green shutters which had been thrown back against the wall.

A sound of music issued through the wide, open door,—interspersed, every now and then, with loud bursts of laughter. Yes,—the Governor must certainly live here; he and his friends were, doubtless, holding revel inside. A steep flight of steps led up to one end of the stoep; these Kanu mounted, leading Elsie by the hand.

The Bushman paused before the open doorway and looked in. The splendour appalled him. Rich mats of varied colour covered the floor; wonderful coloured objects hung upon the walls; a large glass case stood upon a table just before him. It was full of clear water, in which numbers of golden fishes darted to and fro,—red light flashing from their scales. Yes, this was surely the house he had been seeking.

As he paused, shrinking back against Elsie who was trying to push him forward, a door suddenly opened on the other side of the room and a man as burly as any Boer Kanu had ever seen emerged, walking unsteadily. He was dressed in blue cloth with bright buttons, and had a funny-looking glazed hat placed sideways on his head. At first he seemed to be unaware that there was anyone but himself in the room. When, however, he became conscious of the presence of Elsie and her companion he started, and paused unsteadily, hiccoughing.

"Sam," he shouted to someone in the next room, "come and look at this."

Sam came. He also walked unsteadily. He was nearly as big as his companion and was similarly dressed.

“Well, Sam,—what do you make of it?”

“It gets over me, Cap’n,” said Sam, after a pause of anxious scrutiny.

“Well,—I’ve been round the world and I’ve never seen hair like that—Say, my lass, where do you hail from?”

Kanu replied in Dutch, asking if the Governor lived there, and if he were at home.

“Dry up with that monkey-chatter, or I’ll wring your neck,” rasped the irate Captain. Kanu shrank back in dread, pressing Elsie behind him. The Captain lurched over to the child and laid his hand on her shoulder.

“My lass,—I’ve a little girl at Southampton who looks like you, but you can show her your heels as far as hair goes.—Why—Sam—the child’s blind.”

The Captain had sat down on a chair, drawn Elsie towards him by the shoulders, and looked into her face at close quarters. When his eyes met hers something penetrated to his perceptions through the fumes of the liquor he had drunk and told him she was blind. Sam came forward and had a look. He did not believe the child was blind, and said so. She was just a beggar, shamming. He had often seen the same kind of thing on London Bridge.

The Captain roughly, but kindly, drew the child again towards him. Elsie kept passive and silent in his hands. Perhaps this was one of the Governor’s friends,—or even the Governor himself. She read his character by his touch, and trusted him, but she had shrunk away from Sam.

“Come, my lass,—you look tired and hungry; is it some dinner you want?”

Elsie, feeling that this remark was directly addressed to her, replied in Dutch, using almost the same words as Kanu had used.

“I cannot understand this blooming lingo,” growled the Captain—“Sam,—call the waiter.”

The waiter, a black boy, who spoke both Dutch and English well, came in and interpreted. The Captain was mystified; Sam was sure that the whole thing was a “plant,” and growled an advice to the Captain to keep a careful guard upon his silver watch.

Then the landlady was called. She, good woman, was too busy to be much interested. However, the Captain sent for some food, which he gave to Elsie. She ate a little and passed the rest on to Kanu, who ate it wolfishly. The Captain sent for another plateful, which Kanu disposed of with great rapidity. The Captain—and even Sam—became interested. The Bushman was asked, through the waiter, if he could eat any more. He replied in the affirmative, so another, and after that yet another—plateful was brought. This kind of thing might have gone on indefinitely, had not a young man, who looked like a merchant’s clerk, come and taken possession of the Captain for business purposes.

As he was going away, Elsie arrested him with a cry, and when he turned for a moment she begged pathetically to be told if the house she was in was the Governor’s, and, if not, where his house was. The Captain tossed sixpence to the black waiter and told him to take the “monkey-chap,”—for thus he designated Kanu,—down the street and show him where the Governor berthed.

The waiter, fully persuaded that he had to do with two lunatics, hurried them up one street and down another at the further end of which stood a large white building.

“There,” said he to Kanu, “is where the Governor lives.”

Then he turned round and bolted.

Chapter Nine.

How They Sought the Governor and Found the Good Samaritan.

Elsie’s heart again bounded with delight as she and Kanu hurried along the street. They reached the building indicated by the black boy. It had a large doorway opening to the street on the ground floor; several wagons drawn by horses stood before it,—some full of bales and boxes,—others empty. Kanu led the way in between the scattered parcels of merchandise and paused before a stout man who was making entries in a note-book.

“Please, Mynheer, is the Governor in?” asked the trembling Bushman.

The stout man glanced carelessly and contemptuously at his interlocutor. Then, having finished his entries, he closed his pocket-book, put it hurriedly into his pocket, and strode away. Just then a truck heavily laden with sacks was trundled in at the door; Kanu quickly dragged the child aside and just saved her from being knocked down and run over. A big Malay seized Elsie roughly by the arm and dragged her into the street; then he returned, caught Kanu by the neck and flung him after her.

“Here,” he said, “take your white brat away; you all know that we don’t allow beggars here.”

The two belated wanderers drew a little to one side to avoid the traffic and stood in silent and astonished desolation. In obedience to Elsie’s prompting, Kanu accosted several of the passers with his now stereotyped enquiry about the Governor. As a rule no attention was paid to his question. One or two answered him with jibes. At length a coloured man answered him kindly, telling him that the house opposite was a store, and that the Governor did not live

anywhere in the neighbourhood. He added significantly that they had better move on, or else he might get into trouble. Kanu asked what trouble would be likely to come upon them. The man replied that he might be whipped and added that his companion's hair might be cut off. The threat of whipping filled the sensitive-skinned Bushman with terror. He seized Elsie's hand and hurried away.

By this time the sun had gone down behind the Lion's Head, and the streets were full of people. The dismayed pair wandered about, sick with perplexity. Poor Kanu had been utterly demoralised by the threat of the whip, and Elsie could not, for a long time, induce him to accost any of the people they met. When he did so the result was the same as previously; no one would take his enquiry seriously.

Their random steps took them to a quarter of the town where people of mixed race dwelt in low-built houses. The streets were full of bands of shouting boys, who jostled them and jeered annoyingly.

A stout coloured woman was standing at the door of a little shop, the stock-in-trade of which appeared to be composed principally of stale, unwholesome-looking fruit. Some spell of kindness in the woman's homely face caused Kanu to pause. Then the woman addressed Elsie in Dutch, in a kind voice, and the tired child bent her head and burst into a passion of tears.

The woman drew Elsie into the shop and tried to comfort her, but it was long before the child's pent-up woe, terror and disappointment had spent themselves. At length, when exhaustion had brought calmness, Elsie murmured that she wanted to see the Governor. The woman at once looked askance at her, suspecting that she was mad. But in a moment her look softened and her eyes became moist. Then the kind creature drew the child into a little room at the side of the shop and laid her tenderly on a bed. Elsie became calmer, so the woman drew off the tattered shoes and wept over the poor, lacerated feet. She covered the poor waif up with a soft patchwork quilt, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing her sink into a deep sleep.

The woman then went out to the shop, where Kanu was lying exhausted on the floor. She questioned him closely—and afterwards angrily, but the Bushman was proof against her cross-examination. All she could elicit from him was that they had come from a great distance and that they wanted to see the Governor about an important matter.

The woman stole back into the room on tip-toe, and gazed at the sleeping child. Made paler by sleep the face of Elsie looked like that of a corpse. Her hair lay in a glowing, tangled mass on the pillow; the gazer picked up one of the tresses and examined it with reverent wonder. Then she left the room, closed the door softly, shut up the shop and went to her kitchen for the purpose of concocting some strong broth.

It was late when Elsie woke. Her hostess was sitting at the bedside. She soothed the child, gave her a drink of warm broth and made her lie down again. Then the woman crept into the bed, and the two slumbered together until morning. Kanu had been accommodated with a sack in the kitchen and a supper of fruit which had become unsaleable stock.

At early dawn the woman arose, leaving Elsie still sleeping. She went to the kitchen and lit a large fire, over which she placed a capacious pot of water. Then she fetched a wooden tub and laid it noiselessly in the bedroom. When Elsie awoke she found a good cup of coffee and a biscuit ready for her. These she consumed with a good appetite.

It was in preparing her for the bath that the woman found out that the child was blind. Then her pity overcame her so that she sobbed aloud. She had lost her own only child, a girl of about Elsie's age, a few years previously. After Elsie had bathed, the woman went to a cupboard and fetched out what was her greatest treasure,—the clothes of her dead child, which she had folded carefully away interspersed with aromatic herbs to keep out the moth. With the best of the garments she clothed her little guest. Then, after dressing the lacerated feet, she wrapped them in clean strips of linen, and put shoes and stockings which would have been much too large under other circumstances, upon them. This done, she combed out the child's hair, marvelling audibly at its length and richness.

Elsie could no longer resist the importunities of her kind friend, so she told her story,—how her dearly-loved father was in prison, suffering for a crime he had never committed; how she and Kanu were the only ones who could establish his innocence; how they had run away and wandered thither over mountain and desert plain for the purpose of seeing the great English Governor and obtaining justice.

The woman did not know what to make of it. The places named were strange to her; the whole thing seemed uncanny. The extraordinary tale of the shooting, the child's blindness,—her wonderful tresses,—the savage, wild-animal look of her diminutive protector,—his language—an outlandish click-mingled corruption of an already corrupt patois—it was quite beyond the good soul's imaginative range, so she gave up the problem with a sigh and redoubled her tenderness to Elsie.

After breakfast Elsie and Kanu again wandered forth on their pathetic quest. The woman tried her very best to induce Elsie to remain, and let Kanu endeavour to locate the Governor's dwelling as a preliminary measure. She herself could give no information on the subject, nor could any of the neighbours of whom she enquired. She made Elsie promise to return if her search proved unsuccessful.

This woman was a lonely soul, with nothing to love, and Elsie had made a way straight to her heart. She exultingly made up her mind to adopt the child, knowing that the latter, even if she succeeded in finding the Governor's house, would never be let in by the attendants. Therefore she made sure that her guests would return in the evening. All day long she could think of nothing but Elsie, the silky richness of whose yellow hair seemed to adhere to her dusky fingers and to lie like chrysm upon her charitable palm.

That day the little shop and dwelling was swept and garnished as it had never been since the death of the woman's own child. Clean sheets were placed upon the bed and a new and more wonderful patchwork quilt was unearthed from the depths of the press and spread out in all its glory. As evening drew near she cooked a dainty little supper;

the child would surely return hungry after her walk.

The hour at which the visitors had arrived on the previous day drew on. Supper was ready,—done to a turn,—and the woman stood before her doorway, anxiously scanning the street, up and down. The neighbourhood had grown loud with the strident tones of squalid children, rushing about in bands at uncouth games as was their wont. The darkness came but there was no sign of the missing guests.

The night drew on and the noises died down in the streets, until almost utter silence reigned. When midnight struck in the spire of the distant church, the disappointed woman sadly closed the door. She sat in the shop for a while longer, her ear alert for the footstep her heart yearned for. Then she put out the light and went weeping to bed, leaving the untasted supper on the table.

Chapter Ten.

The Sorrows of Kanu.

The two waifs resumed their search for the Governor's dwelling with feelings very different from those which had inspired them at the beginning. Throughout the long, blistering morning they wandered about the streets, timidly accosting any occasional passer-by whose appearance suggested possibilities of kindness, but no one would take their enquiries seriously. Some sent them purposely wrong, as one has seen unfeeling persons send an ignorant native round a village on April Fool's Day, carrying a paper with the legend: "Send the Fool on." Most of the people they spoke to smiled and passed on; more than once Kanu had to spring to one side to avoid a blow. He, poor savage, had a continual dread of the whip hanging over his shuddering shoulders, whilst cold and deepening despair lay like lead upon his blind companion's breast.

And, truly, the appearance of the two was sufficiently *bizarre* and startling. Kanu, clad in a few tattered skins,—gaunt with famine, his body and limbs scarred by brambles and his quaking soul glaring out through his eyes,—his questions clothed in badly-broken Dutch and his whole manner that of a wild beast at bay,—why, such a being had never been seen in the city of Cape Town before.

Of the two, however, the blind girl was the more alarming object than the Bushman, who made for her a most effective foil. Her face was pale with the hue born of that fatigue and starvation against which her frail body had been braced by a great resolve and a transcendent hope,—but staring through this pallor was the bitter agony of disappointment and fear. Her eyes, grown large and hollow, glowed deeply under the masses of her hair. Her face had taken on a terrible beauty that seemed to radiate calamity and despair.

Thus passed this day of tribulation, but it was late in the afternoon before the full measure of their sufferings was attained. Elsie had sunk exhausted on the pavement near an almost deserted street-corner. Suddenly a noise of shouting was heard, and within a few seconds the terrified waifs found themselves surrounded by a swarm of tormenting street boys. Elsie sprang to her feet and clasped her hands around her companion's sinewy arm. They stood close to the wall, and the boys formed a half-circle before them. The crowd seemed ever to increase. Although molested, neither was actually hurt. Now and then some bolder urchin would jostle them and once or twice Elsie's hair was tugged at. But it seemed as though the touch of the rich fibre had some strange effect; each one who laid hands on it drew away at once, and slunk to the outskirts of the crowd, as though ashamed.

They were rescued from this terrible predicament by three soldiers who were evidently taking a stroll. These, seeing what was going on, laid into the persecutors with their canes to such effect that the street was soon clear. Kanu spoke to his rescuers, asking the old question, but they could not understand his language, and passed on.

Kanu now tried to shape his course towards the harbour of the previous night, trying to avoid the more frequented streets. But the instinct by means of which the Bushman could find his way unerringly through the desert spaces in the deepest darkness, was useless to him here, in an unnatural environment. He had lost all perception of distance, direction and locality.

But yonder, impassive above this scene of persecution and confusion, towered the bastioned crags of the great mountain. This at least was a wild, natural object Kanu turned towards it as a drowning man turns towards an islet suddenly seen close at hand in a waste of waters, and pressed up the steepening slope. The shouts of the horrible boys became fainter and fainter as the waifs struggled up the rocky terraces. It was sundown before they reached a rugged ledge at the foot of the main precipice. Here were thick bushes and great irregular masses of rock scattered formlessly about; between them the tough mountain grass was thickly matted. Elsie sank to the ground and lay as if dead. She had got beyond tears; even the sense of pain had nearly died in her.

Fortunately, Kanu still had his wallet, and in it was the piece of bread which their kind entertainer had given them in the morning. There was a bright trickle of cool water issuing from a cleft at the foot of the cliff, and to this Kanu led the child after she had rested for a space. She had been for some time dreadfully thirsty, although hardly aware of the fact, and a drink of the cool water somewhat revived her. Then she removed her shoes and stockings, and placed her feet on a stone where the water splashed upon them. When Kanu placed a piece of bread in her hand she began mechanically to eat it.

The site was suitable as a camping-place. It was hemmed in by a loose-linked chain of great, irregular rocks, and, from the absence of paths in the neighbourhood, was evidently not often visited by human beings. Around were strewn soft cushions of moss and sheaves of waving grass swayed from high tussocks. Dead wood from the fallen branches of sugar-bushes lay about in considerable quantities. Kanu gathered a number of these together and lit a fire at the back of the largest of the rocks.

The weather was perfect. At the Cape, Spring performs her duties at the time which chronologically ought to be Winter. Thus, by the time her own proper season arrives, the flowers have already emerged to meet the mild, cloudless, steadfast sky, which, where the ground lies at any considerable elevation, scorches not by day nor chills by night. Thus, the unthinking cruelty of man was, in the case of these derelicts, in a measure compensated for by the careless kindness of the heavens.

“Kanu,—what shall we do?” asked Elsie at length, in a dejected voice.

“I do not know. It seems to be against the law down here to ask about the Governor,” replied the Bushman, reminiscent of the possibility of the whip.

“Kanu,—have you seen the island where the prison is?”

“Yes,—it is far away across the water. If the water were land it would take half a day to walk to it.”

After some further discussion it was finally agreed that next day Kanu was to leave Elsie on the mountain and continue his search for the Governor’s residence alone. So at break of day the Bushman stole down the mountain side and continued his quest. At length he met one who vouchsafed a reply to his question. This was a blind Hottentot beggar whom he met being led by a little child to the street-corner where he was wont to ply his trade.

“The Governor,” replied the beggar, with an air of superiority, “lives at Rondebosch, which is at the other side of the mountain, at this time of the year. I know this, because my niece, who is a washerwoman and washes for his coachman, told me so.”

“Is it against the law to ask where the Governor lives?”

“No,—why should it be against the law?”

“Then one cannot be whipped for asking?”

“Whipped? no; what an idea. But there are many things a Hottentot can get whipped for, all the same.”

“What kind of things?” asked Kanu, starting.

“Oh, plenty; stealing, for instance, or getting drunk, or being found in a garden at night. But who are you and where do you come from?”

Kanu was not prepared to answer on these points. However, he managed to elicit some further particulars,—for instance that if he walked along the main road he would pass the Governor’s house on his right hand; that the house had big pillars of stone before it; that two soldiers with red coats and guns walked up and down in front of it night and day.

Kanu hurried away towards Rondebosch. Two things it was imperatively necessary to do,—to locate the Governor’s house, and to get something for Elsie and himself to eat. He had left Elsie a small portion of bread,—hardly enough to serve for the scantiest of breakfasts. His own hunger was horrible. In spite of the tightening of his bark belt, which now nearly cut into his skin—the Bushman tribal expedient for minimising the pangs of famine—he was in agony. He passed the fruit market and saw piles of luscious eatables that made his mouth water, and the odour of which made him almost faint with longing. All this plenty around him—whilst he and Elsie were starving. He hurried away, the wild animal in him prompting to a pounce upon the nearest table, to be followed by a bolt. He knew his legs were swift, but there were too many people about and he would be sure to be caught. Stealing, he remembered with a tingling of the shoulders, stood first in the old beggar’s category of deeds for which one might get whipped.

A thought struck him,—he would first locate the Governor’s house, then return and try, by following the course he had taken the first day, to rediscover the dwelling of the charitable woman who kept the little shop. But Rondebosch was on the other side of the mountain; would he be able to go there and back without food? Well, there was nothing else to be done. He would try it at all events.

But after he had walked a few hundred yards his hunger got the better of him and he turned back and began to search for the woman’s dwelling. He reached the hotel with the wide stoep; from there he had no difficulty in reaching the store which the waiter had pointed out to him as the Governor’s house. After this, however, he could no more unravel his way among the unfamiliar lines of exactly-similar houses, than a bird could find its way through a labyrinth of mole-burrows.

So the day drew to a close without Kanu obtaining any food. His own agony of hunger had given place, for the time being, to a sick feeling of weakness; it was Elsie’s plight that now filled his thoughts. Food he must have, so he decided to steal the first edible thing he saw and trust to his swift running for escape. The whip was only a contingency, albeit a dreadful one,—but the hunger was a horrible actuality. Kanu made for the outskirts of the city and began to prowl about seeking for food to steal.

In the valley between Table Mountain and the Lion’s Head were the dwellings of a number of coloured people of the very lowest class. Most of the dwellings were miserable huts built of sacking and other rubbish, and standing in small clearings made in the thick, primaeval scrub. In the vicinity of some of these huts fowls were pecking about Kanu skirted the inhabited part of the valley, marking, with a view to possible contingencies, the huts near which fowls appeared to be most plentiful. In a path near a hut which stood somewhat distant from any others, the matchless eye of the Bushman discerned a well-grown brood of chickens, evidently just released from parental tutelage. A swift glance showed him how he might, unobserved, get between them and the hut. After worming his way through the scrub he emerged close to the unsuspicious poultry, into the midst of which he flung his stick, quick as lightning and

with practised hand. Two chickens lay struggling on the ground. The others fled homeward, with wild cacklings.

Within the space of a couple of seconds Kanu had clutched the two unhappy fowls, wrung their necks and wrapped them up in his tattered kaross. Then he sprang aside, ran for a few yards and dropped like a stone. A man and a boy came rushing up the pathway and then commenced searching the thicket in every direction. Once the man passed within a yard of the trembling Bushman, whose back began to tingle painfully. However the danger passed, so after a short time he crept along through the thicket to a safe distance, and then fled up to the mountain side to where he had left Elsie.

Bitter was the poor child's disappointment when she heard that the Governor did not live in Cape Town after all. However, Kanu was sanguine now of being able to locate the dwelling they had so long and so painfully sought for.

Kanu soon lit a fire and cooked the chickens, which proved tender and toothsome. The Bushman ate hardly anything but the entrails. He lied freely to Elsie in regard to the manner in which he had come by the birds, and waxed nobly mendacious as to the amount of food which he pretended to have enjoyed during the day.

Next morning Elsie's feet were still so much inflamed that she could hardly put them to the ground. Kanu gave her the rest of the meat,—which, as the chickens had been but small to begin with—came to very little. Then he bade her farewell, promising to be back as early in the afternoon as possible, and started on his way along the western flank of the mountain to Rondebosch.

He crossed the high neck which connects the eminence known as "the Devil's Peak" with Table Mountain. This name used then to cause great scandal to the Dutch colonists,—the term being an unconscious perversion by the English of the original name of "Duiven's," or "Dove's" Peak. Then he descended the almost perpendicular gorge to the thickets behind Groot Schuur, and soon found himself in the straggling village of Rondebosch.

It did not take him long to find the big house with the tall stone shafts before it, as described by the old beggar. His eye caught a glint of scarlet through the trees,—yes, there were the two soldiers walking up and down, armed with guns from the muzzles of which long bright knives projected.

However, it was best to make sure, so he took up a position fronting the house, but on the opposite side of the road. He saw people going in and coming out, some in scarlet and some in wonderfully shiny black clothes. Several people passed by, but they all looked too important for him to accost. At length a miserable-looking coloured woman hobbled by and he plucked up courage to address her:

"What are those two men walking up and down for?"

"Who are you that you don't know soldiers when you see them?"

"Are these soldiers;—and what are they doing here?"

"Taking care of the Governor, of course. That is his house."

At last. Well, he had found what he wanted, and there was nothing to do now but to tell Elsie, and bring her out here as soon as her feet were better.

But now that the excitement of the quest which had sustained him hitherto was over, a sudden agony of hunger gripped his vitals like a vice, and he felt that he must presently eat or die. Elsie, too! He had only left her a bite of cold chicken. He would go and seek for more prey. The whip was clean forgotten. Hunger—supremely agonising hunger—held him by the throat. He would go and seek for more fowls. There must be other places on the outskirts of the city where they were obtainable. So Kanu started swiftly back along the main road to Cape Town, with all his faculties concentrated upon fowls and the stealing thereof.

It was early afternoon when he reached the outskirts of the city. The sun shone oppressively; there was hardly a soul to be seen.

He passed a little shop, the proprietor of which,—a stout Malay, was apparently sleeping under a small awning hung over the front to protect the wares from the sun. A barrow, piled with cakes and other comestibles, stood at his side. They were queer, outlandish-looking eatables, such as Kanu had never seen before. The sight and the smell made him wolfish. He looked up and down the street; not a soul was in sight. He tightened his left arm against his side and let a fold of the ragged kaross hang over it like a bag. Then he shuffled his feet on the ground to test the slumber of the Malay, who gave no sign of observance. Then he clutched as many of the cakes as his hands would hold, placed them in his improvised bag, and hurried away on tip-toe. Just afterwards a strong grasp compressed his neck and he was borne to the ground. When he managed to turn his head he saw the enraged countenance of the Malay glaring down upon him.

Kanu stood in the dock, looking like the terrified wild animal that he was, and pleaded "guilty" to stealing the cakes. He had spent the night in a foetid cell with a number of other delinquents who had been scummed off the streets. The case attracted no particular attention, being one of a class very common in, it may be supposed, every city.

The prisoner took some pains to explain to the bench how hungry—how *very* hungry he had been, and how he had found it impossible to pass by the food after he had seen and smelt it.

The magistrate asked Kanu where he had come from and what he was doing in. Cape Town. The reply came in the form of a long, rambling statement which caused the minor officials to titter audibly, and the obvious untruthfulness of which caused His Worship, to frown with judicial severity. He had, come—the Bushman said—from a great distance, but from what exact locality he begged to be excused from saying. His business in Cape Town was "a big

thing"; no less than an interview with the Governor. If Mynheer would only let him go to seek a companion who was waiting for him, and who must, by this time, be very hungry indeed;—and would let him have a piece of bread—just one little piece of bread no bigger than his hand, he would promise to return at once.—And if Mynheer would let him and his companion be taken before the Governor, Mynheer would soon see that the story he told was true.

Then he went on to say that he knew that he had done wrong in stealing the cakes, and consequently he deserved punishment, but Mynheer must please remember how hungry he had been, and how hungry his companion had been, and not give him the whip. He had heard that "brown people" were whipped in Cape Town if they stole, which was quite right if they stole when they were not hungry. He had never stolen before; he had only stolen this time because he could get nothing to eat, and had been unable to find the Governor. Only two things he begged of Mynheer: to let him go to his companion with a little piece of bread;—she had had nothing to eat since yesterday morning, and must be very hungry now, and frightened, for she had been alone all night. The other favour was that Mynheer might spare him the whip.

By this time everyone in court,—except His Worship, who had no sense of humour,—was almost convulsed with merriment at the quaint and guileful fictions of the Bushman. Where, wondered carelessly some of the more thoughtful, had this "*onbeschafte*" savage learnt to practise such artful hocus pocus. It was, they thought, an interesting object lesson, as proving the essential and hopelessly-mendacious depravity of the Bushman race.

His Worship was "down on" vagrancy in all its forms. Probably, being responsible for the good order of the city, he had to be. His official harangue in passing sentence was not long, nor,—with the exception of the last paragraph,—interesting, even to Kanu. This last paragraph struck into the brain of the Bushman with a smart like that produced by one of the poisoned arrows of his own race, for it sentenced him to receive that whipping the dread of which had persistently haunted his waking and sleeping dreams. In addition he was to be imprisoned for a week—the greater portion of which had to be spent upon spare diet. After this he had to leave the precincts of the city within twenty-four hours, on pain of a further application of the lash.

Kanu, the Bushman thief, received his stripes dumbly, as a wild animal should; but the bitter physical agony which he underwent when the cruel lash cut through the skin of his emaciated body expressed itself in writhings and contortions which, the prison warders said (and they spoke from an extended experience), were funnier than any they had ever seen before. The spare diet he did not so much mind, being well accustomed to that sort of thing.

After the shock of his punishment, which had dulled every other feeling for the time, had somewhat passed away, Kanu realised that by this time Elsie must surely be dead, and he fell, accordingly, into bitter, if savage, tribulation. But soon he found himself thinking, in quite a civilised way, that it was better, after all, that the blind child should be free from her sufferings. Then Kanu turned his face to the wall of his cell and slept with inconsiderable waking intervals, throughout the rest of his period of durance.

When he was released a throb almost of joy went through the Bushman's untutored breast. Freedom, to the wild man, is as necessary as to the sea-mew. He hurried from the gaol door and made his way up the side of the mountain to where he had left Elsie eight days before, expecting to find her lying white among the rocks, half-covered by her shining hair.

Bushmen, everyone says, have no hearts,—yet a spasm contracted the throat of this Bushman as he neared the spot where he had left the blind girl, which, in the case of a civilised man, would have been attributed to an agony of grief.

But no trace of Elsie could he see. His keen, microscopic eye searched the ground for a sign, but none was visible. The north-east wind had blown; the swift springing of vegetation had affected Nature's obliterative work—wiping away the faint traces of the tragedy from this small theatre as completely as Time, with the assistance of lichens, grass and a few others of Nature's busy legion, will finally obliterate man with all his works and pomps.

No sign.—Stay,—there, floating on the slow, sweet stream of sun-buoyant air, quivered a yellow thread,—bright as materialised sunlight. It hung from the bough of a shrub upon which bright, sweet-scented buds were struggling through between cruel-looking, black thorns, and miraculously getting the best of the struggle. Kanu carefully disentangled the precious filament, rolled it up into a minute coil and put it into a little bag containing several namelessly-unpleasant charms, which hung by a strand of twisted sinew from his neck.

Swiftly the Bushman examined every nook and cranny in the vicinity, but no other trace of the blind girl he had served so faithfully and unselfishly could be found. Then his eyes began to swim with what in the case of a European would certainly have been called tears, and his throat tightened once more with the same sensation he had a few minutes previously experienced.

Far away to the northward the great blue peaks of the Drakenstein glowed and pulsed in the sunshine, while their hollows were dyed a more wonderful purple than Tynan artificer ever took from the depths of the Mediterranean. Beyond this range, albeit on the other side of an almost interminable series of other ranges, seemingly as impassable, lay the desert; and towards this Kanu the Bushman sighed his savage soul.

One more look round—lest, haply he might have left some sign unread or some nook unsearched;—one more recurrence of the unaccountable (for a Bushman) sensation in his throat, and Kanu set his face to the North, and went forth for ever from the shadow of the dwelling-places of civilised men.

Chapter Eleven.

Elsie and the Satyrs.

The long day drew to a close but Elsie, with the sweet steadfastness of a nature that had hardly ever known what it was to repine, did not feel impatient. She knew that it would be impossible for her to go to Rondebosch until the following day, so she was content to sit in the mild sunlight, bathing her feet in the cool stream.

The portion of cold chicken that remained she had divided into two, one of which she ate for breakfast. When she knew from the coolness of the air that the sun had gone down, she ate the remainder. When night came she wondered why Kanu had not arrived, and the wild thought that he might by some wonderful chance have seen the Governor and then gone straight off to procure her father's release lifted her heart for one moment's wild delight. But she soon saw the impossibility of her imaginings, and her joy fell, broken-winged, to earth. However, her spirits soon regained the former mean. Fear she felt not; the only thing that had caused her terror was the mob of boys in the street of the city, but here, where Kanu had placed her, she felt quite safe. To those who are blind from birth darkness harbours no more terror than day.

Although the lovely scene which lay around her was cut off from her cognisance by the failure of her principal channel of sense, her remaining faculties had been so sharpened by the striving of the imprisoned individuality to apprehend its environment, that she might almost be said to have developed a special sense which those possessing sight have no idea of. To Elsie the evening was full of beauty and for one short hour she was soothed in the lap of Peace.

The faint, far-off murmur of the city stole up and seemed to cluster like a lot of echo-swallows against the sheer rock-wall that soared into its snow-white fleece of cloud above her head. To her fine-strung ear they made music. She wondered in what direction her father's prison lay. Perhaps he had breathed the very air which now, full of the scents and ichor of the sea, gently stirred her locks.

The dew-fall made everything damp; it was cold and she longed for a fire. Why was Kanu so long in coming back?—Her mind searched in vain for an explanation. Could it be possible, after all, that he had seen the Governor and then gone with the soldier and the great key to effect her father's release? Even now he might be hurrying up the rugged path, under the faithful Bushman's guidance, to greet the beloved child who had dared, suffered and accomplished so much for his sake. No, she reflected with a sigh, that was hardly to be hoped. The Governor would, doubtless, want to see and talk to herself before taking any steps. Kanu was, after all, only a Bushman, and, although she knew how brave and honest and true he was, and how superior to his race, it was not to be expected that the Governor would recognise his good qualities at the very outset of their acquaintance.

But where *was* Kanu? It was most extraordinary that he should have left her so long as this, all alone. Surely he could not have forgotten that she had no food and no means of lighting a fire.

It was now, she knew, very late, for the noises had died down and the city lay as silent as the grave. She knew also that Kanu was not anywhere near. Last evening her supersensitive ear had been able to detect his approaching footsteps long, long before he arrived. She was now very hungry indeed and the penetrating dew had chilled her to the bone. But she was accustomed to exposure and she did not suffer in this respect as another might have done. She was crouched under the lee of a rock. Drawing her knees up for the sake of warmth she shook her tresses out over her like a tent, and soon fell asleep.

She awoke suddenly and started up with a wild cry, her every nerve tingling with horror. From the krantz-ledges above her head were issuing strident shrieks and hoarse roarings. In an instant she recognised the sounds:—they came from a troop of large, fierce, dog-faced baboons which had taken up their quarters on the face of the cliff.

The baboons were having one of those noisy scuffles which, several times in the course of a night, invariably disturb an encampment of these animals. Down the face of the cliff came bounding good-sized pebbles and even small rocks, dislodged by the struggling simians. These thudded into the grass or crashed into the bushes close beside her. Seizing the short staff which she always carried, the terror-smitten child felt her course away from the vicinity of the cliff and began descending the mountain with stumbling steps.

The sole and only terror which Elsie had felt on her native farm,—the dread of these animals,—returned upon her with irresistible force. The Tanqua Valley was full of these monsters, whose hoarse roarings, heard from afar, haunted the dreams of her nervous childhood. In seasons of drought they would sometimes rush in among a flock of sheep and tear open the stomachs of the young lambs with their powerful paws, for the sake of the newly-drunk milk. To Elsie and her kind the baboon took the place of the dragon, the giant, and the gnome, around which cluster the terrors of northern childhood.

Bruised, bleeding, and palpitating with horror, the poor little blind child stumbled on down the rough, brambly mountain side until she lost her footing and fell heavily over a ledge. Then she swooned from the combined mental and physical shock, and for a time lay still in merciful unconsciousness. When she revived she could not at first realise what had occurred; then the horror came back upon her like a flood, and she once more arose and staggered forward, groping before her with her stick.

Then came another dreadful thought:—Kanu would not now know where to find her when he returned. What was she to do? She had dreaded the boys in the cruel, perplexing city—yet she felt that she could now fly to them for protection—if she only knew the way. And Kanu might—the thought brought a momentary gleam of cheerfulness—possibly track her course down the mountain side, but—if she once reached the streets he would never be able to trace her. No,—she had better remain somewhere on the mountain.—But the baboons—thus the poor, over-laden little brain reeled along the mazes of a labyrinth of frightful alternatives.

Now her alert senses told her that the day was breaking and the sweet influences of the dawn brought a momentary relief from the worst of her imaginary terrors. She thanked God with happy tears for the returning of the blessed day. But almost immediately afterwards the ripple of relief was swamped by a returning tide of dismay.

Even at this late day the baboons of Table Mountain sometimes assume a very threatening attitude to persons rambling alone in the more unfrequented spots, but in the early days of the Cape settlement these great simians were far more daring. It was no uncommon thing for them to raid the vineyards and gardens on the outskirts of the city in the early morning,—and this is what they were preparing to do on the occasion of Elsie's great travail. At the first streak of light they began to descend from the krantzes and spread in skirmishing order over the slopes beneath. The centre of the scattered column headed direct for the spot where Elsie lay cowering, and it was the guttural bark by which the animal that discovered her announced the presence of a human being to the others, that gave her such a redoubled shock of dread.

She tried to move, but her strength failed her; so she crept under a bush and lay there, crouched and quaking. On right and left she could hear the harsh signals of the sentinels, from flank to flank of the long-extended troop. Far and near she could hear the stones being rolled over as the baboons searched for scorpions and other vermin.

She heard a rustling close to her, and then a guttural grunt of mingled curiosity and surprise. The horrors of the situation struck her rigid, and she ceased, for a few seconds, to breathe. The baboon was now close to her, wondering no doubt, as to who and what she was. Then, with a movement which combined the elements of a slap and a scratch, the creature drove its hairy paw into her face.

With a long, shrill shriek Elsie sprang to her feet and fled down the steep slope. A thorny shrub caught and held her dress fast. She thought that one of the monsters had overtaken and captured her, and she fell to the ground and lay huddled in a swoon that was very nigh to death.

The fruit-orchard at the back of the du Plessis' dwelling had on several occasions suffered severely from the depredations of the baboons. Thus, whenever these brutes were heard roaring and coughing on the mountain side—which usually happened in the very early morning, it was customary for all the male members of the household to turn out in a body, to repel the attack.

On this occasion the slaves, armed with whatever weapons could be hurriedly laid hands on, and headed by the old white-headed gardener, who carried a blunderbuss of ancient make, rushed out to protect the fruit Mr du Plessis and his two daughters joined in the sortie a few minutes afterwards. The girls enjoyed this sort of thing very much, and the cry of "baviaan" would turn them out of bed earlier, and more quickly, than anything else. The sensation of "creeps," which any enterprise involving a small tincture of imaginary danger brings, is dear to the youthful female breast.

On the present occasion the enemy made even less show of resistance than usual. Driven back in disorder, they retreated to the mountain krantzes which were inaccessible to all but themselves, hoarsely defiant and threatening what they would do next time.

The morning was delightful as only an early morning can be when listless Spring coquettes with impatient Summer under a cloudless, calm, and southern sky; so Mr du Plessis and his daughters decided to spend some of the time which must elapse before breakfast would be ready in strolling over the flower-strewn mountain slope. The lovely bay lay like a white-fringed purple robe cast down to earth from the couch of some regal goddess; in the deep, deep hollows of the Drakenstein the shattered remnants of the host of conquered night were cowering; overhead the scarred crags of Table Mountain lent, by force of contrast, a splendid foil to the softness of the rest of the landscape.

They had left the footpath and were wandering among the dew-bejewelled bushes. Suddenly, with one accord they all stood still; before them lay what appeared to be the dead body of a young girl, fallen upon its face.

Mr du Plessis stepped forward and bent over the pallid form. He ascertained that it still contained life, and he signed to the two girls to approach.

They turned the unconscious frame over upon its back and placed the slack limbs in an easy position. The face was untouched, but the poor hands had been sorely torn by thorns. The lips were almost bloodless and the whole form as cold as the earth it lay on. The hair, sadly tangled, glowed in the sunshine like live gold.

"The blind girl we saw with the Bushman," said Helena, in an awed whisper.

"Yes," said Mr du Plessis,—"there has been some foul play here. You girls rub her body as hard as you can and loosen her dress at the throat; I will run and send Ranzo and one of the boys with a basket-chair."

It was not long before the chair arrived, carried by two strong slaves. Elsie was tenderly lifted from the cold earth and carried down to the cottage, where she was soon laid upon a soft, warm bed. Her damp clothes were removed and warm wraps substituted. The doctor had been sent for at once, but in the meantime Mrs du Plessis poured a hot cordial down her throat. This soon caused a glow of warmth to spread over the almost pulseless body.

Soon the doctor arrived and ordered that the patient should be laid in a warm bath. This caused her to revive considerably. When her eyes opened it seemed as if they were filled with the pain of the whole world. After swallowing a little nourishment she fell into a swoon-like sleep, which lasted all day and into the middle of the night.

When Elsie awoke it was to delirium of the most painful kind. Ever and anon she would shriek with terror and try to spring from the bed. This lasted for several days, until the doctor feared brain-fever. However, she once more fell asleep, and lay for days like a faintly-breathing statue. She was wakened now and then and given nourishment, which she mechanically swallowed,—immediately afterwards sank back to deepest sleep.

The strange story of the finding of the blind girl with the wonderful hair had in the meantime spread abroad, and the circumstance aroused general interest. Many now recalled having seen the strange pair wandering up and down the streets upon their hopeless quest, and regretted, too late, that they had not rendered assistance. Public feeling,—

that mad perverter of probabilities,—was very much aroused against Kanu, and had that unhappy Bushman been caught it would have gone hard with him. However, Kanu, with his savage equivalent for the emotion of grief, was straining every nerve to get as far away from civilisation as possible, bent on hiding his suspected head in the depths of the uttermost desert.

Many were the visitors at the cottage on the mountain slope during Elsie's illness. When the child grew better a favoured few were allowed to take a peep into the dimly-lighted room where, upon a bed as white as snow, the pallid, pathetically-beautiful image of tragic suffering lay. The wonderful hair had been carefully combed; it flowed like a golden cataract over the headrail of the bedstead. When the light of a candle shone upon it through the gloom of the darkened room the beholders marvelled at a depth and richness of colour such as they had never before thought possible.

Up from the vaults of blank unconsciousness floated the mind of the blind girl until she became cognisant of her immediate surroundings; but the past remained to her an utter blank. Bit by bit she recovered the faculty of speech. It would be more correct to say that she re-acquired it, for she picked up words from those around her almost as an infant does—only more rapidly and intelligently. Her sweet, equable disposition had not altered. Thus, she began to fill in the obliterated pages of her mind with serene unconsciousness. She never laughed, but a strain of music, a sweet scent, or a soft touch from the hands she had learnt to love for their constant kindness would bring to her pale face the light of a rare smile, and flood it with a soft colour that was good to behold.

Thus blind Elsie, after her sore travail and disappointment, drifted, a derelict, into a harbour of safety and loving-kindness.

Chapter Twelve.

Elsie's Awakening.

Four years had come and gone; four times had the winter rains from the hidden Antarctic floated up to the storm-smitten shores of that continent over which the wings of Ancient Mystery still brood, and made sweet the ways of Spring.

The cottage still stood on the slope of Table Mountain but it was no longer alone; other dwellers of the city had selected sites and built near it. Moreover, it could not so readily be seen from a distance as formerly, for the reason that the bowering trees had enviously stretched forth their boughs around it.

Mr and Mrs du Plessis had been tenderly dealt with by Time; being young in heart they still knew youth, and the lady's French vivacity remained unimpaired. Gertrude and Helena had grown into young women comely to see, and the path leading to their dwelling was often trodden by the feet of the young men of the city and the officers of the garrison. The suit of a young minister of the Dutch Reformed Church had found favour with Gertrude. He had graduated in Leyden in a distinguished manner three years previously. Mr Brand and Gertrude were engaged and meant to be married in the early part of the ensuing year.

The greatest change was, however, to be seen in Elsie. She was about seventeen years of age and as beautiful as a lily. Tall and slight, her sweet face marble-pale, her deep eyes fringed with long, brown lashes and her wonderful hair full of amber hues mingled with the golden tints of dawn, the blind girl who dwelt in darkness was the sunshine of the household.

Although her mind was still a blank so far as events that had occurred previous to her waking in the home of her protector were concerned, her intellect otherwise was quite unimpaired. Her memory had regained its old strength, and once more she became remarkable for never forgetting anything she experienced. She was quite without fear except of the baboons, the barking of which upon the mountain side always made her tremble. It was this circumstance which led the old doctor who attended the household to express his belief that she would one day recover her memory. She was called Agatha by the du Plessis after numerous attempts to elicit her name had failed.

The Reverend Philip Brand, Gertrude's *fiancé*, was an earnest and a muscular Christian. He was a man who held quite original views upon most questions; one peculiarity of his being that he rather preferred the society of the very bad to that of the correspondingly good. The visitation of the unfortunates condemned to serve in chains at the quarries on Robben Island was a self-imposed branch of his duties which he took the greatest interest in.

"I have recently come in contact," he said one day to Gertrude, "with a very remarkable man. He is a convict at Robben Island,—a man named van der Walt. He tried to murder his brother, and was sentenced to ten years imprisonment in consequence."

"Yes;—and why does he specially interest you?"

"Well,—'tis a very curious thing;—you know that I am apt to take a liking to reprobates; this man's influence upon me is, however, very strange. Whenever I have been talking to him I come away with the impression that there is some mistake,—that he is God's minister and I am the criminal."

"I wish I could meet him."

"I wish you could. I can hardly describe him.—The man is as humble as Christ himself, and is always, without the least sign of cringing, grateful for the least attention. He does not talk religion at all; in fact he tries rather to avoid the subject, but he continually endeavours to enlist my help towards getting favours granted for the other prisoners. He has never, so far as I can make out, asked for anything for himself."

“Do you know the particulars of his crime? his story ought to be interesting.”

“I only know a few of the bare facts. It appears that he and his brother—they lived far up country, near the Roggeveld—had been quarrelling for years. One day they met in the veld, and this one shot the other with his own gun,—tried to murder him, in fact Murder or no murder, something always seems to say to me when we meet: ‘That man is a better Christian than you.’”

“Has he been long in prison?”

“About eight years. They tell me that he has never been known during all that time to disobey an order or to grumble at anything. His wife died five years ago, and just afterwards his little daughter, whom he loved better than anyone else, disappeared. They say his health afterwards broke down completely for a time, and his hair and beard turned from jet black to pure white within a few months.”

“Poor old man,—why don’t they let him out if he has suffered so much and has become so good?”

“They are talking of asking the Governor to commute the last year of his sentence. I shall do my best to have the idea carried out, but I had better not move in the matter openly, because all say I am already too much on the side of the convicts, and I am no longer listened to when I intercede for them.”

Summer had not yet come, but its approach was making itself felt from afar. The du Plessis’ were spending the day on the western side of the peninsula, where the South Atlantic tides, steel-grey and cold, sweep past the black, broken rocks. To landward the bastioned turrets known as the “Twelve Apostles” soared into a blue sky; from seaward the rollers were thundering up, in front of a steady north-west breeze.

Elsie had been placed in a comfortable situation such as she loved—safe above the reach of the moving waters, but where faint fragrant whiffs of spray might now and then reach her, and where the generous sunshine prevented her from feeling chilled. She loved sometimes to be left alone thus, so the others wandered away. Soon she fell into a deep sleep.

When the strollers returned they were alarmed at the change which had taken place in the blind girl. She was sitting straight up; her face was drawn, her lips were parted; she breathed with quick, husky gasps and her eyes blazed. The two girls ran up and put their arms around her; then she shrieked loudly, and became almost convulsed. But she soon became calmer under their soothing words and touch.

“Kanu,—are you here?” she uttered.

“We are here,” replied Helena, gently—“Gertrude and I. What is the matter.—What frightened you?”

“Oh,—how long have I been sleeping.—Where is Kanu? Where am I?”

They noticed that she spoke in quite a different tone to her usual one, and in an uncouth idiom they had never heard from her before.

“Hush, dear,” said Helena, soothingly. She guessed what had happened. The doctor had told her that an awakening of the girl’s dormant memory might happen at any time.—“Hush,—do not trouble to think just now. You will remember it all by and by.”

Helena drew the blind, frightened face down upon her generous breast, whilst Gertrude softly stroked the rigid hand which had seized one of hers with such a convulsive grasp as caused her acute pain. The blind girl’s brain was reeling perilously near to madness. Like a flood came the memory of her journey and its purpose—of the misery of disappointment, and the terror of the baboons. Her mind began anew at the flight from Elandsfontein, and retraced every painful step of the journey which came to such a tragic close in the inhospitable streets of the city. The whole pageant went through her consciousness in a whirling phantasmagoria.

When she reached that stage of her adventures wherein she left the dwelling of the kind old coloured woman, she instinctively passed her hand over her knees to feel if she still wore the dress which had been lent her then. Again she ascended the rugged slopes of Table Mountain, with her ears filled with the horrid shouts of the persecuting boys. The long-waited-for Kanu seemed so imminent that she bent her ear to listen for his expected step in the sound of the rocking surf. Then her terror of the baboons returned upon her like a hurricane sweeping everything away in fury; she started up with a shriek and tried to rush away.

“Oh God,—the baboons. Kanu—Kanu.”

“Hush—hush, dear,” said the soothing voice of Helena; “you are safe with us; nothing can hurt you. Feel—we are holding you safely.”

The sudden rupture of the cells in the blind girl’s brain, within which the terrors of that dire morning of four years back were pent, was like the breaking of the Seventh Seal. The shock almost unseated her reason. However, she gradually came to realise that she was with friends, whose tender touch brought comfort and a sense of safety. For the moment the last four years of her life were as effectually blotted out as though they had never been. Then, as a tortured sea gradually glasses over when the storm-cloud has passed on, although it yet heaves with silent unrest, her mind began to calm down and the recollection of more recent events to dawn upon the verge of her consciousness.

“But where is Kanu? Why did he not come back to me?”

“Was Kanu the Bushman who led you about?” asked Helena, gently.

“Kanu left me on the mountain and went to find out where the Governor lived.—My father—How long ago is it—Where have I been?”

“What is your father’s name and where does he live?” asked Gertrude.

“My father is in prison, but he is innocent, and only Kanu and I know the truth. We came to tell the Governor, so that he might let my father out.”

“Come, Agatha,—let us go back to mother and tell her.”

“My name is not Agatha,—my name is Elsie,—Elsie van der Walt.”

The two girls looked at each other in surprise, recalling the name of the prisoner in whom Mr Brand was so much interested, and of whom he had spoken several times. After gently assisting Elsie to arise they led her to where the other members of the party were waiting. Helena then drew her mother and Mr Brand aside and told them of what had occurred.

“Find out her father’s Christian name,” said the latter; “if it is Stephanus you may safely tell her that she will be taken to him to-morrow. I will get permission to-night and arrange to have a boat ready in the morning.”

“Elsie,” said Helena, passing her arm over the bewildered girl’s shoulder, “is your father’s name Stephanus van der Walt?”

“Yes—yes,—that is his name. Is he still in prison?”

“He is still in prison, but he is well. You will be taken to him to-morrow.”

The light of a great happiness seemed to radiate from Elsie’s face. At last—at last—The compensation for the long travail was about to be hers. And he—the innocent and long-suffering, would be freed from his bonds.

The eventful day was drawing to a close, so preparations for the return homeward were at once made. Mr Brand started on foot for Cape Town, by a short cut. He meant to call upon the magistrate at once and obtain a written permission to visit Robben Island and see the prisoner on the following day.

As the party drove homeward Elsie was wrapped in a trance of utter happiness. The lovely day had ripened into a sunset-flower of gorgeous and surpassing richness, and, as the pony drew the little carriage up the hill-side to the peaceful home among the trees, its rarest light seemed to be intensified in and reflected from the radiant face of the blind girl.

Elsie spoke no more that night, and the others made no attempt to disturb her blissful silence. In the middle of the night Mrs du Plessis arose, lit a candle and stepped softly to the room where the blind girl slept alone. She was dreaming, and her lips were parted in a smile. Her long, brown lashes lay darkly fringed upon her cheeks, her face and throat had lost their marble pallor and were faintly tinged with the most delicate rose. Adown her sides and completely concealing her arms flowed the double cataract of her peerless hair. Across her bosom and concealing her clasped hands, the streams coalesced into a golden billow which, as it heaved to her breath showed full of changing lights.

The kind woman gazed, spell-bound, until happy tears came and blurred her vision. Then, with thanks to the Power which had sent this angel to her household upon her lips, she noiselessly withdrew.

Chapter Thirteen.

Father and Daughter.

Stephanus Van Der Walt had entered the door of his prison with the firm conviction that his God—the just and mighty God of the Psalms that he knew so well—had laid this burthen upon him for his great transgressions. In the light of his changed heart all the provocation which Gideon had given him seemed to melt away like snowflakes in the sunshine, whilst his own contributions to the long-drawn-out quarrel waxed larger and blacker the more he looked at them.

The exaltation of spirit which buoyed him up when he received his sentence had never flagged. He gloried in his sufferings. His only prayer was that God might not visit his crimes upon his innocent children,—that Elsie, his little blind child, might have the shield of divine protection extended over her helplessness—that Marta, the wife whom he had neglected, and Sara, his elder daughter who stood on the threshold of womanhood, might find the wind of adversity tempered to their need.

When he heard of Marta’s death he bent his head anew in bitter self-reproach. He felt he had left the weak woman whom he had vowed to cherish alone and unprotected,—disgraced and sorrowful. Up till now he had been happy—happier than he had felt for years, for his heart was no longer the home of torturing hate. He felt that this later misfortune was sent to chasten him,—a thing which his imprisonment had failed to do. He took his wife’s death as a sign of the wrath of the Almighty, and he winced at the soreness of the stroke.

But when, a year later, the loss of his little blind daughter became known to Stephanus, his bones seemed to turn to water and light died out of his life. It was the uncertainty of her fate which made the blow so terrible. Month by month would he write letters asking for news and suggesting places to be searched. Had her body only been found it would have brought some consolation. But no—God’s wrath was still sore against him. It was his perfect trust in God’s justice that saved him from despair. He had no hope that Elsie was alive; God, he firmly believed, had taken her to

himself, and had left her fate uncertain so as to punish her father, who was the greatest of sinners.

His health nearly broke down under the strain. However, his sublime faith triumphed in time—he bent his back to the sore stroke and the soreness grew less.

Stephanus was employed with the ordinary convict gang in the stone-quarries upon Robben Island. For the first few years he had worked in chains. Afterwards his good conduct had attracted so much remark that he was freed from his fetters and allowed several privileges which, however, he always tried to pass on to his fellow-convicts.

Whenever any of the others fell sick, it was Stephanus who would tirelessly nurse them, night and day. He had even offered on one occasion to receive corporal punishment to which another prisoner had been sentenced, but this, of course, the authorities would not allow.

Since his prostration consequent upon the news of Elsie's disappearance Stephanus had not been asked to do any labour in the quarries. Moreover, he had not been forced to cut his hair or beard of late years. These were snow-white and of considerable length, and, combined with his upright figure, strongly marked features, and keen but kindly eyes, gave him that appearance we are accustomed to associate with the Hebrew prophets filled with the fire of inspiration.

An early breakfast was hardly over at the du Plessis' home next morning, before Mr Brand appeared, armed with permission for himself and Elsie to visit the convict van der Walt. They drove down to the wharf, where they found a boat awaiting them. The day was clear and bracing and the stout boat flew before the south-east wind across the heaving welter of Table Bay.

Although Elsie had never been on the sea before, she felt neither alarm nor inconvenience. In the course of a couple of hours the keel grated on the shingle and the passengers were carried ashore through the surf.

Her impatience had given place to a feeling of calm, and she paced up the pathway to the prison without the least appearance of agitation. Leaving her in charge of the wife of one of the officials, Mr Brand went to prepare Stephanus for the great surprise.

Elsie's beauty became almost unearthly when she was led up the stone steps, at the other side of which she knew her father was waiting to receive her. She entered a flagged passage and then was led to a doorway on the right. The door opened, and she stepped into the room where her father was waiting. He, with a wild look of astonishment and almost incredulity, clasped her in his arms. The door was gently closed, leaving the two alone together.

Some time elapsed before any words were spoken. Stephanus drew Elsie upon his knee and she passed her white hands over his worn face in the old enquiring way. The wrinkled lines that had been ploughed deep by sorrow were traced by her fingers, one by one. Then she clasped her arms around his neck and laid her face against his.

Stephanus could hardly bring himself to believe, at first, that this beautiful and daintily dressed young woman was the roughly-clad and unkempt little girl he had parted from so long ago. The rest of mind and body she had enjoyed,—the calm and wholesome life she had led during the past few years had blotted out the traces of the hardships she had undergone, and had fostered her physical development. The serenity of her spirit had stamped itself upon her beautiful face and she had imbibed the refinement of her surroundings as though to the manner born.

When, at length, her speech came, and her father learnt, bit by bit, all she had endured for his sake, his tears fell fast. But for her the bitterness of the past only enhanced the happiness of the present. Even when he laid a charge upon her, which almost seemed to take away the true value of all she had suffered for his sake, she did not attempt to repine.

"God laid this punishment upon me," said Stephanus, "and it is His will that I should bear it to the end."

"But when I tell them what I heard they will surely set you free."

"My child,—God does not smite without knowing where and how the stripes will fall."

"But you did not mean to shoot Uncle Gideon, and he knew it when he spoke at your trial."

"My child,—you have been brave for my sake, and we will soon be happy together once more. I lay this charge upon you:—that you go back to the farm,—to your uncle's house, and wait for me there. Moreover, that you say not a word to anyone of what you know. If God wants this revealed He will reveal it in His own way."

Elsie no longer questioned her father's decision. It was agreed between them that as soon as arrangements could be made she was to return to Elandsfontein, and there await her father's release.

Elsie and Mr Brand slept at the house of the Superintendent of the Convict Station that night, and returned to the mainland next morning.

There was grief and dismay in the du Plessis' household when it became known that Elsie was about to take her departure. It was as though a child of their own were leaving. They tried every persuasive argument to detain her, but all were of no avail. It was pointed out that if she remained in Cape Town she would be near her father and could return with him after his release. But his will to her was law, and her determination was not to be shaken.

A letter was written to Gideon apprising him of the fact that his niece had been found, and another to Uncle Diederick, asking him to come and fetch Elsie with his tent-wagon and a team of Stephanus' oxen. In due course a reply was received, to the effect that Gideon was absent on a hunting trip, and that Uncle Diederick would start for Cape Town in the course of a few days, accompanied by Elsie's cousin Adrian.

Elsie had begged that enquiry should be made as to whether Kanu had returned to the farm, but nothing had been seen or heard of him there. This was, of course, a very fortunate circumstance for the Bushman. Had he ever been found and recognised, it is to be feared that a short shrift and a round bullet would have been his portion.

Chapter Fourteen.

Adrian and Jacomina.

Aletta, who had mentally and physically become grey like her surroundings, like a tree growing in a damp and dark corner which has long since given up the attempt to shine and burgeon like its fellows that rejoice in the sunlight—received the news of Elsie's having been found with but a faint shock of surprise and satisfaction. Her perceptions had become dulled by the woe-laden years. Sara had, some two years previously, married a young farmer from an adjoining district.

Uncle Diederick was glad of the opportunity of visiting Cape Town; he had heard of some wonderful new discoveries in the drug line, and he wanted to advance professionally with the times. His farming on joint behalf of himself and Stephanus had prospered. He felt that when his (at present) sleeping partner should be released, he, Uncle Diederick, would be able to build himself another "hartebeeste house" of ample proportions and sumptuous style, and devote his energies exclusively to the exercise of that healing art which his whole soul loved.

Adrian had—being of a careful and frugal nature—begun acquiring stock when still very young. This had increased considerably, owing to a long series of excellent seasons and the exercise of careful management. Thus, he had recently found himself quite rich enough to start farming on his own account. When, however, he mooted this contingency with his father, Gideon at once offered him a full partnership in the farm as a going concern, leaving him the unrestricted management and only stipulating for the supply of teams of oxen and relays of horses for use on the hunting trips upon which he now spent by far the greater proportion of his time. Adrian at once closed with the offer.

Whilst Uncle Diederick was making preparations for his trip the thought struck Adrian that the present might prove a good opportunity for him to visit that city which he had never yet seen. He felt that not alone could he make the journey pay its expenses, but that a handsome profit might be won by taking down a load of produce and bringing back another of supplies. So he overhauled his wagon, packed it with ostrich feathers and hides and then sent over to tell Uncle Diederick of his intention.

Uncle Diederick had arranged to start on the third day following. Adrian's notification came in the form of a message sent through a Hottentot who was directed to enquire as to the hour of Uncle Diederick's intended departure, so that the wagon might arrive at the spot where the two roads from the respective homesteads met, at the same time. Up to this it had been understood that Jacomina was to remain behind and attend to any patients who might turn up.

"Pa," said that artless damsel, at supper, "it will be very lonely here while you are away."

A quizzical expression crinkled over the withered-apple-like visage of Uncle Diederick. Otherwise he impassively went on with his meal.

"Yes,—and I have never seen Cape Town. Besides Elsie will be very lonely on the road if there is not another girl to talk to and look after her."

After she had obtained her father's consent Jacomina began at once making preparations for her trip. Her best frock was taken from the box and thoroughly overhauled, her smartest *cappie* and her newest *veldschoens* were laid ready for the morrow. A brooch of old workmanship and some other trinkets which had drifted into Uncle Diederick's coffers in the course of trade, and thence been annexed by his daughter as part of her share in the profits, were examined and judiciously selected from.

Next day Adrian was astonished, elated and embarrassed to find Jacomina, resplendent in what passed, locally, for finery, sitting throned upon Uncle Diederick's wagon box when the wagons met at the appointed spot.

As a matter of fact Adrian's shyness had grown with his passion until each had reached a pitch of tragic intensity. He had often ridden over to Uncle Diederick's homestead with full and valiant intentions of declaring his love, but invariably his courage had failed at the last moment Jacomina had been at her wits' end to bring him to the point of proposing which, she knew perfectly well, he was longing to do. She had tried various ways and means, but all had failed. When she became cold he sank into gloomy despondency and moped away by himself. If she grew tender he seemed to dissolve in nervousness and grew as shy as a young girl. Once, she tried flirtation with another, for the purpose of arousing jealousy, but the effect was alarming. Adrian went without food or sleep for several days and rode about the country like one demented.

The obvious way to arrange matters would have been to get Uncle Diederick to intervene. This, however, in spite of many direct hints from Jacomina he had declined to undertake.

In the days we tell of no marriage could be solemnised in the Cape Colony unless the parties had previously appeared before the matrimonial court in Cape Town. It is an historical although almost incredible fact that in the early days of the present century couples wishing to marry had to come to the metropolis for the purpose from the most distant parts of the Colony.

Now, in the tender but astute soul of Jacomina a bright and happy thought had been born. Like the birth of Athene was the issue of this fully equipped resolve that stood before Jacomina in sudden and dazzling completeness. Adrian was to accompany her and her father to Cape Town,—she would induce him to propose on the way down and then

there would be no difficulty in leading him up to the marrying point. He was of full age; she was accompanied by her father. There was no reason why the wedding should not take place at once, and thus save them all the necessity for another trip.

Adrian's shyness did not diminish during the journey. At each outspan Jacomina exercised all her faculties to shine as a cook. He shewed by his appetite that he deeply appreciated the results, but he got no farther than this. With her own deft hands would Jacomina mix Adrian's well-known quantity of milk and sugar with his coffee, and then pass him the cup which he would receive so tremblingly that the contents were in danger.

The skin bag of rusks made so crisp and light that they would melt instantaneously and deliciously in coffee or milk—the jar of pickled "*sassatyes*,"—hanks of "*bultong*" and other delicacies would be produced from the wagon-chest at each outspan and, if Adrian's passion might be gauged by his appetite, he was, indeed, deeply enamoured.

But Jacomina was at her wits' end,—her lover would not declare himself, do what she might. One day, however, some difficulty arose with the gear of Adrian's wagon, so that off Uncle Diederick started alone, its owner's intention being to wait for his travelling companion at the next outspan place, where water and pasturage were known to be good. Uncle Diederick, as was his wont, fell asleep shortly after a start had been made. Jacomina sat at the opening of the vehicle behind, gazing back along the road in the direction of where she had left her lover.

It was a drowsy day; a faint haze brooded over the land; not a breath stirred the air, faint with the scent of the yellow acacia blooms. The road was deep with heavy sand, through which the oxen slowly and noiselessly ploughed.

A small, bush—brimming *kloof* was crossed. Through it sped a small stream, plashing over a rocky bar into a pool around which nodded a sleepy forest of ferns. Jacomina put her head out of the back of the tent. Then she sprang from the back of the wagon and went to examine the grot. She found a flat ledge, out of range of the spray, which made a most convenient seat, so she sate herself down and contemplated the scene.

Jacomina liked the scenery so much that she determined to stay for a few minutes, and then follow the retreating wagon. Anon she thought she would wait a little longer and get Adrian to give her a seat as he came past. The Hottentot driver had seen her dismount, so her father would know that she had not fallen off and got hurt, at all events.

She sat among the ferns for a good half-hour before she heard the shouts of the driver urging on the labouring team. Then the wagon laboured through the *kloof*, and Jacomina peered through the ferns as it passed her.

Adrian was walking behind the wagon, with long, slow strides and bent head. Jacomina was just about to arise and call out to him when he lifted his face at the sound of the plashing water, hesitated for a few seconds, and then stepped towards the grot.

Jacomina knew, instinctively, that the hour she had long hoped for had come; that her lover was at length to be caught in the toils which she had, half-unwittingly, set for his diffident feet,—and the knowledge filled her with a feeling of bashfulness to which she had hitherto been a stranger. Thus, when Adrian walked heavily through the fern and almost touched her dress before he perceived her, she felt covered with confusion.

Adrian started as though he had seen a ghost. Jacomina lifted a blushing face and gave him an instantaneous glance from her bright eyes—made brighter now by a suspicion of tears. Then she bent her face forward upon her hands and began to sob.

Adrian was bewildered. This was something he had never thought the matter-of-fact Jacomina capable of. Something must be very wrong indeed. But he felt no longer awe, and his shyness was swept away in a tide of pity. There was room on the ledge for two; Adrian sat down next to the distressed damsel and endeavoured to comfort her.

"What is it, then, Jacomyntje,—has your Pa been scolding you?"

Jacomina nearly gave herself away by indignantly repudiating the bare notion of her succumbing to anybody's scolding, but she remembered herself in time. After a partial recovery she was seized by another paroxysm of sobs, in the course of which she pressed one hand across her eyes and allowed the other to droop, limply, to her side. No observer of human nature will be in doubt as to which hand it was she let droop.

Adrian, after a moment's hesitation, nervously lifted the hand and pressed it slightly. As it was not withdrawn he increased the pressure. The sobbing calmed down somewhat, but the head remained bowed in an apparent abandon of hope.

"What is it, Jacomina; tell me why you are weeping."

"Ach, Adrian,—I am so unhappy."

This was getting no farther forward. The sobbing again recurred, and the fingers of the sufferer took a tight grasp of those of the consoler. Then the afflicted form swayed so helplessly that Adrian felt bound to support it with his arm, and in a moment the head of Jacomina reposed quietly upon his breast.

"What is it, 'Meintje; tell me?"

There was no reply. Adrian looked down upon the sorrow-bowed head and felt that the growing lassitude of the girl called for firmer support, which was at once forthcoming. The experience was new and alarming but, taken all round, he liked it. Jacomina was no longer formidable; in a few moments he forgot that he had ever been afraid of her.

"Come, Jacomyn', tell me what is the matter."

“Oh, Adrian,—I am afraid to tell you for fear you would despise me.”

“Despise you? No, you know I could never do that.”

“I am so unhappy because—because you used to like me so much, and now you never speak to me.”

Jacomina had now come to believe in the genuineness of her own woe, so she fell into a flood of real and violent tears. Adrian gradually gathered her into his arms, and she allowed herself to be consoled. After a very few minutes a full understanding was arrived at; then Jacomina recovered herself with remarkable rapidity, and recollected that the wagons were far ahead. Adrian’s shyness had by this time completely gone, so much so that Jacomina had some difficulty in getting him to make a start. In fact she had to escape from his arms by means of a subterfuge and dart away along the road. Her lover did not lose much time in following her. The course was interrupted by amatory interludes whenever the wayside boskage was propitious, so it was not before the outspanning took place that the wagons were reached.

When the blushing pair stood before Uncle Diederick, that man of experiences did not need to have matters explained to him.

“Well, Jacomina,” he said, “I’ll have to see about getting a wife myself now. But you need not be afraid on account of Aunt Emerencia; no one, who is not a fool, buys an old mare when he can get a young one for the same price.”

Uncle Diederick, who had not been to Cape Town since the days of his early youth, was very much impressed by everything he saw, but by nothing so much as the chemists’ shops. He never got tired at gazing at the rows of bottles with their various coloured contents. He wandered from one drug emporium to another, until he made the acquaintance of an affable young assistant who dispensed with an engaging air from behind a counter deeply laden with wondrous appliances and enticing compounds. This young man loved experiment for its own sake, and he had a wide field for the exercise of his hobby among the poorer classes, who usually came to him for panaceas for their minor ills.

As Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel, Uncle Diederick sat on a high-legged stool in the chemist’s shop, drinking in greedily the lore which fell from the young man’s lips, and making notes of the same in a tattered pocket-book, with a very stumpy pencil. Thus Uncle Diederick widened his medical knowledge considerably, until he felt that all worth knowing of the healing art was now at his command. The young man was the only one who suffered; his moral character became sadly deteriorated owing to the reverence with which Uncle Diederick regarded him, and the wrapt attention with which every essay of his was observed and recorded.

Eventually Uncle Diederick placed an order worth about ten pounds at the shop, and obtained copious directions as to treatment of the different maladies which the contents of each bulky bottle might be expected to cure.

The wagons had outspanned on the mountain slope, not far below the du Plessis’ dwelling. Jacomina was much impressed at the luxuriousness of Elsie’s surroundings and the quality of the stuff of which her garments were made. Gertrude and Helena tried to be civil and attentive to Jacomina and Adrian but—well, Jacomina was not long in seeing that the two town-bred girls were much more attractive than she was herself, and she did not care to appear at a disadvantage before her lover. Elsie she did not at first feel jealous of. As she expressed it to Adrian, the blind girl reminded her of the great peak at the head of the Tanqua valley, when it was covered with snow in winter. One day, however, she observed a look upon Adrian’s face as he was regarding his cousin, which made her resolve to hurry on the wedding at all hazards.

At the lower end of Plein Street was a shop, a mere contemplation of the contents of which filled Jacomina’s soul with satisfaction. It was a large emporium, specially stocked and arranged for the purpose of supplying the needs of the farmers visiting the metropolis. At this establishment produce of all kinds was purchased, the value being usually taken out in goods—a double profit thus being secured by the management. Everything—from hardware to drapery, from groceries to hymn-books could here be purchased.

It was at the establishment described that Uncle Diederick and Adrian had disposed of their respective loads of produce, and Jacomina had had a certain sum placed to her credit in the books. Each day she would spend several hours wandering through the store, from one bewildering room to another, and now and then making a small purchase after such protracted deliberation and examination as drove the assistants well over the bounds of distraction. The object which most fascinated Jacomina was a dummy attired in gorgeous bridal array and enclosed in a glazed frame. This model, strange to say, bore a remote resemblance to Jacomina herself, and might have easily passed for an intentional likeness had its inane simper been changed into a smart and decidedly wide-awake expression.

No youthful artist hovered, fascinated, before Milo’s Venus so devotedly as did Jacomina before this glass shrine in which seemed to be housed the Goddess of Love. She breathed no conscious prayer to the deity; yet it was in one of her ecstasies of worship that an inspiration came to her which eventuated in propitiously bringing about the end she had in view.

Jacomina fell into bad spirits, and grew cold to her lover. Adrian became distressed and redoubled his attentions. Jacomina one day arranged so that she met Adrian on his way to the city. She tried to avoid him, but he pursued her and persuaded her to accompany him for the sake of the walk, which was to be to the shop of perennial attractions. As the pair entered the establishment, Jacomina hesitated for an instant, bent her head and seemed as though about to retrace her steps into the street. A wild hope surged up in the breast of a counter-clerk who had seen her approach, and now thought he was going to have a respite.

Adrian became perplexed and bent over Jacomina’s bowed head with solicitude. Then, with a mighty effort she

managed to raise a blush; lifting her face, when she had succeeded, to that of her lover for a ravishing instant. After a pause she allowed herself to be reluctantly drawn into the building.

Before the door, which led into the drapery department—which Adrian had not previously visited, stood the shrine, and from it the goddess beamed down upon the pair with inane benignity. Adrian caught a glimpse of the ravishing form, and was at once struck by the resemblance it bore to his beloved. A wild tumult seethed up in his ingenuous breast. Just like that, he felt, Jacomina would look if similarly attired. The embarrassed damsel moved away, causing consternation behind the counter she approached, and left her spell-bound adorer gaping.

Adrian transacted his business with masculine promptitude, and then sought for Jacomina, whom he found at a counter absorbed in the examination of many coils of ribbon. But she had executed the real business she had visited the shop for to her entire satisfaction, so she went away with her lover at once, leaving behind her a general sense of relief.

Adrian tried to steer his course for an exit past the shrine, but Jacomina knew it would be a better move to get out by another door. When they were in the street Adrian began to refer to the subject which had caused such a ferment in his bosom:

“Jacomyn—that girl in the white dress. I wonder who made her. She looked just like you.”

“Ach, Adrian,—how can you joke so?”

“Jacomina,—she’s really just like you, only not half so pretty. I—I—I’d like to see you in a dress like that, Jacomina.”

“Ach, Adrian,—how can you talk like that? It’s only town girls that ever dress like that and then only—”

“But, Jacomyn,—when we get married you might buy that very dress and put it on. I—I—I wonder if they’d sell it. They might easily make another for the figure in the glass case.”

Jacomina sighed deeply, and looked down with an air of mingled dejection and confusion.

“That dress will be old before I will want it,” she said.

“How can you talk like that? Why, I want you to put a dress like that on very soon.”

Jacomina sighed deeply and did not speak for a while. Then she sadly said—raising, as she spoke, her eyes to Adrian’s emotion-lit face:

“I know that my father will go to live at the old place as soon as we return, and it will be years and years before he will ever come to Cape Town again. No, Adrian,—you had better forget me, and look out for some girl whose father will be able to bring her to Cape Town soon. I do not want you to be bound to one who may have to keep you waiting such a long, long time.”

The sentence ended with a sob. They had now reached beyond the outskirts of the dwellings, and were on a pathway which meandered between patches of scrub. At an appropriate spot Jacomina darted in behind a thicket, sank with every appearance of exhaustion on to a stone, and burst into tears.

“Leave me,—leave me,”—she sobbed, as her lover, fondly solicitous, attempted to console her. “I have had a dream; I know I shall never be able to come to Cape Town again. Go away, Adrian, and find some girl who will not have to keep you waiting for years and then die without making you happy.”

Adrian became seriously alarmed. Like most of his class, he was a firm believer in dreams. Jacomina became more wildly dear at the thought of losing her. His mind sought distractedly for an expedient to avert the threatened doom. Then the memory of the goddess flitted across his brain and gave him an inspiration.

“Jacomina,—I will buy that dress and we can be married at once. I will go straight back now and ask the price of it.”

Jacomina feebly shook her head, but surrendered herself insensibly to her lover’s embrace. Then followed hotly-pressed argument on his side, feebly, but mournfully combated on hers. Eventually she agreed to leave the matter in the joint hands of her lover and her father. She then allowed herself to be led home, leaning heavily on the arm of her enraptured adorer. Both were equally happy; each had gained that point the attainment of which was most desired.

No difficulty was experienced in obtaining Uncle Diederick’s consent to speedy nuptials. Much distress was, however, felt by Adrian when he found, on calling at the emporium next day, that the nuptial robe of the goddess had been purchased by another prospective bride. When he entered the establishment he found the goddess in a lamentable state. The dress, the veil and the wreath of orange blossoms had disappeared. The head and face were intact, but the rest of her once-ravishing form was little else than a wiry skeleton,—not constructed upon any known anatomical principles.

Adrian’s heart sank; he thought of Jacomina’s dream. He had made much capital out of the garment and its accessories—he had, in fact, used the goddess as a kind of battering ram wherewith to level Jacomina’s supposed objections to a speedy union; now he thought in his innocence that Jacomina would draw back from the performance of her side of the contract. After hurrying from the emporium with a sinking heart he arrived, pale and breathless, at the wagon. Uncle Diederick happened to be in the City, engaged in the selection of drugs.

“Jacomina,”—panted Adrian, “the dress is gone—sold to someone else—and it will take a week before another can be made. Do you think Pa will wait for a few days more?”

Uncle Diederick had this peculiarity: if he announced his intention of doing any given thing on a given day, he stuck to his word; nothing short of absolute necessity would stop him. It was this that Adrian had in view. Uncle Diederick had said that he meant to start on the following Monday; it was now Tuesday; wedding or no wedding it was quite certain that he would not alter his plans.

Jacomina put on the look of a virgin saint who had just been condemned to the lions.

“No, Adrian,—you know Pa *never* waits.” She spoke with a resigned sigh.

“But, my little heart,—it will only be for two days.”

“Pa *never* waits. No, Adrian—we will bid each other good-bye—you must forget me—My dream—If it had not been this it would have been something else—Good-bye, Adrian—Think of me sometimes—”

She dissolved in tears. Adrian sprang to her side and tried to comfort her, but she was beyond consolation for a long time. Then she ceased weeping and sat with her eyes fixed steadfastly on the far away.

“No, Adrian,—I had another dream last night. I thought I met an old Bushwoman gathering roots in the veld, and she said to me that if any delay came you and I would never be married. Good-bye, Adrian,—I would only bring you bad luck. Go and find some other girl—but don’t—forget me—altogether.”

The last words were spoken with a sobbing catch. Adrian became agonised. Jacomina, exhausted by her emotions, allowed him to possess her waist and draw her to him.

“If you would not mind—Of course I know it would not be what I had promised—but as you have had those dreams;—if you would not mind being married in another dress;—we might get married on Monday, after all. Come, Jacomyntye, what does the dress matter?”

Jacomina allowed herself to be persuaded, leaving her lover under the impression that she was conferring a great favour upon him. But the shadow of an abiding sadness was upon her visage, as though she saw the hand of Fate uplifted to strike her. She told her lover that he was not to hope too much—that she felt as though something were sure to intervene at the last moment. This made Adrian feverishly anxious that the ceremony should take place and, had it been possible, he would have marched down to the church and had the knot tied at once.

Jacomina told him that she did not want to trouble her father, who was enjoying himself so much, with her forebodings, and accordingly, her manner in Uncle Diederick’s presence was as cheerful as usual. Adrian was much impressed by this evidence of filial feeling. He grew more and more enamoured as the hours dragged slowly past, and shuddered increasingly at the imminent catastrophe to which Jacomina continually alluded when the lovers were alone.

At length the blissful day dawned. A garment somewhat less ambitious than that which had clothed the goddess in the glass case had been hurriedly put together for the occasion, Adrian calling on the sempstress several times each day, to enquire how the important work was progressing. After the ceremony, the bridal party returned to the wagon, and thence to the du Plessis’ house, where a small feast had been prepared.

Jacomina, feeling herself at a disadvantage, was anxious to get away. Adrian was speechless with bliss, and had no eyes for anyone but his bride. He did not appear to advantage in his new store-clothes, which did not suit his stalwart form nearly as well as the rough, home-made garments to which he was accustomed. Uncle Diederick enjoyed himself immensely. He had never previously tasted champagne; under the influence of the seductive wine he nearly went the length of proposing marriage to Helena.

In the afternoon a start was made. Uncle Diederick’s wagon had been comfortably fitted up for Elsie. Gertrude and Helena accompanied their friend as far as the first outspan place, where a farewell libation of coffee was poured out from tin pannikins. The wagon with the newly-married pair started first; that of Uncle Diederick remaining until the pony-carriage, which was sent out to fetch the two girls, arrived.

The wagon with its green sides and long white tent rolled heavily away over the sand. The two girls gazed through their tears until this ship of the desert which bore back to the unheeding wilds this strange and beautiful creature who had brightened their home during four happy years, slowly disappeared.

Chapter Fifteen.

Elsie’s Return to Elandsfontein.

It was late in the evening of a misty, depressing day, when Elsie arrived at the Elandsfontein homestead. The same air of unkempt mournfulness brooded over the place. Aletta, who had grown stout and frowsy, had prepared herself to meet her errant niece with bitter reproaches, but one glance at Elsie’s stately presence and superior attire, proved sufficient to demoralise the aunt.

Aletta had a furtive, crushed look. The long years of misery and isolation had left their mark upon her. The only thing which kept her above the level of the mere animal was the love she still bore her husband, in spite of his consistent neglect Gideon had spent the greater portion of the past four years in wandering vaguely through desert spaces, the more remote the better. In fact he only returned to the farm from time to time to refit his wagon or renew his cattle or stores. On each occasion of his departure Aletta had made up her mind that she would never see him again. He had now been absent for several months, and none could say when he was likely to return.

But Aletta's curiosity soon got the better of her awe, so one day she began, tearfully and apologetically, to ask Elsie about her adventures. Why had she gone—how could she leave them all in such a state of fear and uncertainty—how could she, a white girl, run away with a Bushman and thus bring disgrace on respectable people? The questions came out in an incoherent torrent, which ended in a flood of tears.

"I went on account of my father," replied Elsie.

"But why did you go without telling us?"

"Had I told you, you would have stopped me."

"But you don't mean to tell me that you and Kanu walked all the way to Cape Town. Why, it takes ten days to reach Cape Town with a span of fat oxen."

"Yes, Kanu and I walked all the way."

"But where is Kanu."

"I cannot say; I thought to have found him here."

"We thought he had taken you away and murdered you. Had he come back here he would have been shot."

"Poor Kanu; I am glad he did not return."

"But, my child, there must be more to tell. Why did you go just then, and why did you never let us know where you were?"

"There is much to tell, but the time to tell it has not yet come. When my father returns you will, perhaps, know all, but until he bids me speak I cannot."

The blind girl's words made Aletta quail. The return of Stephanus was above all the thing she most dreaded. Deep down in her consciousness lay a conviction of Stephanus' innocence and her husband's guilt. This she had never admitted even to herself. The first suspicion of the dreadful truth began to grow upon her immediately after the trial; of late years suspicion had developed into certainty. Her knowledge of the deeply-wronged man led her to infer that he would return raging for vengeance, and that her husband's life would inevitably pay the penalty of his sin. Many a time had she poured out frantic petitions to Heaven that Stephanus might die in prison, and thus free her husband from the shadow that darkened his life. To think now that the event she dreaded so sorely was about to happen within the space of a few months, turned her heart to stone.

A few weeks, however, of Elsie's society made her think that possibly her conviction that Stephanus would come back filled with an implacable desire for vengeance was a mistaken one. The pledge which Elsie had made to her father sealed her lips on the subject of his forgiveness of the wrong that had been done him, but the influence of her strong, sweet nature came more and more to still the terror that had recently made Aletta's life more of a misery to her than ever. The only hope of the unhappy woman now lay in the possibility of being able to influence Stephanus through the child that he loved so dearly, and she meant to pour out her whole soul, with all its doubts and suspicions to Elsie before her father's return, and beg for her intercession.

Nearly four months elapsed after Elsie's arrival before her uncle returned. One night, late, the footsteps of a horse were heard, and soon afterwards Gideon entered the house with weary tread. He had left the wagon some distance behind. When Aletta told him of Elsie's return he started violently and turned deadly pale. He did not ask where his niece had been. As his wife descanted with nervous volubility upon the mystery, and explained how she had been unsuccessful in eliciting from Elsie any particulars of her flight and subsequent adventures, Gideon found himself wondering whether it would not be possible for him to get away secretly and return to the wilderness, thus to avoid meeting the accusing look of the blind eyes that he remembered so well and dreaded so sorely. But Elsie just then stepped softly into the room.

"Where is Uncle Gideon?" she said in a soft voice.

Gideon gazed in speechless astonishment at Elsie. His apprehensive eye wandered over her graceful form and her pallid, beautiful face. He noticed how her figure had developed and how the gold had deepened in her hair. As Aletta tremblingly led her forward to the bench upon which Gideon was seated the unhappy man quailed and tried vainly to avoid the blind, accusing eyes, which seemed to seek his and to hold them when found. Elsie lifted her hands and placed them on his shoulders.

"Uncle Gideon," she said, "my father sent me back to live with you until his release."

Gideon murmured some unintelligible words. Elsie passed her hands lightly over his features. Aletta quietly left the room.

"Yes," said Elsie, "you have suffered; I will try to comfort you, Uncle Gideon."

A sense of immediate relief came over the unhappy man. It was now clear to him that Stephanus could not have told her the truth about the tragedy at the spring, or else she would never have met him and spoken to him as she did. So far it was well, but the fact of Stephanus not having taken her into his confidence was a proof of the implacability of his mind. But in an instant his mind rushed to another conclusion: this blind creature who loved her wronged father so utterly,—was it not certain that her desire for vengeance must be as keen as his? But he would balk them both by plunging again into the wilderness—so far, this time, that he would never be able to return.

“A good way to comfort one,” he growled ungraciously, “to wander away with a Bushman and make us run all over the country looking for you.”

“Would you like to know, truly, why I went, Uncle Gideon?”

“Oh, as you are back all right now and have had enough to eat, wherever you have been, it does not matter; you can tell me some other time.—Only you must not do such a thing again.”

“No,—there will be no need for me to do the like again.”

Gideon left the room, feeling more and more puzzled. Each one of Elsie’s ambiguous remarks sent his speculations farther and farther afield. One thing only was clear to him,—it was time to carry out that intention which had been gradually growing of late years as time went by and his brother did not, as the miserable man had confidently expected, die in prison. This was the intention, previously unformulated, of finally leaving wife, home and everything else and trekking to some unknown spot far beyond the great, mysterious Gariep,—to some spot so distant that his brother’s vengeance would not be able to reach him, and there spending the remnant of his miserable days.

To do Gideon but justice, the strongest element in his dread of meeting Stephanus was not physical but moral. He felt he could not bear to confront the stern accusation which he pictured as arising in the injured man’s piercing eyes. He feared death, for he dared not meet his God with this unrepented crime on his soul, but he feared it less than the eyes of his injured brother,—that brother whom he had robbed of ten precious years of life.

Chapter Sixteen.

Gideon’s Flight to the Wilderness.

After Gideon had become somewhat accustomed to Elsie’s presence that awe with which she had at first inspired him began to lessen. Now that he meant to go away finally nothing she knew or could do mattered to him very much. He was fond of Aletta in a way,—more or less as one is fond of a faithful dog, but she was the only being in the wide world who cared for him, so he felt the prospect of parting from her very keenly. He determined to make a full confession of his transgression to her before leaving, feeling persuaded that thenceforth she would look upon him with abhorrence and thus would not sorrow at his departure. The thought that he was about to destroy his patient wife’s regard for his lonely self was not the least of Gideon’s troubles.

He tried to carry off his distress with an air of unconcern which, however, did not deceive anyone. As the preparations for his departure were being hurried towards completion he became more talkative than usual. Aletta, at the near prospect of the parting, was sunk in the depths of misery. Adrian and his wife who resided with Uncle Gideon, now and then visited the homestead. Jacomina had refused to leave her father, on the pretext that her assistance in his medical practice was indispensable. The true reason was, however, that she wanted, if possible, to prevent him marrying again.

Elsie, to whom the night was as the day, continued her old habit of wandering abroad after all the others had gone to bed. She invariably dressed in light colours and used to flit like a ghost among the trees. Gideon had dubbed her “White Owl,” and he never addressed her as anything else.

Two days before Gideon’s intended departure the three were sitting at breakfast. A messenger who had been despatched to the residence of the Field Cornet, some forty miles away, was seen approaching. Gideon was in one of his forced sardonic moods.

“Aletta,” he said, “your eyes are red again; have you been boiling soap?”

“No, Gideon; it is not only the steam from the soap-pot that reddens the eyes.”

“Has the maid spoilt a batch of bread? If she has, *her* eyes ought to be red and not yours.”

“No, Gideon,—the bread has been well baked.”

“What is the matter, then? Sunday, Monday and Tuesday your face is like a pumpkin when the rain is falling; Wednesday, Thursday and Friday the water is still running; Saturday it is not dry. Did you ever laugh in your life?”

“It is long since I have heard you laugh, Gideon.”

“I? I can laugh now,—Well,—you have never seen me weep.”

“Would to God you did rather than laugh like that.”

“Uncle Gideon,” said Elsie, “one day your tears will flow.”

“When will that day come, White Owl?”

“When my father’s prison doors are opened.”

Gideon glared at her, terror and fury writ large upon his distorted face. Just then a knock was heard; Aletta arose and went to the door where she found the returned messenger, who had just off-saddled his horse. She came back to the table and silently laid a letter before Gideon who, when he recognised the handwriting started violently. After looking at the letter for a few seconds he picked it up as though about to open it; then he flung the missive down and hurried

from the room.

“Elsie,” said Aletta in agitated tones, “here is a letter from your father.”

Elsie sprang to her feet.

“Read it,—read it,—Aunt,” she said, “perhaps the prison doors are open.”

Aletta opened the letter with shaking fingers and read it aloud laboriously and in an agitated voice:—

“My Brother Gideon,

“In three days from now I shall once more walk God’s earth—a free man. Because I worked well and did as I was bidden without question, my time of punishment has been shortened. From our cousins at Stellenbosch I have obtained a wagon and oxen, by means of which I shall at once hurry home. When this reaches you I shall be well on my way. My first business must be to see you.

“We two have a reckoning to make together. It will be best that we be alone when it is made.

“Your brother,

“Stephanus.”

Aletta uttered a moan and bent forward with her face on the table. Elsie, with a rapt smile on her face stood up and laid her hand upon her aunt’s shoulder. Then a hurried step was heard and Gideon entered the room.

Seeing the letter lying upon the table where it had fallen from his wife’s nerveless hand, Gideon picked it up and hurriedly read it through. Then, with a curse, he flung it down.

“Aletta,” he cried, “I am going at once. I cannot meet him. God—why was I born this man’s brother?—Nine long years thirsting for my blood.”

“It is not your blood that he wants, Uncle Gideon,” said Elsie in a calm tone.

“Yes,—yes, Gideon,” said Aletta, “go away for a time. I will keep him here and try to soften his heart.”

“Yes,—keep him here for a time—for only a little time—but I shall go away for ever. I shall go where never a white man’s foot has trod, and when I can go no farther I will dig my own grave.”

“Do not go, Uncle Gideon,” said Elsie, “stay and meet him.”

“Silence, blind tiger’s cub that wants my blood. Get out of my sight.”

“You will not go so far but that he will find you,” said Elsie as she moved from the room. “He will have his reckoning. He does not want your blood.”

“Aletta, I have told them to inspan the wagon and start. Put in my food and bedding at once. When the wagon has gone we will talk; I will follow it on horseback. I have things to tell you that will make you hate me and wish never to see my face again.”

“Nothing could make that happen.—Gideon, I know—”

“Wait,—let me see when this letter was written—Christ! it is thirteen days old,—he must be nearly here—”

Gideon rushed from the room and began to hurry the servants in their preparations for departure. The oxen had just been driven down from their grazing ground high on the mountain side. The wagon had been hurriedly packed with bedding, water, food and other stores. The mob of horses were driven in from the kraal; Gideon gave hurried directions to the Hottentot servants as to which were to be selected. Soon the wagon was lumbering heavily up the steep mountain track towards the unknown, mysterious North, in the direction where Gideon had so sorely and vainly sought for the dwelling-place of Peace.

The horses were now caught and Gideon’s favourite hunting steed saddled up. The spare horses were led after the wagon by a Hottentot after-rider. Then Gideon entered the house to take farewell of his wife.

He bent down and kissed her almost passionately on the lips.

“Aletta,” he said, “you will not understand me; nobody could. What I have done will seem to you the worst of sins;—yet to me it was right—and yet it has hung like a millstone about my neck all these years.”

Aletta seized one of his hands between hers.

“It will fall from you if you repent,” she said.

“Repent. Never. He deserved it; I would do it again to-morrow. Aletta,” (here he moved towards the door, trying to disengage his hand) “Stephanus never meant to shoot me; the gun went off by accident. I accused him falsely and he has suffered all these years for a thing he did not do. Now,—good-bye.”

He again tried to escape, but Aletta held him fast.

“Come back, come back, Gideon,—I have known this for years.”

“Known it?”

“Yes,—and so has Elsie, although no word of it has passed between us.”

“Do not think that I regret it; do not think that I repent. He deserved it all, and more. Think of all he did to me.—And yet I fear to meet him.—That blind girl—she wants to dip her white fingers in my blood—and yet I do not fear his killing me. Do you know why I am running away from him?”

“Yes, you fear to meet his eyes.”

“That is it,—his eyes. I am not afraid of death at his hands—although I suppose God will send me to burn in Hell for doing the work He keeps for His own hands.—And he means to kill me when he finds me—the White Owl knows it—but his eyes—Nine years chained up with blacks, thinking the whole time of his wrong and his revenge.—You remember how big and fierce his eyes used to get in anger.—I have seen them across the plains and the mountains for nine years, getting bigger and fiercer. They are always glaring at me; I fear them more than his bullet.”

“Yes, Gideon, it is well that you go away for a time. I will try what I can do. He is getting to be an old man now and anger does not burn so hotly in the old as in the young. I will not speak to him now, but when he has been free for a time I will kneel to him and beg him to forgive for Marta’s sake, and Elsie’s. Elsie does not hate you, Gideon.”

“She must, if she knows what I have done to her father. She hates me. You heard what she said about his having his reckoning. Were his anger to cool she would light it anew with those eyes of hers that glow like those of a lion in the dark. But anger such as his does not cool.”

“Gideon, you are wrong about Elsie; she loves her father, but she will not counsel him to take revenge. Oh, Gideon, we are old now, and this hatred has kept us in cold and darkness all our lives. One little, happy year; then the first quarrel,—and ever since misery and loneliness. If he forgives, you will come back. Do not take away my only hope.”

“He will never forgive.”

“I will follow him about and kneel to him every day until he forgives. Then you will come back and we will again be happy—just a little happiness and peace before we die.”

“Happy, Aletta? There is no more happiness for us. He—he killed our joy years back, for ever. I go away now and I shall never return. Get Adrian and his wife to come and live here. For years I have known that this would happen. At first I hoped that he would die; then I knew that God was keeping him alive and well and strong to punish me for doing His work. I have made over the farm and stock to you; the papers are in the camphor-wood box. Good-bye,—we must never meet again.”

“My husband, the desert, holds spoor a long time. The sand-storm blots it out for a distance, but it is found again farther on. When Stephanus forgives I will follow you and bring you back.”

“No, Aletta, we will meet no more. When I die my bones will lie where no Christian foot has ever trod.”

“Gideon, on the day when Stephanus forgives I will go forth seeking you, and I will seek until I find you or until I die in the waste.”

When Gideon van der Walt reached the mountain saddle at the head of the kloof, across which the track which led into the desert plains of Bushmanland passed, he turned and took a long look at his homestead. Then his glance wandered searchingly over the valley in which his life had been passed. There it lay, green and fertile,—for the south-western rains had fallen heavily and often during the last few months. The black, krantzed ranges glowed in the noontide sun. The last spot his eye rested upon before he crossed the saddle was the little patch of vivid foliage surrounding the spring on the tiny ripples of which his life and the lives of so many others had been wrecked. Just on the edge of the copse the stream seemed to hang like a bright jewel, as the sunlight glinted from the pure, limpid water.

As Gideon turned away his eyes grew moist for an instant, and he felt a queer, unbidden feeling of almost tenderness for the brother with whom among these hills and valleys he had played and hunted in the days of his innocence, creeping like a tendril about his heart. But he crushed the feeling down, and rode on with his hat pressed over his eyebrows.

On the other side of the mountain pass the outlook was different. He was on the north-eastern limit of the coast rains. Bushmanland depended for its uncertain rainfall upon thunderstorms from the north in the summer season. But for two years no rain had fallen anywhere near the southern fringe of the desert, so the plains which stretched forth northward from Gideon’s feet were utterly void of green vegetation.

To one familiar with the desert the sight before him had an awful significance; it meant that there was no water, nor any vegetation worth considering for at least a hundred and fifty miles. Gideon had known, by the fact of the larger game flocking down into the valleys, that Bushmanland was both verdureless and waterless, and that anyone who should attempt to cross it would incur a terrible risk.

But nothing before him could compete for terror with what he was fleeing from. Setting spurs to his horse Gideon passed the wagon; then he rode ahead at a walk, the patient oxen following with the rumbling wagon, upon his tracks.

Chapter Seventeen.

The Return of Stephanus.

“Come, child, it is past our time for sleep,” said Aletta. She was sitting on the sofa in the *voorhuis*. It was midnight of the day of Gideon’s departure. Elsie stood at the open window which faced the south. The night was still and sultry and a dense fog covered the earth.

“I shall not go to bed to-night, Aunt. My father draws near. His wagon has reached the sand-belt where the dead tree stands.”

“Nonsense, child, the sand-belt is an hour’s ride on horseback from here. Let us pray to God for sleep and good dreams, and then lie down until the day comes.”

“I shall not go to bed to-night; my father is coming.”

“Nonsense, nonsense,—you cannot hear at such a distance.”

“I can hear, and the sound stills the long pain in my heart. My father draws near and nearer.”

“Well—well—perhaps it is true—perhaps—”

She fell upon her knees and threw up her clasped hands. “Oh God, let him not come before my husband is far away. Oh God,—I am blameless.—Grant me only this.”

Elsie approached her with a smile, bent down and encircled her with a protecting arm and then drew her gently to a seat.

“Aunt,—let me talk to you: Do you know that I am often very glad that I was born blind?”

“Glad you are blind?”

“Yes, because I have knowledge of many things unknown to people who can see.”

“What kind of things?”

“Many things of many kinds. For instance:—to-night you cannot see the stars; a dry mist has rolled up from the sea since we have been in this room; it covers the valley like a blanket. But the hill-tops are clear; they are hidden from you, but I can see them—and the stars above, as well.—And my father draws nearer.”

“God’s mercy forbid. Three days,—three short days is all I ask for.”

“Where you see but clouds I see the stars; where you see danger I see joy. You fear my father without cause.”

“Without cause.—Nine long years—no cause—?”

“There was cause enough, but my father is not angry.”

“Not angry? Hark. Did you not hear a sound?”

“Yes, I hear the wild ostriches booming in the valley.”

“Close the window and come away, child; the darkness is full of horror. You are right not to go to bed. I could not sleep to-night.”

“Why do you fear the open window, Aunt?”

“The night is dark.” She shuddered and crouched into the corner of the sofa.

“The day is ever dark to me, yet I fear not.”

“Last night the dogs howled and I saw white shapes flitting among the trees where the graves are.”

“What of that? Shapes often flit about me; I call them and they are here; I bid them depart and they are gone.”

“Child,—you are blind and thus cannot understand.—Hark.—Is not that a sound of shouting, afar off?”

“It is but the jackals howling on the hill-side.—The time has not yet come.—But, Aunt,—let me tell you farther of the things I know.”

“Not to-night,—I am in terror enough as it is.”

“What I have to tell you will not terrify you, for you are guiltless.”

“Guiltless,—yes; but God visits the sins of the guilty upon the guiltless. But it is not for myself that I fear.”

“One of the things which I see with clearness is that there is no reason for your terror.”

Aletta bowed her head forward on her hands. The candle had almost burnt out; only a faint, uncertain flicker arose

out of the socket. She started, and lifted her head:

“Listen,—that is surely a sound.”

“Yes,—the springbucks came over the mountain last week; you hear the bellowing of the rams on the upland ledge and the clashing of their horns as they fight—But I can hear that my father draws nearer.”

“If he be not coming in anger, why does he hasten thus? But you cannot hear him; the sound is in your own ears.”

“May not one hasten in love as well as in hate? The wagon has now reached the rocky pass between the kopjes. It will soon be here.”

Aletta arose and walked over to the window. She linked her arm in that of Elsie and tried to draw the blind girl away from her post.

“Come to bed,—I am not so terrified as I was a while ago.”

“Hark.—Even the ears of one who is not blind can hear that.”

A light breeze was streaming up the valley, driving the mist before it in broken masses. From the rough, stony pass could be heard the heavy thumpings of the massive wheels. Aletta once more sank to her knees in agony.

“Oh God,—you have brought him here.—Oh God,—soften his heart—”

“Aunt,—God heard your prayer long before you spoke it. His heart has been softened.”

“No, no, child. I hear anger in the noise of the wheels and in the clappings of the whip.—Nine years—nine years—and innocent.—Oh God, soften his heart,—or let my husband get away.—Elsie,—I charge you not to tell your father what road my husband has gone.—Tell him that your uncle went a month ago.—Let us go to the huts and warn the servants—”

“Aunt,—wait just a little while and you will see. I shall walk down the road and meet my father.”

“Yes,—yes,—and, Elsie,—pray to him for the sake of a lonely old woman who seems to have never known joy.—Go, child—but wait—No, I cannot stay here alone; I fear the darkness.”

“Come with me, Aunt.”

“Yes,—yes,—but what if it be not his wagon?”

“It is my father’s wagon. Come.” The breeze had freshened; the mist had been rolled out of the valley, leaving it clear to the stars, but the vapour hung in wisps from every mountain head and streamed away white in the shining of the rising moon. As the two walked down the road it was she who was blind that walked forward with unfaltering steps, leading her who could see, but who faltered at every yard.

Nearer and nearer came the clattering wagon, and the driver’s voice as he shouted to the team could be clearly heard. Aletta sank down upon a stone at the wayside and Elsie, after walking on for a few paces, stood motionless in the middle of the road. Her loosened hair floated on the wind; her tall figure, clad in fluttering white, made a striking picture in the light of the now fully arisen moon.

The leader threw up his hand and stopped the team with a call; Stephanus sprang from the wagon box, ran forward and clasped Elsie to his breast.

“My little child—grown into a woman—her face shining as brightly as the sun she has never seen, and making night like day.—But where is my brother—where is Gideon—?”

Aletta staggered forward and knelt in the road at his feet.

“Oh, Stephanus,—have mercy and let him be.—He fled when he heard you were coming.—Have mercy.—He has suffered too—”

“We both need the mercy of God.—Aletta, do not kneel to me.—Where is my brother Gideon?”

He drew the half-unconscious woman to her feet and she burst into a storm of tears.

“Oh, Stephanus,” she said, “you are not deceiving me?—Tell me,—have you forgiven the wrong?”

“Yes, Aletta,—as I hope to be forgiven. Whither did Gideon go? Let me follow him.”

“Thank God,—thank God, who has heard my prayer.”

Chapter Eighteen.

How Kanu Prospered.

Kanu arose from his hard couch on the floor of the cavern wherein he dwelt with his followers and clambered to the top of the rocky ridge which capped the krantz at the foot of which the cavern was situated. It was hunger and thirst

which drove him forth thus restlessly under the midnight stars. Every night for more than a month he had sat for hours at this spot. Rain had not fallen for nearly two years and the little brackish fountain in the kloof below, on which these Bushmen were solely dependent for water to keep body and soul together, had shrunk and shrunk until it was reduced to a mere trickle. As the fountain shrank it became more and more brackish; so much so that after his long day of unsuccessful hunting Kanu had been unable to quench his thirst at it.

When he reached the top of the ridge the Bushman instinctively turned his gaze to the north-east. The sky was absolutely cloudless and the stars were shining and throbbing as they only shine and throb over the desert. He sat long motionless and was about to return, sick at soul, to the cave, when he caught his breath short, and his heart gave a great throb, for a faint flash lit up the horizon for a instant. Another flash, brighter than the first, soon followed. Kanu clambered swiftly down the steep hill-side, wakened the other cave-dwellers and informed them of what he had seen. In a few seconds the cave was the scene of bustling activity, preparatory to an immediate migration.

These distant flashes of lightning had for the little clan—or rather family of Bushmen, an all-important significance, for they meant that in some distant region beyond the north-eastern horizon a thunderstorm was raging and thus the long drought had broken on the vast plains sloping northward to the mighty, mysterious Gariep.

The cave was situated in a spur of that rugged range of iron-black hills known as the Kamiesbergen, and which were now, after the long-protracted drought, covered with blackened stumps marking the spots where, after rain, the graceful sheaves of the “twa” grass grow. The Bushmen knew there was no chance of rain falling where they were, for their moisture came in the winter season in the form of wet mists from the sea. These never passed the limit of the hills. On the other hand, the only rains which visited the plains were those which swept down with the thunderstorms from the torrid north, when the great clouds advanced with roarings as though to smite the hills asunder but, within the compass of a vulture’s swoop, would be stopped as though by a wall of invisible adamant and sent reeling to the eastward.

It was now midsummer and the Bushmen well knew that they would never be able to survive in their present situation until midwinter, before which season no rain from the southward was to be expected. For some time they had realised that their only chance of escaping a death of terrible suffering lay in cutting the track of the first thunder shower which would, as they were well aware, be the track of the others soon following. Should they succeed in doing this they would revel in a belt of desert turned as though by magic into a smiling garden, full of game, and with many a rock-bottomed, sand-filled depression in which good water could be easily reached by burrowing.

Already the herds of famished game would be on the move, apprised by the lightning-sign of the falling of that rain which was to be their salvation:—springbucks,—flitting like ghosts under the late-risen moon; gemsbucks,—sore-footed from digging out with their hoofs the large tap-roots from which they get that supply of moisture that serves them in lieu of water to drink; hartebeests lumbering along with swift, ungainly stride, and other desert denizens in bewildering variety. Hanging on the flanks of the horde might be seen the gaunt, hungry lions, seeking in vain to quench their raging thirst in the blood of their emaciated victims.

When Kanu found that Elsie had disappeared from where he had left her among the rocks and bushes at the foot of Table Mountain, he took to the veldt with the intention of getting as far from the dwellings of civilised men as possible. He knew that if he returned to Elandsfontein and told the van der Walts his remarkable story he would never be believed, and that the consequences would be distinctly unpleasant, if not fatal, to him. So he exercised the utmost wariness, taking great precautions against the possibility of being observed by day when seeking food. It will, of course, be understood that he travelled only by night. Being a Bushman of intelligence Kanu reflected upon many things in the course of his exciting and wearisome journey. In his untutored ignorance he classified the Caucasian race arbitrarily into two categories,—the good and the bad. Elsie comprised within her own person the one category; all other Europeans fell into the other.

Cautiously feeling his way northward, Kanu made a wide détour to avoid passing anywhere near the Tanqua Valley, and then wandered vaguely on in the hope of falling in with some of his own race. This hope was realised one morning in a somewhat startling manner. Following some tracks which he had discovered leading up the stony side of a very steep mountain, he suddenly found himself confronted by a number of pygmies such as himself; each, however, with a drawn bow and an arrow which Kanu knew was most certainly poisoned, trained upon him at point-blank range.

Kanu at once did what was the only proper thing to do under the circumstances,—he cried out in the Bushman tongue that he was a friend and a brother, and then fell flat on his face and lay, with extended arms, awaiting death or the signal to arise. Then he heard the warriors consulting together as to whether they should summarily despatch him or lead him captive to the cave in which they dwelt and kill him there for the amusement of the non-combatant members of the little community. They decided in favour of the latter alternative and then Kanu knew that most probably his life would be spared.

But as yet he was not by any means out of the wood His vestiges of European clothing caused him to be suspected and, in the savage mind, suspicion and condemnation are not very far apart. Cases were familiar to all in which renegade sons of the desert had betrayed the hiding-places of their compatriots to their deadly enemies, the Boers, and it was quite possible that Kanu might turn out to be a traitor. But when the captive showed the unhealed stripes with which his back was still scored, the captors began to feel more kindly disposed towards him, and they eventually came to the conclusion that he was not a spy.

Later, when Kanu told his father’s name, and related the circumstances of the raid which swept his family from the face of the earth and made him a bondman to the hated Boer,—and when it turned out that old Nalb, the patriarch of the party, had once seen a picture painted by Kanu’s father who, though he had died comparatively young, had been a somewhat celebrated artist, the new arrival was accepted into full fellowship and made free of the cave and all its

contents.

The Bushman acknowledged no chieftain, nor was he bound by any tribal ties. Each family was independent of every other family and hunted on its own account. The little community into which Kanu found himself adopted consisted of eight men, seven women and fourteen children of various ages. They lived after the manner of their kind,—absolutely from hand to mouth, taking no thought for the morrow. Their movements about the country were determined by accidents of weather and the chase, but they retired from time to time to their cave in the Kamiesbergen, whenever the adventitious rains made the locality habitable. When they, or any of them, killed a large animal, they would not attempt to remove the meat, but would camp alongside the carcase and gorge until everything but the hair and the pulverised bones was finished. The family cave, besides being endeared by many associations, had the advantage of being in the vicinity of a spring which, although its water was rather brackish, had never been known to give out completely in the severest drought.

The cave had another great advantage,—that of being surrounded on all sides by a wide belt of desert, so the pygmies were not at all likely to be disturbed by inconvenient callers. It was spacious, and its walls were well adapted for the exercise of that remarkable art which the Bushman practised,—the art of painting. Here, on the wide natural panels were frescoed counterfeit presentments of men and all other animals with which the Bushmen were familiar, in more or less skilful outline. There was no attempt at anything like perspective, but some of the figures were drawn with spirit and showed considerable skill as well as an evident natural artistic faculty. The animals most frequently represented were the eland, the hartebeeste, the gemsbok and the baboon. One picture was a battle-piece and represented a number of men being hurled over a cliff. This was old Nalb’s handiwork, and was executed in commemoration of an attack by some strangers upon the ancestral cave, which was repulsed with great slaughter.

A few of the paintings were the work of itinerant artists, who sometimes, in seasons of plenty, wandered from cave to cave,—possibly in the interests of art,—even as Royal Academicians have found it necessary to visit the schools of Rome and Paris. Such paintings could be distinguished among the others by the hand-print of the artist in paint below each. They were usually somewhat better executed than the others, and often represented animals not common in the neighbourhood, but with whose proportions the artist had evidently familiarised himself in other and, perhaps, distant parts.

The paints used were ochres of different tints,—from white, ranging through several reds and browns, up to black. These were mixed with fat and with some vegetable substance to make the colours bite into the rock. Some of the most vivid tints were taken from those fossils known as coprolites, in which small kernels of ochreous substance are found to exist. The brush was made of the pinion feathers of small birds.

It was not long before Kanu rose to a position of eminence in the little clan. He took unto himself, as wife, Ksoa, a daughter of old Nalb and, when that venerable leader’s physical vigour began to decline, Kanu gradually came to be looked upon as his probable successor. His sojourn among the Boers, whilst it had told against his skill as a hunter, had sharpened his wits generally. Soon he became as expert as any in the tracking of game. Then he introduced a slight improvement in the matter of fixing an arrow-head to the shaft, which was immediately recognised by the superstitious Bushmen as an evidence of more than human ability. Thus, when old Nalb met his death from thirst, after finding that the store of water-filled ostrich-eggshells which he had cached a long time previously had been broached, Kanu was at once looked upon as the leader.

For a few seasons peace and plenty reigned. The locusts appeared year after year, on their way to devastate the cultivated portions of the Colony, and the Bushmen thanked their gods for the boon, with elaborate sacrifices in which Kanu officiated as high priest. Then came the drought, which was attributed to the fact of one of their number having allowed his shadow to fall upon a dying ostrich in the afternoon. Had this happened in the morning, it would not have mattered so much but, happening when the sun was going home to rest, and thus preventing the luminary from taking his lawful dues in the matter of supper, it was looked upon as likely to prove a deadly affront to all the spirits of the sky, who were the sun’s subjects. These spirits, who sent or withheld run as pleased their capricious minds, the Bushmen feared and constantly endeavoured to propitiate. The man guilty of this heinous offence was looked at askance by all, but was forgiven after elaborate and painful rites had been solemnised over him. Nevertheless, when the drought increased in intensity, and the children began to sicken from drinking the salt-charged water from the failing spring, the offender found it judicious to disappear.

As soon as the women had returned from the spring, bearing their bark nets full of ostrich-eggshells containing water,—the shells being closed with a wooden peg at each end, a start was made. The skins were rolled up into bundles and upon these were bound the earthen pots and the bags containing the very scanty store of grain. This grain was the seed of the “twa” grass, plundered from the store-houses of ants. The women and children were loaded to their utmost capacity of draught, whilst the men carried nothing but their bows and arrows, and their digging sticks. These last were pointed pegs of very hard wood, about eighteen inches long, stuck through round stones four or five inches in diameter, which had been pierced for the purpose. The object of the stone was to give the sticks weight in the digging.

The oldest of the women was charged with the important duty of carrying fire. The Bushman knew no metal and, consequently, had no tinderbox, so his only way of kindling fire was by the long and laborious process of twirling a stick with the point inserted in a log, between the palms of the hands. Thus whenever a move was made from one place to another, one of the party was appointed fire-carrier. When the two sticks which invariably were carried had nearly burnt out, a halt was called and a fire lit from twigs; in this two fresh sticks were lighted; these would then be carried forward another stage. As a matter of fact Kanu had learnt the use of tinder from the Hottentots, and had, as a great miracle, kindled some dry and pulverised bark from a spark generated by striking a fragment of iron which he picked up at the spot where some European hunters had camped, upon a flake of quartz. But, after the principle enunciated by a modern philosopher, that it is a mistake to call down fire from Heaven whenever you cannot lay your hand upon the matchbox, Kanu rightly judged that his miracle would lose some of its most important advantages if repeated too often, so he reserved it for great emergencies, and allowed the time-honoured plan of fire-carrying from

place to place to continue. In this Kanu showed a very sound political instinct, and his example might be profitably followed by many reformers whose impatience to put the whole world straight all at once, often defeats its own ends.

Consider, for a moment, what the result of a popularising of the tinderbox would have been:—In the first place what was looked upon as a miracle would have ceased to be regarded as such and, with the miraculous, a good deal of Kanu's influence would have gone. Then,—the old woman whose function it was to carry fire-sticks would not alone have lost her importance, but would have had to carry heavy loads like the other women.

Not only she, but her immediate relations, might have resented this, and, accordingly, Kanu would probably have weakened the allegiance of at least one-fourth of his subjects. There is nothing, in the humble opinion of the writer, which proves Kanu's natural fitness for leadership so much as his having decided against the popularising of the tinderbox.

Now that the lightning-sign, which had been so long and so anxiously waited for, had come, the black despair which Kanu and his companions had been the prey of during the last few months, gave way to sanguine hope. They knew that the ordeal which had to be endured,—the crossing of the black belt of scorched desert which lay between them and the track of the thunder shower, would strain their endurance to the utmost, but such experiences are but incidents in the life of the Bushman—and he takes them as they come, without repining at Fate. In their different hunting trips they had exhausted all the caches of water-filled eggshells within a distance of two days' march, but there was one cache far away on the edge of the great dune-region to the north-eastward which, if they could manage to hold out for four days on the brackish liquid which they were carrying and,—if the treasure should prove not to have been broached, would relieve their necessities for the moment, and enable them to make a successful dash for the deep and precipitous gorge through which the great Gariep winds on its mysterious course to the ocean.

After descending the mountain the Bushmen struck across the plain in single file, heading due north-east. The men stalked ahead, trusting that their dread of prowling beasts of prey would keep the women and children, heavily laden as they were, close behind. Soon the liquid beams of the Morning Star warned them that the friendly night was nearly over, and they quickened their paces so as to reach a long, low ridge dotted with *karee* bushes and large arboreal aloes, which lay some distance ahead, and on the side of which some protection might be afforded from the raging sun. When day broke this ridge loomed large before them in the midst of the oceanlike plain, but before they reached it the day was well on towards noon. Then water was dealt out in sparing quantities to human beings and dogs alike, and the weary wayfarers scattered about seeking shade under rock, tree and shrub.

In several directions could be seen clouds of dust arising,—indications of the migrating herds of game; far and near the silent sand-spouts glided about in stately rhythm, like spectres of the daytime threading some mysterious dance-measure. Early in the afternoon the clean-cut margin of a snow-white cloud projected slightly above the north-eastern horizon. This turned the expectation of rain falling upon the plains before them to a certainty, but the track of the storm-cloud was an appalling distance ahead.

When the sun had somewhat declined another start was made. The women now kept together, while the men scattered out on other side of the course with digging-picks in readiness to unearth roots and tubers should the drought have left any indication of their existence above ground. Each warrior wore a skin fillet around his head, into which his supply of poisoned arrows was stuck by the points, the shafts standing straight up in a circle reaching high above him. This served the double purpose of having the arrows where they could be easily got at when required, and making the braves look fierce and formidable in the event of an enemy being met with.

The unbroken plain now lay before them in all its solitary horror; their only hope of relief lay a three-days agony in front. The sand,—so hot in Summer on the plains of Bushmanland that one can cook an egg in it several inches below the surface,—scorched their feet; it even caused the dogs to roll over and lie on their backs, howling from the pain they suffered.

As night fell the men closed in, bringing the scanty supply of lizards, striped-faced desert mice with long, bushy tails, roots and other desert produce which they had succeeded in capturing or unearthing. The little band pressed on silently over the sand which had now begun somewhat to cool down, and beneath the stars which seemed so close above them in the purple vault. Some of the men now remained behind to assist the weaker of the women, who were lagging, by relieving them of portions of their heavy loads.

At each halt which was made for the purpose of rekindling the fire-sticks, all but the one charged with the duty of kindling the fire lay down and sank at once into deep sleep. When the sticks were once more properly alight the sleepers would be wakened by a touch and, once more, the party would steal, ghost-like, across the velvet-like sand.

Day broke, and when the party halted a little shade was obtained by stretching skins over sticks stuck into the ground. Then a fire was soon kindled and the food obtained on the previous day cooked and eaten. Another sparing ration of water was issued and, in spite of its scarcity, and of the fact that every drop was as it were their life-blood, a small libation was poured out on the sand to propitiate the spirits of the sky who so greedily drank up moisture from the thirsty earth.

It was late in the afternoon of the third day when they reached the spot where the water-filled eggshells lay buried. Some of the women and children had been left half a day's march behind, where they had dropped from thirst and exhaustion. Fortunately the cache was found to be intact. During the night a supply of water was sent back to those left behind, and early in the forenoon of next day the whole party was once more together. Their only loss was that of their best dog; the animal went mad while they were digging for the water, and rushed away to meet its death alone among the dunes.

They rested all that day as well as the next night, and it was on the following day that Kanu made the great discovery which more than ever convinced his followers of their leader's supernatural powers. Before dawn Kanu left the

encampment on a solitary hunting expedition. Skirting the edge of the dune-tract he went on and on, wondering sorely at the absence of game of every description. Then he noticed a number of tracks of jackals, all converging towards one point. Following one of these he was led to a narrow opening in a low, overhanging ledge of rock. Entering the opening and groping about, he found himself in a small, oblong cave. His heart beat fast, for he distinctly smelt water. Feeling along the walls of the cavern he came to an inner opening, of size just sufficient to admit the body of a man. This proved to be the mouth of a passage which dipped inward at a steep angle. Kanu held his bow by one end and tried to find the bottom of the shaft, but unsuccessfully. Then he carefully let himself down, feet first. Soon he found himself standing,—or rather half-reclining,—with his feet in icy cold water, but the passage was so narrow that he could not stoop sufficiently to reach the water even with his hands.

With some difficulty he managed to extricate himself, and then he turned and let himself down head first, having previously placed his bow across the opening and fastened a thong to it, so as to enable him to work his way back again. He drank his fill of water more delicious than anything he had tasted for years past and then hastened back to where he had left his companions.

Great were the rejoicings over what to all appearances was a permanent spring, the water of which was absolutely perfect in quality. The little community at once decided to make the cave their head quarters. Food was plentiful and easy to obtain. On account of the general drought no water was to be found anywhere else in the neighbourhood; consequently, numbers of jackals visited the spot every night. Of these, the flesh of which is looked upon by the Bushman as being a special delicacy, as many as were required for consumption were slain. Later, when the rains came, the herds of game returned; moreover, the vicinity proved to be rich in “veldkost,” which is the name by which the edible bulbs and tubers with which the desert sometimes abounds, are known by.

The years went by and these Bushmen, isolated as they were from the rest of mankind, led a life of absolutely ideal happiness from their own point of view. They had no want ungratified; to them the desert and what it contained were all-sufficing. There were no other human creatures anywhere near them, so they had nothing to fear.

It is a mistake to suppose that the life of the Bushmen was solely that of animals. Besides painting, they possessed the art of mimicry to a high degree and were, moreover, excellent actors. Their plays were hunting scenes, the characters being the different animals they were accustomed to hunt. The cries, movements and peculiarities of such were imitated as accurately as was possible by human beings, and a curious tincture of humour,—humour of a kind almost unintelligible to the civilised mind, was imported into the personifications. For instance: the shifts and stratagems by means of which a trio of ostriches will endeavour to lead an enemy away from their nest,—the simulated alarm of the birds when the enemy takes a wrong direction and the comparative absence of any sign of uneasiness if he takes the right one, were hit off to the life and accentuated with an amount of drollery one might think the subject incapable of sustaining.

The favourite episode for dramatic representation was the robbing of the lion of his prey. The lion’s favourite time for killing is just before daybreak. After he has killed he loves to drain, at his ease, every drop of blood from the carcase of his quarry. The act of killing by the king-killer of the wilderness is a noisy affair and, if it happened within a radius of several miles, and the wind were not unfavourable, the sound was almost sure to reach the keen ears of the pygmies. Then all would turn out, each being armed with a firebrand and carrying a bundle of dry, inflammable grass and twigs.

Approaching the spot where the kill had taken place, from different directions, the Bushmen would begin to shout and jeer at the lion and call him by all sorts of ridiculous and insulting terms. If he attempted to attack, some of the inflammable stuff would at once be ignited, and the lion, no matter how enraged, would always turn tail and retreat from the blaze. All this time the circle would be gradually closing in, leaving a gap through which the baffled and furious animal could beat a retreat, snarling and showing his teeth.

In the Bushman’s moonlit theatre this scene would be acted with astonishing skill and realism. In regions where the clans were thickly distributed, a good actor of the lion’s part in this popular play would be as sure of a welcome as if he were a great painter, and thus could pick and choose his society among the different communities.

Kanu had much to tell his fellows about his varied experiences, and the relation of these was always more than half acted. The old, bald-headed man with the white beard who had sentenced him to be whipped, would have felt his dignity to be seriously compromised if he had seen his former victim perched on a rock mimicking him, and declaiming gibberish to a group of convulsed admirers; accentuating in a most preposterous manner every one of His Worshipful peculiarities.

It was in the hunting-field that the true potency of the Bushman was shown. Inside a wicker framework covered with the skin of an ostrich, the hunter would stalk in among an unsuspecting flock of feeding birds. With slow, swaying stride,—the long neck bent down and the beak bobbing as though pecking at the green beetles on the bushes, the counterfeit presentment of a stately, full-plumaged male would edge its way in, making the characteristic by-play which the male adopts when he wants to attract the females by an affective display of his beauties. Then, one by one, the members of the doomed flock would bite the dust, and the slayer, doffing his disguise, would proceed to cut up the carcases into pieces convenient for roasting,—or else collect fuel pending the arrival of his friends with the fire-stick.

Thus passed the halcyon days. Kanu and his men became muscular and wiry; the women and children fat and sleek. Kanu was venerated by his subjects as a powerful but beneficent magician, who had gone to some wonderful “other” world and returned laden with gifts of useful knowledge. Ksoa, Delilah-like, tried to get him to reveal to her the secret of his power, so he told her that he had been taken captive once by a monstrous being which was about to eat him,—when a blind lioness of wonderful size, strength and beauty had set him free and destroyed his enemy. This lioness had given him as a charm a hair out of her own splendid mane. So long, he said, as this hair were not stolen from him, or lost, all would go well with him and his. If, however, the hair were to be stolen,—not alone would good fortune

depart from Kanu and his clan, but dire disaster would fall upon the stealer.

One day, after much persuasion, Kanu consented to show his wife the talisman. It had been carefully rolled around a dry leaf; Ksoa marvelled greatly as she saw its length uncoiled and saw how it glinted in the sun. She did not dare to touch it, but begged of her lord to put the precious thing safely away at once, lest anything should happen to it.

“What a great and wonderful lioness that must have been.—And a lioness with a mane,” she commented, in an awed whisper.

“Yes,” answered Kanu, with a sigh.

Chapter Nineteen.

How Stephanus Pursued Gideon.

Early in the morning after the arrival of Stephanus, the mob of cattle was driven in and with the assistance of some of the Hottentots a fairly good span of oxen was sorted out. Then the wagon was loaded with provisions and water, and Stephanus started in pursuit of the brother who had fled before his accusing face. Elsie insisted on accompanying her father; Stephanus, full of the trust in Providence which he had attained to through suffering,—imbued with that sublime confidence which had come to him in his nine years of repentance, prayer and watching,—made no objection.

A great happiness welled up in Aletta’s heart and seemed to transfigure her, body and soul. She felt that her dark hour had indeed been the prelude to a day brighter than her starved soul had known for many years. With feverish haste she completed the preparations for departure, and when the wagon rolled away up the steep kloof-track, its fresh team of sixteen drawing it with hardly an effort, she watched it until her sight grew dim with happy tears. Then she and Stephanus knelt down and he breathed forth a prayer as humbly exultant as ever the rapt singer of Israel uttered like trumpet blast whose sound still fills the centuries.

Afterwards, Stephanus followed the wagon on horseback, and Aletta turned to the joyful task of garnishing the dismal, unkempt house in preparation for her husband’s return.

At the top of the saddle the oxen were outspanned and driven to the spring to take their last drink before entering the region of thirst. Stephanus, like Gideon—but with what different feelings—looked back and let his eye luxuriate upon the fertile valley. How sweet and peaceful it all looked.—How the frowning krantzes shut it in on each side, their stark forms accentuating the soft slopes that billowed away from their bases. He could see the patch of scrub that hid the spring,—and the silvern water issuing from it,—like a jewelled pendant. The forenoon sun took the foliage at an angle which turned its usual hue to a rich, full tint. That spot was the pivot upon which his life and that of his brother had turned, and from which they had been whirled off into such strange regions.

He turned his gaze until it swept the blackened desert across which his course lay, but the prospect had for him no dismay. He knew by experience the dangers that lay before him, but his faith was to him as a strong shield and a buckler of might against all evil. Elsie stood at his side and held his horny, toil-worn hand between hers that were so soft and white. Few words passed between the father and daughter; they were content just to be together. She, happy in the fulfilment of her long-deferred hope,—he, exultant with the feeling that he was fighting Satan for his brother’s soul and confident of victory.

The thoughts of Stephanus moved upon a stage higher than Elsie’s could attain to. To Stephanus the presence of his beloved child was enough to fill his heart with joy. She seemed to be the embodiment of peace,—the dove that had come back across the troubled waters of his life. But over and above this towered high the realisation of the task laid upon him,—the lifting of his brother’s life from the slough in which it had been so long sunk. To Elsie happiness and duty were one; to her father his great happiness and his burning responsibility were different and, as it were, filled separate chambers of his mind.

It was noon by the time the oxen again stood in the yoke. The trail of Gideon’s wagon lay plainly marked across the sand, far below. Stephanus could see between the stones—close to where he stood, the clear print of his brother’s large *veldschoen*; Gideon had here paced restlessly to and fro. Yonder was the spot where he had stood gazing back into the valley which he deemed he had left for ever; there he had paused to cast his haggard eyes across the desert which he meant should be his dwelling-place henceforth. It seemed to Stephanus as though he could enter into all the phases of his brother’s mind at this spot where the physical conditions seemed to suggest appraisement of the probabilities of the future as well as of the results of the past. He felt as though standing on the boundary-line between two worlds.

Then, with brake-shoe fixed to the wheel the wagon jolted heavily down the mountain side until it reached the red and burning sand-waste which seemed to stretch northward to infinity.

At every outspan place could be seen the remains of the fires lit by the fugitive. These places were far apart; it was clear that Gideon had made desperate efforts to put as many miles as possible between himself and his injured brother.

The wilderness was in a frightful state of aridity, so the unhappy cattle suffered much from thirst. Stephanus always let them rest in the heat of the day; in the evening he would inspan and then push on through the cool hours of the night. The leader had no difficulty, by the diffused light of the stars, in following the wheel-tracks.

Elsie would lie sleeping in the wagon, undisturbed by the least jolt, for the surface of the plain was as soft as down.

Her father would walk ahead under the liquid stars, which seemed to look down upon him with more than human sympathy and understanding. During his captivity Stephanus had never seen the sky at night; thus, the memory of what had always strongly influenced him became idealised in his awakened and alert soul. Now, the vastness and the thrilling mystery of the night skies seemed to have fused with his purpose, and his spirit inhabited the infinite.

The travellers had brought enough water in kegs for their own personal needs, but day by day the agonies of the wretched cattle increased. The Hottentot driver and leader became more and more uneasy, feeling themselves in danger of that worst of all deaths,—a long-drawn death of thirst in the desert. But Stephanus was sustained by his lofty trust, and never doubted that they would issue safely from their difficulties.

Each forenoon as the mocking mirage was painted athwart the northern sky, the clear, wide stream of the far-fountained Gariep, with its fringe of vivid green boskage, seemed as though lifted out of the depths of the awful gorge and hung across the heavens for their torment.

One morning they saw the red-mounded dunes quivering far ahead in the ratified air, slightly to their right. Stephanus and the Hottentots knew this region by repute, and accordingly recognised the fact that their last and most terrible effort was now at hand,—that now they would have to plough their way through some ten miles of sand so light and loose that the wheels of the wagon would sink in it to the axles. Once through the sand-hills, they would be within a day's journey of that cleft in the black mountains through which the cattle might be driven to the river.

The day smote them with fury. The sand became so hot that it blistered the soles of their feet through the *veldschoens*. The wind, heavily charged with fine, red sand, was moaning and shrieking across the waste. Their only chance lay in keeping moving, for the drifting sand would have buried the wagon, if stationary, in a few hours. But the moment came when the unhappy cattle were unable to advance with the wagon another step, so had to be outspanned.

The oxen staggered away for a few paces and sank exhausted to the ground. It was clear that without water, not one of them would ever rise again. It was now the eighth day since they had last drunk their fill. The Hottentots surrendered themselves to despair. Stephanus knelt in the sand and lifted heart and voice in supplication to his God.

Chapter Twenty.

The End of the Feud.

One morning Kanu and his men, who had shortly before left their place of abode on a hunting expedition, were astonished at seeing the white tent of a wagon slowing moving through the sand dunes at a short distance from them. They at once dropped in their tracks and then crept into concealment for the purpose of discussing the situation. The Bushmen, although the different clans often quarrelled among themselves, had one sentiment in common,—hatred of the European. After they returned to the cave there was a general furbishing-up of the best arrows, a testing and a tightening of the bow-strings and a performance of the war sacrifice. This last consisted in drawing a small quantity of blood from the right knee of each warrior, mixing it in an earthen bowl with a small quantity of arrow-poison and pouring the mixture out upon the ashes of the previous night's fire. Then, with arrows erect around their heads, they looked impatiently towards their leader for the signal to attack.

The wagon was only about a couple of miles away; the white tent intermittently gleaming between the driving clouds of sand. Among the broken hillocks the strangers were quite at the mercy of an attacking force, no matter how small. Thus, the pygmies might have crept right up to the wagon without being noticed, and discharged their deadly shafts from within point-blank range, settling the business with one noiseless volley. But Kanu did not give the signal; he sat with his head bowed in thought, and his braves looked at him and at each other in astonishment.

Kanu reflected. He was aware of many things beyond the cognisance of his followers. One thing had specially impressed him during his captivity,—the implacable vengeance with which the Boers pursued the marauders who murdered their friends and stole their cattle. This wagon had certainly come much farther than any wagon had ever come before, and it was not likely to be followed by others. Better not interfere with it. The cave had not been discovered; it was impossible that any white men would come and settle in the waterless neighbourhood. Tempting as was the opportunity of wreaking vengeance for many wrongs, policy demanded that they should forego it, so Kanu threw down his bow, plucked the arrows from his head and said that he had been told by the spirits not to attack these people.

It was a critical moment and, had Kanu's authority not been far more strong than that which the Bushman leader usually held over his followers, his orders would have been disregarded. However, no attack was made and the wagon was permitted to proceed upon its laboured course unmolested,—the people with it little deeming of their narrow escape.

Two days afterwards another wagon was reported to be proceeding along the same course, and Kanu saw by the demeanour of his followers that he would probably be unable to restrain them from attacking, so he led them forth, and the little band took up its position in a patch of scrub which crowned a small sand-hill overlooking the two-days-old track.

The travellers were evidently in terrible straits, and before they reached the ambush the oxen collapsed. Leaving his braves with strict injunctions not to move before his return, Kanu went towards the wagon for the purpose of reconnoitring. Creeping sinuously among the hollows between the hillocks over which the streaming sand was being swept like spray from the crests of waves, he crept up to within a few yards of the wagon and lay, concealed by a bush, watching it intently.

Just then Elsie came out of the tent and stood, protecting her face from the stinging sand with her hands, and with her hair streaming in the wind.

Kanu started. The figure and the hair suggested Elsie, but he could not see the face, and the girl had grown almost beyond recognition. Then Stephanus arose from where he had been kneeling at the other side of the wagon and stood at his daughter's side. Kanu recognised his former master in an instant, and now had no doubt as to Elsie's identity. Throwing down his bow and arrows, he strode forward and called out:—

"Baas Stephanus—Miss Elsie—here is Kanu."

Stephanus turned and gazed at the Bushman with astonishment. Elsie stepped forward with hands outstretched to greet her old guide and preserver.

"Kanu," she cried, "can you get us water?"

"Yes,—the water is close at hand."

"God, who has sent this creature to succour us, I thank thee," said Stephanus, solemnly.

"Baas must give me a small present of tobacco, so that I may soothe the hearth of my people," said Kanu.

With his hands full of the much-coveted treasure Kanu sped back to his impatient band. No one knows how, when or where the Bushmen learnt the use of tobacco. When first the Europeans came in contact with them they were evidently accustomed to its use. In an instant the rancour of the warriors was turned into extravagant delight. With these children of the wilderness the transition from ferocity to amiability was instantaneous, and the one sentiment arose as unreasonably and inspired them as completely as the other.

Immediately they crowded around the wagon, ready to assist with all their power those who a few minutes previously they would have delighted to put to a cruel death.

Soon every keg and other utensil in the wagon capable of holding water was carried over to the spring and then the water was dealt out by willing hands as fast as circumstances would permit. Vessels were afterwards borne from one to the other of the famishing oxen and each animal was allowed to take a sup at a time. All through the afternoon this went on, until the cattle were once more able to arise.

Kanu told Stephanus of another spring which he had discovered among the mountains to the north-west, about half a day's journey away, and thither the oxen were taken during the night, and allowed to drink their fill. Then, after a day's rest they were driven back to the wagon.

The Bushmen and their womenkind were, in the meantime, made happy with liberal presents of tobacco, coffee and sugar. The tobacco had a most curious effect upon them. They smoked it through a rough kind of a hookah made out of a hartebeeste's horn, a stone bowl and a piece of reed a few inches in length. There was no mouth-piece, so the smoker pressed his mouth into the natural aperture at the base of the horn, and inhaled the smoke. It was thus that they were accustomed to smoke the "dagga" or wild hemp. After each smoker had filled his lungs and again emptied them about a dozen times, he passed on the pipe to a companion, and then laid himself upon the ground where, after becoming slightly epileptic, he stiffened from head to feet and lay unconscious and scarcely breathing for some minutes.

The women enjoyed the coffee and sugar, which were delicacies they knew of only by report, with great zest. They were not satisfied with merely drinking the beverage, but insisted on eating the grounds also.

These artless, cruel, innocent and murderous savages made their guests royally welcome, when the latter visited the camp. They entertained the strangers with songs, dances and dramatic performances, and presented them with a supply of edible roots some of which proved exceedingly good eating.

Stephanus soon ascertained from Kanu that Gideon's wagon had passed but a few days previously. It was evident that Gideon meant to cross the dune-tract at its junction with the mountain range that skirts the river gorge, and then make for the eastward.

Kanu accompanied them when they returned to the wagon, and then he and Elsie had a long talk, relating to each other their respective adventures since they had last met. Elsie was struck by an idea.

"Kanu,—will you do something for me?"

"Anything that young mistress asks of me."

"Well,—I want you to go after the other wagon, steal all the oxen and horses and bring them to me."

"Yes,—that can easily be done."

"Mind,—you are not to kill or harm anyone, but just to bring the cattle and horses to me."

"Yes, I understand."

In the cool of the evening a start was made. The oxen, refreshed by their drink, stepped out briskly. Thus, long before daylight came again they had succeeded in passing through the heavy sand. The ground now immediately before them was easy to travel over.

When outspanned for breakfast they saw a lot of cattle and some horses being driven towards them. These were Gideon's,—stolen by the Bushmen at Elsie's instigation. Stephanus, who had not been told of the plot, laughed loud and long at Elsie's stratagem for stopping Gideon's flight.

Gideon's journey across the desert had not been so difficult as was that of his pursuer. His team was composed of picked oxen that were well accustomed to such work, and the day on which fell the crisis of the journey,—the crossing of the dune-belt,—was comparatively cool. Nevertheless, the cattle were almost exhausted when he outspanned on the salt-impregnated ridge on which the Mission Station of Pella now stands—just opposite the head of the deep kloof which breaks through the otherwise impassable mountains, thus affording a way to the Orange River. This kloof is about eight miles long, and the cattle were hardly able to stagger down it to the drinking place. When the animals smelt the water from afar they uttered pitiful lowings, and those that were less exhausted broke into a stumbling run. It was found impossible to bring the span back to the wagon until they had rested for a couple of days.

Gideon, chafing with impatience, remained with the wagon. The servants replenished the kegs with water and then returned to the river bank, where they remained with the cattle.

Gideon, in his loneliness, was the prey of the most miserable apprehensions. In estimating possibilities he had always endeavoured to place himself in his brother's situation and by this means had driven from his mind the possibility of Stephanus being otherwise than absolutely implacable. He pictured the injured man hurrying, immediately after his release, to the farm, his whole mind bent on the wreaking of his long-panted-for revenge. Then, how he would have foamed with fury at finding that the one in whose blood he had so longed to imbue his fingers, had escaped. Of course a hot pursuit would be immediately undertaken, and it would be as keen and relentless as that of a blood-hound. The thought of this man, whose eyes he dreaded more than he dreaded the face of Death, pressing furiously after him across the blackened waste was ever before his vision, sleeping or waking.

He had not the slightest doubt that Stephanus was following him, for it was exactly what he felt he would have done himself to Stephanus under similar circumstances, but he drew a little comfort from the conclusion that his pursuer could not have crossed the scorched desert anything like as quickly as he himself had done. The raging heat of the past few days had been as balm to his suffering spirit. Others had died in Bushmanland—even when it had not been as arid as it now was; why not Stephanus? But, he reflected, he had never expected his hotheaded brother,—the restless, passionate man who could never brook restraint in any form, to survive his long term of imprisonment; his heart should have broken years ago.

Well,—here in the desert it was a case of man to man, and each was a law unto himself. One thing was sure: if his vengeful brother persisted in following him now,—if Stephanus would not even leave him the starved desert as his lonely portion,—then the wide earth was not spacious enough to hold them both. He was doing his best to put the miles between them; if Stephanus followed he did so at his own risk and must abide by the consequences.

But for the dread of Hell-fire Gideon would have ended it all years ago, by means of a bullet through his own brain. That would be nothing,—the bullet,—but Gideon imagined his soul standing, immediately afterwards, naked before the vestibule of the Pit, listening to the roaring of the flames and the shrieks of the damned, and awaiting its own summons to enter.

After the cattle and horses had been driven back to the wagon from the river, it was necessary for them to be allowed a night's grazing on the edge of the plains, no grass having been found on the river bank. So the horses were hobbled and turned out to graze with the oxen. The leader was strictly enjoined to get up before daylight next morning and bring the animals back to the wagon in time to admit of an early start being made. There were tracks of lions visible here and there, but the risk of beasts of prey had to be taken. Gideon now meant to turn due east, cross the "neck" which connects the dune-tract with the river mountains, and plunge into the unknown country beyond.

Next morning, soon after daylight, the herd returned, terrified, and reported that both oxen and horses had been driven off by Bushmen. Gideon's heart stood still. This appeared to be proof of what he had often suspected, that the Lord had singled him out for relentless persecution because he had done His work of vengeance. However, there was only one thing now to be done: to pursue the marauders and attack them at all hazards. Arming the leader and driver and taking his own gun, he left the wagon and its contents to their fate and started on the spoor.

To his surprise he found that the spoor, instead of leading into the rough ground, as was invariably the case when animals were stolen by Bushman marauders, led back along the track made by his own wagon. After walking for about an hour he reached the top of a low ridge from which the eye could range for an immense distance across the plains. Then Gideon saw what made the blood curdle in his veins with horror. A wagon which he knew must be that of Stephanus was approaching and behind it was being driven a mob of loose cattle and horses which he could not doubt were his own. The Hottentots raised a shout of joy; to their astonishment Gideon turned and fled back across the plains towards his wagon.

The miserable man now became insane in his terror. His only thought was to escape,—to hide from the face of the man he had so greatly wronged. Fear lent wings to his feet and, by the time Stephanus had reached the top of the ridge where the two Hottentots were waiting in their perplexity, Gideon had almost reached his wagon. Stephanus, overjoyed at hearing that his brother was so close at hand, at once mounted his horse and rode forward.

Gideon took refuge in the wagon and laid himself down with his loaded gun in his hand. He had made up his mind as to what he would do in this last emergency:—he would allow his brother to approach and, when he arrived within point-blank distance, would cover him with the gun and bid him stand. Then he would solemnly warn Stephanus not to approach, holding him at parley where he stood. If the warning should be disregarded Gideon determined to shoot his brother dead, but he hoped not to be driven to do this. He would force Stephanus, under the muzzle of the gun, to swear to go back and trouble him no more. He would say:—"Your life is mine, here in this lawless land, to destroy by

the mere slight pressure of my finger upon the trigger against which it rests.—It is mine,—forfeit because you have pursued me when I tried my best to avoid you, and driven me to bay.—I give it to you in exchange for the wrong I have done you. Take it and go in peace and I will never cross your path again,—but come one step nearer and you are a dead man with your blood upon your own revengeful soul."

As the past is said to crowd upon the consciousness of a drowning man so these thoughts, wild and half-unformulated, hurtled against the distracted consciousness of Gideon van der Walt as he lay shaking in the wagon, holding his loaded gun with the muzzle projecting through the slit in the canvas which, he had made with his knife for the purpose. Every few seconds he lifted his head and glanced out with fevered eyes to see whether his enemy were approaching. At length he saw what his eyes had been seeking with expectant dread; riding down the long slope swiftly on a stout pony was a man with a long, snow-white beard, whom he recognised as Stephanus.—But what did this mean? his brother was unarmed.—But perhaps the gun was concealed—slung from the saddle behind as guns were sometimes carried in the hunting-field.—No,—the pony swerved to avoid a shrub,—Stephanus was certainly unarmed.

He was riding in his shirt-sleeves and not even a switch did he carry in his hand. Surely, Gideon thought, the man who was engaged in this implacable pursuit could not expect his enemy to allow him to approach to within gripping distance. No matter,—Gideon would challenge his brother when he came close, and bid him stand if he valued his life.—But would the man who had tenaciously held to a trail across Bushmanland in a black drought stand still when bidden? Gideon felt sure that he would not. Well,—he must shoot,—there was nothing else for it.

As Stephanus came nearer Gideon could see clearly the silvery whiteness of his beard. He thought of the last time his eyes had rested on his brother's face, when the sentence was pronounced, and that then the beard was as black as the wing of a raven. Then a sudden horror struck him to the heart.—He could not—could not—stain his already guilty hands with this man's blood, after having ruined his life. The threatened curse of Cain thundered in his ears. With a wild shriek he sprang from the wagon, and fled among the naked, piled-up rocks which formed the base of the hideous mountain at the foot of which his wagon stood.

Unheeding the shout of Stephanus, Gideon sped on, leaping from boulder to boulder in his mad endeavour to avoid the presence of the man against whom he had so terribly sinned. By some curious trick of thought his brother, thus unarmed, was more formidable to his maddened and guilty soul than had he come with a primed and loaded gun. A dread of some such fascination as the snake is said to exercise over his victim possessed him; he felt that once under his brother's eyes he would be bound and helpless. It was a terrible illustration of the dread which the malefactor sometimes feels towards the one he has wronged.

Stephanus followed steadily, his heart full of its lofty purpose. He knew that his brother could not escape him now,—that the moment he had longed for through the slow years was at hand. Serene in his trust, confident in his faith that Providence was directing his and Gideon's steps, and that neither could stumble until God's purpose had been fulfilled, he breasted the steep, rugged incline with a careful and methodical expenditure of energy.

Soon the mountain narrowed to a wedge-shaped slope of an easier gradient, which culminated in a naked peak on each side of which a black gulf yawned. Under this, at a sheer depth which it made the senses dizzy to contemplate, the mighty river, now turbidly brimming from the heavy thunder-rains which had fallen upon its course, rolled down between fringes of tall green timber.

When Gideon saw that he was trapped,—that in front of him and on either hand were perpendicular cliffs, and behind him the brother whose face he dreaded more than the face of Death, such a mighty cry of agony and despair issued from his deep chest that the dead, black chasms seemed for the instant to become peopled with lost souls. Then, nerved with the courage of despair he turned and faced his pursuer.

"Keep back—keep back," he shouted hoarsely, "or I will shoot you dead and follow you to Hell over the krantz."

"You cannot do it, my brother," called out Stephanus; "the shield of the Lord would turn the bullet aside and His hand would bear you up from the depths."

"Stand, I tell you.—Stand.—Another step and you are a dead man."

Stephanus continued to approach, so Gideon lifted his gun and pulled the trigger, but the powder flashed in the pan. Stephanus never faltered, but walked composedly to where the desperate man was hastily endeavouring to reprime the gun with loose powder from his pocket. Stephanus laid his hand on his brother's shoulder and Gideon at once ceased in his attempt,—the gun slipped from his nervous fingers and crashed upon the stones, and he sank, swooning, to the ground.

When he regained consciousness Gideon found himself supported by the arms of his brother, whose eyes, deep with love and dimmed with pity, looked steadily into his own. Then his sin, his anguish and his terror slipped from him like a cast-off garment, and for the first time in his manhood he wept.

It did not need much to be said on either side for an understanding, full and complete, to be at once established. It was as though the unveiled souls looked at each other, revealing all and wholly revealed.

Before turning to retrace their steps the brothers stood for a short space and looked forth across the awful, Titanic chaos, in the convoluted depths of which the weary river hurried improvidently along with its wasted load of fertilising wealth. The sun had nearly sunk; already the dark chasms were full of almost opaque gloom, above which the rarefied air quivered around each sun-scorched mountain head, seeming to cap it with thin, colourless flame.

In the north-east a great crudded cloud lifted its soaring towers into the blue heart of the awful aether. Pure white on the side lit by the sun, on the other it was deep purple, and through it shafts of lightning were incessantly playing.

Higher and higher it towered, sweeping past at a distance of a few miles. Now and then during the pauses of the thunder could be heard the low roar of the rain which fell like the fringe of a pall from the lower margin of the immense mass. Then they knew that the black, two-years' drought was over,—that along the track over which they had so laboriously struggled a few short days since, the flowers would be bursting forth in a few hours and the rocky depressions brimming with silvern water.

Stephanus' wagon had in the meantime arrived and was standing, outspanned, close to that of Gideon. Elsie stood near it, her face turned to the mighty thunder-chariot from which a refreshing wind, laden with the ichor of the fallen rain, stirred the richness of her hair. She turned as her quick ear caught the sound of their approaching footsteps, and it seemed to them as though the Spirit of Peace inhabited her and looked out from the unfathomable depths of her sightless eyes.

Glossary.

"Alle Wereld" "Whole world": equivalent to "Good gracious."

Baas: Master.

Baviaan: Baboon.

Benauwdheid: Indigestion.

Bultong: Dried meat.

Cappie: A sun bonnet.

Dassie: A rock-rabbit or coney.

Field Cornet: rural official with powers resembling those of a Justice of the Peace.

Karee Bush: A shrub; Rhus viminalis.

Kloof: A valley.

Krantz: A cliff.

Nachtmaal: The Lord's Supper.

Onbeschafte: Unshorn; uncivilised.

Oom: Uncle.

Pan: A depression in the ground which sometimes contains water.

Rhebok: An antelope which frequents mountain heights.

Tanta: Aunt.

Schepsel: Creature; a term of tolerant contempt.

Stoep. The platform in front of or at the side of a house.

Sassatyes: Flakes of pickled meat cooked with skewers stuck through them.

Spoor: Trail.

Veldschoen: A heelless, home-made boot.

Voorhuis: The sitting-room in a Boer homestead.

| Chapter 1 | | Chapter 2 | | Chapter 3 | | Chapter 4 | | Chapter 5 | | Chapter 6 | | Chapter 7 | | Chapter 8 | | Chapter 9 | | Chapter 10 | | Chapter 11 | | Chapter 12 | | Chapter 13 | | Chapter 14 | | Chapter 15 | | Chapter 16 | | Chapter 17 | | Chapter 18 | | Chapter 19 | | Chapter 20 |

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