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Chapter One.
Madúla's Cattle

Madúla's kraal, in the Sikumbutana, was in a state of quite unusual excitement.

The kraal, a large one, surrounded by an oval ring-fence of thorn, contained some seventy or eighty huts. Three or four smaller kraals were dotted around within a mile of it, and the whole lay in a wide, open basin sparsely grown with mimosa and low scrub, shut in by round-topped acacia-grown hills bearing up against the sky-line at no great distance.

The time was towards evening, usually the busy time of the day, for then it was that the cattle were driven in for milking. But now, although the sun was within an hour of the western horizon, no lowing herds could be descried, threading, in dappled streams, the surrounding bush, converging upon the kraal. The denizens of the calf-pens might low for their mothers, and might low in vain;

and this was primarily at the root of the prevailing excitement.

In the neighbourhood of the chief's hut squatted six or eight head-ringed men, sullen and resentful, conversing not much, and in low murmurs. At a respectful distance the young men of the kraal clustered in dark groups; less reserved, judging from the fierce hubbub of angry voices, which their elders made no effort to restrain. Few women were visible, and such as were, kept well within the shelter of the huts at the back of those of the chief, peering forth anxiously, or darting out to retrieve some fat runaway toddler, which seemed to be straying in the direction of all sorts of imaginary danger. And, in the centre of all this brewing commotion, quite unconcerned, although clearly the object of it, stood ten men, or to be more accurate, eleven. These were of the same colour and build, of the same cast of features, as those around them, but whereas the excited inhabitants of the kraal wore nothing but the *mútya*, these were clad in neat uniform, consisting of blue serge tunic, red-braided khaki knee-breeches, and fez caps; and while the others showed no weapons – as yet – save knobsticks, these were armed with Martini rifles and well-filled bandoliers. They consisted, in fact, of a sergeant and ten men of the Chartered Company's Matabele Police, and to their presence and errand there at that time was due the brooding, not to say dangerous, excitement prevailing. The nature of that errand stood revealed in the *indaba* then being held between the two opposing parties.

"Who talks of time?" said the police sergeant, swelling

himself out in his uniform, with the swagger of a native of no class who finds himself in a position of authority, and by virtue of it qualified to domineer over and flout those of his own race to whom formerly he looked up with deference. “Who talks of time? You have had time, Madúla – more than enough time – yet the cattle have not been sent in. Now we have come to take them. It is the ‘word’ of the Government.”

A click, expressive of contemptuous disgust, broke from the groups of bystanders, and with it deep-toned murmurs of savage wrath. But its only effect was further to develop the arrogant swagger of the native sergeant.

“Keep your dogs quiet, Madúla,” he said insolently, with a sneering glance at the murmurers. “*Hau*! A man cannot talk amid such a barking of curs.”

“A man! *Hau*! A man! A dog rather. A dog – who cringes to those who throw stones at him and his father’s house,” they shouted, undeterred by the presence of their elders and chief; for the familiar, and therefore impudent manner in which this uniformed “dog of the Government” had dared to address their chief by name, stung them beyond control. “Who is the ‘dog’? Nanzicele, the bastard. Not his father’s son, for Izwe was a brave man and a true, and could never have been the father of such a whelp as Nanzicele. *Au*! Go home, Nanzicele. Go home!” they shouted, shaking their sticks with roars of jeering laughter, in which there was no note of real mirth.

At these insults Nanzicele’s broad countenance grew set with

fury and his eyes glared, for beneath the uniform seeming to tell of discipline and self-restraint, the heart of a savage beat hard – the heart of a savage as fierce and ruthless as that which beat in the dusky breast of any of those around. A Matabele of pure blood, he had fought in the ranks of Lo Bengula during the war of occupation, and that he and others should have taken service under their conquerors was an offence the conquered were not likely to forgive. As to his courage though, there was no question, and for all his insolence and swagger, no qualm of misgiving was in his mind as he faced the jeering, infuriated crowd with a savage contempt not less than their own. They represented a couple of hundred at least, and he and his ten men, for all their rifles and cartridges, would be a mere mouthful to them in the event of a sudden rush.

"Dogs? Nay, nay. It is ye who are the dogs – all dogs – dogs of the Government which has made me a chief," was his fierce retort, as he stood swelling out his chest in the pride of his newly acquired importance. "You have no chiefs now; all are dogs – dogs of the Government. I —*I* am a chief."

"*Hau*! A dog-chief. *Nkose*! We hail thee, Nanzicele, chief of the dogs!" roared some; while others, more infuriated than the rest, began to crowd in upon the little knot of police. Before the latter could even bring their rifles to the present, Madúla rose, with both hands outspread. Like magic the tumult was stayed at the gesture, though deep-toned mutterings still rolled through the crowd like the threatening of distant thunder.

The chief, Madúla, was an elderly man, tall and powerfully built. Like the police sergeant he was of the "Abezantzi," the "people from below" – i.e. those from lower down the country, who came up with Umzilikazi, and who constituted the aristocratic order of the Matabele nation, being of pure Zulu parentage; whereas many of his tribal followers were not; hence the haughty contempt with which the police sergeant treated the menacing attitude of the crowd. Standing there; his shaven head – crowned with the shiny ring – thrown back in the easy unconscious dignity of command; his tall erect frame destitute of clothing save the *mútya* round the loins – of adornment save for a string of symbolical wooden beads, the savage chieftain showed to immeasurable advantage as contrasted with the cheap swagger of the drilled and uniformed convert to the new civilisation who confronted him. Now he spoke.

"Hearken, Nanzicele. Here we have none of the King's cattle. All we have is our own. When we sent in such of the King's cattle as were among us, we were told to send in more. We asked for time to search and see if there were a few more that had been overlooked, and we were granted time. Now we have searched and there are no more. If there are no more we can send no more. Can anything be clearer than that?"

A full-throated shout of assent went up from the young men. Their chief had spoken, therefore there was an end of the matter. Nanzicele and his police could now go home, and go empty handed. But Nanzicele had no intention of doing anything of the

sort.

"Then that is your 'word,' Madúla," he said. "You will send no cattle?"

"Have I not spoken?" returned the chief. "*Whau*! The Government must employ queer messengers if it sends men who cannot understand plain words. If there are no King's cattle for me to send, how can I send any? Is not that 'word' plain enough, Nanzicele?" And again a shout of uproarious delight went up from the young men.

"There is a plainer 'word,'" retorted the police sergeant, "and that is the 'word' of the Government. All the cattle in the country are King's cattle, therefore the cattle of Madúla are King's cattle, and as Madúla will not send them in I am here to take them. Fare ye well, children of Madúla. You have resisted the arm of the Government, and you have insulted its mouth. Fare ye well;" and there was a volume of threatening significance in the tone.

No movement was made to hinder them as the handful of police marched out between the serried ranks of dusky forms, the glare of savage animosity darting forth from hostile eyes. But as they gained the outside of the kraal a great roar of derision went up, coupled with allusions which caused Nanzicele to scowl darkly. For the incident to which they referred was the curt refusal of a follower of Madúla to give him one of his daughters to wife, at less than the current market value; in which the obdurate parent received the full support of his chief, who was in nowise disposed to befriend the Government policeman.

The man had since married his daughter to somebody else, but Nanzicele had neither forgotten nor forgiven. And now the young men of the kraal followed him jeering, and improvising songs asking whether Nanzicele had found a wife yet.

But soon such good humour as underlay their mirth was turned to downright hate. They had followed the retreating police as far as the brow of an eminence some little distance from the kraal, and now a sight met their view which turned every heart black with pent up hostility. Away over the plain a dust cloud was moving, and behind it the multicoloured hides of a considerable herd of cattle. These were travelling at a swift pace, propelled by the shouts of a number of running figures. The bulk, if not the whole, of Madúla's cattle were being swept away by the Government emissaries.

No further time had Madúla's people to devote to this handful of police, whom hitherto they had busied themselves with annoying. With long-drawn whoops of wrath and rally, they surged forward, intent only on retaking their cherished, and, in fact, their only possessions. Assegai blades flashed suddenly aloft, drawn forth from their places of concealment, and the plain was alive with the dark forms of bounding savages. There would be a collision and bloodshed, and the country was in no state for the heaping of fuel upon a smouldering fire.

But Nanzicele's native astuteness had not been caught napping. He had been prepared for some such move, for his quick glance had not been slow to note that many of those

who had followed him from the kraal were arrayed in skin karosses or other nondescript articles of attire, whereas, only just before, except for their *mútyas*, they had been naked. This could mean nothing but concealed weapons, and when such were produced he was ready for the contingency. With hurried, muttered commands to his men to hold their rifles in readiness, he pressed them forward at the double, and arrived on the scene of turmoil not much later than Madúla's excited tribesmen.

These, for their part, had rushed the situation on all sides, and things were already tolerably lively. The scared and maddened cattle, frenzied by the dark forms surging around them front and rear, halted, bunched, "milled" around for a moment in blind unreasoning fear, then broke up and streamed forth over the plain in a dozen different directions, bellowing wildly, and pursued by the whooping, bounding figures in their rear and on their flanks; and in a few moments, save for long lines of lingering dust-clouds, not one remained in sight. Nanzicele's plan had miscarried entirely. In a fury the latter turned upon his corporal.

"Fool – dog – jackal!" he snarled. "Is this how my orders are obeyed? Instead of carrying them out promptly, were ye all asleep or drinking beer with the women? Yonder cattle should have been halfway to Jonemi's by this time, and lo now, Madúla and his herd of Amaholi are laughing at us. Thou, Singisa – I will have thee flogged out of the ranks with raw-hide whips. Was I to keep Madúla talking for a moon instead of a very small piece of a day, to give thee time to rest thy lazy carcase and go to sleep?

Ye shall all suffer for this, and dearly."

But the corporal was not much perturbed by this threat. He merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I know not," he said. "But this I know, Nanzicele. Seven men cannot move quicker than two hundred, and as many were yonder" – pointing in the direction of the retreating dust-clouds. "And we were under no orders to fire upon Madúla's people, nor indeed do I think we were under orders to take his cattle at all."

"Thou art a fool, Singisa," retorted Nanzicele, with a savage scowl.

But whether Singisa was a fool or not, the fact remained with them that Nanzicele's plan had miscarried. All he had effected by his attempted *coup de main* was to render the name of the Matabele police a trifle more putrescent in the nostrils of the Matabele than it already was, and in the mean time Madúla's cattle were still in Madúla's possession. And, after all, that possession is nine points of the law – meaning presumably nine-tenths – still remains a good old English axiom.

Chapter Two.
John Ames

John Ames was Native Commissioner for the district of Sikumbutana.

Now, the area of the said district contained about as many square miles as did one half of England. It likewise contained some thousands of its original inhabitants, a considerable percentage of which were Matabele, and the residue Makalaka, the bulk of whom had, prior to the war of occupation, been incorporated into the ranks of Lo Bengula's fighting-men. Indeed, they reckoned themselves as integral with the nation – as much so as the original Abezantzi, even then fast dwindling numerically – and by no means welcomed their so-called emancipation at the hands of the British with the acclaim our theoretically humane civilisation had striven to persuade itself they would. They were settled upon reservations there as in other districts under the charge of Native Commissioners appointed by the Government of the Chartered Company.

Now the duties of these Native Commissioners were multifarious, if ill-defined. They involved the collection of hut tax; the keeping of a vigilant eye upon the people at large; the carrying out of the disarmament programme; the settlement of all local disputes that were potient of settlement; and of about

half a hundred other questions that might arise from day to day. These officials were expected to act the part of benevolent uncle all round, to the natives under their charge; and in order to effect this thoroughly, they had to be continually on the move, keeping up a constant system of patrol in order to become acquainted with every nook and corner of their somewhat vast area, and see that things were going on all right in general; and bearing in mind the extent of that area, it will be seen that this alone constituted a very laborious and responsible side of their duties. For it was no case of progressing in a fairly comfortable conveyance: neither the natural formation of the country nor the not very munificent travelling allowance granted by their government would admit of that. It meant real downright roughing it. Day after day of long rides on horseback, over mountain and plain and low-lying fever belt in all weathers, and a camp under rock or tree at night; and when it is remembered that such peregrinations amounted in the aggregate to about half the year, it follows that the faculties both physical and mental, of these useful public servants were not likely to stagnate for lack of use.

There was one other duty which devolved upon them at the time of our story; the collecting of the cattle which the Chartered Company exacted as a war indemnity from the not thoroughly conquered Matabele; and remembering that cattle constitutes the whole worldly wealth of a native, it may be imagined what a thankless and uningratiating task was thrown upon their hands.

John Ames was an excellent specimen of this class of public

official. Born on a Natal farm, he could speak the native languages fluently, and had all the idiosyncrasies of the native character at his fingers' ends, a phase of useful knowledge which a few years spent at an English public school had failed to obliterate, and which, on his return to the land of his birth, he was able to turn to practical account. He had come to Rhodesia with the early Pioneers, and having served through the Matabele war of 1893, had elected to remain in the country. He was of goodly height and proportion, standing six feet in his socks, handsome withal, having regular features, and steadfast and penetrating grey eyes; and at the time we make his acquaintance had just turned thirty, but looked more.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish," he was saying, as he sat in his compound on the day following the events recorded in the last chapter. "This thing will have to be gone into, Inglefield, and that pretty thoroughly."

"Certainly, old chap, certainly. But what is the 'thing' when all's said and done, and what sort of fish are in the kettle? You forget you've been pattering away to these chaps for the last half-hour, and except for a word or two, I haven't caught any of it. Even now I don't know what it's all about."

"These police of yours seem to have been rather playing the fool," was the direct answer.

He addressed as Inglefield was the sub-inspector in charge of the Matabele Police, whose camp lay about a mile away. Inglefield was an English importation, an ex-subaltern in a line

regiment, who having lived at the rate of about double his means for a few years, had, in common with not a few of his kind, found it necessary to migrate with the object of "picking up something;" and he had duly "picked up" a commission in the Matabele Police. Now Inglefield twirled his moustache and looked annoyed.

"Oh, the police again!" he retorted, somewhat snappishly. "I say, Ames. Can they by any chance ever do anything right according to you fellows?"

The two men were seated together outside the hut which Ames used for an office. In front of them about a dozen Matabele squatted in a semicircle. One of these – a ringed man – had been speaking at some length, but the bulk of his conversation was utterly unintelligible to Inglefield.

"Granting for the sake of argument they never can, it is hardly to be wondered at," replied Ames, tranquilly. "Their very existence as at present constituted is a mistake, and may prove a most serious one some of these days. First of all, the Matabele have never been more than half conquered, and having given them peace – on not such easy terms, mind – the first thing we do is to pick out a number of them, arm them, and teach them to shoot. And such fellows are turned loose to keep their own crowd in order. Well, it isn't in human nature that the plan won't lead to ructions, and this is only another of them. I know natives, Inglefield, and you don't, if you'll excuse my saying so. Now, every man Jack of your Matabele Police imagines himself

a bigger man than the old indunas of the country before whom he used to shake in his shoes. And the Matabele won't stand that for ever."

"Oh, come now, Ames, you're putting things rather strong. Besides, we seem to have heard all that before."

"And so these fellows can swagger around in their uniforms and put on side, and crow over the old indunas, and bully the crowd at large, and – what is worse, use their position to pay off old grudges. Which is just what seems to have been done in the present case."

"The devil it does! Who says so?"

"The man who has been talking the most is Samvu, the brother of Madúla," went on Ames. "He is here to complain of your men. They appear to have acted in a pretty high-handed way at Madúla's, and the wonder is they didn't come to blows. You remember what the orders were to Nanzicele? We gave them conjointly."

"Yes. He was to remind Madúla that more cattle were due from him, and that it is time they were sent in."

"Precisely. Well, what do you think the fellow has been doing? He sent half his patrol to drive off all Madúla's cattle, while he kept the people of the kraal busy with *indaba*. Even then he seems to have cheeked the chief and played Harry all round. The wonder is he didn't bring on a fight. As it was, the whole kraal turned out, and simply ran all the cattle back again."

"If he did that, of course he exceeded his orders," allowed

Inglefield, albeit somewhat grudgingly. "But how do we know these chaps are not lying?"

"I don't think they are, but of course we must have a full investigation. We can begin it this afternoon. It's dinner-time now. Come in and have a bite, Inglefield."

"No thanks, old chap. I've got something going at the camp, and my cook will get careless if I keep disappointing him. I'll look round in an hour or so. But – I say. Why the deuce should Nanzicele – oh, dash it, I can't get round these infernal clicks! – why should he have played the fool at that particular kraal?"

"There comes in what I was saying before about paying off old grudges. He had a squabble about a girl at that very kraal a little while back, and now sees his chance. Well, so long. We'll go thoroughly into the thing."

The police officer mounted his horse and rode away in the direction of the camp, and John Ames, having said a few words to the squatting Matabele, dismissed them for the present, and turned into the hut which he used as a dining and general sitting-room. This was a large, circular hut, rough and ready of aspect outside, with its plastered wall and high conical thatch, but the interior was not without comfort and even tastefulness. It was hung around with a dark blue fabric commonly called by the whites "limbo," being a corruption of the native name "ulembu," which signifieth "web." Strips of white calico constituted the ceiling, and thus both thatch and plastered walls being completely hidden, the interior, hung around with framed photographs and

prints, wore a comfortable and homelike aspect. Two small glass windows let in light and air when the door was closed, which it seldom was. Four other huts similarly constructed stood within the compound, doing duty for office, bedroom, kitchen, and store-house respectively, and the whole were enclosed by a palisade of woven grass, standing about breast high.

The life was a lonely one, and there were times when John Ames would feel very tired of it. The place being more than a long day's journey from anywhere, visitors were few and far between, and beyond Inglefield, the police sub-inspector, he rarely saw a social equal. Inglefield was a married man, but his wife, a soured and disappointed person, had made herself so disagreeable to John Ames on the few occasions they had met, that the latter had dropped all intercourse which involved associating with Inglefield at that worthy's own home. If Inglefield wanted to see him for social purposes, why, he knew his way up; and truth to tell, it was a way Inglefield not seldom found, for if there is one state more lonely than the man who lives alone in an out of the way locality, it is the man who lives in it with an entirely uncongenial partner. But even with Inglefield the position was occasionally strained, by reason of their official relations Inglefield thought the force under his command could do no wrong; Ames knew that it could, and not infrequently did.

The latter sat down to his solitary meal, which on the whole was a good one; for the game laws were not at that time rigidly enforced, nor had a combination of rinderpest and prospector

decimated the larger kinds; and steaks of the roan antelope, hot and frizzling, are by no means despicable. Add to this brown bread and tinned butter, the whole washed down with a couple of glasses of whisky and aerated water from a selzogene, and it will be seen that our lonely official did not fare so badly. The era of "bully" beef and other canned abominations had not yet set in.

His dinner over, John Ames lit a pipe and adjourned to a cane chair before his office door to await the appearance of Inglefield. The day was hot and drowsy, and he wore the light attire customary in Rhodesia – shirt and trousers to wit, and leather belt – and on his head a wide-brimmed hat of the "cowboy" order; but the heat notwithstanding, a shiver ran through his frame, bringing with it a not unwarranted misgiving.

"This infernal fever again," he said to himself half aloud. "How the mischief am I going to get through the rainy season? No. I really must apply for three months' leave, and get to some cool place at the seaside. If they won't give it me I'll resign. I'm not going to turn into a premature wreck to please anybody."

There was very little fear of this alternative. John Ames was far too valuable an official for his superiors to bring themselves to part with so readily. His thorough knowledge of the natives and their ways, his consummate tact in dealing with them, and his scrupulous and unquestionable probity, had already rendered him a man of mark in his department; but withal it never occurred to him for a moment to overestimate himself, or that his chances were one whit better than those of anybody else.

In due course Inglefield arrived, and with him Nanzicele and the squad of police whose conduct was under investigation. John Ames was attended by his native messengers – a brace of stalwart Matabele – and, Madúla's people having been convened, the investigation began.

Even here the picturesque element was not wanting. The open space of the compound was nearly filled; the police ranged in a double file on the one side, the people of Madúla under Samvu, the chief's brother, squatting in a semicircle on the other. Inglefield occupied a chair beside John Ames, his orderly behind him, and his interpreter – for his acquaintance with the language was but scanty – rendering the words of each witness. And these were legion; and as the hearing progressed, both sides became more and more excited, to such an extent that when Nanzicele was making his statement, audible murmurs of dissent and disgust, among which such epithets as "liar" were not undiscernible, arose from Samvu's followers. More than once John Ames would intervene, quiet but decisive; but even his influence seemed strained under the task of preserving order among these rival bands of savage and slightly civilised savage.

But Nanzicele had no chance. When it came to cross-questioning him, Samvu and another ringed man of Madúla's simply turned him inside out. There could be no question but that he had exceeded his orders, and had acted in a grossly provocative and arbitrary manner, calculated to bring about serious trouble.

Yet not all at once was this decision arrived at. Inglefield, promptly sick of the whole thing, would have slurred the proceedings over – anything to finish them that day – but Ames was built of different stuff. Calm and judicial, he gave both sides a thoroughly patient hearing, and the investigation indeed was not concluded until late on the following day. Then the above decision was arrived at and reported to the proper quarter, and in the result, it not being his first offence of the kind, Nanzicele was adjudged to lose his stripes.

There were three parties to whom this decision was exceedingly unwelcome. The first was represented by the comrades of the degraded man, who looked up to him on account of the very derelictions which had brought him into trouble – his high-handed thoroughness, to wit. The second was Inglefield, who felt that he had lost a particularly smart non-com., and one that was useful to him in another capacity, for Nanzicele was a skilful hunter, and could always show his officer where sport was to be obtained; whereas now, Nanzicele, sulky and reduced to the ranks, would probably revenge himself by a falling off in this direction.

The third was Nanzicele himself, and, his fierce and sullen spirit smouldering with bitter resentment, he inwardly vowed vengeance against Madúla and his following. But greater vengeance still did he vow against the white race in general, and John Ames in particular. There was point in this, because he was in a position to suppose that the day might not be so very far

distant when his vow should be repaid to the uttermost.

Chapter Three.
Shiminya the Sorcerer

Shiminya the sorcerer was seated within his "múti" kraal on the banks of the Umgwane river.

This kraal was situated in the heart of a vast thicket of "wait-a-bit" thorns. It was enclosed by a closely woven fence of the same redoubtable growth, whose height and bristling solidity laughed to scorn the efforts of man or beast. The main approach consisted of a narrow labyrinthine passage; other approaches there were, but known only to its weird occupant, who had mechanical but secret means of his own of being warned of any advance, even by the recognised way, some time before the visitor or visitors should arrive at the gate.

This formidable stockade enclosed a space in which stood three huts, circular, with low conical roofs of thatch, and in front of these Shiminya was squatting. He had a large bowl in his hands, which he kept turning from side to side, narrowly scrutinising its contents, which smelt abominably, half muttering, half singing to himself the while. In front, its head couched between its paws, dog-like, blinking its yellow eyes, lay an animal. Yet it was not a dog, but represented the smaller species of hyaena – the South African "wolf."

This brute looked grim and uncanny enough, but not more so

than his master. The latter was a native of small stature and very black hue, with features of an aquiline, almost Semitic cast. But the glance of his eye was baleful, cruel as that of a serpent, keen, rapacious as that of a hawk; and while the muscular development of his frame was slight almost to puniness, his sinister features showed that which must ever dominate over mere brutal sinew and brawn, viz. Mind. Craft, guile, cunning, illimitable patience, and dauntless courage all fought for the mastery in the thin cruel features of the sorcerer.

His whole aspect differed as widely as possible from the pure-blood Matabele, which is scarcely surprising, seeing that he could boast no strain of that warrior race. He was, in fact, of the Amaholi, or slave caste; but as among other and more powerful nations of both new and old civilisation, Mind is bound to tell Shiminya – at the time we make his acquaintance and for some years previously – was one of the highest in the ranks of the mysterious hierarchy known to the natives as "Children of the Umlimo."

The origin of the cultus of this sinister abstraction has never been located with certainty. Its hierarchy was protected, if not encouraged, by Lo Bengula and his warrior sire, probably out of three parts political motive to a fourth superstitious; and now, at the period of our story, when the dynasty and despotism of the Matabele kings had gone down before the Maxims of the Chartered Company, the shadowy-sayings of the Umlimo began to be sought out eagerly by the conquered race, and a rosy time

seemed likely to set in for the myrmidons of the abstraction.

These, with the astuteness of their craft all the world over, saw their time. The conquered race, strange to say, was not satisfied. It had signally failed to appreciate the blessings of civilisation. If life was a trifle less secure under the rule of the King, why, that was all in accordance with national custom. In the good old days there was plenty of fun and fighting, of raids far and near; of the mustering of regiments at the King's kraal, and cattle-killing and feasting and dancing. Yes, life was life in those days, when looked at from the point, of view of a warrior nation. But now, all this had given place to a state of things which from that point of view was utterly nauseous. The great circle of Bulawayo proudly dominating the land was razed to the ground, its place occupied by a solitary house, whence the white man governed a nation of conquered slaves. Below, in the valley, which formerly shook to the hum and thunder of marching impis, the white man was dumping down his iron houses and calling it his town. Throughout the land even the oldest and most powerful indunas were under white officials, to whom they were obliged to give deferential greeting, and all the little phases of excitement incidental to former days were sternly forbidden. Moreover, the conquerors had seized all the cattle of the nation, and now the land was flooded with arrogant, masterful whites, to whom no spot was sacred if only it was thought to contain a little gold. Outwardly patient, but with black rage and inexhaustible hostility gnawing at their hearts, chiefs and people

alike sullenly brooded; and on such dry tinder the sparks, artfully kindled by the "Abantwana 'Mlimo," fell as on well-prepared ground.

Seated there upon the ground, Shiminya continued to shake his bowl of hell-broth. Save for a few birds' claws and a bladder or two fastened in his thick wool – for he was not ringed – he was destitute of the revolting gewgaws of his profession. Suddenly the wolf emitted a low snarl, simultaneously with an inarticulate wail which proceeded from the hut behind.

"Ha – my Lupiswana! Ha – ha, my good little beast!" chuckled Shiminya, apostrophising the creature. "Tea – lick thy jaws, for I think it is time for more blood – only a little – only a taste. *Hau*!"

As though understanding these words the brute rose, and sneaked over to the wicker door of the hut, sniffing at the fastenings, sullenly growling. Rising, the wizard followed, and, pushing back the animal, crept into the hut, and slapped the door to in its jaws. At his appearance the low moaning rose again, and in its note was the very extremity of pain and fear.

It proceeded from a long dark form lying on the ground, which the eyes, becoming accustomed to the semi-light of the interior, would have no hesitation in pronouncing as human. Further investigation would reveal it a female form, securely bound and lashed to a pole; a female form too, dowered with no small share of symmetry and comeliness. The face, when undistorted by pain and terror, must have been a pleasing one in the extreme.

"Ah – ah, Nompiza!" chuckled the wizard, rubbing his hands

together. “The children of Umlimo have pretty houses, do they not – pretty houses?” And he glanced gleefully around his horrible den.

For this is just what it was. Human skulls and bones decked the plastered wall, but the most dreadful object of all was the whole skin of the head and face of a man – of a white man too, with a long heavy beard. This awful object glowered down in the semi-gloom, a gruesome expression of pain in the pucker of the parchment-like hide. Great snake-skins depended from the roof – the heads artfully stuffed, and the attitudes arranged to simulate life; and many a horrid object, suggestive of torture and death, was disposed around.

“A pretty house, Nompiza – ah – ah – a pretty house, is it not?” chuckled Shiminya, leering down into the young woman’s face. “And thou hast only to speak one word to be taken out of it. Yet I wonder not at thy refusal.”

“I will not speak it, Shiminya,” she replied, with some fire of spirit. “The rattle of these old bones has no terror for me. And if thou harmest me further, there are those who will avenge me, child of the Umlimo or not.”

For all answer the wizard laughed softly but disdainfully. Then reaching to the door, he opened it. The wolf leaped in, snarling.

“See now, thou obstinate Nompiza,” he went on, restraining the brute with a flourish of a large stick painted red, before which it cowered back. “This is Lupiswana – no ordinary wolf. Whoever this one bites becomes *tagati*, and will be hunted

through the night by him after death, until they can escape only by riding on him as the white men ride their horses. Then, if they fall off, they are hunted again night after night – for ever and ever. Ha!"

At the enunciation of this grim superstition the unfortunate prisoner tugged at her bonds, uttering a shriek of terror. She recognised here not the dog she had at first expected to see, but the horrid mongrel beast held in abhorrence by the superstitious. The growlings of the brute redoubled.

"Now, tell quickly," went on the wizard. "The news of the meeting thou didst make known to two people only. Their names? Hesitate not, or – "

"Shall I be allowed to depart from here if I tell, child of the Umlimo?" she gasped eagerly.

"Thou shalt be taken hence. Oh yes, thou shalt be taken hence."

"Swear it. Swear it," she cried.

"Umzilikazi!" rejoined the wizard, thus ratifying his assertion by the sacred name of the great king, founder of the nation.

But now, seeing its master's vigilance relaxed, the wolf sprang forward, and, with a horrid mumbling snarl, buried its fangs in the helpless prisoner's thigh. A wild, piteous, despairing shriek rent the interior of this fiend's den.

"Take it off! Take it off! Oh, I am devoured! Quick! I will tell!"

Seizing a pair of iron tongs, Shiminya compelled the now

infuriated brute to loose its hold, and following it with a tremendous blow on the head, it retreated yelling to the further side of the hut.

"The names – quick – ere it seizes thee again," urged the wizard.

"Pukele," she howled, frantic with agony and terror.

"The son of thy father, who is servant to Jonemi?"

"The same. The other is Ntatu."

The words seemed squeezed from the sufferer. Her thigh, horribly lacerated by the jaws of the savage beast, streaming with blood, was quivering in every nerve.

"Thy sister, formerly wife of Makani?"

"The same. Now, child of the Umlimo, suffer me to depart."

"Thy thigh is not well enough, sister," replied the wizard, in a soft purring voice, putting his head on one side, and surveying her through half closed eyes. "Tarry till evening, then shalt thou be taken hence. *Au*! It is not good to be seen quitting the abode of Shiminya. There is *tagati* in it."

Having first kicked the wolf out of the hut, the sorcerer set to work to tend the wound of his helpless victim. She, for her part, lay and moaned feebly. She had purchased her life, but at what a cost. Still, even the magnificent physical organisation of a fine savage was not proof against all she had undergone, for this was not her first taste of the torture since being forcibly seized by the satellites of Shiminya and brought hither.

Now, moaning in her pain, Nompiza lay and reflected. She

had betrayed two of her father's children, had marked them out for the vengeance of not only the Abantwana 'Mlimo, but of the disaffected chiefs. This, however, might be remedied. Once out of this she would go straight to Jonemi – which was the name by which John Ames was known to the natives, being a corruption of his own – and claim protection for herself and them, perhaps even procure the arrest of Shiminya. This thought came as a ray of light to the savage girl as she lay there. The white men would protect and avenge her. Yet – poor simpleton!

"Of what art thou thinking, Nompiza?" said the wizard, softly, as he refrained from his seeming work of mercy. "*Au*! Shall I tell thee? It is that thou wilt reveal to Jonemi all thou knowest of the gathering at the Home of the Umlimo when the moon was full. So shalt thou save thyself and Pukele and Ntatu, the children of thy father."

A cry of terror escaped the sufferer. How should she have forgotten that this dreadful sorcerer could read the thoughts of men?

"Not so, my father, not so," she prayed. "I ask for nothing but to be allowed to go home."

"To go home? But how would that avail one who has been bitten by Lupiswana? There is no escape from that. Lupiswana will come for thee after death. Thou wilt be hunted round for ever, with Lupiswana biting – biting – at thee even as now, and thou wilt spring wildly forward to avoid his bites, and his teeth will close in thy flesh, even as now. Thou wilt run wailing round

the kraals of thy people, hunted ever by Lupiswana, but they will not admit thee. They will cover their heads in terror lest the same doom overtake them. *Hau*! Even this night will that doom begin."

"This night?" echoed the victim, feeling well-nigh dead with an awful fear. "This night? Now, my father, thou hast promised – hast sworn – I shall be allowed to depart."

"I did but mean the night of death," replied the other, his head on one side, his eyes glittering with satanic mirth. "That may be when thou art old and tottering, Nompiza, or it may mean this night, for what is time but a flash, even as that of the summer lightning? The night of death will surely come."

No relief came into the face of the sufferer. The awful fate predicted for her by Shiminya seemed to her just as certain as though it had already befallen her, and the recollection of the horrid animal tearing at her flesh was too recent. It was a form of superstition, too, not unknown among her people, and here everything seemed to bring it home – time, place, surroundings, and the horror of this gruesome being's presence. But before she would utter further prayer or protest, a strange hollow, humming noise was heard, at sound of which Shiminya arose suddenly, with an eager look on his repulsive countenance, and crept out of the hut, taking care to secure the door behind him.

Chapter Four.
A Human Spider

Shiminya resumed his seat upon the ground, with the *múti* bowl in his hands. The wolf he had already secured in one of the huts. The grim beast was in truth his familiar spirit, and as such not to be gazed upon by profane eyes, and in broad daylight. And now footsteps were heard approaching the *scherm*, together with the rattle of assegai hafts. Three men entered by the narrow gateway. Shiminya looked up.

"Greeting, *Izinduna*," he said.

"Greeting to thee, Umtwana 'Mlimo," came the reply in a deep-voiced hum, as the newcomers deposited their assegais just within the gate, and advanced a few steps nearer in. With two of these we are already acquainted, they being, in fact, Madúla and his brother Samvu. The third was another influential chief by name Zazwe.

Shiminya seemed to take no further notice of their presence, continuing to sway the *múti* bowl from side to side, muttering the while. The faces of the three indunas wore an expression of scarcely to be concealed disgust; that of Zazwe in addition showed unutterable contempt. He was an unprepossessing looking man, lean, and of middle height, with a cold, cruel countenance. At bottom he loathed and despised the whole

Umlimo hierarchy as a pack of rank impostors, but it suited him now to cultivate them, for he was an arrant schemer, and would fain see every white man in the country cut to pieces.

"There are three goats in thy kraal beyond the river, Shiminya," he began presently, tired of the silence.

"That is good, my father," the sorcerer condescended to reply. "They are for Umlimo?"

"Nay; for his child."

"And – for Umlimo?"

"There is a young heifer."

"*Au*! Of such there will soon be no more," replied Shiminya.

"No more?" echoed the trio.

"No more. The whites are bewitching all the cattle in the land. Soon you will see great things. The land will stink with their rotting carcases."

A murmur went up from the three listeners. They all bent eagerly forward. Shiminya, who knew his dupes, was in no hurry. He continued to shake his bowl of abomination and mutter; then he went on:

"The last time you heard the Great Voice, what did it say? Were not the words thereof as mine are now – I, its child? *Whau*! I fear there were some who heard that voice and laughed, Izinduna – who heard that voice and did not believe."

At this juncture there came a subdued wail, inexpressibly doleful, from one of the huts. It was answered by a snarl from another. Two of the three chiefs, listening, felt perturbed,

the countenance of Zazwe alone preserving its hard, sceptical expression; though, to tell the truth, even he – so rooted is the innate superstition of savages – did not feel entirely at ease in his surroundings.

"There is, further, a good milch cow for the Umlimo," spake Madúla, "and for his child a heifer."

"It is well. There will soon be no more," repeated the wizard.

"And three fat-tailed sheep, and for Umlimo a young bull," said Samvu.

"That, too, is good," was the cold acknowledgment of Shiminya, "for there will soon be no more."

Now, cattle constitute the very life of all the South African tribes, wherefore the three chiefs felt their hearts sink as they realised the gist of this doleful prophecy. The rinderpest had not as yet made its appearance in their midst, but was very soon destined to do so, and the sorcerers of the nation, having gained secret information that the terrible scourge was, in the ordinary course of things, bound to be upon them soon from further north, used their knowledge as a most powerful lever towards promoting the uprising they were straining every nerve to bring about. In this they found willing aid from many of the chiefs, who saw their power and influence waning day by day; themselves forced to be the subservient vassals of a few – from their point of view – upstart and arrogant whites.

"Why, then, should Makiwa (Matabele term for the white man) wish to bewitch all the cattle?" said Madúla, who at present

was in the vacillating stage, though the high-handed action we have recorded, on the part of the native police, had gone far towards settling him in the wrong direction. "They will suffer equally with ourselves."

"*Our* cattle are our life. *Their* life is in other things," pronounced Shiminya, who never looked at his interlocutors when he spoke, thus giving his answers an oracular air, as though inspired by the magic stuff into whose black depth he was gazing. "We die. They live."

"*Hau*!" cried the listeners, fully comprehending the hint.

"Not many times will the moon be at full before this death is upon us," went on the wizard, still without looking up. "If there are no whites left in the land, then will it be averted."

Again that hollow groan proceeded from the hut. Their feelings worked up to an artificial pitch, the superstitious savages felt something like a shudder run through their frames. But the imperturbable Shiminya went on:

"There are two who must die – Pukele, the son of Mambane."

"He who is servant to Jonemi?" queried Madúla.

"The same."

"Has he done wrong?" said Samvu, for the man named was one of Madúla's people, and neither of the brothers liked this edict.

"He knows too much," was the remorseless reply. "The other is Ntatu, formerly wife of Makani."

A measure of relief came into the countenances of the two

chiefs. A woman more or less mattered nothing, but they did not like to sacrifice one of their men.

"It is the 'word' of Umlimo," pursued Shiminya, decisively. "This must be." And for the first time he raised his eyes, and fixed them upon the two chiefs with cruel, snake-like stare.

"What is the life of a man, more or less, when Umlimo has spoken?" said Zazwe, thus throwing in the weight of his influence with the dictum of the sorcerer. "A man, too, who is faithful to one of these whites set over us! *Au*! Umlimo is wise."

This carried the day; and after some more talk, mostly "dark," and consisting of hints, the three chiefs, gathering up their assegais, withdrew.

Left alone, Shiminya still sat there, satisfied that his sanguinary edict would be carried out. A dead silence reigned over the great thorn thicket, and as though the satanic influence which seemed to brood upon the place imparted itself to wild Nature, even the very birds forbore to flutter and chirp in its immediate vicinity. The sun sank to the western horizon, shedding its arrows of golden light upon the myriad sharp points of the sea of thorns, then dipped below the rim of the world, and still the grim wizard squatted, like a crafty, cruel, bloodthirsty spider, in the midst of his vast web, though indeed the comparison is a libel on the insect, who slays to appease hunger, whereas this human spider was wont to doom his victims out of a sheer diabolical lust of cruelty and the power which he could sway through that agency. This day, indeed, he might feel

content, for it had not been wasted. But the day was not over yet – oh no – not quite yet. Still, would it be possible for this satanic being to commit further deeds of atrocity and of blood? Well, is there not the wretched sufferer lying bound and helpless within the hut?

Again that low, vibrating hum sounded forth. It seemed to come from the thick of the thorn palisade. The deeply plotting brain of the wizard was again on the alert, but its owner evinced no eagerness, not even looking up from what he was doing. Some person or persons had unawares touched the hidden communication wire which, situated at the entrance of the narrow labyrinthine passage leading to the kraal, signalled such approach.

Shiminya's discernment was consummate in every sense he possessed; indeed, this faculty had not a little to do with the ascendency he had gained. In the very footsteps of the new comer, shod with the *amanyatelo*– a kind of raw-hide sandal used as protection in thorny country – his keen ear could gather a whole volume of information. They were, in fact, to him an open index of the new comer's mind. While distant they indicated a mind made up, yet not altogether removed from, the verge of wavering; the possession of a purpose, yet not altogether a whole-heartedness in its carrying out. Nearer they revealed the vulgar trepidation attendant upon the mere fact of approaching a place so sinister and redoubtable as the *múti* den of a renowned sorcerer, and that in the dim hours of night.

For the brief twilight had long since passed, and now a golden moon, in its third quarter, hung lamplike in the sky, and, save in the shadows, its soft brilliance revealed every detail almost as clear as in the day. It fell on the form of a tall, powerfully built savage, standing there in the gateway, naked save for the *mútya*, unarmed save for a short, heavy knobstick. This he laid down as he drew near the wizard.

"Greeting, my father," he uttered.

"Greeting, Nanzicele," replied the sorcerer, without looking up.

Divested of his civilised and official trappings, the ex-sergeant of police looked what he was – a barbarian pure and simple, no whit less of a one, in fact, than those over whom he was vested with a little brief authority. Whether this visit was made in the interests of loyalty to his superiors or not may hereinafter appear.

"Hast thou brought what I desired of thee, Nanzicele?" said the wizard, coming direct to the point.

Nanzicele, who had squatted himself on the ground opposite the other, now fumbled in a skin bag which was hung around him, and produced a packet. It was small, but solid and heavy.

"What is this?" said Shiminya, counting out ten Martini-Henry cartridges. "Ten? Only ten! *Au*! When I promised thee vengeance it was not for such poor reward as this."

"They are not easily obtained, my father. The men from whom I got these will be punished to-morrow for not having them; but I care not. Be content with a few, for few are better than none.

And – this vengeance?"

"Thou knowest Pukele – the servant of Jonemi?"

"The son of Mambane?"

"The son of Mambane, who helped hoot thee out of his kraal when thou wouldst not offer enough *lobola* for Nompiza. He is to die."

Nanzicele leaped with delight. "When? How?" he cried. "Now will my eyes have a feast indeed."

"At thy hand. The manner and the time are of thine own choosing. To thee has Umlimo left it."

Nanzicele's glee was dashed. His jaw fell.

"*Au*! I have no wish to dance in the air at the end of a long rope," he growled; "and such would assuredly be my fate if I slew Pukele, even as it was that of Fondosa, the son of Mbai, who was an *innyanga* even as thyself, my father. *Whau*! I saw it with these eyes. All Fondosa's *múti* did not save him there, my father, and the whites hanged him dead the same as any rotten Maholi."

"Didst thou glance over one shoulder on the way hither, Nanzicele? Didst thou see Lupiswana following thee, yea, even running at thy side? I traced thy course from here. I saw thee from the time of leaving Jonemi's. He was waiting for thee was Lupiswana. It is not good for a man when such is the case," said Shiminya, whose *esprit de corps* resented the sneering, contemptuous tone which the other had used in speaking of a member of his "cloth."

For the event referred to was the execution of a Mashuna

witch-doctor for the murder of a whole family, whose death he had ordered.

The snake-like stare of Shiminya, the appeal to his superstitions, the sinister associations of the place he was in, a stealthy, mysterious sound even then becoming audible – all told, Nanzicele looked somewhat cowed, remembering, too, how his return journey had to be effected alone and by night.

Having, in vulgar and civilised parlance, taken down his man a peg or two, Shiminya could afford to let the matter of Pukele stand over. Now he said softly —

"And the other ten cartridges, those in thy bag, Nanzicele? Give them to me, for I have a better revenge, here, ready at thy hand, and a safer one."

"*Au*! They were to have been thine, my father; I was but keeping them to the last," replied the ex-police sergeant, shamefacedly and utterly mendaciously, as he placed the packet in the wizard's outstretched hand. "And now, what is this vengeance?"

Shiminya rose, and, beckoning the other to follow, opened and crept through the door of the hut behind him. A hollow groan rose from the inside. Nanzicele, halfway in, made an instinctive move to draw back. Then he recovered himself. "It is not a good omen to draw back when half through a doorway," said Shiminya, as they both stood upright in the darkness. "Yet – look."

He had struck a match, and lighted a piece of candle.

Nanzicele looked down, and a start of surprise leapt through his frame.

"*Whau*!" he cried. "It is Nompiza!"

"And – thy vengeance," murmured the wizard at his side.

But the sufferer heard it, and began to wail aloud —

"Thy promise, Great *Innyanga*! Thy promise. Give me not over to this man, for I fear him. Thou didst swear I should be allowed to depart hence; on the head of Umzilikazi thou didst swear it. Thy promise, O Great *Innyanga*!"

"It shall be kept, sister," said Shiminya, softly, his eyes fairly scintillating with devilish glee. "I swore to thee that thou shouldst be *taken* hence, and thou shalt, for this man and I will take thee."

The wretched creature broke into fresh outcries, which were partly drowned, for already they were dragging her, still lashed to the pole, outside.

"Ha, Nompiza!" jeered Nanzicele, bending down and peering into her face as she lay in the moonlight. "Dost remember how I was driven from thy father's kraal with jeers? Ha! Whose jeers were the loudest? Whose mockeries the most biting? Thine. And now Kulúla will have to buy another wife. Thou hadst better have been the wife of Nanzicele than of death. Of death, is it not, my father?" turning to Shiminya, who glared a mirthless smile.

Wrought up to a pitch of frenzy by the recollection of the insults he had then received, the vindictive savage continued to taunt and terrify the wretched creature as she lay. Then he went over to pick up his great knobstick.

“Not thus, blunderer; not thus,” said Shiminya, arresting his arm. “See now. Take that end of the pole while I take the other. Go thou first.”

Lifting the pole with its helpless human burden, these bloodthirsty miscreants passed out of the kraal. Down the narrow way they hurried, for Shiminya though small was surprisingly wiry, and the powerful frame of the other felt it not, although their burden was no light one. Down through a steep winding path, and soon the thorns thinned out, giving way to forest trees.

“Well, sister, I predicted that Lupiswana would come for thee to-night,” said Shiminya, as they set their burden down to rest themselves. “And – there he is already.”

A stealthy shape, which had been following close upon their steps, glided into view for a moment and disappeared. The wretched victim saw it too, and uttered such a wild ringing shriek of despair that Nanzicele fairly shuddered.

“*Au*! I like not this,” he growled. “It is a deed of *tagati*.”

“Yet thou must do it, brother, or worse will befall thyself,” said Shiminya, quietly. Then they resumed their burden.

Through the trees now came a glint of silver light, then a broad shimmer. It was the glint of the moon upon water. The Umgwane River, in the dry season, consists of a series of holes. One of these they had reached.

“And now, sister,” began the wizard, as they set down their burden upon its brink, “thou seest what is the result of an unquiet tongue. But for that thou wouldst not now be here, and thy

brother Pukele and thy sister Ntatu would have yet longer to live. But you all know too much, the three of you. Look! Yonder is Lupiswana waiting for thee, even as I predicted," said this human devil, who could not refrain from adding acute mental torture to the dying moments of his victim. And as he spoke a low whine rose upon the night air, where a dark sinister shape lay silhouetted against the white stones of the broad river-bed some little distance away.

The victim heard it and wailed, in a manner that resembled the whine of the gruesome beast. Shiminya laughed triumphantly.

"Even the voice she has already," he exclaimed. "She will howl bravely when Lupiswana hunts her."

"Have done," growled Nanzicele. Brutal barbarian as he was, even his savagery stopped short at this; besides, his superstitious nature was riven to the core. "Get it over; get it over!"

They raised the pole once more, and, by a concerted movement, swung it and its human burden over the brink, where the pool was deepest. One wild, appalling shriek, then a splash, and a turmoil of eddies and bubbles rolling and scintillating on the surface, and the cold remorseless face of the brilliant moon looked down, impassive, upon a human creature thus horribly done to death.

"*Hlala-gahle*!" cried Shiminya, with a fiend-like laugh, watching the uprising of the stream of bubbles. Then, turning to his fellow miscreant, "And now, Nanzicele, whom Makiwa made a chief, and then unmade, the people at Madúla's can hardly

speak for laughing at thee, remembering thy last appearance there, bragging that thou wert a chief. Makiwa has done this, but soon there may not be any Makiwa, for so I read the fates. Go now. When I want thee I will send for thee again."

And the two murderers separated – Nanzicele, dejected and feeling as though his freedom had gone from him for ever; Shiminya, chuckling and elate, for the day had been a red letter one, and the human spider was gorged full of human prey.

Chapter Five.
The Meeting of the Ways

The mail-steamer from England had been docked early in Cape Town, and the tables at lunch-time, in the dining room of Cogill's Hotel at Wynberg, were quite full. There is something unmistakable about the newly landed passenger, male or female, especially when taken gregariously; and this comes out mainly in a wholly abnormal vivacity, begotten presumably of a sense of emancipation from the cooped monotony of shipboard, and a conversational tendency to hark back to the incidents of the voyage, and the idiosyncrasies of the populace of the recent floating prison. Add to this a display of brand new ribbons on the hats of certain of the ornamental sex, bearing the name of the floating prison aforesaid, and a sort of huddled up clannishness as of a hanging together for mutual protection in a strange land.

With this phase of humanity were most of the tables filled. One, however, was an exception, containing a square party of four, not of the exuberantly lively order. To be perfectly accurate, though, only three of these constituted a "party;" the fourth, a silent stranger, wearing more the aspect of a man from up-country than one of the newly landed, was unknown to the residue.

"What an abominable noise those people are making,"

remarked one of the trio, a tall, thin, high-nosed person of about thirty, with a glance at a table over the way, where several newly landed females were screaming over the witticisms of a brace of downy lipped youths, who were under the impression the whole room was hanging upon their words. "I only hope they don't represent the sort of people we shall have to put up with if we stay here."

"Don't you be alarmed about that, Mrs Bateman," said the man on her right. "That stamp of Britisher doesn't stay here. It melts off into boarding-houses and situations in Cape Town or Johannesburg. Just rolls up here because it's the thing to run out to Cogill's and have tiffin first thing on landing; at least, so it thinks. It'll all have disappeared by to-night."

"That's a comfort, anyway, if we do stay. What do you think of this place, Nidia?"

"I think it'll do. Those views of the mountain we got coming along in the train were perfectly lovely. And then it seems so leafy and cool. You can get about from here, too, can't you, Mr Moseley?"

"Oh yes, anywhere. Any amount of trains and trams. And I expect you'll wear out the roads with that bike of yours, Miss Commerell."

"By the way, I wonder if they brought our bicycles from the station?" said the other of the two ladies. "You saw them last, Nidia."

"Yes. They are all right. They were standing outside when we

came in."

Now, utterly workaday and commonplace as all this was, not a word of it escaped the silent stranger. This girl, seated at his right, had riveted his attention from the moment she came in, and indeed there was that about Nidia Commerell's face which was likely to exercise such an effect. It had a way of lighting up – a sudden lifting of the eyelashes, the breaking into a half smile, revealing a row of teeth beautifully even and white. She had blue eyes, and her hair, which was neither brown nor golden, but something between, curled in soft natural waves along the brow, dispensing with the necessity of any attempt at a fringe; and her colouring was of that warm richness which gave the idea that Nature had at first intended her for a brunette, then got puzzled, and finally had given her up in hopeless despair, which was perhaps the best thing that could have happened, for the result was about as dainty, refined, alluring a specimen of young womanhood as the jaded glance of the discriminating male could wish to rest upon.

This, at any rate, was the mental verdict of the stranger, and for this reason he hailed with inward satisfaction the recently expressed decision of the two as to taking up their quarters there for a time.

"You ought to remain here a few days, and show us about, Mr Moseley," said the elder of the two ladies, after some more desultory conversation.

"Wish I could, Mrs Bateman. No such luck, though. I've got

to start for Bulawayo to-night. They are hurrying the soul out of me as it is."

"Isn't the journey a frightful one?" asked Nidia.

"It isn't a delightful one," laughed the man, who was just a fair average specimen of the well-bred Englishman, of good height, well set up, and well groomed. "Railway to Mafeking, then eight days' coaching; and they tell me the coach is always crammed full. Pleasant, isn't it?"

The stranger looked up quickly as though about to say something, but thought better of it. Nidia rejoined —

"What in the world will we do when our time comes?"

"I am afraid you must make up your minds to some discomforts," replied Moseley. "One of the conditions of life in a new country, you know. But people are very decent in those parts, and I'm sure would do everything they could to assist you."

A little more conversation, and, lunch being over, the trio withdrew. John Ames, left alone at the table, was lost in all sorts of wild imaginings. Something seemed to have altered within him, and that owing to the proximity of this girl, a perfect stranger, whom three quarters of an hour ago he had never set eyes on. It was really very absurd, he told himself. But when a man has had fever, he is bound to be liable to fall a victim to any kind of absurdity. Fever! that was it – so he told himself.

Now, as he sat there, dreamily cracking almonds, he began to regret his reticence. The very turn of the conversation favoured him. He might have volunteered considerable information for the

benefit of the man who was going up-country, he suspected, for the first time. The conversation would have become general, and might have paved the way to an acquaintanceship. There was no necessity for him to have been so reticent. He had lived too long stowed away, he decided. It was high time he came out of his shell.

He had applied for and obtained his leave, and had come down there to spend it. The sea breezes blowing across the isthmus of the Cape Peninsula, the cool leafiness of the lovely suburbs, were as a very tonic after the hot, steamy, tropical glow of his remote home. But the effects of the fever, combined with a natural reserve, kept him from going much among people, and most of his time was spent alone.

"I wonder who that man is who sat at our table," Nidia Commerell was saying; for the trio were seated outside trying to converse amid the cackle and din of one of the livelier parties before referred to.

"He looked awfully gloomy," said Mrs Bateman.

"Did you think so, Susie? Now, I thought he looked nice. Perhaps he wasn't feeling well."

"He had a look that way, too," said Moseley. "Up-country man perhaps. Down here to throw off a touch of fever. I've seen them before."

"Poor fellow! That may have accounted for it," said Nidia. "Yes; he's quite nice-looking."

John Ames, meanwhile, was smoking a solitary pipe on the

balcony in front of his room, and his thoughts continued to run on this new – and to him, supremely foolish subject. Then he pulled himself together. He would get on his bicycle and roll down to Muizenberg for a whiff of the briny.

The afternoon was cloudless and still, and the spin along a smooth and, for the most part, level road exhilarating. A brisk stroll on the beach, the rollers tumbling lazily in, and he had brought his mind to other things – the affairs of his district, and whether the other man who was temporarily filling his place would be likely to make a mess of them or not, and how he would pull with Inglefield – whether Madúla had recovered from the sulky mood into which the action of Nanzicele had thrown him – and half a hundred matters of the sort. And so, having remounted his wheel, and being about halfway homeward again, he could own himself clear of the foolish vein in which he had set out, when – there whirled round the bend in the road two bicycles, the riders whereof were of the ornamental sex; in fact, the very two upon one of whom his thoughts had been chaotically running.

One quick glance from Nidia Commerell's blue eyes as they shot by, and John Ames was thrown right back into all that futile vein of meditation which he had only just succeeded in putting behind him. The offender, meanwhile, was delivering herself on the subject of him to her companion in no uncertain terms.

"Susie, that's the man who was sitting at our table. I think we'll get to know him. He looks nice, and, as he bikes, he'll come in

handy as escort to a pair of unprotected females."

"How do you know he'll appreciate the distinction you propose to confer upon him? He may not, you know. He looks reserved."

"Oh, he's only shy. Say something civil to him to-night at dinner. We'll soon get him out of his shell. He only wants a little judicious drawing out."

The other looked dubious. "I don't know," she said. "I'm not sure we hadn't better leave him alone. You see, I'm responsible for your good behaviour now, Nidia; and really it is a responsibility. I don't like being a party to adding this unfortunate man's to your string of scalps."

We regret to record that at this juncture Nidia's exceedingly pretty mouth framed but one word of one syllable. This was it:

"Bosh!"

"No, it isn't bosh," went on her friend, emphatically. "And, the worst of it is, they all take it so badly; and this one looks as if he'd be no exception to the general rule, but very much the reverse. I don't know what there is about you, but you really ought to be cloistered, my child; you're too dangerous to be at large."

"Susie, dry up! We'll exploit our interesting stranger this evening, that is, presently; and now I think we'd better turn, for after three weeks of the ship I can't ride any further with the slightest hope of getting back to-night."

The upshot of all this was that when the two sat down to dinner they gave John Ames the "Good evening" with just as much geniality as the frigidity of English manners would allow

to be manifested when outside England towards the only other occupant of the same table. It sufficed for its purposes, and soon the three were in converse.

"We passed each other on the road this evening," said John Ames. "It was some way out, and I wonder you got back in time. Are you fond of bicycling?"

"We simply live on our bikes when the weather is decent," replied Nidia. "This seems a good locality for it. The roads are splendid, aren't they?"

"Yes. I generally wheel down to Muizenberg or Kalk Bay for a puff of sea air. It's refreshing after the up-country heat."

"Sea air? But can you get to the sea so soon?" said Mrs Bateman, surprised.

"Oh yes. In less than an hour."

Both then began to enthuse about the sea, after the British method, which was the more inexplicable considering they had just had three weeks of it, and that viewed from its very worst standpoint—*upon* it, to wit. They must go there to-morrow. Was it easy to find the way? And so forth. What could John Ames do but volunteer to show it them? – which offer was duly accepted. Things were now upon a good understanding.

"Do they ride bikes much up-country – I think you said you were from up-country, did you not?" said Nidia, artlessly, with that quick lift of the eyelids.

"Oh yes, a good deal. But it's more for the hard practical purpose of getting from one place to another than just riding

about for fun. It strikes one though, if one has any imagination, as a sample of the way in which this aggressive civilisation of ours wedges itself in everywhere. You are right away in the veldt, perhaps only just scared away a clump of sable or roan antelope, or struck the fresh spoor of a brace of business-like lions, when you look up, and there are two fellows whirring by on up-to-date bikes. You give each other a passing shout and they are gone."

"Yes. It is a contrast, if one has an imagination," said Nidia. "But not everybody has. Don't you think so?"

"Certainly. But when a man lives a good deal alone, and sees comparatively little of his kind, it is apt to stimulate that faculty."

Nidia looked interested. The firm, quiet face before her, the straight glance of the grey eyes, represented a character entirely to her liking, she decided. "Is it long since you came out?" she asked.

"Well, in the sense you mean I can't be said to have come out at all, for I was born and bred out here – in Natal, at least. But I have been in England."

"Really? I thought you were perhaps one of the many who had come out during the last few years."

"Am I not colonial enough?" said John Ames, with a quiet laugh.

"N-no. At least, I don't mean that – in fact, I don't know what I do mean," broke off Nidia, with a perfectly disarming frankness.

"Do you know Bulawayo at all?"

The diversion came from the third of the trio.

"Oh yes; I have just come from up that way."

"Really. I wonder if you ever met my husband. He is a mining engineer. Bateman our name is."

John Ames thought.

"The name doesn't seem altogether unknown to me," he said. "The fact is I am very seldom in Bulawayo. My district lies away out in the wilds, and very wild indeed it is."

"What sort of a place is Bulawayo?"

"Oh, a creditable township enough, considering that barely three years ago it was a vast savage kraal, and, barring a few traders, there wasn't a white man in the country."

"But isn't it full of savages now?" struck in Nidia.

"Yes; there are a good few – not right around Bulawayo, though. Are you likely to be going up there?"

"We are, a little later," replied Mrs Bateman. "This is fortunate. You will be able to tell us all about it."

"With pleasure. I shall be too happy to give you any information I can."

"Is it safe up there?" said Nidia. "Is there no fear of those dreadful savages rising some night and killing us all?"

Unconsciously the official reserve came over John Ames. He had more than once predicted to himself and one or two confidential friends such a contingency as by no means outside the bounds of practical politics, almost invariably to be laughed at for his pains. Now he replied:

"Everything that precaution can do is against it. They are

carefully supervised; in fact, it is my own particular business to supervise a considerable section of them."

"Really? But how do you talk, to them? Can they talk English?"

John Ames smiled. "You forget I mentioned that I was raised in Natal."

"Of course. How stupid I am!" declared Nidia. "And so you know their language and have to look after them? Isn't it very exciting?"

"No; deplorably prosaic. There are points of interest about the work, though."

"And you keep them in order, and know all that's going on?"

"We try to; and I think on the whole we succeed fairly well."

But at that very moment Shiminya the sorcerer was dooming to death two persons, and filling with seditious venom the minds of three chiefs of importance within the speaker's district.

Chapter Six.
About some Dallying

John Ames was beginning to enjoy his leave, and that actively.

At first he had done so in a negative kind of way. It was pleasant to have nothing to do, and plenty of time to do it in, to rise in the morning and know that until bedtime at night he had only to please himself and take no thought for anything whatever. He had a few acquaintance in the neighbourhood, more or less busy people whose avocations kept them in Cape Town throughout the working day, and so was mostly thrown upon his own resources. This, however, was not without its advantages, for the change had hardly benefited him much as yet, and he was conscious of a sort of mental languor which rendered him rather disinclined than otherwise for the society of his fellows. He liked to mount his bicycle and spin for miles along the smooth level roads, beneath the oak and fir shade, the towering wall of mountain glimpsed ever and anon athwart the trees; or, gaining the nearest point of sea shore, lie on the beach for hours, watching the rollers come tumbling in, and the revels of bathers skipping amid the surf. Hitherto he had been content to do all this alone, now he was not; and the name of the agency which had effected this change was Nidia Commerell.

Nearly a fortnight has gone by since we introduced that

entrancing personality to the reader's notice; and whatever effects the same had had upon John Ames, one at any rate was certain, viz. a conviction that it was not good to be alone.

They had seen a good deal of each other within that time. Nidia had carried out to the full her expressed intention of using him as an escort, and he, for his part, had gladly welcomed the *rôle*, and efficiently discharged it; and whether it was along bicycle ride, or a more remote expedition by rail, or a scramble up the Devil's Peak, that commended itself to the two ladies for the day's programme, there was John Ames in sure and faithful attendance. It did him good, too. There was an ingredient in the tonic which was stimulating, life-giving indeed, and now in this daily companionship he felt that life was worth living. Decidedly he had begun to enjoy his leave.

"Well, Susie, wasn't I justified in my prediction?" said Nidia to her friend, as they were dressing for dinner after one of these expeditions.

"Which prediction? You make so many."

"Concerning John Ames," – for so they had got into the way of designating him when alone together.

"I said he looked as if he were nice, and also that he would come in handy as an escort for two unprotected females. Well, he is both. Isn't he?"

"Yes; he is a remarkably well-mannered, pleasant man."

"With more than two ideas in his head?"

"Yes; he can talk intelligently on any subject, and if he knows

nothing about it won't pretend to."

"As is the case with the average turned-out-of-a-bandbox, eyeward-twisting-moustache type of Apollo one usually encounters in one's progress through this vale of woe," supplied Nidia, with an airy laugh.

"That holds good, too. But, gracious Heavens, child, don't pile up your adjectives in that mountainous fashion, or you'll reflect no credit on my most careful training and tuition."

"All rights Govvie," cried Nidia, with a peal of merry laughter – the point of the allusion being that prior to her marriage Susie Bateman had been a combination of companion and governess to the girl she was now chaperoning; in fact, was a distant relation to boot. "But the said careful training was such a long time ago. I'm beginning to forget it."

"Long time ago!"

"Yes, it was. In the days of my youth. I am in my twenty-fourth year, remember. Is that nothing?"

"Of course it's nothing. But – what were we talking about?"

"Oh, John Ames, as usual."

"As usual – yes. But, Nidia, isn't it rather rough on the man? He's sure to end by falling in love with you."

Again the girl laughed, but this time she changed colour ever so slightly.

"To *end* by it! That's not very complimentary to my transcendent fascinations, O Susie. He ought to begin by it. But – to be serious – perfectly serious – he isn't that sort."

"I'm not by any means sure. Why should you think so?"

"No signs. He'd have hung out signals long ago if he'd been trending that way. They all do. The monotony of the procedure is simply wearisome."

"Nidia, you are really a very dreadful child. Your talk is absolutely shocking to the ears of a well brought up British female."

"Can't help it. If a series of idiots come to labour under the impression that life outside my presence – ten days after first becoming aware of my existence – is totally unendurable, where am I to blame? I can't scowl at them, and nothing short of that will restrain them. Now, the reason why I rather like this man is that he has so far shown no signs of mental aberration."

She meant it all. For one so plenteously, so dangerously, dowered as far as the other sex was concerned, Nidia Commerell was strangely unromantic. In her allusion to the rapidity with which the average male succumbed to her charms there was no exaggeration. She seemed to possess the art of conquest sudden and complete, yet, in reality, art it was not, for she had not a shadow of the flirt in her composition. The very artlessness of her frank unstudied demeanour constituted, in fact, her most formidable armament. But she refused to see why she should avoid the other sex simply because a large percentage of its members were weak enough to fall in love with her upon no sort of warranty or provocation. There was no affectation, either, in her declaration that the unanimity wherewith they did so candidly

bored her.

"Just as I begin to like a man," she would plaintively declare, "and find him of some use, he gets serious, gloomy, and spoils everything." And for all her airiness on the subject, she was not entirely without a qualm lest John Ames should follow suit, and him she had more than begun to like very much indeed. The roar of a truly demoniacal gong cut short further discussion of the subject, by warning them that it was time to go down and join the object of it at table. Him they found in an amused state.

"Rather fun," he said. "Some fellow has been going for that most cherished and firmly rooted institution, the great Cape fish-horn, in a letter to the evening *Argus*. He doesn't see how a civilised community at the end of the nineteenth century can tolerate their day and night alike being made hideous by an unending procession of dirty Malays blaring weirdly, wildly, deafeningly through a 'yard of tin;' and, for the matter of that, no more do I. Look, here it is" – handing the paper across to Mrs Bateman.

The latter, like most high-featured people, was of censorious habit. "Yes; it's amusing," she said. "But there are some people who are never happy unless they are finding fault. I suppose even these poor Malays must earn their living."

"No fear of their not doing that," rejoined Ames. "Why, they are the most well-to-do crowd on this peninsula. I take it the writer's point is they could earn it without making life intolerable to the world at large."

At which remark, ever so faint a droop of the mouth-corners changed the visage of a silent, middle-aged individual seated at an adjacent table; but his back was towards them, and they couldn't see it. "Oh, nonsense," retorted Mrs Bateman, breezily. "People who can't stand a little noise ought to go and live by themselves on a desert island."

Here the droop on the lips of the silent one became a very pronounced sneer. "A fool of a woman, answering according to her folly," he thought.

"Let me see it," cried Nidia. "Yes; it is a good joke, and perfectly true, too. I know I've wished that same hideous noise anywhere times out of number. I quite agree – it is amazing how they tolerate it. I wonder who the writer is. Positively I'd like to send him an anonymous letter of cordial thanks."

This time the silent one laughed to himself, heartily and undisguisedly.

"Write it to the *Argus* instead and agree with him; that'll do just as well," said John Ames. "The fact of the matter is that the Malay vote is a power just here, and it would be about as easy to uproot Table Mountain itself as the diabolical snoek trumpet under discussion."

"No, I don't agree with you in the least, Susie," declared Nidia. "I think unnecessary racket ought to be put down with a stern hand. Don't you remember all that abominable cannon nuisance when we were in the Bernese Oberland? You didn't like that any more than I did. Just fancy, Mr Ames. Some of the most

picturesque turnings of the road, almost wherever we went, were tenanted by a miscreant volunteering to let off a horrid cannon for half a franc – to raise an echo."

"I should have felt like offering him a whole one not to raise it," was the reply. "But the noble Switzer was shrewd enough to appraise his clients at their correct value. The English are never quite happy unless they are making a noise, unless it is when they are listening to one."

"Yes; aren't they?" cried Nidia. "You see it in their fondness for banging doors and talking at the top of their voices on every landing at all hours of the day and night, and throwing their boots about and pounding up and down for hours over somebody else's head, in a house full of other people."

The silent one hearkened approvingly. "That's no fool of a girl," he was saying to himself.

"I know," replied John Ames. "And, talking about that stumping overhead trick, if you were wantonly to knock a cripple off his crutch you would be voted the greatest brute on earth. Yet that same cripple will go into the room above yours, and, as you say, pound up and down for hours, or perhaps let fall that same crutch with a mighty bang upon the floor, totally callous to the possibility of there being some unfortunate wight underneath with shattered nerves, and generally seedy, and who would give his soul for a square night's rest. No; if you expect from other people any of the consideration they expect from you, you are simply laughed at for a fool, and a selfish one at that."

"Oh, well, in life we have to give and take, I suppose," remarked the censorious one, with striking originality.

John Ames smiled. He had an idea as to the sort of giving and taking this masterful person would be likely to practise, save in one quarter, that is; for he had not spent the time he had in the society of the two without detecting that she had at any rate one soft place, and that was Nidia Commerell. So he agreed easily, and the talk drifted on to other matters.

It was pleasant out in the moonlight. The elder of the two ladies had pronounced herself tired when Nidia, whose freshness nothing seemed to impair, suggested strolling. John Ames was rather inclined to be silent as they wandered on, the light of the southern moon flooding down through the overshadowing firs, the balmy stillness of the night broken by distant snatches of shrill laughter and the chatter of voices from squalid coloured loafers on the main road. He was realising with a sort of pang at the heart how all this time would soon be behind him, as in a flash, only as an episode to look back to. The girl, noting his silence, was wondering whether it was a prelude to what she had airily termed "hoisting the signals," and, thus conjecturing, was surprised at herself and her lack of the usual eagerness to avoid them.

"You are feeling much better than when you came down, are you not, Mr Ames?" she said softly.

"Ever so much. I shall go back quite set up."

Her practised ear detected the slightest suspicion of melancholy in the tone, while admiring the strength which

controlled it.

"What a strange life you must have to lead up there!" she went on; for he had told her a good deal about himself during the time of their acquaintanceship.

"Oh yes. It gets monotonous at times. But then, I take it, everything does."

"But it is such a useful life. And you have helped to open up the country, too."

"Not I. That is left to other people."

"But you were with the first expedition, and so of course you helped. I don't wonder you pioneers are proud of the part you took in extending the Empire. Isn't that the correct newspaper phrase? At any rate, it sounds something big."

John Ames smiled queerly. He was not especially proud of the extension of the Empire; he had seen a few things incidental to that process which had killed within him any such incipient inflation.

"Oh yes; there's a good deal of sound about most of the doings of 'the Empire,' but there – I must not get cynical on that head, because the said extension is finding me in bread and cheese just now, and I must endeavour to be 'proud of' that."

"You must have great responsibilities holding the position you do. Tell me, are you able to throw them off while you are away, or do you lie awake sometimes at night wondering if things are going right?"

"Oh, I try not to bother my head about them. It's of no use

taking a holiday and thinking about 'shop' all the while. Besides, the man who is in my place is all there. He has been at it as long as I have; and if there is one thing I may say without conceit I do know – in fact, both of us know – it is the wily native and his little ways."

Ah, John Ames, so you thought, and so thought many others in those boding days! But at this moment the man who is in your place is drinking whisky and water and smoking pipes with the Police sub-inspector in a circular hut on the Sikumbutana, and you are dallying beneath a radiant moon upon a fir-shaded road at Wynberg, with more than one lingering glance into the eyes of the sweet-faced, soft-voiced girl beside you. But one could almost read a leering derisive grin into the face of the cold moon, for that moon is now looking down upon that which would give both yourself and 'the man in your place' something very serious to think about and to do. It is looking down upon – let us see what.

Chapter Seven.
The Voice of Umlimo

It is probable that the Matopo Hills, in Southern Matabeleland, are, as a freak of Nature, unique on the earth's surface.

Only a vast upheaval – whether through the agency of fire or of water, let the geologists determine and quarrel over – can have produced such a bizarre result. A very sea of granite waves, not smooth and rolling, but piled in gigantic, rugged heaps; cones of immense boulders, rising to the height of many hundred feet; titanic masses of castellated rock; slab-like *mesas* and smooth-headed domes all jumbled together arbitrarily side by side; it is as though at some remote age a stupendous explosion had torn the heart out of earth's surface, and heaving it on high with irresistible force, had allowed it to fall and settle as it would. Colossal boulders, all on end, anyhow, forming dark holes and caves, lead up to the summits of these marvellous cones; and in such clefts wild vegetation finds abundant anchorage – the acacia and wild fig and mahobo-hobo. Here a tall rock pinnacle, balancing upon its apex a great stone, which, to the unthinking eye, a mere touch would send crashing from its airy resting-place where it has reposed for ages and ages beyond all memory; there a solid square granite block the size of a castle, riven

from summit to base as completely and smoothly as a bisected cheese. Grim baboons, of large size and abnormal boldness, bark threateningly from the ledges, and every crag is a perfect rookery of predatory birds – hawks and buzzards, and kites and carrion crows – soaring and wheeling beneath the blue of the heavens. Valleys, narrow and winding, intersect this chaotic mass, swampy withal in parts, and harbouring reedy water-holes where, beneath the broad leaves and fair blossoms of radiant lilies, the demon crocodile lurks unsuspected. Great crater-like hollows, too – only to be entered by a single way, and that a very staircase of rocks – the whole a vast and forbidding series of natural fastnesses, which even now have been thoroughly penetrated by but few whites, and at that time by the conquerors of the country not at all.

Evening is drawing down upon this rugged wilderness. The sun has gone off the world, but a rosy afterglow still tinges the piled boulders or smooth, balanced crags rearing up above the feathery foliage of acacia; and, save for an odd one here and there, the wheeling birds of prey have sought their inaccessible roosting-places. But such as have not – for these an unwonted sight lies beneath. The deathlike solitude of each winding valley is disturbed by an unwonted life – the life of men.

On they come – dark forms in straggling lines – threescore here, two there; a dozen further back, even as many as a hundred together. And they are converging upon one point. This is a hollow, the centre of which forms an open space – once under cultivation – the sides a perfect ruin of shattered rocks.

On they come – line upon line of dark savages – advancing mostly in silence, though now and then the hum of a marching song, as some fresh group arrives at the place, rises upon the stillness in clear cadence. None are armed, unless a stick apiece and a small shield can be defined as weapons; and there is a curiously subdued note pervading the assembly – an elated look on some of those dark faces, a thoughtful one on others – but one of expectancy upon all.

Each party as it arrives squats upon the ground awaiting the next. And still the tread of advancing feet, the hum of approaching voices, and presently the open space is filled with dark humanity to the number of several hundreds. During the period of waiting, chiefs, leaving their own following, greet each other, and draw apart for converse among themselves. Suddenly, and with startling nearness, there echoes forth from a crag overhead a loud resonant bark. It is answered by another and another. A volley of deep-voiced ejaculation, first startled – for their feelings are wrought up – then mirthful, arises from scores of throats. A troop of baboons has discovered this human concourse, and, secure in a lofty vantage ground, is vocally resenting its presence.

But such levity is promptly checked by a sense of the serious nature of the gathering. It is clear that all are assembled who mean to come. And now the gloom lightens with amazing rapidity, as the broad disc of a full moon sails majestically forth above the jumble of serrated crags; and to it turns that sea of wild

dark faces stamped with an unwonted expectation and awe, for as yet the bulk of those present have but a dim idea of the end and object of this mysterious convention.

In the lamplike glow of this new light faces are clearly discernible, and amid the group of chiefs are those of Madúla, and Zazwe, and Sikombo, and Umlugula, and several others holding foremost rank among their tribesmen. On this occasion, however, they are not foremost, for it is upon another group that the main interest and expectation centres.

The members of this are decked out in the weird array of sorcerers, are hung around with entrails and claws, mysterious bunches of "charms," white cowhair and feather adornments, and the grinning skulls of wild animals. One alone is destitute of all ornamentation, but the grim hawk-like countenance, the snaky ferocity of the cruel stare, the lithe stealthiness of movement, stamps this man with an individuality all his own, and he is none other than Shiminya. These are the "Abantwana 'Mlimo," the hierarchy of the venerated Abstraction, the "Children of Umlimo." Of them there are perhaps two score. They are seated in a circle, droning a song, or rather a refrain, and, in the midst, Shiminya walks up and down discanting. The chiefs occupy a subsidiary place to-night, for the seat of the oracle is very near, and these are the mouthpieces of the oracle.

By degrees the assembly gathers around. Voices are hushed. All attention is bent upon these squatting, droning figures. Suddenly they rise, and, bursting through the surrounding ranks,

which promptly open to give them way, start off at a run. The crowd follows as though magnet drawn. But the run soon slows down to a kind of dancing step; and, following, the dark assemblage sweeps up the valley bottom, the long dry grass crackling as the excited multitude crushes its way through. On the outskirts of the column a great venomous snake, disturbed, trodden on, rears its hideous head, and, quick as lightning, strikes its death-dealing fangs into the legs of two of the crowd, but in the exaltation of the hour no thought is given to these. They may drop out and die; none can afford to waste time over them.

For nearly an hour the advance continues, the black mass pouring, like ants, over every obstacle – over stones, rocks, uprooted tree-trunks – winding through a tortuous valley bottom, the granite crags, towering aloft in their immensity, looking down as though in cold scornful indifference upon this pigmy outburst of mere human excitement, and then the way opens, becoming comparatively clear. The "Abantwana 'Mlimo" slacken their pace, and then the whole body is brought to a halt.

The spot is a comparatively open one save for the long dry grass. In front is a belt of acacias; but behind, and towering above this, there rises an immense mass of solid granite, its apex about two hundred feet above the bottom of the hollow – a remarkable pile, smoother and more compact than the surrounding crags, and right in the centre of its face is a black spot about twelve feet square.

The blackness, however, is the effect of gloom. This spot is

the mouth of a hole or cave.

In dead silence now the multitude crouches, all eyes fixed expectantly upon the black yawning mouth. Yet, what can appear there within, for the rock face is inaccessible to any save winged creatures? A cleft, passing the hole, traverses obliquely the entire pile, but as unavailable for purposes of ascent as the granite face itself. No living being can climb up thence. Another vertical crack descends from above. That, too, is equally unavailable. Yet, with awe-stricken countenances, the whole assembly, crouching in semicircular formation, are straining their eyeballs upon the gaping aperture.

In front are the hierarchs of the grim Abstraction. If here indeed is the home of the latter it is well chosen, for a scene of more utter wildness and desolation than this weird, granite-surrounded fastness is hardly imaginable. The great round moon, floating on high, seems to the impressionable multitude to lower and spread – almost to burn.

And now the "Abantwana 'Mlimo" rise from their squatting posture, and, forming into a double line, their faces lifted towards the black, gaping hole, begin to sing. Their chant rolls forth in a regular rhythm, but the usual accompaniment of the stamping of feet is at first absent. But the song, the wild savage harmony of voices fitting well into their parts, is more tuneful, more melodious, than most barbaric outbursts of the kind. Its burden may be rendered somewhat in this wise —

"Voice from the air, Lighten our way! Word of the Wise, Say!

shall we slay? Voice of the Great, Speaking from gloom; Say! shall we wait Darkness of doom?”

The echoes ring out upon the still night air, rolling in eddies of sound among the granite crags. The company of sorcerers, every nerve and muscle at its highest tension, softly move their feet to the time, as again and again they repeat their awesome invocation, and with each repetition the sound gathers volume, until it reaches a mighty roar. The multitude, stricken motionless with the awe of a great expectation, gaze upward with protruding eyeballs, awaiting a reply. It comes.

The singing of the Abantwana ’Mlimo has ceased. There is a silence that may be felt, only broken by a strained breathing from hundreds of throats. Then, from the black cave, high above, sounds forth a voice – a single voice, but of amazing volume and power, the voice of the Great Abstraction – of the Umlimo himself. And the answer is delivered in the same rhythm as the invocation —

“Dire is the scourge, Sweeping from far: Bed is the spear, Warming for war. Burned is the earth, Gloom in the skies; Nation’s new birth – Manhood arise!”

Strong and firm the Voice rolls forth, booming from that black portal as with a thunder note – clear to a marvel in its articulation, cold, remorseless in the decision of its darkly prophesying utterance. Indescribably awe-inspiring as it pours forth its trumpet notes upon the dead silence, small wonder that to the subdued eager listeners it is the voice of a god. Thrice is

the rhythm repeated, until every word has burned deep into their minds as melted lead into a beam of soft-grained wood.

And now in the silence which ensues there steps forth from the ranks of the Abantwana 'Mlimo one man. Standing alone a little in front of the rest, he faces upward to the great cave overhead. In the absence of weird adornment, and with the moon upon his bird-like countenance, stands revealed Shiminya.

"Great Great One! Voice of the Wise!" he cries. "Thy children hear thee. They are brought even unto death. The scourge which Makiwa has brought upon them strikes hard. It is striking their cattle down by scores already. There will be no more left."

There is a pause. With outstretched arms in the moonlight, the mediator stands motionless, awaiting the answer. It comes: —

"There will first be no more Makiwa."

A heave of marvel and suppressed excitement sways the crowd. There is no misunderstanding this oracular pronouncement, for it is in the main what all are there to hear. Shiminya goes on.

"Oh, Great Great One, the land is burned dry for lack of rain, and thy children die of hunger. Will the land never again yield corn?"

"Makiwa has laid his hand upon it;" and the dull, hollow, remorseless tone, issuing from the darkness, now seems swept by a very tempest of hate, then replies, "Remove the hand!"

Sticks are clutched and shields shaken to the accompaniment of a deep growl of wrath forced from between clenched teeth.

"Remove the hand!" runs in a humming murmur through the multitude. "Ah, ah! Remove the hand!"

Again, with hollow boom, the Voice rolls forth.

"Even the very skies are darkening. Behold!"

Every head is quickly jerked back.

"*Whou*!"

Just the one ejaculation, volleyed from every throat, and in it there is but one consent, one expression, that of marvel and quaking dread. For in the tense excitement of awaiting the utterances of the oracle none have noticed that the flooding light of the moon has been gradually fading to darkness, albeit not a cloud is in the heavens. Now, as they look up, lo! the silvern orb is half covered with a black shadow. Onward it steals, creeping further and further, until the broad disc is entirely shrouded. A weird unnatural darkness lies upon the earth.

In silent awe the superstitious savages gaze blankly upon the phenomenon. There are those among them who have beheld it before, and to such under ordinary circumstances it would be looked upon with little concern. Now, however, worked up as they are, it is different. There are even some among them who have heard of the darkening of the sun during the first struggle of the great parent race of Zulu against the white invasion. Then it presaged great slaughter of their white enemies. And, as though reading the thoughts of such, the awful voice of the Great Abstraction broke in upon the oppressive, unnatural gloom —

"Children of Matyobane, (Father of Umzilikazi, founder and

first king of the Matabelo nation), hearken. When Makíwa thought to eat up the mighty stock from which ye are sprung the very sun withdrew his light, and the plains between Isandhlwana and Umzinyati were red with the blood of Makiwa. Such as were not slain fled from the land. For the children of Zulu the sun grew black. For the children of Matyobane the moon. Lo, the blackening of the moon is the hiding of the nation, crushed, blackened, beneath the might of Makiwa. But the blackness does not last; so is the foot of Makiwa removed from the neck of the people of Matyobane. Behold!"

Every face, which has been turned towards the bark mouth of the oracle, again looks skyward. The black disc is moving back. The outer rim of the broad moon once more shines forth in a shaft of light. Broader and broader does this become, the strained eyeballs of the wrought-up savages bent upon it with concentrated stare. Then the Abantwana 'Mlimo, falling prone to the earth, once more raise the chant, and this time the whole multitude joins, in a great rolling volume of chorus: —

"Burned is the earth, Gloom in the skies; Nation's new birth – Manhood arise!"

In wild uncontrollable excitement the multitude watches the now fast lightening orb; then, when the shadow has entirely left it, shining in bright, clear radiance as before, all faces are once more turned upward to the great granite pile, looming huge against the stars, its front a dull grey in the moonlight. Once more is the silence dead – expectant.

“Oh, Great Great One!” cries Shiminya, standing with arms outstretched, “we behold a nation’s new birth. But the time, O Word of the Wise? The time?”

“The time!” And now the Voice rolled from the black cavern mouth in a very thunder roar that reverberated among the mighty granite walls in a shock of echo that struck the entranced auditors speechless. “The time, Children of Matyobane? The time? *Before next moon is dead*.”

Chapter Eight.
The Parting of the Ways

John Ames was seated beneath the verandah at Cogill's Hotel with a blue official document in his hand and a very disgusted look upon his face.

The former accounted for the latter inasmuch as it was the direct cause thereof. In cold official terminology it regretted the necessity of abridging the period of his leave, and in terse official terminology requested that he would be good enough to return to his post with all possible dispatch.

He looked up from his third reading of this abominable document, and his brows were knitted in a frown. He looked at the thick plumbago hedge opposite, spangled with its pale blue blossoms, at the smooth red stems of the tall firs, up again at the deep blue of the cloudless sky overhead, then down once more upon the detestable missive, and said: —

"Damn!"

John Ames was not addicted to the use of strong language. Now, however, he reckoned the occasion justified it.

"With all possible dispatch." That would mean taking his departure that night – that very night. And here he was, ready and waiting to do the usual escort duty, this time for a long day out on the bicycle. If he were to start that night it would mean

exactly halving that long day. With a savage closing of the hand he crushed the official letter into a blue ball, and once more ejaculated —

"Damn!"

"Sssh!"

Thereat he started. Nidia Commerell was standing in the doorway right beside him, drawing on a pair of suede gloves, her blue eyes dancing with mirth. She was clad in a bicycle skirt and light blouse, and wore a plain white sailor hat.

"Sssh! *You* using naughty swear words? I *am* surprised at you!"

The smile which rippled brightly from the mobile lips showed, however, that the surprise, if any, was not of a derogatory nature. John Ames laughed ruefully.

"I'm sorry. But really it was under great provocation. I've received marching orders."

"No? Not really? Oh, how disgusting!"

The utterance was quick. His eyes were full upon her face. How would she receive the communication? Was that really a flash of consternation, of regret, that swept over it?

"When must you go?" she continued, still, it seemed to him, speaking rather quickly.

"I ought to start by to-night's train" – then, breaking off – "Where is Mrs Bateman? Is she ready?"

"We shall have to go without her. She can't come – says she's getting headachy."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!"

Nidia had to turn away her head to avoid a splutter outright. Never had she heard words intended to be sympathetic uttered in tones of more jubilant relief. To herself she said: "You are a sad tarradiddler, John Ames." To him she said, "Yes; it's a pity, isn't it?" He, for his part, was thinking that this time the official order need not be interpreted too literally. It had plainly intimated that a state of things had transpired which necessitated the presence of every official at his post, but this time the state of things could dispense with his adjusting hand for twenty-four hours longer. "With all possible dispatch." Well, to start that night under the circumstances would not be possible, under others it would. Throughout the whole day Nidia would be alone with him, and he meant that day to be one that he should remember.

They started. At first the exhilarating spin along the smooth fir-shaded road, together with the consciousness that the day was only beginning, caused him partly to forget that most unwelcome recall. They had arranged to use by-roads where the riding was good, and, taking the train at Mowbray, proceed to Cape Town, and ride out thence as far beyond Camp's Bay as they felt inclined. Now, as they spun along through the sunlit air, between leafy gardens radiant with bright flowers and the piping of gladsome birds, the noble mountain wall away on the left towering majestic though not stern and forbidding, its cliffs softened in the summer haze, its slopes silvered with the beautiful wattle, and great seas of verdure – the bright green of oak foliage throwing out in relief the darker pine and blue eucalyptus –

surging up against its mighty base, the very contrast afforded by this glorious scene of well-nigh Paradisical beauty, and the mental vision of a hot steamy wilderness, not unpicturesque, but depressing in the sense of remote loneliness conveyed, was borne forcibly home to the mind of one of them. It was a question of hours, and all would have fled. He grew silent. Depression had reasserted itself.

Yet, was it merely a sense of the external contrast which was afflicting him? He had traversed this very scene before, and not once or even twice only. He had always admired it, but listlessly. But now? The magic wand had been waved over the whole. But why transform the ordinary and mundane into a paradise for one who was to be suffered but one glimpse therein, and now was to be cast forth? A paradise – ah yes; but a fool's paradise, he told himself bitterly.

"Well?"

He started. The query had come from Nidia, and was uttered artlessly, innocently, but with a spice of mischief.

"Yes? I was wondering?" she went on.

"What were you wondering?"

"Oh, nothing! Only – er – as it is rather – er – slow for me, don't you think so – supposing you give me an inkling of the problem that is absorbing you so profoundly? You haven't said a word for at least ten minutes. And I like talking."

"I am so sorry. Yes; I might have remembered that. How shall I earn forgiveness?"

“By telling me exactly what you were thinking about, absolutely and without reservations. On no other conditions, mind.”

“Oh, only what a nuisance it is being called away just now.”

The tone was meant to be offhand, but the quick ear of Nidia was not so easy to deceive. When John Ames did look down into the bright laughing face it had taken an expression of sympathy, that with a quick bound of the heart he read for one that was almost tender.

“Yes. It is horrid!” she agreed. “You had a long time to run yet, hadn’t you?”

“Nearly a month.”

“I call it perfectly abominable. Can’t you tell them it is absolutely impossible to come back just now, that – er – in short, on no account can you?”

He looked at her. “Do *you* wish it?” was on his lips; but he left the words unsaid. He shook his head sadly.

“I’m afraid it can’t be done. You see, I am entirely at their beck and call. And then, from what they say, I believe they really do want me.”

“Yes; I was forgetting that. It is something, after all, to be of some use, as I was telling you the other night; do you remember?”

Did he remember? Was there one word she had ever said to him – one look she had ever given him – that he did not remember, that he had not thought of, and weighed, and pondered over, in the dark silent hours of the night, and in the

fresh, but far from silent, hours of early morning? No, indeed; not one.

"I remember every single word you have ever said to me," he answered gravely, with his full straight glance meeting hers. And then it was Nidia Commerell's turn to subside into silence, for there struck across her mind, in all its force, the badinage she had exchanged with her friend in the privacy of their chamber. If he had never before, as she defined it, "hung out the signals," John Ames was beginning to do so now – of that she felt very sure; yet somehow the thought, unlike in other cases, inspired in her no derision, but a quickened beating of the heart, and even a little pain, though why the latter she could not have told.

"Come," she said suddenly, consulting her watch, "we must put on some pace or we shall miss the train. We have some way to go yet."

On over the breezy flat of the Rondebosch camp-ground and between long rows of cool firs meeting overhead; then a sharp turn and a spin of straight road; and in spite of the recurring impediments of a stupidly driven van drawn right across the way, and a long double file of khaki-clad mounted infantry crossing at right angles and a foot's pace, they reached the station in time, but only just. Then, as Nidia, laughing and panting with the hurry of exertion she had been subjected to, flung herself down upon the cushion of the compartment, and her escort, having seen the bicycles safely stowed, at considerable risk to life and limb, thanks to a now fast-moving train, clambered in after her, both

felt that the spell which had been moving them to grave and serious talk was broken between them – for the present.

But later – when the midday glow had somewhat lost its force, when the golden lights of afternoon were painting with an even more vivid green the vernal slopes piling up to the great crags overhanging Camp's Bay, the same seriousness would recur, would somehow intrude and force its way in. They had left their bicycles at the inn where they had lunched, and had half strolled, half scrambled down to the place they now were in – a snug resting-place indeed, if somewhat hard, being an immense rock, flat-topped and solid. Overhead, two other boulders meeting, formed a sort of cave, affording a welcome shelter from the yet oppressive sun. Beneath, the ocean swell was raving with hoarse sullen murmur among the iron rocks, dark with trailing masses of seaweed, which seemed as a setting designed to throw into more gorgeous relief the vivid, dazzling blue of each little inlet. Before, the vast sheeny ocean plain, billowing to the ruffle of the soft south wind.

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