

A Frontier Mystery
Vol.II

By

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Freeeditorial 

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Chapter Sixteen

To Blows.

“Here come men, Nkose, and I think that they come to cause us trouble,” said Mfutela, shading his eyes to look up the road.

I followed his glance. A dark crowd was swarming over the ridge half a mile in front, and in the then rising sun I could make out the glint of assegai blades. That was nothing, since every man in Zululand at that time seemed to make a point of moving about with as many assegais as he could conveniently carry. But it was significant that at sight of us they should have halted for a moment, and then come forward at a run, shouting like mad.

“Is there to be no end to all these mischievous idiots and their larks?” I said, sourly and in English. And yet at the time I felt not altogether happythings happen suddenly among savages. What if the tension on the Transvaal border had already brought on an outbreak.

“Hallo! What’s the row?” sang out Falkner, from the tent waggon, into which he had dived to fetch something or other. “Any more fellows whose heads want punchingeh, Glanton?”

“No,” I answered more sourly still. “Keep those itching knuckles of yours quiet for oncefor Heaven’s sake.”

It was early morning as I have said, and we were in the act of inspanning. We had camped in an open valley, and in front lay a long acclivity of miry red track mapped out by ancient wheel ruts and rendered diabolical by a heavy rainfall during the night. It was at the head of this that the crowd had appeared, and looking at both I was all the less disposed to meet opposition with the good humour which is always advisable.

“Zulu nigga troublesome debbil,” said Jan Boom, the Xosa, who was fond of airing his English, and his contempt for those of his own colour who “had none.”

The new arrivals left us in no sort of doubt as to their intentions, for they charged straight for us, and waving their weapons roared out to us to stop.

“Treek!” I yelled, seizing the whip from Mfutela, and letting out the long lash in a couple of resounding cracks which had the effect of making one fellow who was brandishing a waraxe within an ace of Tom’s nose who was leading skip aside with some alacrity. Jan Boom, who was driving the other waggon, was quick to follow my example, and to the accompaniment of a cannonade of whip cracking and earsplitting yells, the two spans tugged out laboriously over the heavy miry road.

So far as our disturbers were concerned, I kept silence, by way of showing that I considered them beneath my notice, until I saw that their mouthings and gesticulations as they kept pace with us on either side, were likely to schrik our two horses, leading on behind, to the point of nearly causing them to break their reins and rush away the devil knew where.

“Who are ye?” I shouted. “Who are ye that come bellowing down upon me like a pack of kraal curs? You are not children either, for I see among you men with rings. Go away.”

But the ringed men, to my surprise, were among the most boisterous.

“Turn back, Umlungu,” cried one of them. “Turn back. It is the word of our father, Mawendhlela.”

Mawendhlela! The name set my misgivings at rest in a moment. Mawendhlela a chief by virtue of birth and possessions, a man who was no warrior but one of the few Zulus at that time who was addicted to gin, and disliked me because I had always steadfastly refused either to trade or give him any.

“Mawendhlela!” I echoed. “Hau! I go to a bull that roars louder than he. I go to Majendwato Majendwa I say. Now go away.”

But this, to my surprise, they showed no inclination to do. On the contrary they closed up in such wise as to bring the front waggon to a standstill. Short of cutting a way through them there was no method of proceeding, and there were about a hundred of them, all bristling with assegais. I had my revolver on though it was not visible, and for all their numbers I made up my mind to shoot the first who should lay a hand upon my people or my oxen: for there are times when forbearance may be stretched to a dangerous limit. What would have happened next I won’t pretend to guess, but some sort of diversion must have occurred, for heads were turned, looking back over the way they had come. Then the crowd parted, precipitately too, some tumbling over each other’s heels in their alacrity to get out of the way, and through the lane thus opened there rode up at a furious pace, a mana white man.

“Here, get out of this!” he bellowed, firing off a very blast of profanity. “Turn your blanked oxen round, and trek backd’you hear? trek back a sight quicker than you came. D’you hear?”

“May I be permitted to ask why?” I said, sarcastically.

“No, you mayn’t and be damned to you. But I’ll tell you. Because I say so. That’s why. Because I say so. You’ve heard of me.”

“Don’t know that I have. Who might you be when you’re at home?”

“I’m Dolf Norbury. That’s who I might be. Dolf Norbury, d’you hear? I’ve got the trade up here, and I’m damned if I’m going to have any dirty winkler from Natal coming up here to make holes in it. Nowd’you hear?”

“Winkler” meaning a small shopkeeper, was meant to be offensive.

“Oh, so you’re Dolf Norbury, are you?” I said, pretending to be impressed.

“That’s right. I’m Dolf Norbury, and no man ever got the blind side of me and kept it. Nowclear.”

“Ah!” I said. “I’m Godfrey Glanton, and no man ever got the blind side of me and kept it. Nowclear.”

I thought he would there and then have tumbled down in a fit. It happened that I had heard a good deal about this Dolf Norbury, but had only seen him once, at Krantz Kop, and that some years before; on which occasion, however, he had been far too drunk to remember me now. He was a big, roaring, buffalo bull of a fellow of about fifty, who would be sure to gain ascendancy among savages if he laid himself out to do so. He had Mawendhlela completely under his thumb, and that for a further reason than those which have just appeared, which was as well for himself, for the more respectable chiefs of Zululand would have nothing to do with him by this time. He would have been turned out of the country, or would have died suddenly, before this but that he had his uses; for he was a most daring and successful gunrunner among other accomplishments. With all his bounce he was not wanting in pluck, and could hold his own anywhere, and always had held it as some had found to their costhe would add, darkly boastful. His record was uncertain, but he had an intimate acquaintance with the Transkein border and Pondoland: and talked the native dialects faultlessly; in short he was just the type that would drift into the position of “chief’s white man,” with all the advantages of selfenrichment which it affordsand these are not small if the thing is properly worked.

The only thing certain about him was that for some time past he dared not show his face upon any square yard of ground under British jurisdiction on pain of death in mid air, it was not obscurely hinted. In aspect he was heavy and powerful of build. His face, tanned to a red bronze, was half hidden in a thick and flowing beard just turning grey, but the jet black of his shaggy eyebrows had not begun to turn. Under them his eyes, black and piercing, glittered like those of a snake. Now they began to roll till you could see scarcely anything but the whites. He seemed on the verge of a fit.

“Don’t put yourself in a passion,” I said, for I had become cool in proportion to the other’s rage. “There’s no occasion for it, you know. Only I may as well tell you that I don’t take any man’s bounce, and the idea of you, or any other man coming along here to give me orders strikes me as a joke. See?”

“Joke does it?” he gasped. “You’ll find it a mighty dear joke.” Then followed more talk which it is impossible to reproduce on paper. “A joke does it? D’you know I’ve killed men for less than this yes, killed more men than you’ve even fought. A joke eh? Now you’ll see.”

He was just turning to the noisy crowd, who however had sunk into silence, and, with eyeballs strained, were watching developments, when Falkner, whose restraint had come to an end on seeing a white man, and therefore as he afterwards put it one who could stand up to him, instead of a lot of miserable niggers who couldn’t lunge forward.

“Here, I say. You’ll hurt yourself directly, old man,” he drawled I suspected purposely putting on his most offensive manner.

“Hurt myself will I aw haw?” returned the other, imitating Falkner’s drawl. “Hurt myself will I, my blanked popinjay? But first of all I’m going to hurt you I’m going to hammer you within an inch of your life, and I won’t promise to leave you that.”

He jumped off his horse, and Falkner winked at me, for this was just what he wanted.

“I say, you know, I can’t hit you. You’re too old,” he said, in a tone calculated to exasperate the other, and it had just that effect, for literally bellowing with rage Dolf came straight at him. At first Falkner undertook to play with him, but soon found that he had got his hands full, for the other had weight and was enormously strong, and although he was inferior in science his mad rushes were nearly as irresistible as those of a buffalo bull, which was just what he reminded me of, with his eyes swollen and glaring, and his beard red and shaggy with blood. But he was uncommonly quick on his pins,

and did not fight blindly by any meansindeed for some time I should have been sorry to have risked a large sum on either of them. It was a battle of giants.

I confess to watching the contest with a very keen interest. The Zulus standing around, were still as bronze as they craned eagerly forward to watch this, to them, absolutely novel form of battle. My people standing exactly where they had been, were no less interested spectators. At last I thought to detect a sign of weakening on the part of the enemy. Youth and science was beginning to tell against sheer strength. Norbury must have realised this, for shaking his head like a bull about to charge, he hurled himself forward for a final effort, striking out with terrific force. Falkner got it full on the forehead, but managed to keep up. The other staggered back, and then as he was about to make another rush I saw his right hand go behind him.

“Drop that!” I said sharply bringing round the butt end of my whipstick upon the wrist. With a howl of rage he complied literally, as the sheath knife which he had just drawn leapt from his hand. I put my foot on it just as Falkner, rushing in, knocked him fairly and squarely out.

“Two to one, you blanked cowards,” he snarled, in between curses, as he picked himself unsteadily up, half stunned as he was. “That your idea of fair play, is it?”

“And this is your idea of fair play?” I said, holding up the knife. It had a good eightinch blade and was ground like a razor. “Why you infernal murderer, did you think I was going to stand by and see you use it?”

“You’re a liar,” he answered. “I never pulled it. You knocked it out of its sheath yourself, just for an excuse to pack on to me two to one.”

“Liar yourself,” I said. “You’d pulled it all right. Now clear out, and by the Lord, if you try any dog tricks on us by way of being even we’ll shoot, you understand. This is outside British jurisdiction, you know. So look out.”

He gave me a look that was positively devilish, and which his battered and bloodsmeared countenance did not soften, you may be sure.

“Look out yourself,” he retorted furiously. “What sort of a man are you to come in and try to sneak another man’s trade? I was here first, I tell you.”

“That’s all right. But you might as well have made sure I was trying to sneak your trade first. Instead of that you come charging up to me at the head of about a hundred armed scoundrels and start a game of bounce. Did you think I was going to turn my waggons,

and trek back at your bidding, or at any man's bidding, because if so you got hold of the wrong pig by the ear, that's all. I hadn't intended to go near your old soaker's place but now I shall please myself about it."

"Will you? All right. You were saying something just now about being outside British jurisdiction. Well, remember that. You're not out of this country yet remember, and while you're in it you'd better keep a bright look out. Dolf Norbury ain't the man to be bested all along the line and I shouldn't wonder if he didn't begin now. So keep a bright look out, that's my advice."

"Oh all right. I'm not afraid," I sung out after him, for he had jumped on his horse and was now riding away without another word. "Treek!"

The whips cracked, and the waggons rolled forward, now without opposition. The turbulent crowd had completely quieted down, and although they still kept pace with us it was with a subdued sort of air. The reason was easy to read. We had come off best in the affair wherefore it was obvious to them that we must be greater than Dolf Norbury. Of their first annoyance I took no notice whatever, treating it as a matter of such small account as not even to be worth remembering; and soon they began to drop off by twos and threes, till at last there was only a handful left to whom I administered a suitable lecture.

"Think that skunk'll give us any more trouble, eh, Glanton?" said Falkner, presently.

"Shouldn't wonder. Anyway we'll take his advice and keep a bright look out. He's more than capable of trying a long shot at us from behind, if he sees his chance."

"By Jove, but that's a tough customer. If he'd only had science I should have been nowhere with him. It's science that does it," he added complacently. "Ever learn boxing, Glanton?"

"No. Yet I've held my own in a scrap on an occasion or two."

"Well learn it. I can tell you it's worth while. You get the science that way. We used to go in strong for it in the regiment, but there's every chance of forgetting it here. These silly niggers can't use their hands at all."

"No, but they can use other things, and if you'll take my advice you'll keep yours off them. Keep them for fellows of the Dolf Norbury stamp."

It must not be supposed that friend Falkner had come off light in the scrimmage; for in truth a goodly share of punishment had fallen his way. Both his eyes were badly bunged up, and he had a knob like a walnut over one temple. He further owned to the loosening of a couple of teeth. In short his countenance presented an aspect that would not have endeared him to those of the opposite sex on sight, say his cousins whom he had left behind. But he had held his own like a man, and of his pluck there could be no question at all; and I own that he had gone up very considerably in my estimation since the time of our earlier acquaintance.

Chapter Seventeen.

Majendwa's Kraal.

A large, wellbuilt Zulu kraal is to my mind a picturesque and symmetrical object with its perfect double circle of ring fences enclosing the yellow domes of the grass huts, and the large open space in the centre, dappled with many coloured cattle, or alive with the dark forms of its inhabitants. Such a kraal was that of the chief, Majendwa. It lay deep down in a large basinlike hollow; an amphitheatre, as it were, sparsely bushed and surrounded by high, terracelike cliffs. On one side these rose up to a tall cone of considerable height.

The valley bottom and the slopes of the hills were covered with grazing herds, all sleek and round and shining, for the grass was abundant, and rains had been plentiful in these highlands.

"That looks promising," I remarked to Falkner, as we gazed around upon this land of plenty. "I hope to take back a good few of these with us."

"By Jove, yes," he said. "I say, I wonder if there's anything to shoot among those cliffs over there."

"Not very much. An odd reebok or klipspringer is about all you'd get. However, we can try later on. Hallo! That looks uncommonly like Majendwa himself."

Two tall Zulus were stalking along a path which should converge with ours a little way ahead. We had ridden on, leaving the waggons to follow, and the sound of their creaking and jolting was even now borne to our ears behind, as they wound down the rocky track which led into the hollow from that side, together with an occasional driving shout.

"Is it?" said Falkner, looking up with some curiosity. "By Jingo, he's a finelooking chap for a nigger, anyway."

"Thought you'd worn through that 'nigger' string of yours, Falkner," I said. "Don't play on it for the benefit of Majendwa, that's all."

I may have seen as fine, but I never saw a finer specimen of a Zulu than Majendwa. Tall and straight, and for his age marvellously free from that corpulence which seems to come upon nearly all Zulus of rank or birth in middle life, every movement of his limbs showing great muscular strength the man's frame was a model. His countenance even from a European standpoint was singularly handsome, the broad, lofty forehead and

clear eyes conveying the idea of intellectuality and high breeding, in short he looked what he was, an aristocrat of his race. His greeting was dignified yet cordial.

“I see you, Iqalaqala,” he said, having waited for us to come up “and am glad. It is long since you brought trade our way.”

I answered that my wandering days were over for the present, yet I could not altogether sit still, so had come straight up to the Abaqulusi to trade with them first. Then following their inquiring glance at my companion, I told them he was a neighbour of mine who had been an officer in the English army, causing them to look at him with redoubled interest.

“What’s it all about, Glanton?” struck in Falkner who was always impatient when I was talking and bound to cut in at the wrong time. “Who’s the other chap?”

“Muntisi, the chief’s second son. He’s got seven, but this and the eldest are the only two who wear the ring.”

“Well, I like their looks. Here, have some ’bacca, old chap,” pulling out his pouch.

Majendwa, who of course didn’t understand the familiarity of the address, received the tobacco, in his dignified way, with a slight smile and a glance of furtive curiosity at Falkner’s particoloured countenance, which had by no means shed all traces of his bout of fisticuffs with Dolf Norbury. Then he said:

“Come within, Iqalaqala. I will send men to show your people where to outspan.”

We walked on with them, leading our horses, for we had dismounted to greet them. As we drew near, the kraal, which had seemed deserted, sprang into life. Heads appeared above the thorn fence, watching the approach of the waggons in the distance, and from where the red topknots of women were grouped, a buzz and chatter of expectation went up.

“Hallo, Glanton. You’re never going to leave that there?” said Falkner, as I deliberately put down my rifle outside the gate before entering. “I’m hanged if I’ll leave mine.”

“But you must. It’s etiquette.”

“Oh blazes, but I don’t like it,” he grumbled, as he complied reluctantly. However Majendwa, whose ready tact had seen through his reluctance, told me we need not

disarm there, and in fact we had better bring in our weapons, for there was nothing he enjoyed so much as inspecting firearms.

As we passed among the huts, I greeted several men whom I knew personally. Falkner the while staring curiously about him.

“I tell you what, Glanton. Some of these are devilish finelooking girls,” he remarked. “Quite light coloured too, by Jove.”

I rendered this for the benefit of the chief that my companion observed that the women of the Abaqulusi were far better looking than any he had ever seen in Zululand, which evoked a laugh from those men who heard, and a delighted squeal from those of the sex thus eulogised. Then Falkner committed his first blunder.

We had gained the chief’s hut, and stooping down, I had entered the low door first, Falkner following. When halfway through he drew back.

“Dash it all!” he exclaimed, “I’ve dropped my matchbox.”

“Never mind. Come right through,” I warned. “Don’t stop on any account.”

But it was too late. He had already crawled back, and picked up the lost article.

“Why what’s the row?” he said, startled at my peremptory tone.

“Only that it’s awful bad manners with them to stop halfway through a door and back out again. It’s worse, it makes a sort of bad múti. It’s a pity you did it.”

“Oh blazes, how was I to know? Sort of ill luck, ehevil eye and all that kind of business? Well, you can put that right with them.”

I tried to do this, incidentally explaining that he was a new arrival in the country and could not talk with their tongue yet, and of coarse was not familiar with their ways, that I hoped they would bear this in mind during the time we should spend at the kraal. But although the chief and his son took the incident in good part I could see they would much rather it had not happened. As regarded the offender himself one thing struck me as significant. Time was, and not so long ago either, when he would have poohpoohed it, as a silly nigger superstition. Now he showed some little concern, which was a sign of grace.

Tywala, which is beer brewed from amabele, or native grown millet, if fresh and cleanly made, is an excellent thirst quencher on a hot day, and you never get it so well and cleanly made as in the hut of a Zulu chief. Of this a great calabash was brought in, and poured out into black bowls made of soft and porous clay.

“By Jove, Glanton,” cut in Falkner, during an interval in our talk. “This is something like. Why this jolly hut,” looking round upon the clean and cool interior with its hard polished floor, and domed thatch rising high overhead “is as different as possible to the poky smoky affairs our niggers run up. And as for this tipplesh good Lord!”

There was a squashing sound and a mighty splash. He had been raising the bowl to his lips, and that by the process of hooking one finger over the rim thereof. The vessel being, as I have said, of soft clay was unable to stand that sort of leverage, and had incontinently split in half, and the contents, liberal in quantity, went souse all over his trousers as he sat there, splashing in milky squirts the legs of Majendwa and three or four other men of rank who had come in to join the indaba. These moved not a muscle, but I could catch a lurking twinkle in the eyes of the chief’s son.

“Here, I say. Tell them I’m devilish sorry,” cried Falkner shaking off the stuff as best he could. “I’m not accustomed to these things, you know.”

I put it to them. They looked at Falkner, then at the shattered bowl, and as a Zulu is nothing if not humorous, one and all went off into a roar of laughter.

“Hallo! That’s better,” grinned Falkner looking up, as he tried to wipe off the liquid with his handkerchief. “Why these are jolly sort of fellows after all. I was afraid they were going to look beastly glum over it. Tell them I’ll get into their ways soon, Glanton. Meanwhile here’s their jolly good health,” taking a big drink out of a fresh bowl that was placed before him, only this time taking care to hold it with both hands.

Soon the cracking of whips and an increased buzz of voices without announced the arrival of the waggons, and we all went out to the place of outspan. The sun was sinking behind the high ridge which bordered the great basin, and the plain in front of the kraal was dappled with homing herds, and on these I looked with the eye of a connoisseur and especially on the little fat, black Zulu oxen, which always fetch a good price for trek purposes. The shrill shout and whistle of the boy herds, blended with the trample and mooing of the cows brought in for the evening milking but the chief interest on the part of the denizens of the great kraal was centred around the waggons. However it was too late to unload for trade purposes that evening, so beyond getting out a few things for gifts to Majendwa and some of the principal men of the place, I left everything undisturbed.

“Here’s our hut, Falkner,” I said, presently, as we returned within the kraal. “We’re going to sleep here.”

“Sleep here?” he echoed. “Don’t know. I’d much rather sleep at the waggons. How about crawlers,” surveying doubtfully the interior, wherein Tom was depositing the few things we should require for the night.

“Oh, that won’t trouble us. Beyond a few cockroaches of the smaller sort a new hut like this is clean enough. You see Majendwa’s an old friend of mine, and he wouldn’t take it in good part if we didn’t sleep in his kraal, at any rate for a night or two. Now we’re going to dine with him. Look they’ve just killed a young beast in honour of our arrival.”

And dine with him we did, and Falkner himself was fain to own that the great slabs of grilled beef, cut from the choicest part, down the back to wit, which were presently brought in, flanked by roasted mealies, and washed down by unlimited tywala constituted a banquet by no means to be sneezed at. What though a clean grass mat did duty for a plate, and a skewer of wood for a fork, even he admitted that we might have fared much worse.

I did not talk much as to the state of the country with our entertainers that night that I could get at better by degrees, and later. But they chuckled mightily as I described the scrap with Dolf Norbury.

“Udolfu!” Oh yes, they knew him well, used to trade with him at one time, but they didn’t want such whites as him in the Zulu country, they said. I could understand this the more readily, for I knew that he had tried on his bounce even to the verge of attempted blows with Ngavuma, Majendwa’s eldest son, who was from home just now, and for his pains had got a broad assegai into his ribs which had kept him quiet on the flat of his back for a matter of three or four months or so. So chatting and translating for the benefit of Falkner even he agreed we had got through an uncommonly jolly evening, and that the real Zulu was a real brick, by Jove! Then we turned in.

I have a knack of shutting my eyes and going sound off about thirty seconds after my head touches the pillow, or whatever does duty for one, and that night made no exception to my general practice. I heard Falkner fumbling about and cussing because he couldn’t get his blankets fixed up just as he wanted them, and so on; then I recollect my half-smoked pipe dropping from my mouth just as usual, and then I recollect no more, till

I wokenot at all as usual when there was nothing to wake me. The moonlight was streaming in through the interstices of the wicker slab that constituted the door, throwing a fine silver network upon the floor of the hut. Striking a match I looked at my watch. It was just after one. But as the light flickered and went out I became aware of something else. I was alone in the hut. What the deuce had become of Falkner?

Raising myself on one elbow I called his name. No answer. I waited a little, then got up and crawled through the low doorway.

The moon was nearly at full, and I stood looking over the screen of woven grass which was erected in front of the door, leaving just room on each side for a man to pass. The scene was of wonderful beauty. The great circle of domed huts lying between their dark ring fences, the shimmering solitude of the moonlit plain, and beyond, the far amphitheatre of terraced cliffs rising to the twinkling stars. The calm beauty of it all riveted me, accustomed as I was to night in the open we ever get accustomed to such nights as this I wonder?and I stood thinking, or rather beginning to thinkwhen

Such a clamour broke forth upon the sweet stillness of the night as though all the dogs in the kraalno, in the worldhad suddenly gone stark, staring, raving mad, and then in the light of the broad moon I saw Falkner Sewin clad in nothing but a short light shirt, sprinting as I feel sure he never sprinted before or since. Behind him poured forward a complete mass of curs, gaunt leggy brutes and as savage as they make them, given the conditions of night and a fleeing unwonted object. The ground was open in front of Majendwa's huts, so he had some start.

"This way!" I yelled, lest he should mistake the hut, then quick as lightning I was inside. So was he, in about a moment, and was on his back with both heels jammed hard against the slammedto wicker slab that constituted the door, while the whole snarling mouthing pack was hurling itself against the same, snapping and growling, till finding they couldn't get in, the illconditioned brutes started to fight with each other. Then a man came out of an adjacent hut and shied knobsticks into the lot, dispersing them with many a pained yell. The while I lay there and laughed till I cried.

"If you could only have seen yourself, Falkner, covering distance in the moonlight and a short shirt," I managed to gasp at length. "Man, what the deuce took you wandering about at night? They don't like that here, you know."

"Oh damn what they like or what they don't like!" he growled pantingly. "I couldn't sleepsomewhat infernal leggy thing or other ran over meso thought I'd admire the view a little by moonlight. Then those loathly brutes came for me all at once. Here! give us hold of that fat flask we had the sense to bring along. I want a drink badly."

“So do I!” I said starting off to laugh again. “Well, you mustn’t do any more moonlight patrols. It’s tagati, as the Zulus say.”

Chapter Eighteen.

A Grim Find.

Soon trade became brisk. I had the waggons partly offloaded, and by dint of stretching a large sail across both of them formed an impromptu store in which the goods were piled. All day long the people crowded up, those who were not dealing enjoying the fun of witnessing the arts and dodges of those who were; just as an outdoor sale on the market square of a town will always attract a number of folks who have nothing else to do, and also, an equal number perhaps of those who have.

Cattle would be driven up; good ones, for I had given out distinctly that it was waste of trouble to bring anything but good ones, and then the owners, squatting around, would spend an hour or so haggling, to go away firmly resolved not to deal, but they nearly always came back, and, meanwhile, others would take their places, and go through in all probability exactly the same process; for your Zulu at a deal is a born Jew, and will spend an astonishing amount of time haggling out of sheer love of haggling. He would go on for ever but for one consideration the amount of goods is limited in quantity, and if one neglects to secure his share another does not. So for the first few days I sat tight, making up "lots" with green blankets and cooking pots, butcher knives always in great request and brass buttons, beads and Salampore cloth, which by the way, is not cloth at all, but a light gauzy fabric of dark blue, greatly in favour with the unmarried girls. All sorts of "notions" were in request, the veriest trifles as to market value, but highly prized up there; and as a thing is worth what it will fetch, why there comes in much of the trader's legitimate profit. I always held that no trade was too small to be refused, and I would accept curios, which were always in demand by downcountry dealers in such things. Assegais however were extremely difficult to obtain, so much so indeed as to be practically outside articles of barter, and this was significant. Another thing not less so was the universal request, open or covert, for firearms and ammunition. It was not much use my explaining to them that they were better off without either, that a man can do much better with a weapon he understands than with one he does not. For some reason or other they were bent on having them.

However, in a short while I found myself in possession of quite a nice lot of cattle, the sale of which would leave me a very considerable profit over when expenses were cleared, so I was not dissatisfied. Then, all of a sudden, trade fell off, then ceased altogether. There was no apparent reason for it. I stood well with Majendwa, indeed I always erred in the right direction with regard to the principal chiefs when on trading ventures in their districts, holding that it is far better policy to be too liberal than too mean. But there was no blinking the fact that for some reason or other further trade was "off." No more were my waggons thronged from morning till night. Those from outlying

kraals who had been the most eager, stopped away altogether, but now and then someone from close at hand would drop in for something, and even then the deal would be so insignificant as to remind me of my store at Isipanga.

I put the matter squarely to Majendwa, but it didn't seem to help. He admitted that for some reason or other my trade had stopped. What could he do? He could not order his people to deal. I agreed with him there, still I was puzzled. I had calculated to have easily cleared out all I had at his place. Yet I had done well enough so far, but when I proposed to move further northward, and get into Uhamu's country, Majendwa seemed for some reason or other unwilling that I should.

"You will do no better there, Iqalaqala," he said, "and, for the rest, it is not advisable. See, we are alone, and are talking beneath the bullock's skin. Again I say do not go there. Return rather to your own country, even if you have to carry back some of the goods you have brought. Or, there may be those on your way who will relieve you of them."

I looked at him fixedly and a thought struck me. The phrase he had used might well bear two meanings. Had he intended it as a warning? Such might well have been the case.

Falkner the while had been amusing himself as best he could. He soon got tired of watching the barter, though at first it had afforded him some amusement, but I had laid a stern and uncompromising embargo upon any approach even to practical joking. So he would roam off with a rifle or shot gun, and although I was anxious lest he should get into some mischief or other yet he seemed not to. Now he welcomed the idea of clearing out, when we talked things over. To my surprise he propounded an idea when I was telling him how our trade had come to a standstill.

"What if that sweep whose head I punched should be at the bottom of it?" he said. "Dolf Norbury, I mean?"

I thought there might be something in it. However if it were true, he was bound to have gone to work in some such way that it would be impossible to prove anything, and even if we did, it was hard to see what we could do.

"Do? Why call round and punch his head again, of course," he answered briskly.

"That wouldn't help us to recover our trade. Besides Dolf Norbury isn't the sort to let himself be caught that way twice running. This time it would be a case of shooting on sight."

"That's a game two can play at," said Falkner.

“Yes,” I answered, “but in this case it’s a game in which he holds all the hand. It’s clear that he has some following, and we have a lot of cattle to drive. Well, while we were settling accounts with him his, or rather Mawendhlela’s, rips would have no trouble in clearing these off to some part of the country where we should never see a hoof of them again.”

“But would they have the cheek to do that?”

“Wouldn’t they? And this is a time when neither the King nor any of the chiefs would be overkeen to interfere in a quarrel between two white men. Let them settle it themselves is what would be said and meanwhile we should have lost all we came up for.”

“Damn!”

“I echo that sentiment most fervently, but it can’t be helped,” I said. “As it is I’ve a notion we shall have to round up our belongings extra tight till we are clear of the country.”

“Oh well. Let’s make the best of it and sit tight here a week or so longer, Glanton. I’m beginning to enjoy this shooting among rocks. These klipspringers are such cute little devils. It’s more fun shooting them than it used to be markhor, and nothing like the fag.”

Falkner was a capital shot with rifle and bird gun alike, and one of his good points was that he was a keen and thorough sportsman. That being the case he had been able to find game up here where one less keen would have given up in disgust, and it was a good thing, if only that it kept him out of mischief.

Jan Boom, the Xosa, was the only one who would hint at any reason for the falling off of our trade, but, as it happened, I was rather prejudiced against him by reason of his affectation of a certain air of superiority over those of his own colour, on the strength of his knowledge of English. In fact I rather disliked him, and therefore of course distrusted him. Subsequently I had reason to alter my opinion with regard to him: but that will keep. Out of Mfutela I could get nothing on the subject. Either he knew nothing or was too “close” to say: and when a native is “close” why it is rather less difficult to make an oyster open by whispering soft nothings to it than to get him to unfold.

One day Falkner and I started off to have a hunt among the krantzes beyond those which walled in the hollow. We took Jan Boom with us, and a couple of young Zulus to show us the short cut. It was a grey and lowering day, gloomy in the extreme, and every now and then a spot of rain showed what we were likely to expect, but Falkner was keen on sport,

and I was getting hipped, besides, in those days I cared little enough for weather. We scrambled about all the morning among the rocks, with absolutely no luck whatever, and then I got sick of it, wherefore after we had lunched upon what we had brought with us I proposed to find my way back to the waggons. Falkner of course wanted to keep on, but I pointed out that my defection need cause no drawback to him, for I would leave him the boys and make my way back alone. So we separated and before we had long done so a distant report, some way above, showed that at any rate he was beginning to find sport.

I struck downward, rapidly making use of half obliterated cattle tracks, for the Abaqulusi were largely a mountain tribe, and there were outlying kraals among the heights as well as in the hollows. Following one of these paths I came suddenly upon a steep gorge, falling abruptly to the next slope some distance below.

This gully was in places almost chasmlike in its formation, and was indescribably wild and gloomy in the utter solitude of the grey afternoon. I had just crossed it where the path dipped, when, looking up, there stood a klipspringer gazing at me.

He was an easy hundred yard shot. Slipping from the saddle on the further side from him, I thought to myself that Falkner would not altogether have the crow over me when we got back. But when I looked again, expecting to take a quick aim, by Jingo! the little beast had disappeared.

This was annoying, for now a disinclination to return empty handed had seized me. Quickly and noiselessly I made my way up to where he had been. It was as I had thought. He had been standing on a sort of pinnacle; and now, as I peered cautiously over, there stood the little buck, less than the first distance below.

He was outlined against the black and shadowed bottom of the gorge, and was gazing away from me. Now I would have him, I decided. In a second my sights were on him full I didn't take long over aiming in those days when I lowered the rifle with some precipitation. Right bang in a line with where the klipspringer had been standing had been, observe, for the slight additional movement on my part had caused him to disappear again was the form of a man.

It gave me a turn, for with lightning rapidity it flashed through my mind that nothing could have saved him. Then consternation gave way to curiosity. The form though that of a man was not that of a living one.

Down in the shadow of a dark hole, overhung by gloomy rocks, it sprawled in a constrained half upright posture against one of these. It was too far off and the light not

good enough to be able to distinguish how it was secured in this position, but it seemed to be facing upward in a dreadful attitude of scared supplication. I would go down and investigate. But before I had taken many steps in pursuance of this resolve I stopped short.

For an idea had occurred to me. The body was that of a native, and it was obvious that life had been extinct for some time. What good purpose could I serve by investigating it further? I was in a savage country in which life was held cheap. The man whoever he might be, had quite likely been executed for some offence; the method of his death being in all probability designed to fit the offence. Clearly therefore it was no concern of mine, and accordingly I decided to forego further investigation. And then, as though to confirm me in the good policy of such decision something happened something that was sufficiently startling.

A bullet pinged against a stone beside me, sending up a hard splash of splinters and dust, and, confound it, the thing had hit barely a yard from where I was standing.

“Hallo, Falkner!” I hailed, deeming the puff of smoke from among the rocks above and opposite must be his work. “Look out I’m here. D’you hear, man?”

But no answer came, not immediately that is. In a minute however, one did come, and that in the shape of another bullet, which banged up the dust just about the same distance on the other side of me. My first impulse was that Falkner was playing one of his idiotic practical jokes at my expense, but with the idea I seemed to feel sure that it was not Falkner and that, in short, I had better withdraw from this very uncanny spot.

As I hastened to carry this judicious resolve into practical effect I won’t pretend that I felt otherwise than uncomfortable and very much so. Whoever it was up there could shoot confound him! an accomplishment rare indeed among the natives of Zululand in those days. Clearly too the exact nicety with which both distances had been judged seemed to point to the fact that both shots had been fired by way of warning. That I had at any rate accepted such I trusted I had made clear to the giver of it, as I walked I hoped without undue haste but rapidly to where I had left my horse.

Nothing further occurred, although until clear of the heights I kept an uncommonly sharp look out. Once clear of them however, the incident left no great impression on my mind. I had unwittingly stumbled across something unusual and had been about to pry into what didn’t concern me, and it had been resented. The Abaqulusi were an independent and warlike clan who would be sure to resent such. I had received a hint, and a pretty forcible one, to mind my own business, and I concluded that in future I would mind it, at any rate while in these parts. That was all.

Chapter Nineteen.

Concerning a Letter.

Evening was closing in wet and gloomy. The lowering clouds swept along the high ground which shot in the great hollow, causing the cliffs to seem three times their real height in the ghostly murk. Added to this it was raw and cold, which had the effect of causing the inhabitants of the big kraal to hug their firesides. Here and there a form swathed in an ample green blanket might be seen moving from one hut to another, quickly to dive within the same, for your savage is a practical animal, and sees no fun in foregoing any of his comforts when no necessity exists for doing so and the interior of the huts was warm and dry, and, without, it was neither.

I was alone at the waggon, Falkner not having yet returned. For this I was not sorry, for although Falkner and I had grown accustomed to each other, yet there were times when I could cheerfully accept a holiday from his presence.

Darker and darker it grew. The oxen were driven in and fastened to the trek chain for the night, and the boys, lying snug under the shelter they had rigged up by means of a large sail thrown over the buck waggon, leaving one side between the wheels open, were chatting in their rhythmical deepvoiced hum, and the fire they had built not far from the opening glowing more and more redly as the gloom deepened. Then their talk suddenly ceased, as out of the darkness appeared a tall figure, saluting.

“What have you there?” I said, as the new arrival began fumbling for something in his skin pouch.

“Incwadi ’Nkose,” he answered.

I own to a thrill of excited expectation very foreign to my normally placid way of taking things, for incwadi is the word for a letter or a token of any kind. I could hardly restrain my eagerness to open the packet carefully sewn up in oilskin, which the man now handed me. Aïda Sewin, then, had availed herself of the means of correspondence which I had arranged, but what if this were not addressed to me after all, but only to Falkner? and at the thought my anticipations fell. Still it would be good to hear, anyhow. The rather startling incident of a few hours ago was driven clean from my mind now.

I climbed into the tent waggon and lighted the lantern which hung from the tent, and you may be sure it didn’t take me long to unroll the oilskin wrapping. Two letters it contained one for Falkner and one for myself the latter in the handwriting I knew, and one that a reader of character from handwriting would assuredly not have reported

upon unfavourably. Having once satisfied myself on the point, I believe I was in no hurry to open it. The pleasures of anticipation, you see, counted for something with me still.

Then came another phase in the above. I drew from the envelope several sheets rather closely written. Why, this was too much luck. I glanced quickly through them to ascertain that the whole of it was for me, but resolved not to anticipate the contents in any way. More than ever was I glad now that Falkner had not returned. I could well do without his somewhat boisterous company for the next halfhour, or even longer. Then I spread open the sheets before me, and by the somewhat dim light of the waggon lantern began to read.

“Dear Mr Glanton, I am taking advantage of the arrangement you so thoughtfully made, and only trust this will not miss you during your wanderings. Mother is writing to Falkner at the same time. I hope you have been able to make him useful, and that he has behaved himself generally well. He is a good sort of boy at bottom, but gets far too much spoilt among us all, as you must have observed, though I believe I am the one who spoils him least. At any rate a little roughing it will do him no harm.

“Things are very much as usual. We see a good deal of Mr Kendrew, who comes over when he can and is a great help.” “Oh, the devil he is!” said I to myself at this point. “Just what I foresaw, confound it!” “But we miss you very much, and are hoping soon to welcome you back after a thoroughly successful expedition.”

This was more comforting, I thought to myself, laying down the letter and conjuring up a recollection of the writer’s words, that last evening. She would look forward to my return, she had declared would be disappointed if I did not go to see them immediately. Confound it, what was the matter with me, that I sat dreaming and building castles in the air? The rain fell upon the canvas of the waggon tent with monotonous drip, and a puff of raw air through the flap of the tieddown sail caused the light of the hanging lantern to flicker but I was no longer in the gloomy wilds of Northern Zululand, on a rainy, chilly, and altogether abominable evening. I was again in the starlight glow as on that evening, listening to the sweet tones of the writer’s voice, and gazing at the beautiful, highbred face.

The letter went on, dealing now with everyday matter, in a bright, natural, chatty style. The Major was in great form and delighted with his garden and its development, thanks to some fine rains. The Scotts had been over to see them a couple of times and here followed some banter at the expense of that worthy and neighbouring family, the head of which originally a waggonmaker’s journeyman was, incidentally, addicted to too much grog, when he could get it which wasn’t often. At Major Sewin’s he could get it, and

became comical, but always harmlessly so. Things on the farm were going well, thanks to Ivondwe, who was worth his weight in gold, and I could read between the lines was practically running the place himself. Tyingoza had been over to see them too, and seemed completely to have forgotten Falkner's liberty with regard to his headring, for he had been exceedingly pleasant, and, through Ivondwe, had said a great many nice things about mereading which I felt more than brotherly towards Tyingoza, and made up my mind then and there to present him with something of large and practical value when I should get up my next consignment of trade goods.

This had covered some three sheets, closely written, and there were still quite as many more. Decidedly Miss Sewin was a good correspondent. I had been going through her letter grudgingly, as if the turning of every leaf should bring the end near. The sail was lifted, and Tom's honest black face appeared, to ask some question. I curtly told him to go to the devil, and resumed my reading.

"And now," went on the letter, "I am coming to something that I feel I must tell you, and yet I hardly like to. It seems so ridiculous somehow when one comes to put it down on paper, though if you were here, and we could talk it over, well it might not. You remember that last evening, and what we were talking about when I asked you if some plan could not be arranged under which I could write to you if I felt that we were in need of your aid or advice? The idea rather originated with yourself if you remember, in your usual kindness and forethought, so that consideration alone emboldens me to write what might otherwise seem to you only fanciful and foolish. You know, too, I am not inclined to indulge in that sort of thing, so you will, I am sure, bear with me. But I must begin.

"You remember that witch doctor, Ukozi, who came upon us suddenly at the waterhole that same last evening, when my coin was lost? Well, he has taken to coming here a great deal. At first my father used to get angry with him and want to drive him away; you know, quite in the old style, before you taught him or tried to teach him that the natives here were not to be driven like our people in India used to be. But Ukozi didn't seem to mind. He would go away chuckling, but the next day sure enough, there he was again. Then father suddenly swung round and seemed to take a fancy to him. He would talk to him by the hour through Ivondwe interpreting and when we wondered, would tell us that he was getting Ulcozi to teach him some of the native magic. Of course it seemed to us absurd, but if we said anything of the sort father would get angry, so the only thing was to let him go his own way. But when it came to his going out at night with the witch doctor and coming back at all hours thoroughly done up, why it seemed that the thing was going too far. He has become very mysterious too. Once he let drop that Ukozi was going to tell him all about the waterhole, and the strange thing that we saw there, and then he became more angry still and vowed that he wouldn't be interfered with that here

was a chance of learning something quite out of the common, and he was going to take it whatever happened. Nothing we can say or do seems to weigh with him in the least, and really, if it didn't sound too absurd, I should say that this witch doctor had got him right under his thumb. I asked Ivondwe about it quietly, but he was very nice, and said that the old Nkose was a wise man, yet there were things that his wisdom had not yet reached, and now he would like to learn them that was all. There was nothing to trouble about. When he had learnt what Ukozi could or would teach him and that was not much then he would be the same as before. Now, Mr Glanton, you know these people, and I ask you what does it all mean? My father is altogether a changed man how changed you would be the first to recognise if you could see him. What, too, is the object; for Ukozi, beyond getting something to eat, and tobacco now and then, does not seem to ask for anything by way of payment, and I always thought the native isanusi was nothing if not acquisitive? But he is always here. For want of a better expression he is getting upon my nerves, and not only upon mine. It seems as if we were somehow being drawn within an influence, and an influence the more weird and inexplicable that it is through an agency that we should traditionally hold as something inferior, and therefore quite absurd to take seriously. I mean a native influence.

"Shall I risk disgracing myself for ever in your eyes by owning that I am getting just a little bit frightened? Yes, frightened I'm afraid there's no other word for it and the worst of it is I don't in the least know what I am frightened of. It seems as if a something was hanging over us something awful, and from which there is no escape. You remember it was such a presentiment that made me say what I did the last time you were here, and you reassured me on the subject of the witch doctor at any rate. As to him, there is another strange circumstance. Arlo, too, seems to have come under his influence. Arlo who never could be got to take to any native, and now he is more obedient to this Ukozi than to any of us; yet it is the obedience of fear, for he whines and crouches when the witch doctor speaks to him. Here, you will allow, is a real mystery.

"There are other things I might say, but I think I have said enough. Again I hope you won't put me down as a weakminded idiot frightened at her own shadow. This country, you see, is so new and strange to us, and our position is rather lonely; father, too, is ageing a good deal, so there is some excuse if we feel a little well, nervous, at times. As it is I have put off writing to you until, as I reckon from what you said, your time in Zululand must be nearly up, and then only that you may not delay to come and see us immediately on your return.

"All send kind regards and are looking forward to welcoming you back, but none more so than

"Yours very sincerely,

“Aïda Sewin.

“P.S.I would rather you didn’t mention anything of this to Falkner.”

This letter was, to say the least of it, puzzling. Carefully I read it through again, and then it became obvious that the main drift of it was, if not exactly an afterthought, at any rate not in the writer’s mind to communicate when she first began. Her contradictory accounts of her father pointed to this. I made an effort to put behind me for the present the feeling of exultation that I should be the one appealed to the rock of refuge, so to say for I wanted to think out the drift of the whole thing; and all my experience has gone to teach me that you can’t think, of two things at once without only half thinking of both of them. The witch doctor’s conduct was inexplicable viewed by the ordinary light of commonsense motive. But I had lived long enough among natives to know that I didn’t really know them, which is paradoxical yet true. I knew this much, that underlying their ordinary and known customs there are others, to which no white man ever gains access except by the purest accident customs, it may be, to all appearances utterly inconsequent or even ridiculous, but others again of darker and more sinister import. Such are denied by them with laughter, as too utterly absurd for existence, but they do exist for all that, and the confiding European is lulled completely, thrown off the scent. And now, putting four and four together, I wondered whether it was not somewhere in this direction that I must search for Ukozi’s motive.

As for the Major’s craze, that didn’t trouble me overmuch, if only that I remembered that old gentlemen of the retired AngloIndian persuasion were prone to take up fads, from the Lost Ten Tribes craze to Plymouth Brethrenism. He had been struck by Ukozi’s profession of occultism, and probably hipped by the isolation of his own surroundings, had thrown himself into it. I and Falkner would soon put that right, on our return.

And yet, and yet as I again took up Aïda Sewin’s letter in search it might be of a further sidelight, the very real note of concern, not to say alarm, which I read into it impressed me. It was as though I heard a cry from her to hasten to her assistance. Well, I would do so. As I have said, my trade with Majendwa’s people had suddenly and unaccountably broken down, but I had acquired quite a respectable lot of cattle, all in excellent condition. I would have them all brought in on the morrow and trek the next day for home. And having come to this conclusion I heard the tramp of a horse outside, and Falkner’s voice lifted up in a resounding hail, which had the effect of setting all the curs in the big kraal adjoining, on the stampede in such a fashion as to remind me of Falkner’s sprinting match on the first night of our arrival.

Chapter Twenty.

Falkner Shows His Hand And His Teeth.

I put the letter into my pocket, flung on a mackintosh and dived outside again. The rain was still coming down in a steady pour, and the cloud of vapour rising from the horse's heaving flanks steamed up redly against the firelight. Falkner was in high spirits. A reebok was tied behind his saddle and Jan Boom was carrying the carcass of a klipspringer, and a few unconsidered trifles in the way of partridges.

"You haven't been out for nothing?" I said, glancing at the spoil.

"Rather not. I've had a ripping day of it, buttrot out the grog, old man. Phew! it's cold. For the last hour I've hardly been able to feel my feet in the stirrups."

"Likely. Here, you'd better tumble into the waggon and get into dry togs. Then we'll have scoff. By the way, the post has come."

"Post? See here. Who are you getting at, Glanton? Post!"

"Not at anybody. Here's a letter, from your aunt I believe."

"By Jove! I thought you were humbugging. Oh well, that'll keep till after scoff at any rate, and I'm starving."

I had made up my mind to say nothing to him of Aïda Sewin's letter unless his own communication should contain some reference to it. Soon he was in dry clothes, and the klipspringer was sizzling on the fire, which the boys had managed to shelter ingeniously with the aid of some stones and a bit of old sail. Then, in a trice, the grill being ready, we fell to with a will, seated on the edge of the kartel, our metal plates in our laps, and the rain splashing down upon the waggon tent, while we were warm and dry, if somewhat cramped, within.

"This is jolly and snug, and no mistake," pronounced Falkner, "and grilled klipspringer makes right radiant scoff. Here, put the bottle across it's on your side. And I say, Glanton, I came across a devilish rum thing today a devilish nasty thing. It turned me quite sick, 'pon my word it did. By the way, what were you blazing at soon after we parted? I heard a couple of shots."

"Oh, it was another klipspringer. But a mere snap, not a fair chance," I answered, not intending to let him into my secret experience. "What was it you came across?" I went

on, feeling rather curious, for he had turned quite serious, as though impressed by some very unpleasant recollection.

“Why! it was about two hours away from here, or might have been rather more this afternoon just after I’d boned that reeboka nice clear shot he gave me a longish one too. Well, away beyond the second line of krantzes over that side, we stumbled suddenly upon a small kraal, where they were none too civil didn’t seem the least glad to see us, to put it mildly. Well, we didn’t stop, but as we moved on they objected to us going the way we wanted, and in fact the way we eventually came. I rather lost my temper, for they became beastly bumptious, you know, and at one time made as if they’d try to prevent us.”

“You didn’t get punching any of their heads, I hope,” I interrupted, rather sharply.

“No, no. But upon my soul I felt inclined to. First of all they began lying about there being no road there, and so forth, but I knew they were lying, so made up my mind to go that way. Jan Boom didn’t want to either and those two boys who started with us wouldn’t go any further, said we shouldn’t want them any more, and that we could find our own way back now. Well, I was of the same opinion, so on we came. But at one time I began to think they had been right. It was awful the scramble we had over the rocks and boulders. Jan Boom had turned beastly sulky too, and kept wanting to go back himself, but I’m an obstinate beggar, you know, Glanton, and when once I’ve made up my mind to do a thing I’ll do it. What are you grinning at?”

“Only, if you don’t mind me saying so, you ought to have remained in the service of your country. You’d have made a model leader of a forlorn hope, and, in the fulness of time, a model general.”

“Here, hang your chaff,” he growled, not knowing whether to be pleased or not. “I never quite know whether you mean what you say or are only pulling a fellow’s leg.”

“Well, go on.”

“Jan Boom, I was saying, had got so sulky that I more than threw out a hint I was likely to hammer him if he didn’t think better of it. We at last struck a gully which was rather an improvement on our way so far, but even it was beastly bad. It was a sort of dry watercourse, although if the rain kept on at this rate it would soon be a devilish wet one. Well, there was a path of sorts, though not easy to distinguish; now over the rocks now between them, a gloomy hole, I tell you, and most infernally depressing.”

“How depressing?” I interrupted, for I had never given Falkner Sewin credit for sufficient imagination to feel depressed by such a mere accident as surroundings.

“Well, it was. The cliffs seemed to meet overhead as if they were going to topple down on you, don’t you know, and there wasn’t a sound, except the wind howling round the rocks every now and then like a jolly spook. Then, all of a sudden my horse rucked back at his bridewe were leading the horses, you knowso suddenly as nearly to pull me on my backas it was I dropped my pipe on the stones and broke itand before I had time even to cuss, by George, I saw a sight.

“We had got into a sort of caldronshaped hollow, something like our waterhole at home would look like, if it was empty, andby the Lord, Glanton, there, against the rock where the water should have fallen over if there had been any to fall, was the body of a wretched devil of a niggerspreadeagled upright, and staring at us; in fact literally crucifiedfor we found that the poor beast was triced up to pegs driven firmly into cracks in the rock. Good Lord! it gave me a turn. In some places the flesh had all fallen away, showing the bones, and what remained was bleached almost white. Here, send the bottle along again. The very recollection turns me sick.”

“How long did he seem to have been there?” I said. “Could you form any idea?”

“Not well. Besides I was in too great a hurry to get away, and so was Jan Boom, I can tell you. What d’you think it meant, Glanton? Mind you, those devils up in the kraal must have known of it, because it occurred to me afterwards that that was their reason for not wanting us to go that way.”

“Very likely. The chap may have been planted there after he was dead, you know,” I answerednot in the least thinking so. “Some peculiar and local form of sepulture.”

“I don’t believe it,” rejoined Falkner quickly. “The expression of the face was that of some poor devil who had come to a most beastly end and knew itand it haunts me.”

“Well, why didn’t you investigate further, while you were at it?”

“Didn’t feel inclined. ButI’ll tell you what, Glanton, we might go back there tomorrow. I’m sure I could find the way, and at any rate Jan Boom could. Then such an experienced beggar as you could see to the bottom of it perhaps. Eh?”

“I’ve no wish to do anything of the sort, in fact it would have been just as well if you had missed that little find today altogether. And I should recommend you to keep your mouth shut about itto Tom for instance. You may rely upon it Jan Boom will. They have

curious customs in these parts, and some of them they don't in the least like nosed into and talked over. By the way, here's Mrs Sewin's letter I was telling you about."

"By Jove, yes I forgot. Well, I'll like to hear something of them at home, if only to help me to forget that beastly thing. Let's see what the old lady says."

He read me out bits of the letter as he went on just ordinary bits of home talk, but there was no word bearing upon the mystery set forth in his cousin's letter. Suddenly he looked up.

"Hallo Glanton! So Aïda has been favouring you, I find."

"Yes. A letter from your cousin came at the same time as this."

"I say though, but you kept it devilish dark," he said, nastily. In fact, his tone reminded me of the earlier days of our acquaintance.

"I don't know what you mean by 'devilish dark,' Sewin, but I'm quite sure I don't like the expression," I answered shortly. "Let me remind you however that you've 'had the floor' ever since you came back, with that yarn of yours. Could I have got in a word edgeways?"

"Well, what news does she give you?" he jerked out, after an interval of silence, during which he had been viciously rapping his pipe against the heel of his boot as he sat.

"Just about the same as what you've been reading out to me."

"That all?"

It was as much as I could do to keep my temper. Falkner's tone had become about as offensive as he knew how to make it, and that is saying a great deal this too, apart from the fact that I resented being catechised at all. But I remembered my promise to his cousin not to quarrel with him, and just managed to keep it; only then by making no reply.

There was silence again. By way of relieving it I sung out to Tom to come and take away our plates, and the relics of our meal. Falkner the while was emitting staccato puffs from his newly lighted pipe, and as I settled down to fill mine he suddenly broke forth:

"Look here, Glanton, I'm a plainspeaking sort of chap and accustomed to say what I mean. So we'd better have it out now, once and for all."

I didn't affect ignorance of his drift. I merely nodded, and he went on. "Well then, I've noticed that you and Aïmy cousin have been getting uncommon thick of late. I didn't think much of it, but now, when it comes to her writing to you on the quiet, why I think it's time to have some say in the matter."

"In the first place the only persons entitled to have any 'say in the matter' as you put it are Major and Mrs Sewin," I said. "In the next, you should withdraw that expression 'on the quiet.' It's an insult to your cousin."

"Oh well, since you put it like that, I withdraw it," he growled. "But as for the matter in hand, well, I warn you you are poaching on someone else's preserves."

"Might I, as a matter of curiosity, ask who the 'someone else' may be?" I said, conscious at the same time of a wholly unaccustomed sinking of the heart.

"Certainly, and I'll tell you. It's myself."

"That's straight anyway," I rejoined, feeling relieved. "Then I am to understand I must congratulate you both on an engagement?"

He started at the word "both."

"Erno. Not exactly that. Hang it, Glanton, don't I put things plain enough? I mean I was first in the field, and it isn't fair in fact I consider it beastly dishonourable for you, or any other fellow, to come trying to upset my coach. Now do you see?"

"I think I understand," I said, feeling softened towards him. "But as regards myself, first of all you had better be sure you are not assuming too much, in the next place, you are just in the position of anybody else, and can't set up any such plea as prior rights. See?"

"No, I'll be hanged if I do," he snarled. "I've told you how things stand, so now you're warned."

"I'm not going to quarrel with you," I answered. "We are all alone here, with no chance of anybody overhearing us or at any rate understanding us if they did. Yet I prefer talking 'dark' as the Zulus say. Let's start fair, d'you hear? Let's start fair and now you're warned."

He scowled and made no answer. In fact, he sulked for the rest of the evening and, to anticipate long after that.

I went outside before turning in, leaving Falkner in the sulks. The rain had ceased, and bright patches of stars were shining between the parting clouds. The fire had died low, and the conversation of the boys had dropped too. I can always think best out in the open, and now I set myself hard to think over these last developments. By its date the letter must have been nearly a week on the road. Well, there was not time for much to have happened in between. Then what Falkner had just revealed had come to me as something of an eyeopener. I had at first rather suspected him of resenting me as an interloper, but subsequently as I noted the free and easy terms on which he stood with both his cousins the one equally with the other the last thing to enter my mind was that he should think seriously of either of them, and that one Aïda. Why, she used to keep him in order and treat him very much as a boy indeed all her references to him when discussing him with me, even as lately as in the letter I had just received, bore the same elder sisterly tone, and I felt sure that while this held good, Falkner, in entertaining the hopes he had revealed to me, was simply twisting for himself a rope of sand. At the same time I felt sorry for him, and my not unnatural resentment of the very dictatorial tone which he had chosen to adopt towards myself cooled entirely. He was young and so boyish that every allowance must be made. At the same time I envied him his youth. As for me, well I hardly knew, but as my meditations ran on in the stillness and silence of the starlit night, clustering ever around one recollection, well I realised, and not for the first time, that life seemed very much to have been wasted in my case.

The one talent man in the parable recurred to my mind, and I will even own, I hope not irreverently, to a sneaking sympathy for that same poor devil. He might have lost his one talent, or fooled it away, instead of which, he at any rate kept it and, after all there is a saying that it is more difficult to keep money than to make it. Now it seemed to me that I was very much in the same boat with him. I had kept my talent so far and was it even now too late to add to it, but what the deuce had this got to do with Aïda Sewin, who formed the undercurrent of all the riotous meditations in which I was indulging? Well perhaps it had something.

Chapter Twenty One.

Dolf Norbury Again.

When two people, trekking together beyond the confines of civilisation fall out, the situation becomes unpleasant. If each has his own waggon, well and good, they can part company, but if not, and both are bound to stick together it spells friction. For this reason I have always preferred trekking alone.

Even my worst enemy could hardly accuse me of being a badtempered man, let alone a quarrelsome one. On the other hand I have never laid claim to an angelic disposition, and if I had the demeanour of my present companion would have taxed it to the uttermost, since we had each been betrayed into showing the other our hand. For my part I can honestly say the fact would have made no difference whatever in our mutual relations, but Falkner Sewin was differently hung. First of all he sulked heavily, but finding that this did not answer and that I was entirely independent of him for companionship, for I would talk to the Zulus by the hour he threw that off and grew offensive so much so that I felt certain he was trying to pick a quarrel with me. Had it been any other man in the world this would have concerned me not one atom, indeed he needn't have tried overmuch. But here it was different. There was my promise to his cousin, and further, the consideration that Aïda Sewin was his cousin and thus very nearly related indeed. No, on no account must we come to blows, and yet the strain upon my temper became hourly more great.

I had not been able to trek when I had intended, by reason of something beyond the ordinary native delay in bringing in my cattle; in fact in one particular quarter I had some difficulty in getting them brought in at all. In view of the troubled state of the border this looked ominous. In ordinary times Majendwa's people like other Zulus, though hard men of business at a deal, were reliability itself once that deal was concluded. Now they were inclined to be shifty and evasive and not always over civil; and all this had come about suddenly. Could it mean that war had actually broken out? It might have for all we knew, dependent as we were upon those among whom we dwelt for every scrap of information that might reach us from outside. Otherwise their behaviour was unaccountable. But if it had, why then we should be lucky to get out of the country with unperforated skins, let alone with a wheel or a hoof to our names.

Even Majendwa's demeanour towards me had undergone a change, and that was the worst sign of all; for we had always been good friends. All his wonted geniality had vanished and he had become curt and morose of manner. I resolved now to take the bull by the horns, and put the question to Majendwa pointblank. Accordingly I betook myself to his hut, with that object. But the answer to my inquiries for him was prompt. The

chief was in his isigodhlo, and could not be disturbed. This sort of “not at home” was unmistakable. I returned to the waggons.

Now an idea struck me. Was there more in that gruesome discovery of mine and Falkner’s than met the eye? Was the fact that we had made it, first one of us and then the other, at the bottom of the chief’s displeasure? It might have been so. At any rate the sooner we took the road again the better, and so I announced to Falkner that we would inspan at sunrise. His reply was, in his then mood, characteristic.

“But we haven’t traded off the stuff yet,” he objected. “I say. You’re not in a funk of anything, are you, Glanton? I ask because I rather wanted to stay on here a little longer.”

I turned away. His tone was abominably provoking, moreover I knew that he would be glad enough to return, and had only said the foregoing out of sheer cussedness.

“You have your horse,” I said. “If you like to remain I’ll leave Jan Boom with you, and you can easily find your way back.”

“Want to get rid of me, do you?” he rapped out. “Well you won’t. Not so easily as that. No you won’t.”

To this I made no answer. At sunrise the waggons were inspanned. Then another difficulty cropped up. The boys who were to have driven the herd of trade cattle, at any rate as far as the border, did not turn up. In disgust I was prepared to take them on myself with the help of Mfutela. Falkner had learnt to drive a waggon by this time and now he must do it. His reply however when I propounded this to him was again characteristic. He was damned if he would.

The knot of the difficulty was cut and that unexpectedly, by the appearance of the chief’s son, and with him some boys.

“These will drive your cattle, Iqalaqala,” he said.

“That is well, Muntisi,” I answered. “And now son of Majendwa, what has come between me and the chief that he holds my hand no more? Is there now war?”

We were a little apart from the others, and talk in a low slurred tone that natives use when they don’t want to be understood.

“Not war,” he answered; “at any rate not yet. But, Iqalaqala, those who come into a chief’s country should not come into it with too many eyes.”

“Ha!” I said, taking in the quick glance which he shot in Falkner’s direction, and with it the situation. “Too many eyes there may be, but a shut mouth more than makes up for that. A shut mouth, impela!”

“A shut mouth? Au! Is the mouth of Umsindo ever shut?”

This, it will be remembered, was Falkner’s native name, meaning noise, or bounce, and the chief’s son was perpetrating a sort of pun in the vernacular.

“But it will be this time, never fear,” I answered. “Farewell now, son of Majendwa. I, who have seen more than men think, know how not to talk.”

I felt really grateful to Muntisi, and made him a final present which he appreciated.

“You need not mistrust those I have brought you,” he said. “Only for others you cannot have too many eyes now until you reach Inncome,” he added meaningly.

Nothing of note happened and we trekked on unmolested in any way, travelling slow, for the trade cattle were fat and in excellent condition, which of course I didn’t want to spoil. Then befel an incident which was destined to give us trouble with a vengeance.

We had got into sparsely inhabited country now, and were nearing the border. One afternoon Falkner and I had struck off from the track a little to shoot a few birds for the potby the way Falkner had in some degree condescended to relax his sulks, being presumably tired of his own company. We had rejoined the track and had just put our horses into a canter to overtake the waggons when Falkner threw a glance over his shoulder and said:

“What sort of beast is that?”

I turned and looked back. It was a dark afternoon and inclining moreover to dusk, but I could make out something white glinting through the bush, rather behind us, but as if running parallel to our way. The bush grew in patches, and the thing would be alternately hidden or in the open again.

“Here goes for a shot, anyway,” said Falkner, slipping from his horse. He carried a rifle and smoothbore combination gun, and before I could prevent him or perhaps because I tried to, he had loosed off a bullet at the strange beast. A splash of dust, a good deal short of the mark, leaped up where it struck.

“The line was good but not the distance,” he grumbled. “I’ll get him this time,” slipping in a fresh cartridge.

“Much better not,” I urged. “We don’t want to get into any more bother with the people by shooting their dogs.”

He made no answer, and I was glad that the bush thickened where the animal had now disappeared.

“Let’s get on,” I said. “It’s nearly dark.”

He mounted and we had just resumed our way, when not twenty yards distant, the creature came bounding forth, frightening our horses by the suddenness of his appearance. There was nothing hostile, however, in his attitude. He was wagging his tail, and squirming and whimpering in delight, as a dog will do when he has found a longlost master, or at best a wellknown friend. I stared, hardly able to believe my own eyesight. The large, wolflike form, the bushy tailwhy there could be no duplicate of this ever whelped at a Zulu kraal, that was certain.

“Arlo,” I cried. “Arlo, old chap. What are you doing in these parts, eh?”

The dog whined with delight, squirming up to us, his brush going like a flail. In a moment we were both off our horses.

“It’s Arlo right enough,” said Falkner, patting the dog, who never ceased whimpering and licking his hands. “The question is how did he get here? Eh?”

“Stolen most likely, but it couldn’t have been long ago, for Miss Sewin made no mention of his loss in her letter to meand it’s hardly likely she’d have forgotten to mention such an important event if it had happened then.”

Somehow I could not help connecting Ukozi with this, and felt vaguely uneasy. What had been happening of late? Had the dog been stolen with any deeper motive than his own intrinsic value to get him out of the way for instance and clear the road for the carrying out of some sinister and mysterious scheme on the part of the witch doctor?

“Of course,” assented Falkner, “we’ll take him home with us now, at all events. What a devilish lucky thing I happened to look back and see him.”

“Yes, and what a devilish lucky thing you happened to look wrong and miss him,” I answered, for I own to a feeling of petty jealousy that he should be in a position to claim the credit of having found the dog.

“Ohah! But a miss is as good as a mile,” he said, with a hoarse laugh. “By Jove, but won’t Aïda be glad when I bring him back to her. Won’t she just?”

“I should think so. Well we’ll have to keep a bright lookout on him till we get home.”

“How the deuce they managed to steal him beats me, I own,” went on Falkner. “Arlo was the very devil where niggers are concerned. Won’t let one of ’em come within fifty yards of him.”

This would have puzzled me too, but for what Aïda’s letter had told me as well as for what I had witnessed myself up at the waterhole. There was at any rate one “nigger” of which the above held not good. More than ever did I connect Ukozi with the matter.

“Well, we’ve got him back,” I said, “and it’ll be our own fault if we don’t keep him.”

The dog trotted along contentedly behind our horses, wagging his tail in recognition if we spoke a word or two to him. The waggons were outspanning for the night when we reached them according to instructions, but Arlo went straight up to Tom, whom of course he knew fairly well, wagging his tail, in a sort of “howd’you do” manner. He condescended likewise to approve of Jan Boom, who being a Xosa was, of course, a sworn dog fancier, but the others he just tolerated.

We inspanned before daylight, intending to make a long trek, and that evening to cross the Blood River and outspan for the night on the other side. In the then state of the border I should not be sorry to be out of the Zulu country. The trip had not been a signal success, and I began to think of it as possibly the last I should make. I thought too, of other possibilities, even as I had thought when taking my midnight up and down walk beneath the stars a custom I had before turning in, when the weather permitted, as it generally did. The country was sparsely inhabited, as I have said, and beyond passing three or four small kraals we saw nobody.

We had started upon our afternoon trek. In another hour we should strike the drift and have crossed the border. Then one of the boys Muntisi had given me to drive the cattle came up with the pleasant news that a large body of men, armed too, was coming rapidly on behind, on our track.

I don't know why this should have caused me uneasiness yet it did. No war had broken out as yet this I had ascertained from such Zulus as we had fallen in with on the way. I gave orders to push on the waggons, and the cattle. Then getting out a powerful binocular I rode up to a point whence I knew I could command a considerable sweep.

The ground was open on all sides, a thin thread of mimosa along some slight depression being the only sort of cover it afforded. Cresting a rise about three miles distant I made out a dark mass moving forward along our track, and that at a rapid rate.

At any other time this would have caused me little if any anxiety, but now we had had bother enough in all conscience. I didn't want any more of it, but that the crowd behind was in pursuit of us there was no room for doubt. It was an armed band, for by the aid of the glasses I could make out the glint of assegais and the war shields that were carried.

I returned to the waggons but saw that the pace was as good as the oxen could be put to. The cattle were ahead, going well, but the drift was a good deal further on than I should have wished it to be. Of course there was no physically defensive advantage on the other side over this one, still a boundary is a great moral force; certainly was then while the boundary dispute was awaiting the award of the commission.

"We'll get out the rifles and cartridges, Sewin," I said "and have them handy, but we won't show them. Also sling on your revolver, on the same terms. There's a crowd coming on fast on our track what the deuce for I can't make out. Still it's as well to be prepared for emergencies."

"Oh rather," he assented, brisking up at the prospect of a row. "I think it's about time we read Mr Zulu a lesson."

Chapter Twenty Two.

A Solomon in the Zulu.

Suddenly Arlo, who had been trotting along placidly beside the waggons stopped short, looking backward, and emitting low growls, which soon changed to a deep-toned, booming bark. We followed his glance. The Zulus were on the crest of the ridge about half a mile behind. I at once gave orders to the drivers to resume their normal pace. Further flight as flight was useless and impolitic.

“Put the dog into the tent waggon and tie him there,” I said to Falkner. “He knows you better than he does me, and might give me trouble. We don’t want him damaged at any rate.”

Even Falkner found it by no means easy to work his will with the now infuriated animal, which with hackles erect was facing in the direction of the impending aggression, making the air resound with his roaring bark; and only he managed it by his characteristically drastic methods in the shape of a double rein well laid on. As it was I thought the dog would have pinned him. However he managed to get him into the tent waggon and securely tied. Hardly had he rejoined me when the whole crowd was upon us, shouting and roaring as they surrounded the waggons, bringing them to a standstill.

“I see you!” I said, coldly sarcastic. “Well, and what is it you want now?”

For I had recognised several who had taken part in the former riot, what time Dolf Norbury had appeared upon the scene.

“Want? What we want is the dog the white dog,” came the reply. “The dog which you have stolen, Umlungu.”

“The white dog. The dog which we have stolen,” I repeated sarcastically. “But the dog belongs to our people on the other side and we are taking him back. If he has been stolen it is from them.”

“From them. Ha! That is a lie, Umlungu. Give us the dog, or we will take him and everything you have got besides.”

“I think not,” I said. “But as I cannot talk with a number at once, I must talk with one. Where is that one?”

The clamour redoubled but of it I took no notice. I filled my pipe deliberately, and handed the pouch to Falkner.

“What are they saying?” he asked. I told him.

“Well, we ain’t going to give up the dog,” he said. “I’ll see them damned first,” and in his excitement he appended a great deal more that it is not expedient to reproduce.

“I’m with you there,” I said. “And now,” relapsing into the vernacular, as a ringed man came forward he was an evillooking rascal, and I recognised him as having been among those who had troubled us before. “And now to begin with who claims him?”

“Udolfu.”

“Udolfu? Well how long has he had him, and where did he get him?”

“That is nothing to you, Umlungu. He is Udolfu’s dog, and we are come for him. So give him to us.”

“Do you think you could take him yourselves and alive?” I said banteringly, for the savage and frenzied barks of Arlo within the waggon pretty well drowned our talk.

“We will take him, I say. Bring him out.”

“Bring him out bring him out,” roared the crowd, brandishing assegais and rapping their shields, in an indescribable clamour.

“Hau! Umfane! I will cut thee into little pieces,” cried one fellow, seizing my boy Tom by the throat and brandishing a big assegai as though he would rip him up.

“Have done!” I said pulling my revolver and covering the savage. “See. We hold plenty of lives here.”

Falkner too had drawn his and was eagerly expecting the word from me to let go.

“Hold!” roared the spokesman, in such wise as to cause the aggressive one to fall back. “Now, Umlungu, give us the dog.”

“First of all,” I said, “if the dog belongs to Udolfu, why is not Udolfu here himself to claim him? Is he afraid?”

“He is not afraid, Umlungu,” answered the man, with a wave of the hand. “For here he is.”

A man on horseback came riding furiously up. With him were a lot more armed Zulus running hard to keep pace with him. In a twinkling I recognised we were in a hard tight place, for the number around us already I estimated at a couple of hundred. He was armed this time, for he carried a rifle and I could see a businesslike sixshooter peeping out of a side pocket. It was our old friend, Dolf Norbury.

“Hallo, you two damned slinking dog thieves,” he sung out, as the crowd parted to make way for him. “Here we are again you see. Not yet within British jurisdiction, eh?”

There was a banging report at my ear, and lo, Dolf Norbury and his horse were mixed up in a kicking struggling heap.

“I don’t take that sort of talk from any swine, especially outside British jurisdiction,” growled Falkner, hurriedly jamming in a cartridge to replace the one he had fired.

There was a rush to extricate the fallen man, and ascertain damages. It turned out that he had not been hit but his horse was killed. He himself however seemed half stunned as he staggered to his feet. Then up went his rifle but the bullet sang high over our heads in the unsteadiness of his aim.

“Put up your hands!” I sung out, covering him before he could draw his pistol. “Hands up, or you’re dead, by God!”

He obeyed. Clearly he had been under fire enough.

“Go in and take his pistol, Sewin,” I said, still covering him steadily. “If he moves he’s dead.”

It was a tense moment enough, as Falkner walked coolly between the rows of armed savages, for to drive half a dozen spears through him, and massacre the lot of us would have been the work of a moment to them, but I realised that boldness was the only line to adopt under the circumstances. Even then I don’t know how the matter would have ended, but some sort of diversion seemed to be in the air, for heads were turned, and murmurs went up. Still no weapon was raised against us.

“I’ve drawn his teeth now, at any rate, the sweep!” said Falkner with a grin, as he returned and threw down the discomfited man’s weapons. “I say Dolf, old sportsman,”

he sung out banteringly. "Feel inclined for another spar? Because if so, come on. Or d'you feel too groggy in the nut?"

But now I had taken in the cause of the diversion. The opposite ridge that between us and the river was black with Zulus. On they came, in regular rapid march, hundreds and hundreds of them. They carried war shields and the large umkonto or broad stabbing spear, but had no war adornments except the isityoba, or leglet of flowing cowhair.

Those of our molesters who had been most uproarious were silent now, watching the approach of the newcomers. Dolf Norbury sat stupidly staring. The roaring bark of Arlo tied within the waggon rose strangely weird above the sudden silence.

"I say," broke out Falkner. "Have we got to fight all these? Because if so, the odds ain't fair."

For all that he looked as if he was willing to undertake even this. Whatever his faults, Falkner Sewin was a good man to have beside one in a tight place.

"No," I said. "There's no more fight here, unless I'm much mistaken. This is a King's impi."

It was a fine sight to see them approach, that great dark phalanx. Soon they halted just before the waggons, and a shout of sibongo went up from the turbulent crowd who had been mobbing and threatening us but a little while since.

The two chiefs in command I knew well, Untúswa, a splendid old warrior and very friendly to the whites, and Mundúla, both indunas of the King.

"Who are these?" said the first, sternly, when we had exchanged greetings. "Are they here to trade, Iqalaqala?"

"Not so, Right Hand of the Great Great One," I answered. "They are here to threaten and molest us and it is not the first time some of them have visited us on the same errand. We are peaceful traders in the land of Zulu, and assuredly there are many here who know that this is not the first time I have come into the land as such."

A hum of assent here went up from the warriors in the background. Those I had thus denounced looked uncommonly foolish. Still I would not spare them. It is necessary to keep up one's prestige and if those who are instrumental in trying to lower it suffer, why that is their lookout, not mine.

“He is a liar, chief,” interrupted Dolf Norbury, savagely. “These two have stolen my dog and I and my people have come to recover him. Before they came in to try and steal my trade. That is where we quarrelled before.”

Untúswa heard him but coldly. As I have said, Dolf Norbury was not in favour with the more respectable chiefs of Zululand at that time. Quickly I put our side of the case before this one.

“This I will look into,” he said. “It is not often we have to settle differences between white people, especially Amangisi (English). But the Great Great One, that Elephant who treads the same path as the Queen, will have order in the landwherefore are we here,” with a wave of his hand towards his armed warriors; from whom deep-toned utterances of sibongo went up at the naming of the royal titles. “With the matter of the trade, I have nothing to do. But, Iqalaqala, Udolfu says you have stolen his dog, though had it been his lion he had said, I think he would have uttered no lie, for in truth we could hear his roars while yet far away,” added the old induna with a comical laugh all over his fine face. “Now bring forth this wonderful beast, for we would fain see him.”

“Get out the dog, Sewin,” I said. “The chief wants to see him.”

“Yes, but what the devil has all the jaw been about? It’s all jolly fine for you, but I’m not in the fun,” he growled.

“Never mind. I’ll tell you presently. Leave it all to me now. You’ve got to, in fact.”

Falkner climbed into the waggon, and in a moment reappeared with Arlo, still holding him in his improvised leash. At sight of him the warriors in the impi set up a murmur of admiration.

“Loose him,” said Untúswa.

I translated this to Falkner, and he complied. The dog walked up and down, growling and suspicious.

“See now, Udolfu,” said Untúswa, who had been watching the splendid beast with some admiration. “This is your dog. Now call him, and take him away with you.”

“Arno!” called Norbury. “Here, Arno, old chap. Come along home. Good dog.”

But the “good dog” merely looked sideways at him and growled the harder.

“Arno. D’you hear? Come here, sir. Damn you. D’you hear!”

The growls increased to a sort of thunder roll.

“Whau!” said Mundúla. “That is a strange sort of dog to own a dog that will not come, but growls at his master when he calls him instead.”

“I have not had him long enough to know me thoroughly,” said Dolf. “Those two, who stole him from me, have taught him better.”

“Call him in the other direction, Falkner,” I said.

This he did, and the dog went frisking after him as he ran a little way out over the veldt, and back again, both on the best understanding with each other in the world.

“Au! the matter is clear enough,” pronounced Untúswa. “The dog himself has decided it. He is not yours, Udolfu. Yet, Iqalaqala, may it not be that those with whom you last saw the dog may have sold him?”

“That is quite impossible, leader of the valiant,” I answered. “From those who own him no price would buy him. No, not all the cattle in the kraals of the Great Great One. Further, he has not even got the sound of the dog’s name right,” and I made clear the difference between the “l” and the “n” which the other had substituted for it.

“Au! That is a long price to pay for one dog, fine though he is,” said Untúswa with the same comical twinkle in his eyes. “Well, it is clear to whom the dog belongs. You,” with a commanding sweep of the hand towards the riotous crowd who had first molested us, “go home.”

There was no disputing the word of an induna of the King. The former rioters saluted submissively and melted away. Dolf Norbury, however, remained.

“Will the chief ask them,” he said, cunningly, “why they had to leave Majendwa’s country in a hurry, and why they are bringing back about half their trade goods?”

“We did not leave in a hurry,” I answered, “and as for trade goods, the people seemed not willing to trade. For the rest, we have plenty of cattle, which are even now crossing Inncome, driven by boys whom Muntisi the son of Majendwa sent with us.”

“That is a lie,” responded Norbury. “They had too many eyes, and looked too closely into what did not concern them. They had to fly, and now they will carry strange stories to the English about the doings on the Zulu side.”

This, I could see, made some impression upon the warriors. However, I confined myself simply to contradicting it. Then Norbury asked the chief to order the return of his weapons.

“I need no such order,” I said. “I am willing to return them, but I must have all the cartridges in exchange.”

He was obliged to agree, which he did sullenly. As he threw down the bandolier and emptied his pockets of his pistol cartridges he said:

“Glanton, my good friend if you value your life I warn you not to come to this section of the Zulu country any more. If it hadn’t been for this crowd happening up, you’d both have been dead meat by now. You can take my word for that.”

“Oh no, I don’t,” I answered. “I’ve always been able to take care of myself, and I fancy I’ll go on doing it. So don’t you bother about that. Here are your shooting irons.”

“What about my horse? You’ve shot my horse you know. What are you going to stand for him?”

“Oh blazes take you and your impudence,” struck in Falkner. “I’m only sorry it wasn’t you I pinked instead of the gee. Outside British jurisdiction, you know,” he added with an aggravating grin. “Stand? Stand you another hammering if you like to stand up and take it. You won’t? All right. Goodbye. We’ve no time to waste jawing with any blighted dogstealer like you.”

The expression of the other’s face was such that I felt uncommonly glad I had insisted on taking his cartridges; and at the same time only trusted he had not an odd one left about him. But the only weapon available was a string of the direst threats of future vengeance, interspersed with the choicest blasphemies, at which Falkner laughed.

“You came along like a lion, old cock,” he said, “and it strikes me you’re going back like a lamb. Tata.”

I talked a little further with the two chiefs, and then we resumed our way, they walking with us as far as the drift. As to the state of the border Untúswa shook his head.

“See now, Iqalaqala,” he said. “One thing you can tell your people, and that is that any trouble you may have met with in the land where the Great Great One rules has not been at the hands of his people but at those of your own.”

This was in reference to all sorts of reports that were being circulated with regard to the so-called enormities of Cetywayo, and the hostility of his people; and the point of it I, of course, fully recognised.

I made the chiefs a liberal present, out of the remnant of the things we were taking back with us. We took leave of them at the drift, and the whole impi, gathered on the rising ground, watched us cross and raised a sonorous shout of farewell. Under all the circumstances I was not sorry to be back over the border, but I decided to trek on a good bit before outspanning lest Dolf Norbury should yet find means to play us some bad trick.

And then for home!

Chapter Twenty Three.

“Welcome Home!”

I envied Falkner as he parted company with me, for he wanted to go straight home, and my store was all out of his way in the other direction. We had returned by the same route as that by which we had gone, skirting the border and recrossing by Rorke's Drift; and no further incident worthy of note had befallen us.

“See here, Falkner,” I said, as he would have left me in cool offhand fashion. “We've made this trip and taken its ups and downs together, and more than once I've had reason to be glad that you were along. But if we haven't got on as well as we might during the last part of it, really I can't see that it is altogether my fault. Nor need we bear each other any illwill,” and I put out my hand.

He stared, then shook it, but not cordially, mumbling something in a heavy, sullen sort of way. Then he rode off.

It had been a temptation to accompany him, and he had even suggested it, but I saw through his illconcealed relief when I declined. I had plenty to attend to on first arriving home again, and it struck me that neglect of one's business was hardly a recommendation in the eyes of anybody.

Yes, I had plenty to attend to. The waggons had to be offloaded and kraals knocked into repair for holding the trade cattle, and a host of other things. I paid off Mfutela and his son, and sent them back well contented, and with something over. But Jan Boom, when it came to his turn, seemed not eager to go.

Then he put things plainly. Would I not keep him? He would like to remain with me, and I should find him useful. There were the trade cattle to be looked after, to begin with, and then, there was nothing he could not turn his hand to. He would not ask for high wages, and was sure I should find him worth themyes, well worth them, he added. Had he not been worth his pay so far?

I admitted readily that this was so, and the while I was wondering why he should be so anxious to remain? There seemed some meaning underlying the manner in which he almost begged me to keep him, and this set me wondering. Going back over our trip I could not but remember that he had proved an exceedingly willing, handy and goodtempered man, and my earlier prejudice against him melted away.

“I will keep you then, Jan Boom,” I said, after thinking the matter out for a few minutes.

“Nkose! There is only one thing I would ask,” he said, “and that is that you will tell me when three moons are dead whether you regret having kept me on or not.”

I thought the request strange, and laughed as I willingly gave him that promise. I still held to my theory that he had broken gaol somewhere or other, and had decided that he had now found a tolerably secure hidingplace; and if such were so, why from my point of interest that was all the better, if only that it would keep him on his best behaviour.

All the morning of the day following on my return I was busy enough, but by the early afternoon felt justified in starting to pay my first visit to the Sewins.

As I took my way down the bush path I had plenty of time for thought, and gave myself up to the pleasures of anticipation. Those last words: “You will come and see us directly you return. I shall look forward to it,” were ringing in a kind of melody in my mind, as my horse stepped briskly along. And now, what would my reception be? It must not be supposed that I had not thought, and thought a great deal, as to the future during the couple of months our trip had lasted. Hour after hour under the stars, I had lain awake thinking out everything. If all was as I hardly dared to hope, I would give up my present knockabout life, and take a good farm somewhere and settle down. If notwell I hardly cared to dwell upon that. Of Falkner in the light of any obstacle, strange to say I thought not at all.

From one point of the path where it rounded a spur the homestead became momentarily visible. Reining in I strained my eyes upon it, but it showed no sign of life no flutter of light dresses about the stoep or garden. Well, it was early afternoon, hot and glowing. Likely enough no one would be willingly astir. Then a thought came that filled my mind with blankif speculativedisarm. What if the family were away from home? The stillness about the place now took on a new aspect. Well, that sort of doubt could soon be set at rest one way or another, and I gave my horse a touch of the spur that sent him floundering down the steep and stony path with a snort of surprised indignation.

We had got on to the level now and the ground was soft and sandy. As we dived down into a dry drift something rushed at us from the other side with openmouthed and threatening growl, which however subsided at once into a delighted whine. It was Arlo and there on the bank above sat Arlo’s mistress.

She had a drawing block in her hand and a colour box beside her. Quickly she rose, and I could have sworn I saw a flush of pleasure steal over the beautiful face. I was off my horse in a twinkling. The tall, graceful form came easily forward to meet me.

“Welcome home,” she said, as our hands clasped. “I am so glad to see you again. And you have kept your promise indeed. Why we hardly expected you before tomorrow or the day after.”

“It was a great temptation to me to come over with Falkner yesterday,” I answered. “But, a man must not neglect his business.”

“Of course not. It is so good of you to have come now.”

“Good of me! I seem to remember that you would look forward to it that last night I was here,” I answered, a bit thrown off my balance by the manner of her greeting. That “welcome home,” and the spontaneous heartiness of it, well it would be something to think about.

“Well, and that is just what I have been doing,” she answered gaily. “There! Now I hope you feel duly flattered.”

“I do indeed,” I answered gravely.

“And I am so glad we have met like this,” she continued, “because now we shall be able to have a good long talk. The others are all more or less asleep, but I didn’t feel lazy, so came down here to reduce that row of stiff euphorbia to paper. I have taken up my drawing again, and there are delightful little bits for watercolour all round here.”

The spot was as secluded and delightful as one could wish. The high bank and overhanging bushes gave ample shade, and opposite, with the scarlet blossoms of a Kafir bean for foreground, rose a small cliff, its brow fringed with the organ pipe stems of a line of euphorbia.

“Lie down, Arlo,” she enjoined. “What a fortunate thing it was you were able to recover him. I don’t know how to thank you.”

“Of course you don’t, because no question of thanking me comes in,” I said. “I would sooner have found him as we did, than make anything at all out of the trip, believe me.”

“And your trip was not a great success after all, Falkner tells us?”

“Oh we did well enough, though I have done better. But to return to Arlo. The mystery to me to both of us was how on earth he ever managed to let himself be stolen.”

“Ah. That dreadful witch doctor must have been at the bottom of it. I only know that one morning heArlo not Ukozi had disappeared, and no inquiry of ours could get at the faintest trace of him. His disappearance, in fact, was as complete as that of that poor Mr Hensley.”

“Old Hensley hasn’t turned up again, then?” I said.

“No. Mr Kendrew is getting more and more easy in his mind. He’s a shocking boy, you know, and says he’s too honest to pretend to be sorry if he comes into a fine farm to end his days on,” she said, with a little smile, that somehow seemed to cast something of a damper on the delight of the present situation.

“Confound Kendrew,” I thought to myself. “Who the deuce wants to talk of Kendrew now?”

“Tell me, Mr Glanton,” she went on, after a slight pause. “You got my letter I know, because Falkner has told us how he got the one mother wrote him. Did you think me very weak and foolish for allowing myself to get frightened as I did?”

“You know I did not,” I answered, with quite unnecessary vehemence. “Why I was only too proud and flattered that you should have consulted me at all. But, of course it was all somewhat mysterious. Is Ukozi about here now?”

“We haven’t seen him for some days. Do you know, I can’t help connecting his nonappearance with your return in some way. He must have known you would soon be here. Father is quite irritable and angry about it. He says the witch doctor promised to let him into all sorts of things. Now he pronounces him an arrant humbug.”

“That’s the best sign of all,” I said, “and I hope he’ll continue of that opinion. When elderly gentlemen take up fads bearing upon the occult especially, why, it isn’t good for them. You don’t mind my saying this?”

“Mind? Of course I don’t mind. Why should I have bothered you with my silly fears and misgivings at a time too when you had so much else to think about if I were to take offence at what you said? And it seems so safe now that you are near us again.”

What was this? Again a sort of shadow seemed to come over our talk. Was it only on account of some imaginary protection my presence might afford that she had been so cordially and unfeignedly glad to welcome me?

“I think you may make your mind quite easy now,” I said. “This Ukozi had some end of his own to serve, possibly that of stealing the dog, which he knew he could trade for a good price in Zululand, and probably did. I suppose Falkner gave you a full, true and particular account of how we bested the precious specimen who claimed him.”

She laughed.

“Oh, he’s been bragging about that, and all your adventures or rather his up there, in quite his own style.”

“Well, there was nothing for either of us to brag about in the way we recovered Arlo,” I said. “If the King’s impi hadn’t happened along in the nick of time I own frankly we might never have been able to recover him at all. It was a hundred to one, you understand.”

Again she laughed, significantly, and I read into the laugh the fact that she did not quite accept Falkner’s narratives at precisely Falkner’s own valuation.

“How did Falkner behave himself?” she went on.

“Oh, he was all right. He was always spoiling for a fight and on one occasion he got it. I daresay he has told you about that.”

“Yes,” she said, with the same significant laugh. “He gave us a graphic account of it.”

“Well he has plenty of pluck and readiness, and a man might have many a worse companion in an emergency.”

“It’s nice of you to say that. I don’t believe he was a bit nice to you.”

“Oh, only a boy’s sulks,” I said airily. “Nothing to bother oneself about in that.”

“But was that all?” she rejoined, lifting her clear eyes to my face.

“Perhaps not,” I answered, then something in her glance moved me to add: “May I tell you then, what it was that caused our differences, who it was, rather?” And I put forth my hand.

“Yes,” she said, taking it. “Tell me.”

“It was yourself.”

“Myself?”

“Yes. Do you remember what you said that last evening I was here? I do. I’ve treasured every word of it since. You said I was to come and see you directly I returned, and that you would look forward to it.”

She nodded, smiling softly.

“Yes. And I have. And what did you answer?”

“I answered that I would look forward to it every day until it came. And I have.”

“And is the result disappointing?”

“You know it is not.”

I have stated elsewhere that I seldom err in my reading of the human countenance, and now it seemed that all Paradise was opening before my eyes as I noticed a slight accession of colour to the beautiful face, a deepening of the tender smile which curved the beautiful lips. Then words poured forth in a torrent. What was I saying? For the life of me I could not tell, but one thing was certain. I was saying what I meant. Then again her hand reached forth to mine, and its pressure, while maddening me, told that whatever I was saying, it at any rate was not unacceptable when

Arlo, who had been lying at our feet, sprang up and growled, then subsided immediately, wagging his tail and whining as he snuffed in the direction of the sound of approaching footsteps.

“Hallo, Glanton,” sung out a gruff voice. “You taking lessons in high art? They’re wondering where you’ve got to, Aïda. They’re going to have tea.”

“Well, tell them not to wait. I’ll be in directly when I’m ready.”

“Oh no. No hurry about that,” answered Falkner with an evil grin, flinging himself on the ground beside us, and proceeding leisurely to fill his pipe. “We’ll all stroll back togetherh, Glanton?”

I am ashamed to remember how I hated Falkner Sewin at that moment. Had he heard what I had been saying, or any part of it? But he had thrust his obnoxious presence

between it and the answer, and that sort of opportunity does not readily recur, and if it does, why the repetition is apt to fall flat.

He lay there, maliciously watching me watching us and the expression of his face was not benevolent, although he grinned. He noted his cousin's slight confusion, and delighted to add to it by keeping his glance fixed meaningly upon her face. Then he would look from the one to the other of us, and his grin would expand. There was a redeeming side to his disgust at the situation from his point of view. He was annoying us both annoying us thoroughly and he knew it.

She, for her part, showed no sign of it as she continued her painting serenely. Further exasperated, Falkner began teasing Arlo, and this had the effect of wearying Aida of the situation. She got up and announced her intention of returning to the house.

And Falkner, walking on the other side of her, solaced himself with making objectionable remarks, in an objectionable tone, knowing well that the same stopped just short of anything one could by any possibility take up.

Chapter Twenty Four.

“The Answer isYes.”

Nothing could exceed the warmth and cordiality of the reception I experienced at the hands of the rest of the family. I might have been one of themselves so rejoiced they all seemed at having me in their midst againall of course save Falkner. But among the feminine side of the house I thought to detect positive relief, as though my return had dispelled some shadowy and haunting apprehension. There was something about the old Major, however, that convinced me he was cherishing an idea in the back ground, an idea upon which he would invite my opinion at the earliest opportunity. And that opportunity came.

“Let’s stroll down and look at the garden, Glanton,” he began, presently. “I want to show you what I’ve been doing while you were away.”

And without giving anyone an opportunity of joining us, even if they had wanted to, he led the way forth.

I listened as he expatiated upon the improvements he had been making, even as I had listened many a time before, but it struck me his explanations were a little incoherent, a little flurried, like the speech of a man who is not talking of that which lies uppermost in his mind. He continued thus until we had reached the furthest limit of the cultivated ground, where a high bush fence shut this off from possible depredations on the part of bucks or other nocturnal marauders. It was a secluded spot, and there was no sign of any of the others intending to join us.

“Try one of these cigars, Glanton,” he began, tendering his case. Then, after one final look round to make sure we were not only alone, but likely to remain so, he went on: “Let’s sit down here and have a quiet smoke. There’s something I want to get your opinion about. You know this witch doctor chap, Ukozi?”

“Of course I do. What has he been up to?”

“Up to? Oh, nothing. But the fact is I have taken a liking to the fellow. He interests me. He’s been showing me some queer things of lateyes, devilish queer things. And he’s promised to show me some more.”

“What sort of queer things, Major?” I struck in.

“All sorts. Well, the finding of Aïda’s lost coin was a queer enough thing in itself. Now wasn’t it?”

“Yes. But it’s mere conjuring. You’d probably be surprised to know how the trick was done.”

“No doubt. But do you know?” This somewhat eagerly.

“No, I don’t. I doubt though, whether it’s worth knowing. Well, Major, you’ve got bitten with a sort of inclination towards occultism, and Ukozi comes in handy as a means of showing you a thing or two. Isn’t that it?”

“Well yes. But Glanton, I seem to have heard you admit that these fellows can do a good deal. Yet, now you make light of this one?”

“To speak frankly, Major, I think the less you have to do with him, or any of his kind, the better. By the way, how the dickens do you manage to talk to him? Have you learnt?”

“Oh, I work that through Ivondwe. That’s a treasure you’ve found for us, Glanton. Yes sir, a real treasure. He takes all the bother and anxiety of the place clean off my hands.”

“That’s good,” I said. But at the same time I was not at all sure that it was. I recalled to mind what Aïda had said in her letter with regard to “an influence” under which they seemed to be drawn, this old man especially. No, it was not good that he should be on such terms with natives, and one of them his own servant. For the first time I began to distrust Ivondwe, though as yet I was groping entirely in the dark. For one thing, I could see no adequate motive. Motive is everything, bearing in mind what an essentially practical animal your savage invariably is; and here there was none.

“Well?” said the Major expectantly, impatient under my silence. The truth was I found myself in something of a quandary. Old gentlemen notably those of the Anglo-Indian persuasion were, I knew, prone to exceeding impatience under criticism of their latest fad, and for reasons which scarcely need guessing never was there a time when I felt less inclined to incur the resentment of this one.

“I can only repeat what I said before, Major?” I answered. “Candidly I think you’d better leave Ukozi, and his occultism, alone.”

“But it interests me, man. I tell you it interests me. Why shouldn’t I be allowed to make interesting investigations if I have a mind to? Answer me that.”

“Look here,” I said. “I know these people, Major, and you don’t. I have a good many ‘eyes and ears’ as they would put it scattered about among them, and I’ll try and find out what Ukozi’s game is. He hasn’t started in to fleece you any, you say?”

“No. That he certainly hasn’t.”

“All the more reason why he needs looking after. Well now don’t you have anything more to say to him, at any rate until you hear from me again.”

“He won’t give me the chance. I haven’t seen him for quite a long time. He’s never been away for so long a time before.”

In my own mind I could not but connect Ukozi’s sudden absenteeism in some way with my return.

“Here come the others,” went on the Major. “And Glanton,” he added hurriedly, “don’t let on to the women about what I’ve been telling you, there’s a good fellow.”

I was rather glad to be spared the necessity of making or avoiding any promise. It was near sundown, and as they joined us for a stroll in the cool of the evening I thought to catch a significant flash in Aïda’s eyes, as though she were fully aware of the burden of her father’s conversation with me. Falkner was away at the kraals, for it was counting in time, and I for one did not regret his absence.

Yes, it was a ray of Paradise that sunset glow, as we walked among the flowers in the dew of the evening, for although we two were not alone together yet there was a sweet subtle understanding between us which was infinitely restful. Falkner’s interruption, however unwelcome, had not been altogether inopportune, for it had occurred too late; too late, that is, to prevent a very real understanding, though precluding anything more definite. That would come with the next opportunity.

“The usual storm,” remarked Mrs Sewin, looking up, as a low, heavy boom sounded from a black pile of cloud beyond the river valley. “We get one nearly every day now, and, oh dear, I never can get used to them, especially at night.”

“Pooh!” said the Major. “There’s no harm in them, and we’ve got two new conductors on the house. We’re right as trivets, eh, Glanton?”

“Absolutely, I should say,” I answered. We had completed our stroll and had just returned to the house. It would soon be dinner time and already was almost dark.

We were very merry that evening I remember. The Major, glad of someone else to talk to, was full of jokes and reminiscences, while I, happy in the consciousness of the presence beside me, joined heartily in the old man's mirth, and we were all talking and laughing round the table as we had never talked and laughed before. Only Falkner was sulky, and said nothing; which was rather an advantage, for his remarks would certainly have been objectionable had he made any. Then suddenly in the middle of some comic anecdote, came a crash which seemed to shake the house to its very foundations, setting all the glasses and crockery on the table rattling. Mrs Sewin uttered a little scream.

"Mercy! We're struck!" she gasped.

"Not we," returned the Major. "But that was a blazer, by Jingo!"

"Pretty near," growled Falkner.

"Oh, it's horrid," said Mrs Sewin, "and there's no getting away from it."

"No, there isn't," I said. "If you were in London now you might get away from it by burrowing underground. I knew a man there whose wife was so mortally scared of thunder and lightning that whenever a storm became imminent she used to make him take her all round the Inner Circle. She could neither see nor hear anything of it in the Underground train."

"That was ingenious. Did you invent that story, Mr Glanton?" said Edith Sewin, mischievously.

Another crash drowned the laugh that followed, and upon the ensuing silence, a strange hollow roar was audible.

"The river's down, by Jove!" growled Falkner.

"No. It isn't the river. It's a tremendously heavy rain shower," I said, listening.

"Let's go outside and see what it looks like," he went on pushing back his chair.

We had done dinner, and this proposal seemed to find favour, for a move was made accordingly. We went out we four, for Mrs Sewin was afraid to stir and the Major remained in with her. Nearer and nearer the roar of the rain cloud approached, though as yet not a drop had fallen over us. Again the blue lightning leaped forth, simultaneously with another appalling crash, cutting short a wrangle which had got up

between Falkner and Edith Sewin, and ending it in a little squeal on the part of the latter. But already I had seized my opportunity, under cover of the racket.

“That question I was asking you today when we were interrupted,” I whispered to my companion. “It was not answered.”

Then came the flash. In the blue gleam, bright as noonday, I could see the beautiful, clear cut face turned upwards, as though watching the effect, with calm serenity. Through the thunder roar that followed I could still catch the words.

“The answer is Yes. Will that satisfy you?”

And a hand found mine in a momentary pressure.

Thus amid black darkness and lightning and storm our troth was plighted. An ill omen? I thought not. On the contrary, it seemed appropriate to my case; for in it much of a hard but healthy life had been passed amid rude exposure to the elements, and that I should have secured the happiness the great happiness of my life amid the battling forces of the said elements seemed not unfitting.

The vast rain cloud went whooping along the riverbed, gleaming in starry sparkle as the lightning beams stabbed it, but not a drop fell upon us. The storm had passed us by.

Chapter Twenty Five.

The Witch Doctor Again.

From the moment that Aïda Sewin and I had become engaged life was, to me, almost too good to live. As I have said, I was no longer young, and now it seemed to me that my life up till now had been wasted, and yet not, for I could not but feel intensely thankful that I had kept it for her. I might have been “caught young,” and have made the utter mess of life in consequence that I had seen in the case of many of my contemporaries, but I had not, and so was free to drink to the full of this new found cup of happiness. And full it was, and running over.

Of course I didn't intend to remain on at Isipanga. The trading and knockabout days were over now. I would buy a good farm and settle down, and this resolve met with Aïda's entire approval. She had no more taste for a town life than I had myself. The only thing she hoped was that I should find such a place not too far from her people.

“The fact is I don't know how they'll ever get on without you,” she said one day when we were talking things over. “They are getting old, you see, and Falkner isn't of much use, between ourselves. I doubt if he ever will be.”

This made me laugh, remembering Falkner's aspirations and the cocksure way in which he had “warned me off” that night in Majendwa's country. But I was as willing to consider her wishes in this matter, as I was in every other.

Falkner had accepted the situation, wellmuch as I should have expected him to, in that he had sulked, and made himself intensely disagreeable for quite a long time. I was sorry for him, but not so much as I might have been, for I felt sure that it was his conceit which had received the wound rather than his feelings. Which sounds ill natured.

Tyingoza was not particularly elated when I broke the news of my intended departure.

“So you are going to build a new hut at last, Iqalaqala,” he said, with a chuckle.

“I am, but not here.”

“Not here?”

“No. I am going to leave trading, and raise cattle instead.”

“The people will be sorry, Iqalaqala, for we have been friends. Au! is it not ever so in life? You hold a man by the hand, and lo, a woman takes hold of his other hand, and he holds yours no more.”

“But in this case we still hold each other by the hand, Tyingoza,” I said. “For I am not going into another country nor does the whole world lie between Isipanga and where I shall be.”

“The people will be sorry,” he repeated.

It was not long before Kendrew found his way over.

“Heard you were back, Glanton,” he said. “Well and how did you get on with Sewin upcountry?”

“Middling. He has his uses, and he hasn’t.”

“Well, I shouldn’t find any use for him for long. It’s all I can do to stand that dashed commandeering way of his, and ‘hawhaw’ swagger, as it is. Been down there since you got back? But of course you have,” he added with a knowing laugh. “I say though, but doesn’t it seem a sin to bury two splendid looking girls in an outoftheway place like this?”

“Don’t know about that. At any rate I propose to bury one of them in just such an outoftheway place,” I answered. “I believe it’s the thing to offer congratulations on these occasions, so congratulate away, Kendrew. I’ll try and take it calmly.”

“Ehwhat the dev Oh I say, GlantonYou don’t mean?”

“Yes, I do mean. Compose yourself, Kendrew. You look kind of startled.”

“Which of them is it?”

“Guess,” I said, on mischief intent, for I detected a note of eagerness in his tone and drew my own conclusions.

“The eldest of course?”

“Right,” I answered after a moment of hesitation intended to tease him a little longer.

“Why then, I do congratulate you, old chap,” he said with a heartiness in which I thought his own relief found vent. “I say though. You haven’t lost much time about it.”

“No? Well you must allow for the hastiness of youth.”

And then he fired off a lot more good wishes, and soon suggested we should ride over to the Sewins together as he was so near. And reading his motive I sympathised with him and agreed.

Two months had gone by since my engagement to Aïda Sewin and they had gone by without a cloud. If I were to say that a larger proportion of them was spent by me at her father’s place than at my own, decidedly I should not be exaggerating. But we learnt to know each other very thoroughly in that time, and the more I learnt to know her the more did I marvel what I had done to deserve one hundredth part of the happiness that henceforth was to irradiate my life. Truly our sky was without a cloud.

I had found a farm that seemed likely to suit me. It was now only a question of price, and the owner was more than likely to come down to mine. The place was distant by only a few hours’ easy ride, and that was a consideration.

“Everything seems to favour us,” Aïda said. “You know, dear, it is such a relief to me to know that we need not be far away from the old people after all. I would of course go to the other ends of the earth with you if necessity required it, but at the same time I am deeply thankful it does not. And then, you know, you needn’t be afraid of any of the ‘relationsinlaw’ bugbear; because they look up to you so. In fact we have come to look upon you as a sort of Providence. While you were away, if anything went wrong, father would fume a bit and always end by saying: ‘I wish to Heaven Glanton was back. It would be all right if Glanton were here!’ mother, too, would say much the same. So you see you will have very amenable relationsinlaw after all.”

“Oh, I’m not afraid of that in the least,” I answered. “As a matter of fact, as you know, I don’t think your father was at all well advised in coming out here to set up farming at his age and with his temperament. But now he is here we must pull him through, and we’ll do it all right, never fear. But Aïda, if it was a wrong move on his part think what it has resulted in for me.”

“And for me,” she said softly.

I have set out in this narrative deliberately to spare the reader detailed accounts of love passages between myself and this beautiful and peerless woman whose love I had so strangely won; for I hold that such are very far too sacred to be imparted to a third

person, or put down in black and white for the benefit of the world at large. Suffice it that the most exacting under the circumstances could have had no reason to complain of any lack of tenderness on her partah, no indeed!

This conversation took place during a long walk which we had been taking. Aïda was fond of walking, and, except for long distances, preferred it to riding; wherein again our tastes coincided. She was observant too and keenly fond of Nature; plants, insects, birds, everything interested her; and if she saw anything she wanted to look at she could do it far better, she said, on foot than on horseback. So we had taken to walking a good deal. This afternoon we had been to a certain point on the river which she had wanted to sketch, and now were returning leisurely through the bush, picking our way along cattle or game paths. Arlo, for once, was not with us. Falkner had taken him in the other direction. He wanted to train him as a hunting dog, he said, and now he had gone after a bushbuck.

The glory of the slanting sun rays swept wide and golden over the broad river valley as the sinking disc touched the green gold line of the further ridge, then sank beneath it, leaving the sweep of bushclad mound and lower lying level first lividly clear, then indistinct in the purple afterglow. Birds had ceased to pipe farewell to the last light of falling day, and here and there along the river bank a jackal was shrilly baying. But if the light of day had failed, with it another lamp had been lighted in the shape of a broad moon approaching its full, its globe reddening into an increasing glow with the twilight darkening of the sky.

“We shall pass by the waterhole,” I said. “You are not afraid.”

“Afraid? With you? But it is an uncanny place. We have rather avoided it since that time we first saw that weird thing in it. But we have been there since in the daytime with Falkner, and father, and whatever the thing may have been we have never seen it since.”

“Well, we’ll have a look at it in this grand moonlight. Perhaps the bogey may condescend to appear again.”

“Hark!” exclaimed Aïda suddenly. “What is that?” Then listening “Why, it’s a lamb or a kid that must have strayed or been left out.”

A shrill bleat came to our ears came from the bush on the further side of the hole to us, but still a little way beyond it.

“Couldn’t we manage to catch it?” she went on. “It’ll be eaten by the jackals, poor little thing.”

“Instead of by us,” I laughed. “Well, it doesn’t make much difference to it though it does to its owner. WaitDon’t speak,” I added in a whisper, for my ears had caught a sound which hers had missed.

We stood motionless. We were on high ground not much more than twenty yards above the pool, every part of which we could see as it lay, its placid surface showing like a dull, lacklustre eye in the moonlight. In the gloom of the bush we were completely hidden, but through the sprays we could see everything that might take place.

Again the bleat went forth shrilly, this time much nearer. But it ceased suddenly, as if it had been choked off in the middle.

A dark figure stood beside the pool, on the very brink, the figure of a mana native and in his hands he held something white something that struggled. It was a halfbred Angora kid the little animal whose bleat we had heard. I could see the glint of the man’s head ring in the moonlight; then for a moment, as he turned it upward, I could see his face, and it was that of Ukozi, the oneeyed witch doctor. An increased pressure on my arm told that my companion had seen it too. I dared not speak, for I was curious to see what he was about to do. I could only motion her to preserve the strictest silence.

The witch doctor stood waving the kid held in both hands by the fore and hind feet high over his head, and chanting a deep toned incantation; yet in such “dark” phraseology was this couched that even I couldn’t make head or tail of it. It seemed to call upon some “Spirit of the Dew” whatever that might be, and was so wrapped up in “dark” talk as to be unintelligible failing a key. Then, as we looked, there arose a splashing sound. The surface of the pool was disturbed. A sinuous undulation ran through it in a wavy line, right across the pool, and then and then a mighty length rose glistening from the water, culminating in a hideous head whose grisly snout and sunken eye were those of the python species. This horror glided straight across to where the witch doctor stood, and as it reached him its widely opened jaws seemed to champ down upon his head. Not upon it, however, did they close, but upon the body of the white kid which he had deftly placed there, quickly springing back at the same time. Then it turned, and as it glided back, the wretched little animal kicking and bleating frantically in its jaws, it seemed as if the hideous brute were rushing straight for us. Aïda’s face was white as death, and I had to repress in her a panic longing to turn and fly. My firm touch however sufficed to calm her, and we crouched motionless, watching Ukozi on the further side. The serpent had disappeared from our view.

The whole thing was horrible and eerie to a degree. The witch doctor now was in a species of frenzy, walking up and down, with a half dancing movement, as he called out,

thick and fast, the sibongo of the serpent. It was a nasty, uncanny, heathenish performance, and revolted me; although through it there shone one redeeming even humorousside. We had sat and watched it while Ukozi was blissfully ignorant of our presence. He, the great witch doctor, had no inspiration or inkling that he was being watched! One day I would twit him with it.

Not long, however, did he stay there, and on Aïda's account I was glad to see the last of him. Had I been alone I might have gone after him and asked the meaning of the performance. As it was, she had better forget it. For a time we sat there in the dead silence of the moonlight.

"What does it mean?" she whispered, when we had allowed Ukozi sufficient time to make himself scarce.

"Oh, some Mumbo Jumbo arrangement all his own," I answered. "Well that certainly is a whacking big python the very biggest I've ever seen. If I had anything in the shape of a gun I'd be inclined to try and sneak the brute wherever he's lying."

"Wouldn't it be in the water then?"

"No. Lying up somewhere under the banks. In hot weather they're fond of lying in a waterhole, but on a cool night like this not. I must come and stalk the brute another night though; and yet, do you know, it seems strange, but I don't like interfering with anything that bears a sort of religious significance to anybody. And the snake does come in that way with Zulus."

She thought a moment. Then:

"You remember, dear, how I told you that one of the things this man was going to show father was the mystery of the waterhole. Now supposing that horror had suddenly seized him?"

An uncomfortable wave swept through me. The fact is that no white man, however well he is known to natives, ever gets really to the bottom of the darker mysteries of their superstitions, which indeed remain utterly unsuspected in most cases, so well are they concealed. Who could say what might underlie this one! However I answered:

"I don't think there would have been danger of that sort. Ukozi would have shown him the performance we have witnessed, as something very wonderful. As a matter of fact it isn't wonderful at all, in that it resolves itself into a mere question of snake charming.

Ukozi has half trained this brute by feeding it periodically as we have seen. That's all. Hallo!"

Well might I feel amazement, but the exclamation had escaped me involuntarily. We had come round the pool now, and here, very near the spot whereon Ukozi had gone through his strange performance instinctively we had kept a little back from the water an odour struck upon my nostrils, and it was the same sickly overpowering effluvium that had filled the air when my horse had refused to proceed on that memorable night I had intended to ride back from Kendrew's.

"What is it?" exclaimed Aïda, with a start.

"Nothing. Nothing at all. I've frightened you, and you are a little wound up already by that uncanny performance," I answered.

"Frightened? No. I don't believe I could be that when I'm with you. I always feel so safe. Otherwise it would seem strange that this witch doctor whom we have not seen for so long, and in fact whom we thought had left this part of the country, should have been here right in our midst all the time."

"He may not have been. He may only just have returned," I said. "Worthies of his profession are inclined to be somewhat sporadic in their movements. Meanwhile if I were you, I wouldn't say anything about what we've just seen until I've had time to make a few inquiries."

She promised, of course, and as we took our way homeward in the splendour of the clear African night we thought no more of the uncanny episode we had just witnessed, except as something out of the common which had lent an element of unexpected excitement to our walk.

Chapter Twenty Six.

Into Empty Air.

I had completed my purchase of the farm, and was well satisfied with my bargain. It was a nice place, and the homestead was in good repair and very picturesquely situated, commanding a beautiful view. Aïda would revel in it. The veldt was good, and so were the faculties for stocking water. Game too was plentiful, though the dark bushy kloofs intersecting a high rand on one side of the place gave promise of the more undesirable kind from the stockraiser's point of view such as leopards and wild dogs and baboons. However it would be hard if I couldn't manage to keep the numbers of these down, and if they took toll of a calf or two now and then, why one could take toll of them in the way of sport so that the thing was as broad as it was long.

Yes, I was well satisfied, and as I rode homeward I fell castle building. The place would be a Paradise when I should take Aïda there. It was too marvellous. How could such a wealth of happiness come my way? There was no cloud to mar it. Even as the vivid, unbroken blue of the sky overhead so was this marvel of bliss which had come in upon my life. There was no cloud to mar it.

I was not rich but I had enough. I had done myself exceedingly well in the course of my ventures, and was beyond any anxiety or care for the future from a pecuniary point of view. I had always lived simply and had no expensive tastes. Now I was beginning to reap the benefit of that fortunate condition of things. I could afford the luxury of castle building as I cantered along mile after mile in the glorious sunlight.

I had not seen Aïda for three whole days, it was that time since the uncanny episode of the waterhole. Now I was treasuring up the anticipation of our meeting, the light of glad welcome that would come into her eyes, only a few hours hence, for I would call in at my own place to see that things were all right, and get a bit of dinner, and ride on immediately afterwards. So, mile upon mile went by and at last shortly after midday I walked my horse up the long acclivity that led to my trading store.

As I gained the latter I descried a horseman approaching from the other direction, and he was riding too riding as if he didn't want to use his horse again for at least a week. By Jove! it was Kendrew, I made out as he came nearer, but what the devil was Kendrew in such a castiron, splitting hurry about?

My boy Tom came out as I dismounted. I hardly noticed that he hadn't got on the usual broad grin of welcome.

“Where is Jan Boom?” I asked.

“He is out after the cattle, Nkose,” answered Tom, rather glumly I thought. But I paid no attention to this, because Tom had taken it into his head to be rather jealous of Jan Boom of late, as a newcomer and an alien who seemed to be rather more in his master’s confidence than he had any right to be from Tom’s point of view.

“Well, wait a bit,” I said. “Here comes another Nkose, Nyamaki’s nephew. You can take his horse at the same time.”

Kendrew came racing up as if he were riding for his life.

“You back, Glanton?” he cried, as he flung himself off his panting, dripping steed. “Well, that’s a devilish good job. I say. What does this mean?”

“What does what mean?”

“Man! Haven’t you heard? They sent for me posthaste this morning. Knew you were away.”

“Quit jaw, Kendrew, and tell me what the devil’s the row,” I said roughly, for some horrible fear had suddenly beset me.

“Miss Sewin. She’s disappeared,” he jerked forth.

“What?”

I have an idea that I articulated the word, though speech stuck in my throat I felt myself go white and cold, and strong healthy man that I was, the surroundings danced before my eyes as though I were about to swoon. I remember too, that Kendrew ground his teeth with pain under the grip that I had fastened upon his shoulder.

“What do you say? Disappeared?” I gasped forth again. “How? When?”

I heard him as through a mist as he told me how the afternoon before she had gone for a walk alone with her dog. It was towards sundown. She had not returned, and a search had been instituted, with the result that her dog had been found dead not very far from the waterhole, but of her no trace remained. “My God, Glanton,” he ended up. “Buck up, man. Pull yourself together or you’ll go clean off your chump. Buck up, d’you hear!”

I daresay I had a look that way, for I noticed Tom staring at me as if he contemplated taking to his heels.

“I’m on my way down there now,” said Kendrew.

I nodded. I couldn’t speak just then somehow. I went into the house, slung on a heavy revolver, and crammed a handful of cartridges into my pocket. Then I remounted, Kendrew doing likewise, and so we took our way down that rocky bush path at a pace that was neither wise nor safe.

“Is that all they have to go upon?” I said presently, as soon as I had recovered my voice.

“That’s all I gather from the old man’s note. I say, Glanton, what can be behind it all? It seems on all fours with my old uncle taking himself off. I’m beginning to think now there’s some infernal foul play going on among the niggers round us.”

I was thinking the same. At first a thought of Dolf Norbury had crossed my mind, but I dismissed it. Ukozi was behind this, somewhere. The proximity to the waterhole associated him in my mind with the outrage. His beastly performance with the snake! was he training it to seize human beings, in the furtherance of some devilish form of native superstition? Oh, good Heavens no! That wouldn’t bear thinking about. But Aïdamy love had disappeared had disappeared even as Hensley had. He had never been found; the mystery of his disappearance had never been solved. And she! Had she been hideously and secretly done to death? Oh God! I shall go mad!

When we arrived, the Major and Falkner had just returned, and their horses were simply reeking. They had scoured the whole farm, but utterly without result. As for Mrs Sewin and Edith their grief was pitiable would have been only it was nothing by the side of mine.

“How was the dog killed?” was my first question, ignoring all greeting. I had resolved to waste no time in grief. I had now pulled myself together, and was going to do all that man was capable of to find my loved one again.

“That’s the strange part of it,” said Falkner gruffly. “There’s no wound of any kind about the beast, and he hasn’t even been hit on the head, for his skull is quite smooth and unbroken. But, there he is as dead as the traditional herring.”

“You didn’t move him, did you?”

“No. He’s there still.”

“Well let’s go there. I may light on a clue.”

“You’d better not come, uncle,” said Falkner. “You’re played out, for one thing, and there ought to be one man on the place with all this devilish mystery going about.”

“Played out be damned, sir,” retorted the Major fiercely. “I’d tire you any day. I’m going.”

The dead dog was lying right in the path, just beyond where we had found the lost coin on that memorable day. The first thing I looked for were traces of a struggle, but if there had been any they were now completely obliterated by hoof marks and footmarks made by Falkner and the Major when they first made the discovery.

“The dog died before sundown,” I said, after a momentary examination.

“How do you know that?” asked Falkner.

“Because the ground underneath him is perfectly dry. If he had been killed or died later it wouldn’t have been. It would have been damp with dew. LookAh!”

The last exclamation was evoked by a curious circumstance as I moved the body of the dead animal. A strange odour greeted my nostrils. It was as the odour of death, and yet not altogether, and it was the same that poisoned the air on the occasion of my horse refusing to go forward on that night at Kendrew’s, and again here, almost on this very spot three nights ago when we had come away from witnessing Ukozi’s uncanny performance at the pool. Some dark villainy underlay this, and that the witch doctor was connected with it was borne in upon my mind without a doubt.

I examined the dead dog long and carefully, but could read no clue as to the manner of his death, unless he had been poisoned, but this I thought unlikely. One thing was certain. Never in life would he have allowed harm or violence to reach his mistress. Poor Arlo! At any other time I should have been moved to genuine grief for his loss; now that loss was not even felt.

Quickly, eagerly, I cast around for spoor, beyond the radius of the disturbed part of the ground. All in vain. No trace. No trampled grass or broken twig, or displaced leaf, absolutely nothing to afford a clue. The thing was incomprehensible. It was as if she had been caught up bodily into the air.

The ground here was a gentle declivity, moderately studded with bush. It was not rocky nor rugged, and was entirely devoid of holes or caves into which anyone might fall.

Suddenly every drop of blood within me was set tingling. I had found a trace. Where the ground was stony, just above the path I discovered an abrasion, as though a boot, with nail heads in the soles, had scraped it.

It was very faint, but still there was no mistaking it. It was a genuine spoor. And it led on and on, utterly undiscernible to the Major or Falkner, hardly visible to Kendrew at times, but plain enough to me. And now hope beat high. We would find her. We had only to follow on this spoor which we had struck, and we would find her. Heaven knew how, but still! we would find her. She might have met with an accident and be sorely in need of help, but still we would find her, and this even this after the blank, awful realisation of her loss, akin, as it was, to the disappearance of Hensley contained relative comfort.

The others were watching me with mingled anxiety and curiosity as, bent low over the ground, I followed these faint indications. The latter were tolerably perceptible now to a practised eye, though to no other, and I kept upon them steadily. Then a ghastly fear smote me again upon the heart. The spoor was leading straight for the waterhole.

What did it mean? She would not have gone there voluntarily. After the spectacle we had witnessed that night nothing on earth would have induced her to revisit the uncanny place alone, even by daylight. Yet the dreadful thought had already forced itself upon my mind, that there, if anywhere, would the mystery be solved.

In silence, eager, intensified, we pursued our way; for the others would not speak lest they should distract my mind from its concentration. Thus we came out upon the waterhole.

The spoor had led us straight to the high brow of cliff overhanging the pool the spot upon which we had all stood that afternoon when we had first seen the mysterious monster which had disturbed the water. And what was this?

All the soil here, where it was not solid rock, had been swept with branches. There was the pattern in the dust, even if stray leaves and twigs scattered about had not gone towards showing that, beyond a doubt. The object was manifest to efface all traces of a struggle.

Heavens! my brain seemed to be turning to mud with the drear despair of each fresh discovery. The witch doctor's promise to show the old man the mystery of the waterhole

came back to my mind. I put together the words of sibongo to the snake I had heard him chanting. Ukozi had been preparing a way towards a sacrifice to his demon. He had accustomed the great python to seizing its victim as he brought it and he had always brought it, so small, so insufficient, in the shape of the kid we had seen him give it, as to excite the appetite of the monster rather than to gratify it. He had been practising on Major Sewin's curiosity, so that when the time should be ripe he would bring him to the edge of the pool, where all unsuspecting he would be seized by the monster and never be seen or heard of again. And now, and now this unspeakably horrible and revolting fate, instead of overtaking the old man, had overtaken Aïda, my love, the sun and Paradise of my life, instead. She had been substituted for him, as the easier, possibly the more acceptable victim.

But, Ukozi! Whatever might happen to me I would capture and revenge myself upon him in a manner which should outdo the vengeance of the most vindictive and cruel of his own countrymen. I would spend days and nights gloating over his agony, and afterwards it should be talked about with fear and shuddering among the whole population of the borderay, and beyond it I would do it; how I knew not, but, I would do it. All hell was seething in my brain just then all hell, as I thought of my love, in her daintiness and grace; the very embodiment of a refinement and an elevating influence that was almost no, entirely divine, sacrificed horribly to the revolting superstitions of these savages, whom I had hitherto regarded as equalling in manly virtues those who could boast of centuries of so-called civilisation at their backs. And yet revenge could it bring back to me my love my sweet lost love?

Chapter Twenty Seven.

The Dive of the Water Rat.

We stood there we four gazing into each other's livid faces. Then the Major broke down. Sinking to the ground he covered his face with his hands and sobbed. I broke fiercely away. I could not stand for a moment doing nothing, so I set to work to go right round the pool and see if I could find any further trace. But the search was a vain one.

"The next thing is, what are we going to do?" said Falkner when we had rejoined them. "We don't propose to spend the rest of the day staring at each other like stuck pigs, I take it?"

"We ought to drag the hole," I said, "but we haven't got the necessary appliances, nor even a draw net. Can any of you think of some expedient?"

"We might get a long pole, and splice a couple of meathooks to the end somehow," said Falkner, "and probe about with that. Only, the cursed hole is about a mile too deep for the longest pole to get anywhere near the bottom in the middle."

"Amakosi!"

We started at the interruption. So intent had we been that not one of us had been aware of the approach of a fifth hand he a native.

"Ha, Ivondwe!" I cried, recognising him. "What knowest thou of this, for I think thou couldst not have been far from this place at sundown yesterday?"

He answered in English.

"Do the Amakosi think the young missis has got into the water?"

"They do," I said, still keeping to the vernacular. "Now, Water Rat, prove worthy of thy name. Dive down, explore yon water to its furthest depths for her we seek. Then shall thy reward be great."

"That will I do, Iqalaqala," he answered greatly to my surprise I own, for I had been mocking him by reason of his name.

"And the snake?" I said. "The snake that dwells in the pool. Dost thou not fear it?"

I had been keenly watching his face, and the wonder that came into it looked genuine.

“Why as to that,” he answered, “and if there be a snake yet I fear it not. I will go.”

He stood looking down upon the water for a moment; he needed to lose no time in undressing, for save for his mútya he was unclad. Now he picked up two large stones and holding one in each hand, he poised himself at a point about ten feet above the surface. Then he dived.

Down he went straight down and the water closed over him. We stood staring at the widening circles, but could see nothing beneath the surface. Then it suddenly dawned upon us that he had been under water an abnormally long time.

“He’ll never come up again now,” declared Falkner. “No man living could stick under water all that time,” he went on after a wait that seemed like an hour to us. “The beast has either got hold of him, or he’s got stuck somehow and drowned. Oh good Lord!”

For a black head shot up on the further side of the hole, and a couple of strokes bringing it and its owner to the brink, he proceeded calmly to climb out, showing no sign of any undue strain upon his powers of endurance.

“Thou art indeed well named, Ivondwe,” I said. “We thought the snake had got thee.”

“Snake? I saw no snake,” he answered. “But I will go down again. There is still one part which I left unsearched.”

He sat for a moment, then picked up two stones as before. He walked round to an even higher point above the water, and this time dived obliquely.

“By Jove, he must have come to grief now,” said Falkner. “Why he’s been a much longer time down.”

As we waited and still Ivondwe did not reappear, the rest of us began to think that Falkner was right. It seemed incredible that any man could remain under so long unless artificially supplied with air. Then just as we had given him up Ivondwe rose to the surface as before.

This time he was panting somewhat, as well he might. “There is no one down there,” he began, as soon as he had recovered breath.

“No one?”

“No one. All round the bottom did I go and there was no one. Au! it is fearsome down there in the gloom and the silence, and the great eels gliding about like snakes. But she whom you seek must be found elsewhere. Not under that water is she.”

Was he going on the native principle of telling you what you would most like to know? I wondered. Then Falkner began kicking off his boots.

“Here goes for a search on my own account,” he said. “Coming, Glanton? If there’s nothing to hurt him, there’s nothing to hurt us. We’ll try his dodge of holding a couple of stones. We’ll get down further that way.”

Ivondwe shook his head.

“You will not get down at all,” he said, in English.

“I’ll have a try at any rate. Come along, Glanton.”

I am at home in the water but not for any time under it. Half the time spent by Ivondwe down there would have been enough to drown me several times over. However I would make the attempt.

The result was even as I expected. With all the will in the world I had not the power, and so far from getting to the bottom, I was forced to return to the surface almost immediately. Falkner fared not much better.

“It must be an awful depth,” he said. “I couldn’t even touch bottom, and I’m no slouch in the diving line.”

“Where ought we to search, Ivondwe?” I said in the vernacular, “for so far there is no more trace than that left by a bird in the air? It will mean large reward to any who should help to find heryes, many cattle.”

“Would that I might win such,” he answered. Then pointing with his stick, “Lo, the Amapolise.”

Our horses began to snort and neigh, as the police patrol rode up. I recognised my former acquaintance, Sergeant Simcox, but the inspector in command of the troop was along.

“I’ve just come from your house, Major Sewin,” he said after a few words of sympathy, “and I left a couple of men there, so you need be under no apprehension by reason of your ladies being alone. Now have you lighted upon any fresh clue?”

“Eh? What? Clue?” echoed the old man dazedly. “No.”

So I took up the parable, telling how I had found spoor leading to the waterhole and that here it had stopped. I pointed out where the ground had been smoothed over as though to erase the traces of a struggle.

“Now,” I concluded, “if you will come a little apart with me, I’ll tell you something that seems to bolster up my theory with a vengeance.”

He looked at me somewhat strangely, I thought. But he agreed, and I put him in possession of the facts about Ukozi in his relations with Major Sewin, and how Aïda had consulted me about them during my absence in Zululand, bringing the story down to that last startling scene here on this very spot three nights ago.

“Well you ought to know something about native superstitions, Mr Glanton,” he said. “Yet this seems a strange one, and utterly without motive to boot.”

“I know enough about native superstitions to know that I know nothing,” I answered. “I know this, that those exist which are not so much as suspected by white men, and produce actions which, as you say, seem utterly without motive.”

“If we could only lay claw on this witch doctor,” he said, thoughtfully.

“Yes indeed. But he’ll take uncommonly good care that we can’t.”

“Meanwhile I propose to arrest this boy on suspicion, for I find that he couldn’t have been very far from where Miss Sewin was last seen, at the time.”

“Ivondwe?”

“That’s his name. It may only be a coincidence mindbut you remember old Hensley’s disappearance?”

“Rather.”

“Well this Ivondwe was temporarily doing some cattle herding for Hensley at the time, filling another man’s place. It certainly is a coincidence that another mysterious disappearance should take place, and he right at hand again.”

“It certainly is,” I agreed. “But Ivondwe has been here for months, and I’ve known him for years. There isn’t a native I’ve a higher opinion of.”

“For all that I’m going to arrest him. It can do no harm and may do a great deal of good. But first I’ll ask him a few questions.”

Inspector Manvers was colonial born and could speak the native language fluently. I warned him of Ivondwe’s acquaintance with English in case he should say anything in an aside to me.

To every question, Ivondwe answered without hesitation. He had been looking after the cattle, yonder, over the rise, at the time, much too far off to have heard or seen anything. Had he been near, the dog would have kept him off. The dog was always unfriendly towards him.

“Where is Ukozi?” asked the inspector. The question was met by a deprecatory laugh.

“Where is the bird that flew over our heads a few hours ago?” asked Ivondwe. “I would remind the chief of the Amapolise that the one question is as easy to answer as the other. A great isanusi such as Ukozi does not send men before him crying aloud his movements.”

“That we shall see,” said the inspector. “Meanwhile Ivondwe, you are arrested and must go with us.”

“Have I not searched the depths of yonder pool?” was Ivondwe’s unconcerned remark. “Ask these.”

“Well, you are a prisoner, and if you make any attempt to escape you will be shot without challenge.” Then turning to me. “Now I think we had better continue our search down to the river bank. I need hardly tell you, Mr Glanton, how I sympathise with you, but we must not lose hope yet. People do strange and unaccountable things at times generally the last people in the world who would be likely to do them. We shall find Miss Sewin yet.”

“Have you found Hensley yet?” I said bitterly.

He looked grave. The cases were too startlingly akin.

“The old gentleman had better be persuaded to go home,” he said, with a pitying glance at the Major, who was sitting in a state of utter collapse. Kendrew volunteered to effect this. He could join us afterwards, he said.

For the remaining hours of daylight we searched, leaving not a square yard of ground uninvestigated for a radius of miles. But we found nothing not even the remotest trace or clue.

I suppose, if I lived to be a thousand I should never forget the agony of that day. Mile after mile of our patient and exhaustive search, and still nothing. The sickening blank as we returned, obliged to give it up for that day, only to renew our efforts with the first glimmer of returning light!

The moon rose, flooding down over the dim veldt. I recalled that last time when we two had wandered so happily over this very same ground. No presentiment had we then, no warning of mysterious danger hanging over us. How happy we had been how secure in each other's love and now! Oh God! it was too much.

“Look here,” I burst forth roughly. “What's the good of you people? Yes, what the devil's the good of you? What do you draw your pay for anyway? If you had unearthed the secret of Hensley's disappearance this one would never have come about. Your whole force isn't worth a tinker's two penny damn and the sooner it's disbanded and sent about its silly business the better.”

The police inspector was a thoroughly good fellow, and a gentleman. He didn't take any offence at this, for he knew and respected the agony I was undergoing. We were riding a little ahead of the patrol, and therefore were alone together.

“Look here, Glanton,” he said. “Abuse us as much as ever you like and welcome if only it'll relieve your feelings. I don't resent it. You may be, in a measure, right as to Hensley. We all thought and you thought yourself if you remember that the old chap had got off the rails somehow, in an ordinarily natural if mysterious way. But now I'm certain there's some devilish foul play going on, and the thing is to get to the bottom of it. Now let's keep our heads, above all things, and get to the bottom of it. This is my idea. While we go on with our search tomorrow, you go and find Tyingoza and enlist his aid. He's a very influential chief, and has a good reputation, moreover you're on first rate terms with him. I believe he could help us if anybody could. What do you think?”

“I have thought of that already,” I answered gloomily. “But an isanusi of Ukozi’s repute is more powerful than the most powerful chief at any rate on this side of the river. Still it’s a stone not to be left unturned. I’ll ride up the first thing in the morning. No, I’ll go before. I’ll start tonight.”

But I was not destined to do so. On returning to the house I found that both the Major and his wife were in a state of complete prostration. They seemed to cling to the idea of my presence. It was of no use for me to point out to them that the police patrol was camped, so to say, right under their very windows, not to mention Falkner and Kendrew in the house itself. They would not hear of my leaving that night. Edith, too, begged me to fall in with their wishes. A refusal might be dangerous to her father, she put it. Utterly exasperated and amazed at the selfishness, as I deemed it, of the old people, I seemed to have run my head against a blank wall.

“Look here, Edith,” I said. “They are simply sacrificing Aïda by throwing obstacles in my way like this. What am I to do?”

“This,” she answered. “Fall in with their wishes, till they are asleep. They will sleep, if only through sheer exhaustion, and if they don’t I’ll take care that they do, through another agency. Then, carry out your own plan and God bless you in it.”

“God bless you, for the brave resourceful girl you are,” I rejoined. “Manvers and I have been knocking together a scheme, and nothing on God’s earth is going to interfere with it. Well, we’ll make believe but, at midnight I’m off, no matter what happens.”

“That’s right, Glanton,” said Kendrew, who had entered with an opportuneness that under other and less interested circumstances I should have regarded as suspicious. “Edith and I will take care of the old birds, never fear.”

Utterly heartsick, and though unconsciously so, physically weary by reason of the awful strain of the last twelve hours, I only sought to be alone. I went into the room I always occupied and shut myself in. Sleep? Yes, I would welcome it, if only as a respite. I don’t know whether it came or not.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

What Jan Boom Told.

It seemed as though I had slept five minutes when I started wide awake, listening. There was a faint sound of scratching upon the window pane. Then it ceased, to be followed by a succession of gentle taps.

Noiselessly I got out of bed, and drawing my revolver from its holster, stood listening once more. There was no mistake about it. Somebody was trying to attract my attention.

Even then in that tense moment, the drear anguish of yesterday surged like a wave through my mind; but, upon it a gleam of hope. What was this fresh mystery, for, of course, it was in some way connected with the suggestion of tragedy with the mysterious disappearance of my love?

There were no curtains, only blinds. Softly, noiselessly, I slipped to the window and displaced one of these, just sufficiently to leave a crack to be able to see through. The moon was shining, bright and clear, and all in the front of the house was illuminated almost as though by daylight I made out a dark figure crouching under the window, and held the revolver clenched and ready as I put up the sash.

“Who?” I said, in the Zulu.

“Nkose! It is I Jan Boom.”

“Yes. And what do you want?”

“Nkose! Try and slip out of the house, unseen I want to talk. But others may be waking too. Do it. It concerns her whom you seek.”

I knew the ways of a native in such a matter, wherefore without hesitation, I put up the window as noiselessly as I could, and was out in a moment. Bearing in mind the strange and mysterious times upon which we had fallen I didn't leave the weapon behind me in the room either.

“You are alone?” I said.

“I am alone, Nkose. Come round behind the waggon shedor, better still, into the openness of the bush itself. There can we hold our indaba.”

“Good. Now lead on.”

As I walked behind the Xosa, I was all aglow with eagerness. What had he discovered, had he discovered anything? Could I trust him? I remembered my first dislike of him, and how it had faded. What could he know of this last outrage? What part had he borne in it, if any? And if none, how could he be of any assistance?

“Well, Jan Boom,” I said when we were safe from possible interruption. “You know of course that the man who is the one to enable me to recover the Inkosikazi unharmed, will find himself in possession of sufficient cattle to purchase two new wives, with something to spare?”

“I know it, Nkose, and you also know what I said to you when I wanted to remain and work for you,” he answered significantly.

I did remember it. His words came back to me, though I had long since dismissed them from my mind. The plot was thickening.

The Xosa took a long and careful look round, and if my patience was strained to bursting point I knew enough of these people to know that you never get anything out of them by hurrying them. Then he bent his head towards me and whispered:

“If you follow my directions exactly you will recover the Inkosikazi. If not you will never see her again.”

“Never see her again?” I echoed with some idea of gaining time in order to collect myself.

“Has Nyamaki ever been seen again?” said Jan Boom.

“Do you know where she is?”

“I know where she will be tomorrow night.”

Tomorrow night! And I had been expecting instant action.

“Look here,” I said, seizing him by the shoulder with a grip that must have hurt. “Has she been injured in any way? Tell me. Has she?”

“Not yet,” he answered. “Not yet. But if you fail to find her, and take her from where she is, tomorrow night she will die, and that not easily.”

This time he did wince under my grip. In my awful agony I seemed hardly to know what I was doing. The whole moonlit scene seemed to be whirling round with me. My love in peril! in peril of some frightful and agonising form of death! Oh Heaven help me to keep my wits about me! Some such idea must have communicated itself to the Xosa's mind, for he said:

“Nkose must keep cool. No man can do a difficult thing if his head is not cool.”

Even then I noticed that he was looking at me with wonder tinged with concern. In ordinary matters and some out of the ordinary I was among the coolest headed of mortals. Now I seemed quite thrown off my balance. Somehow it never occurred to me to doubt the truth of Jan Boom's statement.

“Where is this place?” I asked.

“That you will learn tomorrow night, Nkose, for I myself will take you there if you are cautious. If not!”

“Look here, Jan Boom. You want to earn the cattle which I shall give as a reward?”

“Cattle are always good to have, Nkose!”

“Well what other motive have you in helping me in this matter? You have not been very long with me, and I cannot recall any special reason why you should serve me outside of ordinary things.”

“Be not too curious, Nkose!” he answered, with a slight smile. “But, whether you fail or succeed tomorrow night, my life will be sought, for it will be known how you came there.”

“Have no fear as to that, Jan Boom, for I will supply you with the means of defending your life six times over and you, too, come of a warrior race.”

“That is so, Nkose. I am of the Ama Gcaleka. Now talk we of our plan. Tomorrow you will return home, starting from here after the sun is at its highest. Up to the time of starting you will help in the search in whatever direction it is made. But if you show any sign or give reason to suspect you know it is all being made in vain, it will mean the failure of our plan, and then”

“Not on my account shall it fail then,” I said. “Tell me, Jan Boom. Is Ukozi at the back of this?”

“His eyes and ears are everywhere,” was the reply, accompanied by a significant glance around. “When you ride homeward tomorrow, your horse will be very lame.”

“Very lame?” I echoed in astonishment.

“Very lame. You yourself will lame it. So shall Ukozi’s eyes be deceived. For a man who has just returned home does not ride forth immediately on a horse that is very lame.”

I saw his drift and it was ingenious.

“You will give out that you are tired of a useless search, that you are exhausted and intend to sleep for three days, and you will pretend to have drunk too much of the strong waters. So shall Ukozi’s eyes be deceived.”

“But Jan Boom, you and Tom are the only people on the place,” I urged.

“U’ Tom? Hau! Ukozi’s eyes and ears are everywhere,” was the enigmatical answer.

“And if my horse is lame how shall I use him?”

“You would not use him in any case,” was his answer. “The sound of a horse’s hoof travels far at night, that of a man’s foot, not. We walk.”

“Walk? Why then the place must be quite near.”

“Quite near it is, Iqalaqala,” slipping into rather an unwarrantable familiarity in addressing me by my native name, but this didn’t exercise me you may be sure. “Quite near, but nowhere near the snake pool. Quite the other way. You will take the nephew of Nyamaki with you.”

“Ah! And what of Umsindo?”

“Ha! Umsindo? He is a good fighting bull but then he is a blundering bull. Yet we will take him, for his strength will be useful. For, we will take Ukozi alive.”

“That will not be easy, Jan Boom. And then just think, how much easier it will be to kill him.”

“Yet we will do it. We will take him alive. You were asking but now, Nkose, what other motive I had in helping you,” he answered, with a dash of significance.

“Ah!”

“So we will take Ukozi alive. Is that to be?”

“Most certainly, if possible. But will it be possible? He is sure to fight. He will have people with him of course.”

“Two, at the most. We had better take them alive too, if we can. It will make things worse for Ukozi. But to no one living save to the two we have named will you by word or hint give knowledge of what I have told you. To do so will mean certain failure.”

I promised.

“Tell me now about this place, Jan Boom, and how you learned of its existence,” I said, for now in my feverish impatience I would rather talk for the remainder of the night than go in to shut myself up with my thoughts throughout its hours of silence.

“I will do better, Nkose, I will show it you,” he answered. “Whau! if we succeed in what we are to do and we must if the three of you only keep strictly to my directions why then I may tell you; and with it a tale so strange that you, or other white people, will give it half belief or perhaps not any. Now I must go. There is still some of the night left, and it is important that none should know we have talked or even that I have been away from Isipanga. Return as silently as you came, and tomorrow, well before the sun goes down ride up to the house on a very lame horse.”

“And with the other two?”

“With the other two. Nkose!” With which parting salute he was gone.

I waited a little, listening. No sound disturbed the dead silence save here and there the ordinary voices of the night. Then I regained my room.

Sleep was of course out of the question, and now I set to work deliberately to marshal my thoughts and bring them to bear on the situation. I felt no misgiving as to the Xosa's good faith the fact that he had agreed to my being accompanied by two tried and trusted comrades seemed to prove that. Though had he stipulated that I should have gone alone, I should, while prepared for any emergency, unhesitatingly have accepted the conditions. Again, the reward was quite enough to tempt a man of his courage,

especially as he came of a totally different race, added to which the corner of curtain which he had just lifted was sufficient to show that he bore a grudge against the witch doctor, not to say a very pretty feud. How and why this should be, passed my understanding, but I knew enough of natives and their ways to know that I didn't know them, as, indeed, I believe no white man ever really does.

And the motive of this outrage? Clearly, it was due to some dark superstition, as I had suspected from the very first. She had not been injured up till now, would not be unless we failed to arrive in time. There was unspeakable comfort in this, for I felt confident the Xosa was sure of his facts. But what stages of horror and despair must she not have passed through since her mysterious capture? Well the villainous witch doctor should pay a heavy reckoning and those who had helped him; and, thinking of it, I, too, was all eagerness he should be taken alive; for a great many years of hard labour perhaps with lashes thrown in which should be his reward, would be a far worse thing to him than a mere swift and easy death.

Then followed a reaction. What if Jan Boom had miscalculated and we arrived too late after all? A cold perspiration poured down me at the thought. "She will die, and that not easily," had been his words. That pointed to torture oh good God! My innocent beautiful love! in the power of these fiends, and sacrificed to their hellish superstitions, and I helpless here! I seemed to be going mad.

No. That wouldn't do. I was letting my imagination run away with me in the silence and the darkness, and above all I wanted coolheadedness and strength. I must make up my mind to believe the Xosa's word and that all would yet be well. By this time the next night she would be with us again safe and sound.

Then I fell to wondering what sort of hidingplace could be found within a walkan easy walk apparently of my dwelling, and it baffled me. I could think of none. Moreover the surroundings had been scoured in search of the missing Hensley, and nothing of the kind had come to light. And then the first signs of dawn began to show, and I felt relieved, for now at any rate, one could be up and doing.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

What we Found.

I have seen a good many astonished natives in my time but never a more astonished one than my boy Tom that evening after supper, when staggering to my feet and lurching unsteadily I bade him in thick and indistinct accents to go into the store and fetch some new blankets for my two guests to sleep on. When on his return, I cursed him roundly, and threw an empty bottle at his head, taking good care however that it shouldn't hit him, then subsided on to the floor to all outward appearances in the last stage of helpless intoxication, poor Tom must have thought the end of the world had come. This, of course, was part of the programme as drawn up between myself and Jan Boom.

In every other particular I had scrupulously observed it even to the severe laming of my unfortunate horse. Poor beast! but then what were the passing sufferings of a mere animal, when issues such as this were in the balance! I had got through the morning joining in the pretended search, and it was while thus engaged that I found an opportunity of imparting to the other two our plan of rescue.

"By the Lord!" exclaimed Kendrew, "I never heard such an extraordinary thing in my life."

"The thing is, can we swallow it?" was Falkner's remark. "These niggers are such infernal liars."

"Well. I'm going to follow it up, even if I go alone," I said.

"Who the devil said you were going alone, Glanton?" he answered gruffly. "Look here, we rather hate each other, but you can't say that up there in Zululand, for instance, I ever backed down."

"Certainly I can't, Sewin," I said. "What I can say is that in any sort of scrap there's no man I'd rather have alongside than yourself. And as for hating each other, it's only natural you should hate me I suppose, but I've never returned the compliment."

"Well we'll knock hell out of someone tonight anyhow," he said. "Now let's have all particulars of the scheme."

I gave them, exactly as I had had them from Jan Boom.

“The thing is to keep it up,” I said. “That’ll be the stiffest part of all to keep it up. We mustn’t go about looking as if we had found her already. Native eyes and ears are sharp, and native deductions are swiftly drawn.”

This was agreed upon, and we continued our mock search more strenuously than ever. We dared not even let fall so much as a hint to the old people. Pitiably as it was to witness their distress, yet it was better that this should continue a little longer rather than that our success should be imperilled, as certainly would have been the case had we let slip the slightest inkling that there was ground for hope.

“Has Ivondwe made any revelation?” I asked the police inspector, later on as we were about to start. “Not a word. Would you like to talk to him, Glanton? You might get something out of him.”

“Not today. Tomorrow perhaps. Only keep him doubly guarded. He’ll certainly escape if he can.”

“He’ll be a bigger magician than Ukozi if he does. He’s handcuffed in a hut, with four of my men guarding him, two inside and two out. And the two out are just dead shots with rifle or pistol, although they do belong to the poor old police,” he added meaningly.

“All right. Now I’m off to try and work the native intelligence department.”

“And I hope to God you may succeed,” had been the fervent answer. “Goodbye.”

So here we were, only awaiting our guide in order to set forth. The other two had also simulated inebriation, but only to a slight extent. We had a businesslike revolver apiece and plenty of cartridges, but no guns. Another significant item of our outfit comprised several strong, new reims. At last, after further waiting, which seemed an eternity, Jan Boom appeared.

There was mirth lurking in his face as he explained that he had come over at Tom’s instance. Tom should have come to see if anything more was wanted before he turned in for the night, but he was afraid. His master seemed bewitched, he declared. He and the other two white men were all drunk, but his master was the most drunk of all, by far. His master drunk!

At any other time we would have roared over the absurdity of the situation, and Tom’s very justifiable amazement. Now Jan Boom was directed to tell him to turn in, and then come back. He came back, but took rather long about it. “Now Amakosi!” he said. “We

will start, but no word must be spoken save in the faintest of whispers, and only then if it cannot be avoided.”

“What if Tom should take into his head to come here again?” I asked.

“He will not, Nkose, I have tied him up so that he can neither move nor speak.”

“Good,” I said.

The night seemed very dark as we set forth, for the moon had not yet risen, and the starlight was insufficient to render our march easy, as we followed the elastic stride of our silent guide. Our excitement was intense, as we threaded the thickness of some bushy kloof by narrow game paths known to our guide and lit upon in the darkness with the unerring instinct of the savage. Every now and then a rustle and patter, as something scurried away, and once some large animal, alarmed, started away with a sudden and tremendous crash which it seemed must have been heard for miles. Not one of us dared break the Xosa’s enjoinder to strict silence, and thus we proceeded. How long this lasted we could only guess, but it seemed that we were hours traversing the interminable tortuousness of bushy ravines, or scaling the side of a slope with such care as not to disturb a single stone. At last Jan Boom came to a halt, and stood, listening intently.

In the gloom we could make out nothing distinct. We were facing a dark mass of thick bush, with a rugged boulder here and there breaking through, as if it had fallen from a stunted krantz which crowned the slope not very much higher above. It took some straining of the eyes to grasp these details. When we looked again our guide had disappeared.

“What does it mean, Glanton?” whispered Falkner. “What if this is another trap and we are going to be the next to disappear? Well, we sha’n’t do it so quietly, that’s one thing.”

Then through the silence came Jan Boom’s voice, and it seemed to come from right beneath our feet.

“Down here, Amakosi. Iqalaqala first.”

“Down here?” Yes but where? Then I saw what was a hole or cavity, seeming to pierce the blackness of a dense wall of bush. Without a moment’s hesitation I obeyed, and finding Jan Boom’s outstretched hand I dropped into what was curiously like a sort of deep furrow. The others followed, and something closed behind us. We were in pitch

darkness, and a moist and earthy smell gave out a most uncomfortable suggestion of being buried alive.

“Now walk,” whispered the Xosa. “Let each keep hold of the one in front of him. But before all silence!”

In this way we advanced, Jan Boom leading, I keeping a hand on his shoulder, Kendrew doing ditto as to mine, while Falkner brought up the rear. The place was not a cave, for every now and again we could see a star or two glimmering high above. It seemed like a deep fissure or crevasse seaming the ground, but what on earth it was like above I had no idea.

We walked lightly and on our toes in order to ensure silent progress. A few minutes of this and the Xosa halted. The fissure had widened out, and now a puff of fresh air bore token that we were getting into the light of day, or rather of night, once more. Nor were we sorry, for our subterranean progress was suggestive of snakes and all kinds of horrors. I, for one, knew by a certain feel in the air that we were approaching water.

A little further and again we halted. A patch of stars overhead, and against it the black loom of what was probably a krantz or at any rate a high bluff. The murmur of running water, also sounding from overhead, at the same time smote upon our ears.

It was getting lighter. The moon was rising at last, and as we strained our gaze through the thick bushy screen behind which we had halted, this is what we saw.

We were looking down upon a circular pool whose surface reflected the twinkling of the stars. On three sides of it ran an amphitheatre of rock, varying from six to twenty feet in height. At the upper end where the water fell into it in a thin stream, the rock dipped to the form of a letter “V.” All this we could make out in the dim light of the stars, for as yet the face of the rock was in dark shadow. And yet, and yet as I gazed I could descry a striking resemblance to our own waterhole except that this was more shut in.

“Remember,” whispered the Xosa, impressively. “There is to be no shooting. They are to be taken alive.”

We promised, wondering the while where “they” were. A tension of excitement, and eagerness for the coming struggle was upon all three of us. For me I rebelled against the agreement which should deter me from battering the life out of the black villains who had brought my darling to this horrible place. What terrors must she not have endured? What ghastly rites of devil worship were enacted here?

Foot by foot the light crept downwards, revealing the face of the rock as the moon rose higher and higher. Then a violent nudge from Falkner, at my side but I had already seen.

The water was pouring down upon the head of what had once been a human being. Now it was a dreadful, glistening slimy thing, half worn away by the action of the running water. It was fixed in a crucified attitude, facing outwards, bound by the wrists to a thick pole which was stretched across horizontally from side to side of the pool, the feet resting upon a rock ledge beneath. It needed not the agonised stare upon that awful upturned face or rather what once had been a face to tell in what unspeakable torture this wretched being had died. To my mind and to Falkner's came the recollection of our gruesome find that grey afternoon in the northern wilds of Zululand.

Two more bodies, one little better than a skeleton, were bound similarly on each side of the central one. As we gazed, spellbound with horror, we saw that which pointed to one of these being the body of a white man.

Now a dark figure appeared on the brink above the central victim, appeared so silently and suddenly as to lend further horror to this demon haunted spot. We watched it in curdling horror as it stooped, then reached down and cut the thongs which held first one wrist then the other. The body thus released toppled heavily into the pool with a dull splash that echoed among the overhanging rocks. Then it disappeared.

The figure, straightened up now, stood watching the troubled surface for a moment. Standing there full in the moonlight I thought to recognise the face. It was that of one of Tyingoza's people whom I knew by sight, but could not fit with a name. Then he turned to clamber back, crooning as he did so, a strange weird song. It was not very intelligible, but was full of sibongo to the Water Spirit, who should now delight in a fresh victim, a rare victim, one by the side of which all former sacrifices were but poor. Then would the land have rain again would drink all the rain it needed.

Now the blood seemed to rush to my brain as though to burst it. A red mist came before my eyes, and my heart seemed to hammer within me as though it would betray our place of concealment without fail. For I realised who this new victim this rare victim was to be, the victim who was to take the place of the ghastly shapeless horror which we had seen disappear beneath that awful surface. A warning touch from Jan Boom brought me back to recollection and sanity again.

Through our concealing screen we saw the man who had released the corpse drop down the rock. Another had joined him, and now the two crouched down in the shadow with an air of eager expectancy as though waiting for something or somebody. One held in his hand a coiled thong. Then we heard voices, one a full, sonorous, male tone talking in the

Zulu; and another, rich, musical, feminine and it I recognised with a tightening of the heart. Both were approaching, in such wise as would bring the speakers almost within touch of us.

And the two fiends, the one with the coiled thong, and the other, crouched waiting.

Chapter Thirty.

The Latest Victim.

There she stood Aïda, my love. I could see every line of the sweet pale face, turned full towards me in the moonlight, but it wore a halfdazed look as that of one who walks and talks in her sleep. But it bore no sign of fear.

“This is the third night, Inkosikazi, and it is time to restore you to your own people,” Ukozi was saying. “You will tell them that we have not harmed you, but that your presence was necessary for three nights, to render perfect our múti.”

She looked as if she but half understood him, and nodded her head. They were but a few paces from us, and where they had emerged from we could not make out. Their backs were toward the horrid remains, and also toward the two crouching figures.

“So now we are ready. Come.”

This was clearly a signal, for the two crouching figures sprang up and forward to seize her. The first went down like a felled bullock, under a judiciously planted whack from Jan Boom’s knobkerrie as we leapt from our concealment. Falkner had grappled with the witch doctor, but Ukozi was a muscular and powerful savage, and it taxed all his younger foeman’s athletic resources to hold him. He writhed and struggled, and the two were rolling over and over on the ground. Then Jan Boom seizing his chance, let out again with his formidable knobkerrie, bringing it down bang in the middle of Ukozi’s skull. He, too, flattened out. The third, held at the point of Kendrew’s pistol, had already surrendered.

“Better tie them up sharp before they come to,” said Falkner. “Here goes for Mr Witch Doctor anyhow.”

All this had happened in a moment. In it I had borne no active part, my first care and attention had been given to Aïda. It was remarkable that she showed but little surprise at the sight of me.

“Is that you, dear? And you have come to take me home? I am rather relieved, for I was beginning to get a little frightened I believe. But what is it all about? These people have done me no harm.”

“No thank the Lord and we four,” said Falkner grimly. “Not yet, but we were only in the nick of time. There you evil beast. You can come to now, as soon as you like.”

This to the fellow whom Jan Boom had first stunned and whom he had just finished tying up in the most masterly manner. The Xosa had effected the same process with the third, under cover of Kendrew's pistol.

"Don't look round, Aïda," I said. "There's a sight it'll be as well for you not to see. In fact I'll take you away as soon as Jan Boom is ready to show us the way out."

But Jan Boom was apparently not ready. He stood glaring down upon the prostrate and unconscious witch doctor with an expression of vindictive hatred upon his countenance that was positively devilish.

"Not killed," he muttered in his own tongue. "Nononot killed. That were too sweet and easy for him."

"Haha, Jan," guffawed Falkner. "You were so keen on capturing the brute alive, and now you've killed him yourself."

"He not dead," answered the Xosa in English. "Zulu nigga's skull damn hard. He come to directly."

"Well it wasn't much of a scrap anyway," grumbled Falkner. "Are there any more of them?"

"Only two women up there at the huts," said Aïda. "But I don't understand. They've done me no harm."

"No, exactly. You don't understand, but we do," answered Falkner grimly. "And, now, by the way, where are the said huts?"

"Up above there. You go by the way you saw me come in. Through that passage."

Now we saw a narrow passage similar to the one we had entered by. It seemed to lead upward.

"Quite sure it's all there are?" he said.

"Yes. There are only a couple of huts there, and I don't think there's any way out, that side. OhWhat is that?"

The words came out in a sort of shriek. As ill luck would have it she had turned and caught sight of the remains of the other two victims. She covered her face with her hands.

“Oh take me out of this horrible place. Now I begin to see,” and she shivered all over.

“Be brave now, darling,” I whispered. “We will go at once. I didn’t want you to see that, but it’s only a way they have of burying their dead,” I added under a swift inspiration that a lie of that sort was highly expedient, and even then I don’t think she more than half believed me.

Jan Boom the while, together with Kendrew, had been acting in a thoroughly practical manner, by way of rendering the situation more secure. They had tied the three prisoners together by the leg, in addition to their other bonds, and this was as well, for the pair who had been stunned were showing signs of returning consciousness. Then we held a council of war. It was arranged that Jan Boom was to return with Aïda and myself to my place, thence he was to take one of the horses and ride straight on to Major Sewin’s and return with the police. The while Kendrew and Falkner would remain, and mount guard over the prisoners.

“Mind you sing out loud enough when you come back, Jan,” said Falkner meaningly. “Because we are going to blow the head off the very first nigger that happens to poke his nose in upon us through either of those holes, and that without warning too.”

The Xosa grinned broadly.

“No fear, I’ll sing out, sir,” he said in English. “But you look after Ukozi. Witch doctor damn smart nigga. Plaps he get away.”

“If he does he’s welcome to,” rejoined Falkner, poking the muzzle of his pistol against the shaven head of the principal prisoner, who having now recovered consciousness was staring stupidly about him. “Eh, my buck? But we won’t cheat the hangman in your case, no fear.”

I was unspeakably glad on Aïda’s account, to find ourselves through the horrid tunnellike way by which we had entered, and out in the wholesome night air again. She seemed none the worse for her adventures, and was wonderfully plucky. She never could feel anything but safe with me, she declared.

The way was much easier now in the clear moonlight than when we had come, under the light of the stars, and as we walked she told me as well as she was able, what had

befallen her on the afternoon of her solitary walk. When I chided her for undertaking a solitary walk she answered that she could not imagine harm overtaking her with so powerful a protector as Arlo.

“I don’t know why,” she went on, “but I felt a half unconscious inclination to go over that way we came together that evening before you went. Suddenly I discovered that Arlo was no longer with me. I called him but he didn’t come. This was strange, so I turned back, still calling him. Then I saw him lying as if he was dead, and bending over him were two natives. They started up at the sound of my voice, and I recognised Ivondwe and the witch doctor.”

“Ivondwe? Ah!” I interrupted, for a new light had now struck me. “Yes. Go on.”

“They called to me to come and I advanced, dreadfully concerned about poor Arlo, and then I don’t know how it was, whether some instinct warned me, or whether it was a look I saw pass between them, but I acted like an idiot. I turned and ran. You see, I lost my head completely.”

For answer I pressed the hand that rested on my arm closer to my side.

“Well, and what then?” I said.

“As soon as I began to run they came after me. As I say I had lost my head completely, and hardly knew where I was going. Then, suddenly, I found myself on the brink of the waterhole; in fact I had nearly fallen into it. I turned, and the two were right upon me. ‘Why had I run away?’ they asked. ‘There was surely nothing to be afraid of. Surely I knew them both well enough. My dog was lying there dead and they had been trying to see what they could do for him.’

“I was unaccountably frightened, and dreadfully out of breath after the run. I felt half faint. Then just as I began to think I had behaved like a fool something was thrown over my head from behind, something that seemed saturated with some particularly overpowering and nauseous drug. Then I became unconscious, and only recovered when I found myself at the place we have just come from rather in a small kraal in a hollow just above it.”

“And you have been there all the time. Aïda, you are sure they have not injured you?”

“Oh yes. On the contrary they were quite deferential, the witch doctor especially. He told me my presence was necessary for a certain time on account of an important rainmaking ceremony he was engaged in. After that I should be taken home again. Well I thought it

advisable to make a virtue of necessity, and conciliate them. I even began to enter into the adventure of the thing, and supposed I was going to witness some quaint and rare native superstition. Another thing. The drug that at first overpowered me had left a strange effect I believe it is a little upon me still. It was a sort of half drowsy apathetic feeling, as if it was too much trouble to think about anything. The women there took care of me, great care; they were Ukozi's wives they said. Well, this evening he came to me and said the moon was right, and with my help, he had accomplished all he wanted, and it would soon rain abundantly. The time had come to take me home and he would guide me there. Do you know, he can talk English quite well?"

"Noby Jove I didn't. He's kept it remarkably dark hitherto. Yet he wasn't talking English when you appeared."

"No he wasn't. I've got to understand them rather well by this time. Well, then you all burst out upon us and here I am."

"Thank God for that!" I said fervently. "There's another, too, of whom the same holds good, Jan Boom here."

The Xosa, who was walking a little ahead of us, paused at the sound of his name and waited for us.

"Nkose," he said, speaking in the vernacular. "Did you promise to tell me before three moons were dead, whether you were sorry you had kept me in your service or not?"

"That I did, Jan Boom, and you know the answer. Nor will you find me forgetfulimpela!"

"Nkose!" he ejaculated and walked on.

"I have yet to get the whole mystery out of him," I said in a low tone, "but for that I must wait his own time."

There was another "time" for which I meant to wait. Not yet would I reveal to Aïda the horrible fate to which the repulsive superstition of the witch doctor had consigned her. That she would learn in due course. At present I wanted her to recover completely from the effects of her experience.

It was close upon dawn when we reached my place, and as I attended to the refreshment and comfort of my love, after her trying and perilous experience, it was as a foretaste of the future. Her people would be here as soon as they could possibly arrive, meanwhile she was under my care. And she needed sleep.

Tom, now cut loose from his night's bonds, but none the worse, came up looking very sulky and foolish, and muttering vengeance against the Xosa, who for his part cared not a straw for such. A judicious present however soon altered that mood, and I believe he would have been quite willing to undergo the same treatment over again on the same terms, and bustled about making himself generally useful with renewed zest.

Ah, how fair arose that morning's dawn. All that I held preciousmy whole world as it werelay peacefully sleeping within that hut, and while I kept guard outside, half fearing lest again that priceless gem should be stolen from its casket, an overwhelming rush of intense thankfulness surged deep through my heart. What had I donewhat could I ever do to deserve such a gift, now valued, if possible, a hundredfold by reason of the awful agony and blank of a temporary loss?

Far down in the riverbed lay waves of fleecy mist, and the rising sun gilded the heights with his early splendour. Birds piped and flashed among the dewy bush sprays, and the low of cattle and bark of a dog from a distant kraal floated upward. All was fair and bright and peacefuland withinmy love still slept on, serene, quiet, secure.

Chapter Thirty One.

The Brotherhood of the Dew.

Aïda looked none the worse for her adventures as she came forth into the clear freshness of the morning. The lethargic effect of the drug seemed to have left her entirely, and she was quite her old self, bright, sunny, fascinating as ever. But scarcely had we begun to talk than we saw three persons approaching on horseback.

“They haven’t lost much time coming for you,” I said, as I made out the rest of the family. “And I wanted you all to myself a little longer.”

“You mustn’t say that, dear,” she answered, with a return pressure from the hand I was holding. “They are perhaps just a little bit fond of me too.”

“Hallo, Glanton,” sung out the Major, breathless with excitement, as he rode up. “What the dickens is this cock and bull yarn your fellow has been spinning us. I can’t make head or tail of it and I didn’t stop to try. Anyhow, there’s my little girl again all safe and sound. She is safe and sound? Eh?”

“Absolutely, father,” answered Aïda, for herself. And then there was a good deal of bugging and kissing all round, and some crying; by the way, it seems that the women, dear creatures, can’t be brought to consider any ceremony complete unless they turn on the hose; for they turn it on when they’re happy, just as readily as when they’re not. For instance there we were, all jolly together again what the deuce was there to cry about? Yet cry they did.

I had breakfast set out in the open on the shady side of the store, with the broad view of the Zulu country lying beneath in the distance, and they declared it reminded them of that memorable time when the contre temps as to Tyingoza’s headring had befallen. And then when Aïda had given her adventures once more in detail, through sheer reaction we were all intensely happy after the dreadful suspense and gloom of the last three days. At length it was I who proposed we should make a move down, for it would be as well to be on hand when the others returned with the police and the prisoners.

“By Jove, Glanton, but you were right when you advised me to have nothing to do with that rascally witch doctor,” said the Major, as we rode along. “One consolation. I suppose he’s bound to be hung. Eh?”

“That depends on how we work the case,” I said. “And it’ll take a great deal of working.”

Hardly had we returned than the others arrived, bringing the three prisoners, and two more in the shape of the women of whom Aïda had told us. These however were kept entirely separate from Ukozi and his companions. No conversation between them was allowed.

Ukozi was sullen and impassive, but the younger prisoners glared around with a savage scowl which deepened as it rested on Falkner. He for response only grinned.

“All right my bucks,” he said. “There’s a rope and a long drop sticking out for you. By George, but this has been a ripping bit of fun for one night.”

“That’s all right,” I said rather shortly. “But you might remember that the reason for it hasn’t been fun by any means.”

“No, not for you, that’s understood,” he sneered, turning away, for he was still more than a little sore over my success.

“Glanton, I’ve something devilish rum to tell you.”

The speaker was Kendrew. “Come out of the crowd,” he went on. “Yes, it just is rum, and it gave me a turn, I can tell you. First of all, that nest of murderers we tumbled into, is bang on the edge of if not within my own place. Yes, it is my own place now beyond a shadow of doubt. For we’ve unearthed something there.”

“You don’t mean” I began, beginning to get an inkling.

He nodded.

“Yes, I do. The furthest of those two poor devils stuck up there against the rock! was poor old Hensley my old uncle.”

“Good lord!”

“Yes indeed. I was able to identify him by several things, but it wasn’t a nice job, you understand. But the mystery is not how he couldn’t be found at the time, but how the deuce such a neat little devil hole could exist on the place at all, unknown to any of us. Why, you can’t get in or out of it at all from the top, only through the hole we slipped in by. It’s like a false bottom to a box by Jove. Yes it’s rum how such a place could exist.”

I thought so too. So now poor old Hensley’s disappearance stood explained; and the explanation was pitiable. He had been beguiled or forcibly brought to the hell pit of

cruelty where these demons performed the dark rites of some secret superstition, and there horribly done to death by the water torture. When I thought of the one who had been destined to succeed him, and who by the mercy of Providence had been snatched from their fiendish hands just in the nick of time, a sort of “seeing red” feeling came over me, and had they been in my power, I could have massacred all four of the prisoners with my own hand.

“Let’s see if we can get anything out of them, Kendrew,” I said. “Manvers won’t mind.”

But Inspector Manvers did mind at first. Then he agreed. They would be started off for the Police Camp that night; however, as they were here we could talk to them.

We might just as well have saved ourselves the trouble. Ivondwe, who had been kept apart from the others, smiled sweetly and wondered what all the bother was about. He could not imagine why he had been seized and tied up. However that would soon come right. Government was his father, but it had made a mistake. However he, as its child, could not complain even if his father had made a mistake. It would all come right.

The witch doctor simply refused to speak at all, but the young men jeered. One of these I seemed to recognise.

“Surely I have seen thee before?” I said. “Where?”

“Kwa ’Sipanga?”

“I remember. Atiyisayo is thy name. ‘Hot water.’ And I warned thee not to get into any more hot water as the whites say.”

He laughed at this but evilly, and no further word could I get out of either of them.

But if they would reveal nothing there was another who would, and that was Jan Boom. Him I had refrained from questioning until we should be all quiet again.

The police, with the exception of three men, who had been detailed to remain on the spot and keep their eyes and ears open, started off that same evening with their prisoners. Later, Jan Boom came to the house and gave me to understand he had something to tell me. The family had just gone to bed, and Kendrew and I were sitting out on the stoep smoking a last pipe.

“Nkose, the time has now come,” he said, “to tell you what will sound strange to your ears. I would not tell it before, no, not till the Amapolise had gone. The Amapolise are

too fond of asking many questions foolish questions asking them, too, as if they thought you were trying to throw sand in their eyes when all the time you are trying to help them. Now is that encouraging to one who would help them?"

I readily admitted that it was not.

"So now, Nkose, if you will come forth with me where we shall not be heard yes, the nephew of Nyamaki may come, too for my tale is not for all ears, you shall hear it."

We needed no second invitation. As we followed him I could not but call to mind, in deep and thankful contrast, his revelation of two nights ago made in the same way and on the same spot.

"You will have heard, Amakosi," he began, "of the tribe called Amazolo, or the People of the Dew, which flourished in Natal before Tshaka's impi drove the tribes of that land into the mountains or the sea.

"It was out of this tribe that the principal rainmakers came. So sure and successful were they in making rain that they were always in request. Even Tshaka, the Great, came to hear of them, and was never without some of them at his Great Place, Dukuza, but as to these, well he was ever sending for a fresh supply. But he, that Elephant, and Dingane after him, protected the Amazolo, so that they became looked up to and respected among all peoples.

"Now Luluzela, the chief of that tribe, was jealous of the first rainmaking doctor, Kukuleyo, for it had come to this that Luluzela was chief of the Amazolo but Kukuleyo was chief of him. So Luluzela waited patiently and watched his chances, for he dare not strike the rain doctor openly because Dingane favoured him, and had anything happened to him would soon have demanded to know the reason why. One day accordingly, knowing some of the mysteries himself, he ordered Kukuleyo to bring rain. The cattle were dying for want of water, and the crops were parched. The people would soon be dying too. But Kukuleyo answered that the moment was not propitious; that anything he did then would anger the izituta instead of propitiating them, and that when the time was right a sacrifice must be offered; not of cattle but of something quite beyond the ordinary. The chief jeered at this, but said the rain doctors might offer any sacrifice they chose."

"Any sacrifice they chose?" echoed Kukuleyo with emphasis.

“Yes. Any sacrifice they chose,” repeated the chief, angry and sneering. But if rain did not come within a certain time why then Kukuleyo and all those who helped him should suffer the fate which had always been that of impostors.

“Soon after this, clouds began to gather in the heavens, and to spread and fly like vultures when they scent death afar. In a roaring thunderrush they broke, and the land, all parched and cracked and gaping, ran off the water in floods. There was rejoicing, and yet not, for it had all come too quickly and violently, washing away and drowning the cattle which it should have restored to life, and covering the cornlands with thick layers of unfruitful sand. The people murmured against Kukuleyo and his rainmakers, the chief waxed fierce, and threatened. But his answer was firm and quiet. ‘Lo, I have brought you rain.’

“Still, good followed, for when the worst had passed the worst, and the water was run off, the land was green again, and all things grew and thrived and fattened. But then followed consternation on other grounds. The chief’s son, Bacaza, had disappeared.

“He had disappeared, suddenly and in mystery. No trace was left. He might have gone into empty air. At first Luluzela was angry, then alarmed. He sent for Kukuleyo.

“But the rain doctor’s face was like rock. What had he to do with the disappearance of people? he said. He was a rainmaker. He was not trained in unfolding mysteries. The chief of the Amazolo had better send for an isanusi if he wanted this one unfolded.

“And then, Amakosi, a discovery was made. Bacaza, the son of the chief was found what was left of him that is. He was spread out beneath the falling water above a lonely pool, and was so arranged that the constant flow of water falling upon the back of his head and neck, slowly wore him to death. But it took days of awful agony such as no words could tell.”

“How do you know that, Jan Boom?” I said, moved to an uneasiness of horror by the vivid way in which the Xosa was telling his story, for his eyes rolled and he passed his hand quickly over his face to wipe off the beads of perspiration. Clearly the recollection was a real and a terrible one to him.

“I know it, because I have been through it,” he answered. “For a whole night, and part of a day I have been through it. Hau! it is not a thing to look back to, Amakosi. But let me tell my tale. When Luluzela heard what had been done he sent for Kukuleyo, intending to put him and his rainmakers to a slow and lingering death by fire. But Kukuleyo was no fool. He appeared armed, and with a great force at his back, so that that plan could

not be carried out. For some time they looked at each other like two bulls across a kraal fence, then Kukuleyo said:

“Did not the chief of the Amazolo bid us offer any sacrifice we pleased, in order to obtain the desired rain?”

“Ehhé, any sacrifice we pleased,” echoed his followers, clamorously.

“Why then, have I not taken the chief at his word?” went on Kukuleyo, defiantly. ‘Nothing less than his son would satisfy the izituta, and his son have we offered. And has it not rained? Ah! Ah! “Any sacrifice we pleased,” was the word,’ he went on mockingly. ‘The word of the chief.’

“But Luluzela did not wait to hear more. With a roar of rage, he and those that were with him, hurled themselves upon the rainmakers. But these had come prepared, and had a goodly following too, all armed, many who were dissatisfied with Luluzela’s rule where is there a chief without some dissatisfied adherents? and who had benefited by the rain. Then there was a great fight, and in it the chief was slain, but Kukuleyo came out without a scratch. This led to other fighting, and the tribe was broken up, some wandering one way, some another. But ever since then the Amazolo have been in request. The scattered remnants thus drifted, but whenever a severe drought occurred some of them were sure to be found. With them they took the tradition of the sacrifice of Luluzela’s son.”

“But,” I said. “Do they sacrifice someone every time rain is wanted?”

“Not every time, Nkose. Still it is done, and that to a greater extent than you white people have any idea of. And it would have continued to be done if Ukozi had not conceived the idea of turning to white people for his victims. Hence the disappearance of Nyamaki. This time it was intended to seize Umsindo, but he is a great fighting bull, and would not only have injured others, but would most certainly have got injured himself; and it is essential that the victim who is put through ukuconsa as it is called, shall be entirely uninjured. So they chose the Inkosikazi instead.”

“But, Jan Boom,” put in Kendrew. “How on earth did they manage, in the case of my uncle, to spirit him away as they did and leave no trace?”

“That I cannot tell you, Nkose. You must get that from Ukozi, if he will tell.”

“Here is another thing,” I said. “Even if Ukozi belongs to this tribe, Atyisayo and Ivondwe do not. They are of Tyingoza’s people.”

“That is true, Nkose. But the thing is no longer confined to the Amazolo. It has become a close and secret brotherhood, and all may belong. They are called Abangan ’ema zolweni, the Comradesor Brotherhoodof the Dew. Andit is everywhere. You remember what we found in Majendwa’s country? Well that was a victim of ukuconsa and it surprised me, because I had not thought the custom had found its way into Zululand.”

“And what of the pool here, and the big serpent, and Ukozi feeding it with the kid?” I asked, for I had already told him about this.

“The snake embodies the Water Spirit,” he said. “It is customary to feed such with offerings.”

“Was there then a snake in the other pool which we found?” I asked, feeling a creepy, shuddering horror run through me at the thought of the indescribably ghastly fate which had hung over my darling and from which we had only just been in time to save her, thanks to the shrewd promptitude of this staunch fellow, whom I had begun by disliking and mistrusting.

“That I cannot say, Nkose. But I think not. The water torture goes on for days, and the victim is left just as he is until he falls off or room is made for a fresh one, as we saw them so make it there.”

“But you. How was it you were doomed to it, and how did you escape?” asked Kendrew.

“That is a long story, and it will I tell another time. I was living in Pondoland then, not far on the other side of the Umtavuna. Ukozi did that, but now I shall have revenge. Tell me, Amakosi, will not your people have him lashed before they hang him? If so I should like to see that.”

It was little wonder that this savage should give way to the intensity of his vindictive feeling. We white men both felt that mere hanging was too good for these fiends. But we were obliged to assure him that such was very unlikely.

“When we returned from the Zulu country,” he went on, “I began to put things together. I remembered what we had found up there, and what with Ukozi being in these parts and the sudden disappearance of Nyamaki, a little while before, I felt sure that the Brotherhood of the Dew was at work. I asked you to keep me with you, Nkose, because I saw my way now, by striking at it, to revenge myself upon Ukozi for the torture he had made me undergo. Whau! and it is torture! That of the fire cannot be worse. I knew that

the Brotherhood would be strong, because among the people here there are so many names that have to do with water from Tyingoza and his son downwards”

I started. Yes, it was even as he said. There were many names of just that description. But Tyingoza! Could that openmannered, straightforward chief for whom I had always entertained the highest regard, really be one of that black, devilish murder society!

“Moreover,” he went on, “I knew whence they would draw their next victim. I, too, have eyes and ears, Nkose, as well as yourself,” he said, with a whimsical laugh, “and I used them. The Abangan ’ema zolweni were strong in numbers, but otherwise weak. Their brethren were too young and they talked a ha ha they talked. Hence I was able to follow Atyisayo to where I guided you. The rest was easy.”

“Well, Jan Boom,” I said seeing he had finished his story. “You will find you have done the very best day’s work for yourself as well as for others that you ever did in your life.”

“Nkose is my father,” he answered with a smile. “I am in his hands.”

Neither Kendrew nor I said much as we returned to the house. This hideous tale of a deep and secret superstition, with its murderous results, existent right in our midst, was too strange, too startling, and yet, every word of it bore infinite evidence of truth. Well, it proved what I have more than once stated, that no white man ever gets to the bottom of a native’s innermost ways, however much he may think he does.

Chapter Thirty Two.

The Last Penalty.

Inspector Manvers was a shrewd as well as a smart officer, and it was not long before he had obtained from the two frightened women who had been made prisoners, sufficient information to warrant him in making several additional arrests. These, which were effected cleverly and quietly, included no less a personage than Ivuzamanzi, the son of Tyingoza. This would have astonished me, I own, but for Jan Boom's narrative; besides after the defection of Ivondwe I was prepared to be astonished at nothing.

An exhaustive search was made of the gruesome den of death, and in the result the identity of poor Hensley was established beyond a doubt, as his nephew had said. The police spared no pains. They dragged the bottom of the waterhole with grappling hooks, and brought up a quantity of human bones, and old tatters of rotted clothing. It was obvious that quite a number of persons had been done to death here.

"The Abangan 'ema zolweni were strong in numbers but otherwise weak. Their brethren were too young, and they talked." Such had been Jan Boom's dictum, and now events combined to bear it out. Two of the younger prisoners, fearing for their lives, confessed. This example was followed by others, and soon ample evidence was available to draw the web tight round the witch doctor, Ivondwe, Ivuzamanzi and Atyisayo, as prime movers in the whole diabolical cult. And then, that there could be no further room for doubt, Ukozi himself confessed.

I own that I was somewhat astonished at this. But since his incarceration the witch doctor's spirit seemed completely to fail him, which was strange; for a native, especially one of his age and standing, does not, as a rule, fear death. But fear, abject and unmistakable, had now taken hold of this one. He trembled and muttered, and at times it seemed as if his mind would give way. Then he declared his willingness to make a statement. Perhaps his life would be spared.

But he was given to understand he need entertain no hopes of that kind if he should be convicted at the trial. Even then he persisted. He wanted to throw off the load, he said, for it lay heavy on his heart.

His statement was consistent with that of all the others, moreover it tallied with all that Jan Boom had told me. The part of it that was peculiar was the manner in which they had been able to remove their victims so as to leave no trace. This had been done by means of muffled shoes. The drug administered had the effect of putting them into a kind of trance. They had all their faculties about them, save only that of volition, but

afterwards they would remember nothing. Nyamaki had been easily removed because he lived alone. He, like Major Sewin, the witch doctor had gradually imbued with a taste for the occult. After that all was easy. It had at first been intended to entrap the Major, then his nephew, but for the reasons that Jan Boom had already given me, this plan was abandoned. Then it was decided to seize his eldest daughter. Such a sacrifice as that could not fail to move the Spirit of the Dew, and to bring abundant rain.

No, she had in no way been injured. To have injured her would have been to have rendered the whole rite invalid. As for Ivondwe, he had gone to the Major's with the object of forwarding the plan when it was ripe. He was almost as great among the Brethren of the Dew as Ukozi himself. Ivuzamanzi? Yes, he, too, was among the foremost of them. Tyingoza belonged to the Brotherhood, but he had been enrolled unwillingly, and had never taken part in any of their deeper mysteries: nor indeed, did they come within his knowledge.

Thus ran Ukozi's confession. When it was read out at the trial it created a profound sensation, as, indeed, did the whole case in the columns of the Colonial Press, which clamoured for a signal example to be made of the offenders. And the Court by which they were tried was of the same opinion.

When those who had turned Queen's evidence had been sifted out of course with the exception of Ukozi there was still a round dozen for trial. The Courthouse at Grey Town was crammed. Natives especially, had mustered in crowds, but so far from there being any turbulence, or tendency to rescue, these were, if anything, considerably awed by the very circumstances of the case itself. Most of them indeed had never heard of the Abangan 'ema zolweni, and a new and stimulating matter of discussion was thus supplied to them.

The confession of Ukozi, and of the others of course went far to simplify the trial. Still, the fairness and impartiality for which British jurisprudence is famous, was fully extended to the accused. I personally can bear witness to a good hour in the box, most of which was spent in cross-examination for the defence. The same held good of Kendrew and Falkner, the latter of whom by the way, drew down upon himself some very nasty remarks from the Bench, by reason of having stated in answer to a question as to whether he had not expressed a wish to see these men hanged that he would cheerfully see every nigger in Natal hanged if he had his way, and they had their deserts. But he didn't care. As he confided to me afterwards, what did it matter what an old fool in a gown said when he knew he couldn't have his head punched for saying it.

Aïda, too, was called upon to go through the ordeal, and of course she did it well. In fact a murmur of appreciation ran through the native section of the audience when she

emphatically agreed with the defending counsel's suggestion, in cross-examination, that she had not been ill-treated in any way. There was, too, a great cloud of native witnesses. Jan Boom, in particular, had a long and trying time of it, but the Xosa was a man of parts, and a good bit of a lawyer himself in his way. There was no shaking his evidence on any one single point. Thus, as I have said, in spite of his confession, Ukozi and his fellow accused were given every chance.

The indictment, so far, was confined to the murder of Hensley. Had it broken down which of course was inconceivable the prisoners would have been re-indicted for the murder of the native victims, of two, at any rate, whose identity could have been easily established. Failing necessity, for the sake of their relatives, in view of possible danger involved to these, it was not deemed expedient to include them in the formal ground of indictment. The verdict of course, could only be "Guilty." The four viz. Ukozi, Ivuzamanzi, Ivondwe and Atisaya were brought in as principals the others as accessories some before, some after the fact.

Never shall I forget the scene in court, as they were asked whether they had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon them. It was just sundown, and an angry storm had been raging outside for fully an hour. Growling, cracking peals of thunder had interrupted the judge's summing up, and now, during a lull, the glare of a wet sunset came in through the windows, and a few heavy drops of rain still fell like stones on the corrugated iron roof during the tense silence. They stood in the dock those twelve dark figures, some leaning eagerly forward over the rail, their eyeballs protruding in the climax of the moment's excitement, others impassive and statuesque. Amid the public was a subdued, hush. The native public especially seemed turned to stone.

In answer to the appeal the bulk of the prisoners shook their heads. They had nothing to say, they declared, and then subsided into stolid silence. But when it came to the turn of Ivondwe, he harangued the Court at some length. The white man, he said, professed to be the protector and tolerator of all religions. Now this, for which they stood there, was part of the black man's religion or at any rate a section of it. Why then, was not that tolerated too? Ivuzamanzi, when it came to his turn, answered with heat, that he was the son of a chief that he was a Zulu of the tribe of Umtetwa; that he cared nothing for a set of preaching whites and their stupid laws; that he only wished he had crossed the river long ago, and gone to Konza to Cetywayo. There he would have been in a warrior land where the heading of his father and chief could not have been insulted with impunity by a swaggering igcwane like the one who sat yonder pointing to Falkner who, however, perhaps fortunately, didn't understand what was being said until the interpreter had rendered it, and then it was too late to kick up a row. Then he might have joined one day in driving the whites into the sea, where sooner or later they would all be driven. He was

the son of a chief and could die like one. He was not going to lie down and howl for mercy like a miserable cheat of an isanusi.

This with a savage glare at Ukozi.

The latter said not much. He had confessed. He had done what he could to put right what had been done. His life was in the hands of the Government.

The judge drew on the black cap, and proceeded to pass formal sentence.

The twelve prisoners before him, he said, after a long and painstaking trial extending over several days, had been convicted of the most heinous crime known to the law, that of murder, the penalty of which was death. They had only been indicted for, and found guilty of one murder, but there was ample evidence that many others had lain at their door. This murder then, was the outcome of one of the vilest, most benighted forms of superstition that had ever disgraced our common humanity, whether black or white. As for urging, as one of the prisoners had done, that such murder was part of the black man's religion or anybody's religion why he could only say that such a statement was a slander upon the honest, straightforward, native population of the Colony, of whose good and trustworthy qualities he personally had had many years of experience. It was a relic of the blackest and most benighted days of past heathenism, and it was clear that a bold attempt had been made on the part of the prisoner Ukozi, to revive and spread it in the midst of a peaceful and lawabiding native population living contentedly under the Queen's rule and under the Queen's laws. Once these terrible superstitions and their outcome of foul and mysterious murder took root, there was no seeing where they would end, therefore it was providential that this wicked and horrible conspiracy against the lives of their fellow subjects had been brought to light, and he would especially urge, and solemnly warn, his native hearers present in court to set their faces resolutely against anything of the kind in their midst. Not for one moment would it be tolerated, nor would any plea of custom, or such a travesty of the sacred name of religion, as had been brought forward by one of the prisoners, be even so much as considered in mitigation of the just doom meted out by the law to all who should be found guilty of such an offence.

Sentence of death was then formally passed upon the whole dozen.

There were many influential natives among the audience in court. These, I could see, were impressed, and in the right direction, moreover I gathered from their comments, which I overheard as they dispersed, that to many of them the existence of the Brotherhood of the Dew came as a revelation. And the comments were diverse and instructive.

“Au!” one man remarked. “There is but one among the twelve who wears the headring, and he is the one that shows fear.”

The death sentence in the case of all but three was subsequently commuted to various terms of imprisonment. Those three were Ukozi, Ivondwe and Ivuzamanzi. As for the latter, Tyingoza had got up a large deputation to the Governor, begging that his son's life should be spared, but without avail. Ivuzamanzi had taken an active part in this new outlet of a destructive superstition, and it was felt that as the son of an influential chief, he of all others should be made an example of.

I don't know how it was called, morbid curiosity if you like, but anyhow I was there when these three paid the last penalty. I had visited them in the gaol once. Ivondwe had talked as if nothing had happened, about old times and what not. The witch doctor was cowering and piteous. Could I do nothing to save him. He would remember it to the end of his days, and would tell me many things that would be useful to me. I told him plainly I could do nothing, but in consideration did not add that I would not if I could, for if ever miscreant deserved his fate he did. I gave them some tobacco however, poor wretches, and that was all I could do for them. Ivuzamanzi was stormily abusive, so I did not waste time over him. Yet for him, I felt pity, as one led away, and was not he the son of my old friend?

It had been decided that the execution should, contrary to custom, be a public one. It was reckoned that the opportunity would be a good one for striking terror among the natives, as an example of the fate that would certainly overtake, sooner or later, all who should indulge in similar practices. Rightly it was argued that a terrible superstition of this nature, fostered by a secret society and finding its logical outcome in barbarous and abominable forms of murder, needed to be sternly stamped out.

On a grey and cloudy morning Ukozi, Ivondwe and Ivuzamanzi were led forth to die. There had been rain in the night, which had left a raw chill in the air; while the wind sang mournfully as it drove the low clouds along the hill tops. A pit had been dug in front of the gaol, to serve as a drop, and over this the gallows had been erected. From an early hour natives had been coming in by twos and threes, and now a crowd of several hundreds of them had assembled. Their demeanour however was neither turbulent nor defiant, on the contrary it was remarkably subdued, and they conversed in awed undertones. With a view to any possible demonstration a full troop of Mounted Police was disposed around the scaffold, with bandoliers filled, and all ready for action, but the precaution was unnecessary. The temper of the dark crowd was one of subdued awe as it contemplated the preparations for this grim and unaccustomed method of exit from life; in short just the very effect intended to be produced by making the execution a public one.

A hollow murmur ran over the crowd like a wave as the gaol doors swung open and the prisoners appeared, pinioned. Their demeanour was varied. That of Ukozi showed, unmistakably, fearshrinking fear. At sight of the scaffold something like a tremor ran through the frame of the witch doctor, and he half stopped instinctively, while his lips moved in piteous protest. Ivondwe was as impassive as a statue; but the chief's son walked with his head thrown back, his tall form erect, and a bitter scowl of hate and defiance upon his face. Then his glance met mine.

"That is the man through whom I am here," he roared. "Are there none present to whom I may bequeath my vengeance?" And he glared around.

"Yet I saved thy life once, son of Tyingoza," I answered, speaking so that all could hear, and this I did with a purpose.

"Walk on, Ivuzamanzi, and die like the son of a chief," said the sheriff to him in a low tone. And he obeyed.

The Indian hangman and his assistant did their work quickly and well, and the three disappeared from view, hardly a quiver in the ropes showing that they had met death instantaneously, and in infinitely more merciful fashion than the lingering and horrible manner in which they had meted it out to so many unsuspecting victims sacrificed to their abominable and devilish superstition; and as I thought of one who came within an ace of adding to the number of such victims I could feel no pity for them now, which may have been wrong, but if it is I can't help it.

In pursuance of the policy which had decreed that the execution should be public, the natives were allowed to come forward in batches and view the bodies if they wished. Many did so come forward, and the sight of the three hanging there, still and motionless, with the white caps drawn over their heads and faces, seemed to impress them deeply, judging from the remarks they made as they went away. Moreover I have reason to believe the effect was salutary and lasting. The pomp and awe and mystery of it appealed to them powerfully.

I had a reason for answering Ivuzamanzi, otherwise I would not have seemed to wrangle with a man on the very steps of the scaffold. For, be it remembered, he was the son of a powerful chief, and his words might be in the highest degree dangerous to myself, and I had no hankering to be marked out as the object of a vendetta. But I knew that natives have a strong sense of justice, and the fact that I had once saved his life being made known, would go far towards taking the sting out of his denunciation.

“He feared,” said a native voice at my elbow.

I turned quickly, though I knew the voice. It was that of Jan Boom.

“He feared,” repeated the Xosa. “He feared death. His heart melted to water within him. Silungile! Now am I avenged.”

Chapter Thirty Three.

Conclusion.

For all the brave way in which Aïda had taken her grisly experience and the full gruesomeness of her peril and narrow escape had been borne in upon her, especially during the trial and the revelations it had evolved an impression had been left upon her mind which rendered the life to which she had been looking forward, and its associations, distasteful to her for the present. So after our marriage, which took place a month later than the dark and tragical circumstances I have just recorded, we decided to start for a prolonged tour of a year or more in Europe.

That time was a halcyon time for me, falling in no whit short of what I had always pictured it in anticipation. We did not hurry ourselves. We took things easily, and thus were spared all the worry and flurry of those who do not. In consequence we were able to enjoy to the full the pick of the Old World in all that was beautiful or interesting, and after my twenty years of upcountry knocking about, and generally roughing it, everything enjoyed in such association was both.

The farm I had bought for our joint occupation I was able to dispose of at a trifling loss, and my trading store I sold at some profit; which made things not merely as broad as they were long, as the saying goes, but broader. But before we started on our tour it transpired that Edith Sewin and Kendrew had managed to compass a very mutual excellent understanding it might have occurred to me at the time of our anxiety and grief that Kendrew had displayed quite an unusual familiarity in his references to my sister-in-law elect, but I suppose in the all-absorbing anguish of my own loss I had no mind to give to any such trivial detail. But as we were to be away a long time, the artful dog took advantage of the circumstance to hurry forward his own ambition. It would never do, he urged they both urged for the presence of her only sister to be wanting at Edith's marriage, and in the result if there was not a double wedding, at any rate there were two within a very short time of each other. Well, we were all glad. Kendrew was a good fellow a thoroughly good fellow and the farm he had inherited through poor old Hensley's murder was a right good one. He was going to throw up transport riding and work it, he declared, and he did.

The old people, reft thus of both their daughters, decided to leave the frontier and settle just outside Durban; an excellent climate and country for those who have spent most of their lives in India. The farm was turned over to Falkner; who, by the way, soon blossomed into a remarkably able and energetic colonist. His sheer brutal pluck won him the very real and undiluted respect of the natives, and after not more than three attempts had been made upon his life, these came to the conclusion that "Umsindo" was

really great, and one whom, taking him all round, it was no disgrace or disadvantage to serve; for with all his faults he was openhanded, and this tells. He was a very devil, they declared, but one that it was better to be with than against, and so he prospered. But he soon found a better outlet for his pugnacity than mere head punching, for the Zulu War broke out, and of course Falkner must be in the thick of it. He served all through, in a corps of Irregular Horse, and performed fine feats of daring on more than one occasion and notably during the disastrous rout on the Hlobane Mountain, for which he ought to have got the V.C. but didn't, and is a happy man proportionately in that he cherishes a grievance. By a curious irony of Fate too he was instrumental in saving the life of no less a personage than our old antagonist, Dolf Norbury, for soon after the invasion of Zululand, that worthy, having quarrelled with his friend and ally Mawendhlela, found himself run very hard by that ginloving potentate's followers. He had made a desperate fight for it, and had shot down quite a number. Still there were numbers left, when Falkner, happening along with a patrol, rescued him only in the bare nick of time. Afterwards he told me that he had invited him to try, just in a friendly way, another "scrap" for the conqueror, but Dolf wasn't taking any. He'd rather light out for over the Swazi border, he said, if it was all the same to his rescuer and quondam enemy. It was and so they parted, this time in a kind of rough friendliness.

Of the "Brotherhood of the Dew" I have been able to get no further information. Whether the Zulu War had created a farreaching diversion, or that the hanging of Ukozi and Co. had conveyed the impression that it was unhealthy to carry on its operations in a white man's country I can't say for certain, but nothing more was heard of it, in Natal at any rate. Aida's experience of it however, had left such an impression upon her that she had a rooted aversion to returning to live anywhere near the scene of its former operations, so we decided to settle down upon a farm in one of the most healthy and picturesque parts of the Eastern Districts of the Cape Colony. There Jan Boom is our most reliable and trusted factotum; Jan Boom, now the owner of three wives with power to add to the number and much cattle the result of the priceless service he rendered us in the past.