A Frontier Mystery Vol.I

By

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Chapter One.

“Where I come in.”

“White dogs!”

“Ha! Calves of Matyana, the least of the Great One’s cattle.”

“Pups of Tyingoza, the white man’s dog! Au!”

“Sweepings of the Abe Sutu!”

“Amakafula!” (Kafirs.)

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

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

“Ha! Come over to us,” was the answer.

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

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

“Ahah! But we shall be less by more than two when we reach the bank. You will strike us in the water.”

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

“Ehhé!” chorussed his followers in loud assent.

“Swear it.”

“U’ Tshaka!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

and strength. Then a sudden crunching sound, and the blood is pouring from the head of one of them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And that is how I come into the story.

Chapter Two.

Godfrey GlantonTrader.

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

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

"Mm!" hummed Tyingoza. "In truth it is hot here, butnot over there, Iqalaqala."

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

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

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

Tyingoza produced his snuffboxhis Zulu conservatism had restrained him from learning to smokeand handed it to me. Then he helped himself.

“They will not be here long,” he said presently.

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

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

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

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

I agreed that it would not; in fact I had more than once ventured to hint as much to Major Sewinbut that veteran, though a dear old man, was likewise a stiffnecked one, and had not taken my wellmeant advice in good part.

“A nigger, sir,” he had answered with heat, “is created to work. If he won’t work he must be made toand, damme, sir, I’m the man to make him.”

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

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

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

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

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

We were interrupted by the appearance of two young men. Their bronze figures, straight and tall, moved with easy, supple grace as they advanced to where we were seated, and, having saluted the chief with infinite respect, they squatted down at a becoming distance; for they would not interrupt our conversation. However I wanted to get rid of them, so allowing sufficient time for the requirements of etiquette, I asked them what they had come for.

They answered that they were in need of a few articles such as I kept in the store, and so I took them within. I reached down from the shelves the things they required, a matter of trifles whose aggregate value hardly amounted to a shilling, and I thought as I moved thus, clad in an old shirt, and ditto pair of trousers, among green blankets and pots and kettles, and sheepskins and goatskins, with strings of beads and brass buttons festooned from the beams, and the shelves loaded with roll Boer tobacco and sugar pockets and coffee canisters and butcher knives, and all sorts of minor “notions” in demand for native tradeI wondered, I say, what sort of figure I should

cut in the eyes of Major Sewin's highbred looking daughters should they happen suddenly to ride up and thus discover me; then I wondered why the deuce I should have thought about it at all.

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

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

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

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

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

"Atyisayo."

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

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

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

“Iqalaqala is our father,” they murmured, rising to leave. “Amakosi! Hlalani gahle!”

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

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

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

“Au! Iqalaqala. When are you going to build a new hut?”

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

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

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

Chapter Three.

Of an Evening Visit.

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

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

The wild guinea fowl were cackling away to their roosts and the shrill crow of francolins miauwed forth from the surrounding brake as I dismounted to open a gate in the bush fence which surrounded what the Major called his "compound." As I led my horse onit was not worth while remountinga sound of voicessomething of a tumult of voices, rathercaught my ear.

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

For I had recognised an altercation, and I had recognised the voices. One was that of the Major's nephew, and it was raised in fine old British imprecation. The other was that of a native, and was volubly expostulativein its own tongue. Then I came in view

of their owners, and heard at the same time another soundthat of a hard smack, followed by another. For background to the scene the fence and gate of a sheepkraal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And you would spend some yearsin chainsmending the roads and quarrying stones for the Government? That would be a poor sort of satisfaction, would it not?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Answer me this,” I said. “Are you prepared to herd your own sheepslaag them, toomilk your own cows, and, in short, do every darn thing there is to be done on the farm yourselves?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“To tell the truth I don’t know whether it is or not. I didn’t learn it, myself. I sort of absorbed it. But I can tell you it makes all the difference in the world if you can talk with them and understand them or not. If you can I can’t imagine any people more easy to get on with.”

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

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

Chapter Four.

My Neighbour's Household.

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

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

He was a fine specimen of the best type of old soldiertall, straight, handsome, hearty and straightforward in mannerin short a gentleman every inch of him. I had a great liking for him, and for his own sake alone would have gone far towards smoothing his difficulties and straightening things out for him no matter how crooked they might be, thanks to his own wrongheadedness. His wife was a good counterpart of himwithout his wrongheadednessand quite free from the fads and fussiness apparently inseparable from most elderly ladies, which render their presence and company a matter for resigned toleration rather than any sort of pleasure or advantage. To such Mrs Sewin was a rare and remarkable exception. The youngest daughter, Edith, was outwardly a complete contrast to her stately sister, being shorter, and plump and fairhaired, but very prettyand sunnynatured to a degree. In fact I believe that to most men she would have proved the more attractive of the two.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Look here,” I said. “If you would really like to ride up there, it occurs to me I might show you something that would interest younothing to do with the store particularly. But I could collect a lot of Tyingoza’s people and scare up a regular native dance. They do it well, and it’s worth seeing, I can tell you.”

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

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

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

“Well, I think the idea isn’t a bad one, if we are not putting you out, Glanton. Butwhat about the farm? We can’t leave it entirely to itself.”

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

“I might be able to straighten that for you, Major. I will send you down a mana native, one of Tyingoza’s people, but as trustworthy as steel. You know, most of them are that way if put in a position of trust. Well you needn’t be afraid of anything going wrongstocklifting and thatwhile he’s in charge. How’s that?”

“Capital!” went up from the girls.

“You seem to ‘straighten’ everything for us, Mr Glanton,” said the eldest, gratefully.

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

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

“You’ll have the same room as last time, Mr Glanton,” said Mrs Sewin, as she bade me goodnight.

“Why, I was just thinking of going home,” I protested.

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

“Let’s take the grog out on to the stoep, uncle,” said Falkner. “It’s cooler there.”

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

“Exactly, Major, he had to and these haven’t. Wherein lies all the difference.”

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

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

“Good Lord, I’m too old to begin learning languages.”

“Not a bit of it,” I said. “I knew a man oncehe must have been about your age, Major, an old Indian, too, only he had been a civilianwho had gone stone blind late in life. But he had a hobby for languages, and I’m blest if he hadn’t taken up this one among others. He had got hold of the Bible in Zulu, done up by missionaries of course, and began putting all sorts of grammar cases to me. I own he fairly stumped me. I told him I didn’t know anything of Biblical Zuluhad always found that in use at the kraals good enough. Then he had the crow over me. But you ought to have a try at it, certainly your nephew ought.”

“By Jove, I believe I will,” growled Falkner. “Only it’d be an infernal grind.”

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

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

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

“You don’t, eh? Well I’m getting up a firstrate garden certainly. And the shooting around here isn’t bad of its kind.”

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

Chapter Five.

A Disappearance and a Revel.

“What is this about Nyakami?”

“U’ Nyakami? Is he dead?” answered Tyingoza, pausing with his snuffspoon in mid air.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Who can think in such a case?”

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

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

He would have entertained even graver doubts could he have witnessed a still further stage of imbecility into which I lapsed. I found myself looking in the glassnot for ordinary purposes of toilet, be it noted, and I have set out upon this narrative determined to spare none of my own weaknesses, but because I was anxious to see what sort of fellow I lookedand I don’t know that I felt particularly flattered by the result; for, confound it, I was no longer in my first youth, and a face bronzed and roughened by twenty years of knocking about, struck me as nothing particularly attractive to the other sex. Yet it was only the roughness of weather and more or less hard times that had told upon it, for I had always been rather abstemious and had set my face like a flint against the wild roaring sprees that some of my friends in the same line were prone to indulge in. If I had not the “clean run” look of Falkner Sewin, my eye was every whit as clear and I had a trifle the advantage of him in height, and held myself quite as straight. No, it was absurd to try and start comparisons with Sewin, who was quite ten years younger, and had never known any hardening experiences, so I turned from the lookingglass imprecating one Godfrey Glanton as a silly ass, who had much better trek away right upcountry and stay there altogether. And this idea was the first intimation that I had returned to sanity again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Yes. He was here this morning.”

“Oh, I should like to see him.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Yes. Those on the immediate border here, Tyingoza’s people, and two or three more of the large locations along the river. Further in they are made up of all sorts of the

tribes originally inhabiting what is now Natal. Ah! Do you hear that? Here come some of them at any rate."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Amakosi!" (Chiefs.)

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

Hardly had they withdrawn to the place I had pointed out and squatted themselves upon the ground than a sound of singing was heard from another quarter and soon a second company came in sight likewise bravely got up, and then another, till I

reckoned there must be something over three hundred of them. The ladies were delighted, and pronounced it well worth coming to see: so was I, because they were.

“I say though,” said Falkner, “to be serious, isn’t this ratherwell, injudicious, Glanton? These fellows are all fully armed you know, and we”

I laughed.

“Look here, Sewin,” I said. “Supposing you were taken to a review, in France or Germany saywould you feel any misgivings because the troops were fully armed?”

“That’s all very well, but these are savages you know. And the ladies”

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

“Hullo, Glanton. Bow your acknowledgments,” cried Falkner, in a tone whose wouldbe geniality could not disguise a sneer. “Well, I was not speaking on my own account.”

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

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

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

“Not a big one. I sha’n’t give them the pick of the herd of course.”

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

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

But all were anxious to make one of that few, and by the time the doomed animals had reached the appointed place, chosen for being well out of sightand scentof the house, a rush was made upon them. Half the number were down at once, deftly

assegaied; the remaining three however careered away, two wounded, and streaming with bloodthe other untouched. Then ensued something akin to a buffalo hunt. With yells and whoops the excited savages bounded in pursuit, but even their speed and agility was not enough to turn the terrified and maddened animals, and had not a fresh crowd raced forward to head them they would have got away into the bush. Now two were promptly transfixed with half a dozen deftly hurled assegais in each, but the last, hardly touched, charged like lightning through its encompassing destroyers, and came straight back to the kraal, and, incidentally, for Falkner Sewin, who had left me to follow on and see the racket.

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

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

Chapter Six.

Further Festivity.

“Near thing that,” I said.

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

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

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

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

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

“There are certain titbits they like that way, just as we do our snipe and woodcock and tealor say we do.”

In truth the groups engaged upon each carcase were not pleasant to the eyealthough thoroughly enjoying themselvesand we left them.

“I say, Glanton, though,” he went on, “I believe I came devilish near getting badly mauled by that beastly cow. The nigger who ripped in that assegai did so in the nick of time. I’d like to give him halfacrown.”

“Hand over then, Sewin. Here’s the nigger.”

“What? You?”

“Me.”

“But the beast was going full bat.”

“Well, a cow’s a good big target even at twenty yards,” I said.

He whistled. “By Jove! I couldn’t have done it.”

For once I was able to agree with him.

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

“I’m afraid it’s all game fare tonight, Mrs Sewin,” I said. “This is roast bushbuck haunch, and that unsightly looking pot there beside the Major contains a regular upcountry game stew. I rather pride myself on it, and it holds five different kinds of birds, besides bacon, and odd notions in the way of pepper, etc.”

“And that’s what you call roughing it,” was the answer. “Why, it looks simply delicious.”

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

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

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

“Hearhear!” sung out Falkner. And then, warmed up into a glow of generosity by a good dinner and plenty of grog, I’m blest if the fellow didn’t trot out quite a yarn about the cow chevying him and my timely assegai throw; whereupon there was a disposition to make a hero of me on the spot.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Won’t they go over it again?”

“Oh, there’s plenty more to come. Rather too soon for an encore yet.”

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

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

“You’ll see. Listen. Now they are returning with the game.”

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

“They are recounting their exploits nowwhat game they have got, and how they got it,” I explained, as the singing ceased.

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

“Well, it might be managed. What d’you think, Major?”

“A capital idea. Buthang it, we haven’t got our guns.”

“Oh, as to that,” I said, “you could use mine. There’s a shot gun and a rifle, and a rifle and smoothbore combined. That’ll arm all hands.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“This is Wabisa, the next biggest chief under Tyingoza,” I said, introducing the foremost, a tall, dignified headringed man. “Now, Miss Sewin, here is a real chief. Tyingoza could not come tonight, but will tomorrow morning.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of all native dances a war dance is the most catching, and this had not long started before even the old Major found himself beating time with his feet, while as for Falkner, it was all I could do to prevent him from rushing in among them to take his part. The chant now rose quickly to a ferocious roar, and as the dancers swayed and crouched, turning half round, then leaping erect, while going through the pantomime of striking an enemy, to the accompaniment of a strident death hiss, the whole scene was vivid and realistic enough to have rendered some people decidedly nervous. Then the thunderous stamping of six hundred feet, the beating of sticks on shields, and the shrilling rattle of assegai haftsa sound not quite like any other I ever heard, and I’ve heard it oftenadd to this the rolling of fierce eyeballs, and the waving of tufted shields in the moonlight and you have a picture unrivalled for thrilling and at

the same time exhilarating terror. A gasp as of involuntary relief went up from my guests as the thunder and racket ceased with a suddenness of silence that was almost appalling in contrast Miss Sewin was the first to speak.

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

I was rarely pleased at this, and mumbled somethingprobably idiotic.

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

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

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

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

Chapter Seven.

Tyingoza's HeadRing.

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

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

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

"Right, I'll chance the cold. Got a towel? Ah, thanks."

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

"I can imagine he would be."

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

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

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

"Well, he mustn't throw it up, that's all," I said.

"That's what I tell him. But he's so restless, swears the life's slow here. Badtempered too, and always kicking up rows with the niggers. Yes, he's a great anxiety to me."

As to the last I thought as coming from Major Sewin it was a good deal of the pot calling the kettle black. For the rest his revelations as to Falkner's prospects, or the

lack of them, were not unpleasing to me, if only that the uncomfortable thought which had beset me last night could have had no foundation. This was mean but I suppose it was natural, and, as a set off, may be accepted the fact that I would willingly have done the youngster any good turn within my power. I felt flattered too that the old gentleman should discuss with me what was, after all, a family matter.

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

“Ah, now, it’s just that which”

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

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

“No, indeed. The kartelisn’t that what you call ithas all the elasticity of a spring mattress. Really, I shall never believe again in you upcountry men’s stories of roughing it.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Nono. Don’t be in the least alarmed about that. By the way, how are you getting on in your studies? Say something to Ivuzamanzi noweven if only two or three words.”

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

“Not a bit of it. Nowgo ahead.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Nonono,” I said. “Not a bit of it. Don’t you think anything about that. I don’t.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The chief ran his eyes over the group.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why what's the row?" cried the offending fool. "The old boy seems a bit cross."

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

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

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

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

Chapter Eight.

The Spoiling of the Hunt.

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

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

“Don’t go. It doesn’t look safe.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

For, seeing that their chief had not returned the angry mutterings of his incensed followers had risen to a threatening hubbub. All the savage was now aroused within them, and they crowded up to the store, clamouring for the man who had insulted their father’s headring. Assegais were flourished, dogs were adding their howls and

yaps to the general racket, and altogether matters were taking a decidedly serious turn.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Go home?” echoed Falkner. “But, confound it allwhat about our hunt?”

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

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

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

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

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

I went out again. Ivuzamanzi came forward.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Ou!” he grunted, and turned away. I thought enough had been said, to these young ones at any rate, so forbore to give them anything more in the way of entertainment lest they should think we were afraid of them. And soon, somewhat to my relief, and

very much to the relief of my guests, they picked up their weapons, and with their curs at their heels moved away in groups as they had come.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Nobody knowsor where he is. He has disappeared.”

“Disappeared?”

“Yes. Nobody seems to have the slightest clue as to what has become of him. He went to bed as usual, and in the morningwell, he wasn’t there. He couldn’t have gone away

anywhere, for his horses were all on the place, and his boys say they had never heard him express any intention of leaving home."

"Good gracious, no. We hadn't heard of it," said Mrs Sewin. "Butwhen was it?"

"About a fortnight ago. I didn't hear of it till the other dayand then through native sources."

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

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

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

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

"I never heard of a case before."

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

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

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

"Nothing's absolutely impossible," I answered. "Still, I don't think that's the solution."

"But the policewhat do they think of it?"

"So far they are stumped utterly and completelynor can their native detectives rout out anything."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then I had my reward.

“Will you come and help me water some of the flowers, Mr Glanton?” said Miss Sewin, after we had offsaddled and generally settled ourselves. “Nodon’t say you are going back. Mother is very nervous tonight, and I know you are going to add to your kindness to us by sleeping here.”

Again I trod on airand yetand yetI felt that I was acting like a fool. What on earth could come of itat any rate to my advantage? Yet, againwhy not?

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

entrancement of listening to her voice and watching her grace of movement wound itself more and more around me.

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

“I want you to promise me not to quarrel with my cousinno matter how rude and provoking he may be.”

“Is that all? Why of course I will.”

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Nine.

Hensley's nextofkin.

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

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

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

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

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

I arrived at the scene of Hensley's disappearance about midday. The homestead stood in a long, narrow valley, thickly bushed. Behind, and almost overhanging it,

was a great krantz whose smooth ironstone wall glowed like a vast slab of redhot metal. The place was wild and picturesque to a degree, butoh so hot!

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

"Good day," said one of them, knocking off his play, and coming up. "Offsaddle won't you? Dashed hot, isn't it?"

"Thanks. I'm Glanton, from Isipanga," I said in answer to his look of enquiry.

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

"Oh, you ride transport then? How many waggons?"

"Three in good timesone in bad; none in worseas in the present case. This is Sergeant Simcox, of the N.M.P.," introducing the other man, whom I noticed wore uniform trousers and boots. "He's been helping me to look for my poor old uncle, you know."

"Oh, Hensley was your uncle, was he?"

"Rather. But I'm nextofkinso if he's not found I take. See?" with a comprehensive wink and jerk of the head which took in the surroundings.

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

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

"Hanged if I did. He didn't like me. Did you?"

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

"Ja. I don't know what to think of it. I've been running the place since I heard of the affairluckily I wasn't on the road just then so was able to. You'll stop and have some scoff of courseyou too, sergeant?"

"Wish I could," said the latter, "but it's against rules. Must get back to my camp."

"Hang rules. Who's to know? Glanton here won't split."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Pecamane, ’Nkose!”

“Have I seen you before?”

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

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

“Tyingoza, Nkose.”

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

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

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

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

And no one had opened the stable?

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

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

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

I promised him I would, as I climbed into the saddleand the great krantz seemed to echo back our cheery goodbye in ghostly refrain.

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

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

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

“Hi! Hallo! Who’s that,” I sung out.

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

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

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

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

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

“Mm!” he hummed. “The moon is low. Just so, Iqalaqala. You will not go home tonight.”

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

He shrugged his shoulders impressively. Then he said:

“Who may tell? Butyou will not.”

I tried to laugh goodhumouredly, but it was not genuine. Yet was not the thing absurd? Here was I, letting myself be humbuggedalmost scaredby an old charlatan of a witch doctor, a fellow who made a comfortable living out of his credulous countrymen by fooling them with charms and spells and omens, and all sorts of similar quackeryI, a white man, withI haven’t mentioned it beforean English public school education.

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

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

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

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

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

Ukozi’s face was as a mask. He uttered a single gruntthat was all.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You will think it strange I should make so light of his warning, yet as I resumed my way up the valley, no thought of material danger came into my mind as I pondered

over it. I would show him that wise as he was, and great his reputation, yet he did not know everything. I would have the crow of him next time we met, when

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some thought of making a détour, and passing the bewitched point by taking a wide sweep, came into my mind, but that would have involved some infernally rough travelling, besides the moon wouldn’t last much longer, and who could say whether the result might not turn out the same, for by now the witch doctor’s declaration had carried its full weight. So I was soon knocking Kendrew out of his first sleep, with

literally a lame excuse to the effect that my steed had gone lame, and it was no use trying to get over two hours of rough road with him that night.

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

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

Chapter Ten.

Falkner Pugnacious.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Not much. I’m waiting for you.”

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

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

“Glantonby the Lord!” ejaculated Falkner, startled, and, I fancied, looking a trifle ashamed of himself.

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

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

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

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

“Well, if I’ve been uncivil I’ll not be above owning it,” said Kendrew. “So come inside MrSewin, and we’ll have a drink and think no more about it.”

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

“You’re early here, Sewin,” I said. “Where did you sleep?”

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

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

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

horse had refused to go any further, and he had to make up his mind to lie by in the veldt and wait till morning.

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

“Where was that?” I said, now roused to considerable interest. “At least, I meanwas it far from here?”

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

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

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

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

“Rum thing to happen,” commented Falkner. “Ain’t you ratherwell, uncomfortable, at times, here, all alone?”

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

“Well butwhat of the niggers?”

Kendrew let go a jolly laugh.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“See? How?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Eleven.

A Farewell Visit.

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

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

“And the young onehe who sits in Nyamaki’s placedoes he think he will return?”

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

“He is inclined to think not. He thinks his relation has wandered away somewhereperhaps into the river, and will never be heard of again.”

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

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

“Ukozi is in these parts,” I went on.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Now, Tyingoza, I would ask: What people does?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was an ominous stillness about the Sewins’ homestead as I approached, and I own to a feeling of considerable disappointment as the thought crossed my mind that the family was away, but reassurance succeeded in the shape of a large white dog, which came rushing furiously down the path, barking in right threatening fashiononly to change into little whines of delight and greeting as it recognised me. This was a factor in the Sewin household which I have hitherto omitted to introduce. He was one of the Campagna breed of sheep herding dogs, and was Aïda’s especial property, she having discovered him as a puppy during a tour in Italy. He was a remarkably handsome beast, pure white, and was of the size and strength of a wolf, to which he bore a strong family likeness. He had honoured me with his friendship

from the very firsta mark of favour which he was by no means wont to bestow upon everybody, as his mistress was careful to point out.

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

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

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

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

“Only the old people?” I said.

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

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

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

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

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

“Don’t you go trying any more experiments at the expense of the chiefs’ headrings up there, Falkner,” said Edith, the younger girl.

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

“Well, and you want itat any rate the adviceonly you never take it,” was the retort.

“Nobody ever does, Miss Edith,” I said, coming to his rescue. “Advice is one of those commodities people estimate at its own costnothing to wit; and set the same value upon it.”

“Now you’re cynical, Mr Glanton,” she answered, “and I don’t like cynical people.”

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

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

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

“For instance that boy you sent usIvondwe. Why he’s a treasure. Everything has gone right since he came. He can talk English, for one thing.”

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

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

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

“Yes, he’s a firstrate boy, Glanton,” said the Major. “I don’t know what we should do without him now.”

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

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

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

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

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

“One thing I like about this country,” pronounced Falkner, when he had got a cigar in full blast, and was lounging luxuriously in a hammocka form of recumbency I detest“and that is that provided you’re in the shade you can always sit out of doors. Now in India you can’t. It’s a case of shaded rooms, and chiks, and a black beast swinging a punkahwhom you have to get up and kick every halfhour when he forgets to go ontill about sundown. Here it’s glorious.”

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

Outside, the blaze of sunlightrich, full, and golden, without being oppressive or overpoweringlay slumbrous upon the sheeny roll of foliage. Here and there the red face of a krantz gleamed like bronze, and away on a distant spur the dark ring of a native kraal sent upward its spiral of blue smoke. Bright winged little sugar birds flitted familiarly in and out among the passion flower creeper which helped to shade the stoep, quite unaffected by our presence and conversationthough half scared temporarily as a laugh would escape Falkner or myself. Striped butterflies hovered among the sunflowers in front, and the booming hum of large bees mingled with the shriller whizz of longwaisted hornets sailing in and out of their paperlike nests under the roofand at these if they ventured too low, Arlo, whose graceful white form lay curled up beside his mistress' chair, would now and again fling up his head with a vicious snap. The scene, the hour, was one of the most perfect and restful peace: little did we think, we who sat there, enjoying it to the full, what of horror and dread lay before us ere we should look upon such another.

Chapter Twelve.

The Mystery of the Waterhole.

Suddenly Arlo sprang up, barking furiously.

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

“Be quiet, Arlo, do you hear!” ordered his mistress. “It’s only Ivondwe.”

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

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

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

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

He laughed.

“That is so, Iqalaqala,” he answered. “Yet it is well for Umsindo, who is long since tired of talking to deaf ones. Au! How shall he talk yonderkwa Majendwa?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Who’s a thundering great scoundrel at bottom, Falkner?” said Mrs Sewin’s voice in the doorway.

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

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

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

“Fishing lines? And it’s Sunday,” said Mrs Sewin, who was old fashioned.

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

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

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

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

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

“By JoveI must apologise. You must find me very dull, Miss Sewin,” I answered, throwing off my preoccupation as with an effort. “The fact is I believe I was thinking of something of the kindruling out the ‘perils.’ Do you know, I believe you’ve all been rather spoiling me herespoiling me, I mean, forwell, for my ordinary life. Butanyhow, the memory of the times I have known latelyof days like this for instancewill be something to have with one, wherever one is.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He raised himself on one elbow, and his then occupationshying stones at every mudturtle that showed an unwary headwas suspended.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What was it?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I knew the coin well by sight. It was of heavy unalloyed gold, thickly stamped with an inscription in Arabic characters. But, as we took our way along the bush path,

expecting every moment to catch the gleam of it amid the dust and stones, nothing of the sort rewarded our search, and finally we came to the rocks at the head of the pool.

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

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

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

“Oh, there it is. Look.”

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

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

“Nono,” she answered. “I won’t have it. What if you were to fall into the waterafter what we have just seen? No. Leave it till tomorrow, and bring a rope.”

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

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

“Don’t risk it,” she repeated earnestly. “Leave it till tomorrow. With a long reim you can easily get down.”

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

Chapter Thirteen.

The Incident of the Lost Coin.

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

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

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

“HaUkozi. I see yousee you again,” I observed, in greeting.

“Inkosikazi!” he uttered, saluting my companion.

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

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

“Something bigger perhaps,” I answered. “He’s a witch doctor.”

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

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

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

As we both knew where it wasor indeed in any casethe opportunity seemed not a bad one. But I said:

“You must remember, Miss Sewin, that native doctors, like white ones, don’t practice for nothing, and often on the same terms. What if this one should ask as the price of his servicesnoprofessional attendance, shouldn’t it be?a great deal more than the lost article’s worth?”

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

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

“Nyamaki is not home again, Iqalaqala?”

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

“Not yet.”

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

“I did not. Your múti is great, Ukozigreat enough to stop a horse.”

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

“No.”

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

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

“I declare it’s rather uncanny,” said my companion. “Does he know what it is? Ask him.”

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

“Nearly to the bottom! But this place has no bottom.”

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

He looked amused, shaking his head softly.

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

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

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

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

“Who may tell?” he answered, having completed that important operation. “Yet, Iqalaqala, are you still inclinedyou and Umsindoto continue swimming there, and diving nearly to the bottomahah! nearly to the bottom?”

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

“That which you seek is not down there.”

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

“It shines.”

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

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

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

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

“Au! It shineslike the sun. To find it something else that shines will be necessary. Something that shineslike the moon.”

I laughed to myself over this “dark” saying, and produced a halfcrowna new one.

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

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

“Halfway between this and where you left the other white people is a redwood treeof which two sticks point over the path. From the path on the other side, a slope of smooth rock falls away. Just below thisresting upright between two stonesone pointed, the other roundis that which you seek.”

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

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

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

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

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

“I declare I feel quite excited over this,” Aïda Sewin said, as we rapidly retraced our steps. “Look. Here is where we left the othersandthere’s the slab of rock.”

“Yes. It won’t be a difficult scramble. Now Miss Sewin, you shall have the opportunity of verifying Ukozi’s dictum yourself. Soyou go first.”

In a moment we were below the rocka matter of ten yards’ descentand, in a small dry watercourse beneath we descried the glint of something. A cry of delight escaped her.

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

Sure enough at our feet, leaning almost upright between the two stonesthe pointed one and the roundwas the lost coin.

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

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

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

Her eyes seemed to search my face. There wasor seemed to beno prevaricating.

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

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

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

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

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

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

She turned towards me, then shook her head.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Glad you did,” I answered, shaking hands with him as heartily as ever. Yet at bottom, that “neighbour” idea struck unpleasantly. Kendrew as a neighbour was all

very well, and I nailed him as suchfor myself, but confound it, I didn't want him getting too "neighbourly" here; and that, too, just as I was going away myself for a time. And then I realised, more fully than ever, what it meant to me to be fulfilling the rôle of a sort of little Providence to these people. Now Kendrew would lay himself out to do that during my absence, and in short, on my return I might find, to use a vulgar syllogism, that my own nose had been most effectually put out of joint.

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

"We're going to have a storm," said the Major, looking upward. "AïdaGlantonyou're only just in time. You too, Mr Kendrew. You'll stay the night of course?"

Kendrew answered that he'd be delighted, and forthwith began to make himself at home in his free and easy fashion. He was not in the least afflicted with shyness, and had no objection whatever to being drawn on the subject of his experiences. He had plenty of stories to tell, and told them well too, only perhaps it was rather mean of me to think that he need not so uniformly have made himself the hero of each and all of them. I don't know that I can plead in extenuation that when we sat down to table the fellow by some means or other contrived to manoeuvre himself into the chair next to Miss Sewin, a seat I had especially marked out for myself, and in fact usually filled. Added to which, once there, he must needs fill up the intervals between blowing his own trumpet by talking to her in a confoundedly confidential, appropriating sort of style; which I entirely though secretly resented. And I was on the eve of an absence! Decidedly events tended to sour me that eveningand it was the last.

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

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

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

“He seems a nice sort of boy. And nowyou start on Wednesday? Shall we see you again between this and then?”

“I’m afraid not, Miss Sewin. Tyingoza’s nephew has disappointed me over the span of oxen he was going to hire me, and I shall have to spend tomorrow and the day after riding Heaven knows where in search of another span. Oxenat any rate reliable onesare precious scarce just now everywhere.”

“I’m sorry. Iweshall miss you so much, Mr Glantonand you have been so kind to us”

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

“But you will come and see us directly you return, won’t you? I shall look forward to it, mindandI hate being disappointed.”

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

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

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

“Glanton? Yes. He’s a good old buffer, Glanton. Why, what’s become of him?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The words “we never ought to have come here” alarmed me. What if when I returned I should find them gone? Oh, butthat wouldn’t bear thinking of. So I did my best to reassure her, and to all appearances succeeded. Yet if I had known thenor had the faintest inkling ofwhat I afterwards knewWell when I did it was too late.

Chapter Fourteen.

A Bad Beginning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Annoyed as I was, for the life of me I could not but feel interested. Both the contending parties were watching each other intently and it was clear that so novel a mode of fighting had appealed to this warlike people to the extent of their allowing their adversary fair play instead of rushing him by weight of numbers. I had seen the same kind of thing among them before, notably on that occasion when Tyingoza's son had accepted the invitation to head a sort of flying invasion of the opposite side. But now, as then, they were destined to forget the strict rules of fair play when blood was up.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Gogo,” I answered. “Send your fathers here. I talk not with children.”

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

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

“No. Better leave that. They’re only blowing off steam.”

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

“Shut that silly jaw,” he growled, seizing the wrist of a fellow who was doing gwaza with a big assegai close to his face, and, with the other hand hitting him a terrific blow right between the eyes, felling him.

Then I thought my last hour had come, but nothey fell back as though scared. Falkner’s fighting powers had done us yeoman’s service after all, was the thought that flashed through my mindand then I saw that it was not so; that our respite was due to another cause.

Unseen by either party to the turmoil two Zulus had come upand one of them I knew, and knowing him, felt devoutly thankful that he was a pretty considerable chief.

“Now I see men,” I said, “men with rings on. Now I can talk. Greeting, Nonguza.”

He answered me with scant cordiality. He was a tall, fine man, but his face was heavy and sullen, more than that, it was a cruel face. The glance he shot at Falkner especially was not benevolent.

“I see you, Iqalaqala,” he said. “What is this, for my dogs seem to be barking over loud!”

I told him what I knew, which was little enough, and calling the waggon drivers we got at the rest of it. They had gone to look after the oxen, which were turned loose to graze, and had arrived in time to find a crowd of armed Zulus driving them off. Some had come for themselves, driving them up to the waggons, threatening them. It was then that Falkner Sewin had come out, and singling out the spokesman had challenged him to fight.

Nonguza called to two of the rioters, and ordered them to tell their story. It was soon told. They had found our oxen eating and trampling the corn of their father, Magebe, and had driven them off until their owners should pay for the damage.

Now Magebe proved to be the man who accompanied Nonguza, and on hearing this he became excited, and must needs rush off to ascertain what damage had been done. This Jan Boom pronounced to be next to nothing.

“They were hardly in the field at all, Baas,” he said in an undertone, and excellent English. “Zulu nigger one damn great big liar.”

The speaker being some shades darker in colour than any Zulu there present I could hardly restrain a laugh. Falkner couldn’t. He guffawed outright. The chief looked angry.

“Steady, Sewin,” I warned. “You’re spoiling everything.” Then to Magebe. “We had better all go and look what has been done. Then we can settle it.”

The mealie crop was only just over the rise, so we were there very soon. I had told Falkner to come too, fearing he might get into more mischief if left behind: and yet it was almost as bad having him, for he eyed the two Zulus with a sort of resentful contempt, more than once expressing a desire to knock their qualified heads together.

Even as Jan Boom had said, the damage proved to be very slight; but Magebe, an old man and avaricious, set to work to make the most of it. Half his crop was ruined and so forth. I must pay him two oxen.

Of course I had no intention of doing anything of the sort, so we adjourned to the waggons again to talk it over. There the discussion became long and heated, notwithstanding the fact that I opened it by filling them up with a great deal of black coffee and sugar. Nonguza, who did most of the talking, and I felt sure would claim the lion’s share of the spoil whatever it might be, was especially curt and offensive. I got sick of it at last.

“Here,” I said, spreading a new green blanket on the ground, and piling upon it a couple of big butcher kniveswhich Zulus dearly lovesome strings of black and white beads, a few brass buttons and a goodly length of roll tobacco. “This is more than twice the damage my oxen have done. So now, Magebe, take it, and I will send one of my drivers with these two,” pointing to the two young Zulus who had explained matters, “and he will bring back the oxen.”

But Magebe objected that this was not enough, no, not nearly enough.

“There it is. Take it or leave it. If you leave it, then we leave the Zulu countrywalk out of it, for we cannot drag our waggons. Then, when the Great Great Onehe who sits at Undiniis called upon to make good the loss of two spans of oxen, two waggons and the whole of their contentsto the Englishmen whose oxen were takenwere taken by Nonguza, the induna whom he sent to keep order here on the boundary, what will he say, that Lionwhat will he do? Tell me that. What will he do?”

“I know nothing of your oxen, Umlúngu,” said Nonguza, sullenly. “It is not I who have taken them.”

“Not you? Ha! When an induna of the King is present, is he greater than only the head of a kraala large kraal certainlyor is he less? Tell me that, Nonguza?”

It was a good game of bluff to play, and I was about at the end of my patience. I held trumps and I knew my hand, for I knew perfectly on what errand this chief was there.

Now he turned and gave an order to those who had lately been threatening us, and I knew that the game was won. Yet even then, as I noted the look of sullen vindictiveness that fled swiftly across the chief's face, I was not inclined to exult, for I was well aware that he would go a good way to be even with me yet, and in the then unsettled state of the border it would be strange if some opportunity of making himself disagreeable did not afford itself.

"Well, I'm sick of all this jaw with a couple of snuffy niggers, Glanton," growled Falkner. "What's going to be done?"

"Oh shut your silly head," I said, irritably, for of course an unconciliatory tone tells its own tale even though no word is understood. "I suspect your readiness to bash all and everybody is at the bottom of the whole bother."

"Well, if a brute comes at me brandishing a stick with a knob like a cricket ball I've got to do something, haven't I?" he answered, lighting his pipe and slouching away in the sulks.

I was in no better humour, to tell the truth, but laid myself out to do the civil to Nonguza, by way of smoothing his ruffled feathers. Then, as time went by, and I was beginning to feel a little anxious once more, to my intense relief my ears caught a wellknown sound, the trampling of hoofs to wit, and locoming over the rise were my oxen, driven at a run by those who had taken them. I gave orders at once to inspan, returning a curt negative to Magebe's inquiries as to whether I would not stop and trade. I was going kwa Majendwa, I answered. There no mistake would be made as to who I was.

So we marched forth with all the honours of war, but as the whips cracked, and the spans tugged out in response I noticed that the cloud of armed Zulus watching us was increased by others coming over the ridgepart of Nonguza's impiand thought we should be lucky if we escaped further trouble at the hands of these. It was a bad beginning to our tripin the temper the people were evidently then inyes, a bad beginning.

Chapter Fifteen.

Two of a Trade.

When Dolf Norbury learned that another white man was coming to Majendwa's country on trading intent, his first remark was that he was damned if he should. This statement he followed up with the use of absolutely unprintable language for the space of many minutes. His first act was to shy a bottle at the head of his informant, who ducked in time to avoid disastrous contact with the same, and then to make him exceedingly drunk with the contents of another bottle, not yet reduced to its last useas a missile to wit. This by way of compensation.

The process had another effect, that of making the injured man talk. He for his part was a young Zulu of no particular account, and what he stated was perfectly true, he went on to declare. The white man was a trader known as Iqalaqala, and with him was another white man, a great fighter, who could knock men senseless with his fists even as one might do with a large and heavy stick. He who spoke knew, for he had seen it donenot once only, either. At this Dolf Norbury's language grew vehement and sultry again, and was interlarded by many aspirations after just one glimpse of the man who could knock him senseless or knock him anything else. Only just one glimpse, that was all. The next thing he did, by way of relieving his feelings was to start in and thrash the nearest of his native wivesof which he had severalshe, unfortunately for her, being the one of least family standing, and therefore the least likely to raise resentment on the part of the relativesor others, a thing which is bad for trade. Then he opened a bottle of "square face," took a very big drink, and putting the bottle in a pocket or his leather coat went round to the chief's hut.

"I have news, Mawendhlela," he began, when he found himself inside. "But"with a look at some others who were seated there"it will keep."

Not long was it before these took the hint, and stole out, one by one. The chief's eyes twinkled as he noted the familiar bulge in the pocket of his visitor.

"Au! it is cold," he said, pretending to shiver, "and I am getting on in years and need warmth."

"This will give it you," said the white man, producing the bottle.

The chief's eyes sparkled as he watched the gurgling rush of the potent liquid into the calabash drinking vessel. Then he tossed off half of it with a gasp of contentment.

"That is indeed warmyes, warm," he said.

"And good. But there will soon be no more."

“No more? Now why, Udolfu?”

“Because I am goinggoing away.”

“Going away? Now that cannot be.”

“It can and it is. There is no longer room for me here. There is a cow at hand who will give you more milk than I can, but not such milk as thisoh no!”

“Ha!”

“It is Iqalaqala who is the cow that lows at the gate. Iqalaqala does not trade in strong drinkneither will he bring you any guns or cartridges or powder and lead. His trade is the trade for womenbeads, coloured cloth, and such.”

“Mm! Why then, Udolfu, there is still room for you here, for Iqalaqala can do the women’s trade and you can still do that for menguns and cartridgesand drink like thislike thiswhich warmsah, ah, which warms,” added the chief finishing his allowance of “square face” and pushing his calabash meaningly towards the other.

“But I will not. There is no room for two here. I will have all the trade or none.”

Mawendhlela’s face fell. He was a man who liked his comfort and the enjoyment of a daily modicum of “square face” gin, or Natal rum had become essential to this. As a chief he was not unmindful of certain plain hints on the part of those very high up indeed in the councils of the nation, to the effect that those under them were required to obtain the weapons of the white man as far as this could possibly be done. Yet here was the man who supplied him with both, threatening to withdraw. He saw the loss of his beloved drink with dismay, and with even greater dismay he contemplated the disfavour into which he would fall with those in high quarters, if his people showed but a poor muster in the way of firearms. The while Dolf Norbury was reading his thoughts, and could gauge their drift exactly. He knew, too, that personally Mawendhlela and many of his people would gladly see the last of himbut, the above considerations were potent.

“We cannot both trade here,” he repeated. “Iqalaqala must not be allowed to come. That’s all.”

“What can I do, Udolfu?” answered the chief helplessly. “Majendwa is a bull that roars louder than I, and he has the ear of the Great Great One himself. It is to Majendwa you must talk.”

“Majendwa?” repeated the white man, with a scowl as though the very name was unpalatable to himand, indeed, it was“Majendwa? Au! his kraal is far enough away. But here, you are chief, you, Mawendhlela. And for some days the people have been talking of the coming of Iqalaqala! Well, he must not come.”

They looked at each other for a little while in silence. Then the chief spoke.

“I can do nothing, Udolfu,” he repeated. “But youau! you white people can do everything. And I do not want a white man who only brings trade for women.”

“Then you leave it to me?” said the trader, reaching over the square bottle and replenishing the calabash.

“It is nothing to me,” said Mawendhlela, carefully extracting a cockroach which had fallen from the thatch into his liquor, and throwing it into the fire. “No more than that” as the insect crackled up.

Dolf Norbury chuckled, and took a big drink himself. The life of another man, a fellow countrymanor, it might be of two menwas no more to him than that of the burnt insect. They understood each other.

It may be asked how I am able to reproduce a dialogue between two persons sitting together alone in a hutalone mindand I many miles away at the time. Well, passing over the question as to whether anyone ever really is aloneespecially in a Zulu kraalrather than that the veracity of this my narrative be in any wise impugned, I would remind the reader that at an earlier stage thereof I took him into confidence so far as to explain that I was wont to derive a considerable amount of information from native sources, and that such information was surprisingly accurate. Sothere it is, you see!

The while we were trekking by slow and easy stages. There was a restlessness among the people as to which there could be no mistake. They were moving about in bands of ten or twenty instead of singly or in pairs, and fully armed, and now and then two or three men would come up hurriedly to the waggon, and hardly troubling to drop their weapons as required by etiquette, would start on again after a few words of inquiry as to our destination. In short the country seemed about as settled as an ant’s nest the top of which has just been kicked off; and more than one rumour had it that armed collisions had occurred with the grazing Boers beyond the Luneburg and Utrecht borders. Towards ourselves the behaviour of the people was rather offhand and independent, the young men especially being inclined to treat us to quite an unnecessary display of swagger. This was a source of anxiety to me, in that it involved a continuous strain upon my moral influence to keep Falkner Sewin from his favourite pastime of head punching, and this was difficult.

So far too, trade prospects seemed but poor. Formerly from each group of kraals we passed, people would have come eagerly forth to do a dealnow for ordinary trade goods they seemed to have no hankering. More than one headman would ask, talking "dark," if I carried what they wanted, and on assuring themselves that I did not, soon showed no further desire to trade. Now "what they wanted," done into plain English, meant firearms and ammunition, and this was a form of illicit trade from which I had always kept my hands clean. Not that the temptation was not great at that. The profits were ditto and the risk to one with my facilities, hardly worth considering, and the same held good of liquor selling, though as to this latter perhaps considerations of self interest lay behind my scruples, for it was in no wise to my interest to bear part in ruining this fine race among whom I lived, and from whom I drew a living.

For the rest, life was pleasant enough as we moved along easilyoutspanning during the heat of the day for several hoursand then trekking on until dark. Then the night camp under the stars, when the savoury game stewor if we couldn't get any game, the fried rashers of bacon, had been discussed, and pipes were in full blastthis constituted not the least pleasant moment of the day, as we sat and swapped yarns, to the accompaniment of the monotonous crunchcrunch of ruminating oxen tied to the yokes; or the occasional howl of a hyena, or the cry of some mysterious night bird coming up out of the surrounding blackness. All this my companion enjoyed immensely, as well he might. He did not so much enjoy the reverse side of the medal though, when a sudden thunderburst and a night of chilly, pelting downpourwhich precluded all thoughts of a fire, or anything hotdrove us to huddle within the tent waggon, and browse upon biscuit and tinned stuff. However I had broken him in fairly well by that time, and he was disposed to take things as they came. Now and again he would try my patience by some outbreak of mulish cussedness, but I remembered his character and training, and had no difficulty in keeping myself in hand. Added to which I believe I entertained a sneaking softness towards the fellow if only that he constituted a connecting link with those I had left behind. Those? Well, to be candid, butnever mind.

We were approaching the mountainous regions of the north, and the bushy valleys and slopes of the lower country had been left behind. The air grew clear and sharp, and the nights had become downright chilly. Around, the hills rose in abrupt slopes, their sweep broken up into great terraces as it were, by tiers of smooth grey cliffs.