

Mitford Bertram

'Tween Snow and Fire: A Tale of the Last Kafir War



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Chapter One. The Episode of the White Dog

The buck is running for dear life.

The dog is some fifty yards behind the buck. The Kafir is about the same distance behind the dog, which distance he is striving right manfully to maintain; not so unsuccessfully, either, considering that he is pitting the speed of two legs against that of eight.

Down the long grass slope they course – buck, dog, and savage. The former, a game little antelope of the steinbok species, takes the ground in a series of long, flying leaps, his white tail whisking like a flag of defiance. The second, a tawny, black-muzzled grey-hound, stretching his snaky length in the wake of his quarry, utters no sound, as with arrow-like velocity he holds on his course, his cruel eyes gleaming, his jaws dripping saliva in pleasurable anticipation of the coming feast. The third, a fine, well-knit young Kafir, his naked body glistening from head to foot with red ochre, urges on his hound with an occasional shrill whoop of encouragement, as he covers the ground at a surprising pace in his free, bounding stride. He holds a knob-kerrie in his hand, ready for use as soon as the quarry shall be within hurling distance.

But of this there seems small chance at present. It takes a good dog indeed to run down an unwounded buck with the open *veldt* before him, and good as this one is, it seems probable that he will get left. Down the long grass slope they course, but the opposite acclivity is the quarry's opportunity. The pointed hoofs seem hardly to touch ground in the arrowy flight of their owner. The distance between the latter and the pursuing hound increases.

Along a high ridge overlooking this primitive chase grow, at regular intervals, several circular clumps of bush. One of these conceals a spectator. The latter is seated on horseback in the very midst of the scrub, his feet dangling loosely in the stirrups, his hand closed tightly and rather suggestively round the breech of a double gun – rifle and smooth bore – which rests across the pommel of his saddle. There is a frown upon his face, as, himself completely hidden, he watches intently the progress of the sport. It is evident that he is more interested than pleased.

For Tom Carhayes is the owner of this Kaffrarian stock run. In that part of Kaffraria, game is exceedingly scarce, owing to the presence of a redundant native population. Tom Carhayes is an ardent sportsman and spares no effort to protect and restore the game upon his farm. Yet here is a Kafir running down a buck under his very nose. Small wonder that he feels furious.

"That scoundrel Goníwe!" he mutters between his set teeth. "I'll put a bullet through his cur, and lick the nigger himself within an inch of his life!"

The offence is an aggravated one. Not only is the act of poaching a very capital crime in his eyes, but the perpetrator ought to be at that moment at least three miles away, herding about eleven hundred of his master's sheep. These he has left to take care of themselves while he indulges in an illicit buck-hunt. Small wonder indeed that his said master, at no time a good-tempered man, vows to make a condign example of him.

The buck has nearly gained the crest of the ridge. Once over it his chances are good. The pursuing hound, running more by sight than by scent, may easily be foiled, by a sudden turn to right or left, and a double or two. The dog is a long way behind now, and the spectator has to rise in his

stirrups to command a view of the situation. Fifty yards more and the quarry will be over the ridge and in comparative safety.

But from just that distance above there suddenly darts forth another dog – a white one. It has sprung from a patch of bush similar to that which conceals the spectator. The buck, thoroughly demoralised by the advent of this new enemy, executes a rapid double, and thus pressed back into the very jaws of its first pursuer has no alternative but to head up the valley as fast as its legs can carry it.

But the new hound is fresh, and in fact a better dog than the first one. He presses the quarry very close and needs not the encouraging shouts of his master, who has leaped forth from his concealment immediately upon unleashing him. For a few moments the pace is even, *then it decreases*. The buck seemed doomed.

And, indeed, such is the case anyhow. For, held in waiting at a given point, ready to be let slip if necessary, is a third dog. Such is the Kafir method of hunting. The best dog ever whelped is not quite equal, either in speed or staying power, to running down a full-grown buck in the open *veldt*, but by adopting the above means of hunting in relays, the chance are equalised. To be more accurate, the quarry has no chance at all.

On speeds the chase; the new dog, a tall white grey-hound of surprising endurance and speed, gaining rapidly; the other, lashed into a final spurt by the spirit of emulation, not far behind. The two Kafirs, stimulating their hounds with yells of encouragement, are straining every nerve to be in at the death.

The buck – terror and demoralisation in its soft, lustrous eyes – is heading straight for the spectator's hiding place. The latter raises his piece, with the intention of sending a bullet through the first dog as soon as it shall come abreast of his position; the shot barrel will finish off the other.

But he does not fire. The fact is, the man is simply shaking with rage. Grinding his teeth, he recognises his utter inability to hit a haystack at that moment, let alone a swiftly coursing grey-hound.

The chase sweeps by within seventy yards of his position – buck, dog, and Kafirs. Then another diversion occurs.

Two more natives rise, apparently out of the ground itself. One of these, poising himself erect with a peculiar springy, quivering motion, holds his kerrie ready to hurl. The buck is barely thirty yards distant, and going like the wind.

“Whigge – woof!” The hard stick hurls through the air – aimed nearly as far ahead of the quarry as the latter is distant from the marksman. There is a splintering crash, and a shrill, horrid scream – then a reddish brown shape, writhing and rolling in agony upon the ground. The aim of the savage has been true. All four of the buck's legs are snapped and shattered like pipe-stems.

The two hounds hurl themselves upon the struggling carcase, their savage snarls mingling with the sickening, half-human yell emitted by the terrified and tortured steinbok. The four Kafirs gather round their prey.

“*Sukainja!*” (“Get out, dog!”) cries one of them brutally, giving the white dog a dig in the ribs with the butt-end of his kerrie, and putting the wretched buck out of its agony by a blow on the head with the same. The hound, with a snarling yelp, springs away from the carcase, and lies down beside his fellow. Their flanks are heaving and panting after the run, and their lolling tongues and glaring eyes turn hungrily toward the expected prey. Their savage masters, squatted around, are resting after their exertions, chatting in a deep bass hum. To the concealed spectator the sight is simply maddening. He judges the time for swooping down upon the delinquents has arrived.

Were he wise he would elect to leave them alone entirely, and would withdraw quietly without betraying his presence. He might indeed derive some modicum of satisfaction by subsequently sjambokking the defaulting Goníwe for deserting his post, though the wisdom of that act of consolation may be doubted. But a thoroughly angry man is seldom wise, and Tom Carhayes forms no exception to the general rule. With a savage curse he breaks from his cover and rides furiously down upon the offending group.

But if he imagines his unlooked for arrival is going to strike terror to the hearts of those daring and impudent poachers, he soon becomes alive to his mistake. Two of them, including his own herd, are already standing. The others make no attempt to rise from their careless and squatting posture. All contemplate him with absolute unconcern, and the half-concealed and contemptuous grin spread across the broad countenance of his retainer in no wise tends to allay his fury.

“What the devil are you doing here, Goníwe?” he cries. “Get away back to your flock at once, or I’ll tan your hide to ribbons. Here. Get out of the light you two – I’m going to shoot that dog – unless you want the charge through yourselves instead.”

This speech, delivered half in Boer Dutch, half in the Xosa language, has a startling effect. The other two Kafirs spring suddenly to their feet, and all four close up in a line in front of the speaker, so as to stand between him and their dogs. Their demeanour is insolent and threatening to the last degree.

“*Whau ’mlúngu!*” (“Ho! white man!”) cries the man whose successful throw has brought down the quarry – a barbarian of herculean stature and with an evil, sinister cast of countenance. “Shoot away, *’mlúngu!* But it will not be only a dog that will die.”

The purport of this menace is unmistakable. The speaker even advances a step, shifting, as he does so, his assegais from his right hand to his left – leaving the former free to wield an ugly looking kerrie. His fellow-countrymen seem equally ready for action.

Carhayes is beside himself with fury. To be defied and bearded like this on his own land, and by four black scoundrels whom he has caught red-handed in the act of killing his own game! The position is intolerable. But through his well-nigh uncontrollable wrath there runs a vein of caution.

Were he to act upon his first impulse and shoot the offending hound, he would have but one charge left. The Kafirs would be upon him before he could draw trigger. They evidently mean mischief, and they are four to one. Two of them are armed with assegais and all four carry – in their hands the scarcely less formidable weapon – the ordinary hard-wood kerrie. Moreover, were he to come off victorious at the price of shooting one of them dead, the act would entail very ugly consequences, for although the frontier was practically in little short of a state of war, it was not actually so, which meant that the civil law still held sway and would certainly claim its vindication to the full.

For a moment or two the opposing parties stand confronting each other. The white man, seated on his horse, grips the breech of his gun convulsively, and the veins stand out in cords upon his flushed face as he realises his utter powerlessness. The Kafirs, their naked, muscular frames repulsive with red ochre, stand motionless, their savage countenances wreathed in a sneer of hate and defiance. There are scarcely ten yards between them.

The train is laid. It only needs the application of a spark to cause a magnificent flare-up. That spark is applied by the tall barbarian who has first spoken.

“*Au umlúngu!*” he cries in his great, sneering tones. “Go away. We have talked enough with you. Am I not Hlangani, a man of the House of Sarili, the Great Chief, and is not the white dog mine? Go away. *Suka!*” (“Get out.” Usually only employed toward a dog.)

Now whether through pure accident – in other words, the “sheer cussedness” of Fate – or whether it imagines that its master’s last word was a command to itself, the white dog at this juncture gets up, and leaving the protecting shadow of its master begins to slink away over the *veldt*. This and the swaggering insolence of the Kafir is too much for Carhayes. Up goes his piece: there is a flash and a report. The wretched hound sinks in his tracks without even a yelp, and lies feebly kicking his life away, with the blood welling from a great circular wound behind the shoulder. The poor beast has run down his last buck.

(Commonly known as Kreli – the paramount chief of all the Xosa tribes.)

The train is fired. Like the crouching leopard crawling nearer for a surer spring the great Kafir, with a sudden glide, advances to the horse’s head, and makes a quick clutch at the bridle. Had he succeeded in seizing it, a rapidly followed up blow from the deadly kerrie would have stretched the

rider senseless, if not dead, upon the *veldt*. But the latter is too quick for him. Jerking back his horse's head and driving in both spurs, he causes the animal to rear and plunge, thus defeating any attempt on the part of his enemies to drag him from the saddle, as well as widening the distance between himself and them.

"Stand back, you curs!" he roars, dropping his piece to a level with the chest of the foremost. "The first who moves another step shall be served the same as that brute of a dog!"

But the Kafirs only laugh derisively. They are shrewd enough to know that the civil law is still paramount, and imagine he dare not fire on them. A kerrie hurtles through the air with an ugly "whigge." Blind with fury, Carhayes discharges his remaining barrel full at the tall savage, who is still advancing towards him, and whose threatening demeanour and formidable aspect seems to warrant even that extreme step in self-defence. The Kafir falls.

Surprised, half cowed by this unlooked for contingency, the others pause irresolute. Before they can recover themselves a warning shout, close at hand, creates a diversion which seems likely to throw a new light on the face of affairs.

Chapter Two.

“You have Struck a Chief.”

“*Baléka* (Run), you dogs!” cried Carhayes, who had taken the opportunity of slipping a couple of fresh cartridges into his gun. “*Baléka*, or I’ll shoot the lot of you.”

He looked as if he meant it, too. The Kafirs, deeming discretion the better part of valour, judged it expedient to temporise.

“Don’t shoot again, *Baas!* (Master.) You have already killed one man!” they said significantly.

“And I’ll kill four!” was the infuriated reply. “*Baléka*, do you hear – quick – sharp – at once, or you’re dead men!”

“Don’t do anything so foolish, Tom,” said a voice at his side, and a hand was stretched out as though to arrest the aim of the threatening piece. “For God’s sake, remember. We are not at war – yet.”

“That be hanged!” came the rough rejoinder. “Anyway, we’ll give these fellows a royal thrashing. We are two to three – that’s good enough odds. Come along, Eustace, and we’ll lick them within an inch of their lives.”

“We’ll do nothing of the sort,” replied the other quietly and firmly. Then, with an anxiety in his face which he could not altogether conceal, he walked his horse over to the prostrate Kafir. But the latter suddenly staggered to his feet. His left shoulder was streaming with blood, and the concussion of the close discharge had stunned him. Even his would-be slayer looked somewhat relieved over this turn which affairs had taken, and for this he had to thank the plunging of his horse, for it is difficult to shoot straight, even point blank, with a restive steed beneath one, let alone the additional handicap of being in a white rage at the time.

Of his wound the Kafir took not the smallest notice. He stood contemplating the two white men with a scowl of bitter hatred deepening upon his ochre-besmeared visage. His three countrymen halted irresolute a little distance – a respectful distance, thought Carhayes with a sneer – in the background, as though waiting to see if their assistance should be required. Then he spoke:

“Now hear my words, you whom the people call Umlilwane. I know you, even though you do not know me – better for you if you did, for then you would not have wounded the sleeping lion, nor have aroused the anger of the hooded snake, who is swift to strike. Ha! I am Hlangani,” he continued, raising his voice to a perfect roar of menace, and his eyes blazed like live coals as he pointed to the shot wounds in his shoulder, now black and hideous with clotted blood. “I am Hlangani, the son of Ngcesiba, a man of the House of Gcaléka. What man living am I afraid of? Behold me here as I stand. Shoot again, Umlilwane – shoot again, if you dare. *Hau!* Hear my ‘word.’ You have slain my dog – my white hunting dog, the last of his breed – who can outrun every other hunting dog in the land, even as the wind outstrippeth the crawling ox-wagon, and you have shed my blood, the blood of a chief. You had better first have cut off your right hand, *for it is better to lose a hand than one’s mind.* This is my ‘word,’ Umlilwane – bear it in memory, *for you have struck a chief* – a man of the House of Gcaléka.”

(Umlilwane: “Little Fire” – Kafirs are fond of bestowing nicknames. This one referred to its bearer’s habitually short temper.)

“Damn the House of Gcaléka, anyway,” said Carhayes, with a sneer as the savage, having vented his denunciation, stalked scowlingly away with his compatriots. “Look here, *isidenge*,” (fool), he continued. “This is my word. Keep clear of me, for the next time you fall foul of me I’ll shoot you dead. And now, Eustace,” turning to his companion, “we had better load up this buck-meat and carry it home. What on earth is the good of my trying to preserve the game, with a whole location of these black scum not ten miles from my door?” he went on, as he placed the carcase of the unfortunate steinbok on the crupper of his horse.

“No good. No good, whatever, as I am always telling you,” rejoined the other decisively, “Kafir locations and game can’t exist side by side. Doesn’t it ever strike you, Tom, that this game-preserving mania is costing you – costing us, excessively dear.”

“Hang it. I suppose it is,” growled Carhayes. “I’ll clear out, *trek* to some other part of the country where a fellow isn’t overrun by a lot of worthless, lazy, red Kafirs. I wish to Heaven they’d only start this precious war. I’d take it out of some of their hides. Have some better sport than buck-hunting then, eh?”

“Perhaps. But there may be no war after all. Meanwhile you have won the enmity of every Kafir in Nteya’s and Ncanduku’s locations. I wouldn’t give ten pounds for our two hundred pound pair of breeding ostriches, if it meant leaving them here three days from now, that’s all.”

“Oh, shut up croaking, Eustace,” snarled Carhayes, “And by the way, who the deuce is this sweep Hlangani, and what is he doing on this side of the river anyway?”

“He’s a Gcaléka, as he said, and a petty chief under Kreli; and the Gaikas on this side are sure to take up his quarrel. I know them.”

“H’m. It strikes me you know these black scoundrels rather well, Eustace. What a queer chap you are. Now, I wonder what on earth has made you take such an interest in them of late.”

“So do I. I suppose, though, I find them interesting, especially since I have learned to talk with them pretty easily. And they are interesting. On the whole, I like them.”

Carhayes made no reply, unless an inarticulate growl could be construed as such, and the two men rode on in silence. They were distant cousins, these two, and as regarded their farming operations, partners. Yet never were two men more utterly dissimilar. Carhayes, the older by a matter of ten years, was just on the wrong side of forty – but his powerfully built frame was as tough and vigorous as in the most energetic days of his youth. He was rather a good looking man, but the firm set of his lips beneath the thick, fair beard, and a certain shortness of the neck, set forth his choleric disposition at first glance. The other was slightly the taller of the two, and while lacking the broad, massive proportions of his cousin, was straight, and well set up. But Eustace Milne’s face would have puzzled the keenest character reader. It was a blank. Not that there was aught of stupidity or woodenness stamped thereon. On the contrary, there were moments when it would light up with a rare attractiveness, but its normal expression was of that impassibility which you may see upon the countenance of a priest or a lawyer of intellect and wide experience, whose vocation involves an intimate and profoundly varied acquaintance with human nature in all its chequered lights and shades; rarely, however, upon that of one so young.

From the high ridge on which the two men were riding, the eye could wander at will over the rolling, grassy plains and mimosa-dotted dales of Kaffraria. The pure azure of the heavens was unflecked by a single cloud. The light, balmy air of this early spring day was as invigorating as wine. Far away to the southeast the sweep of undulating grass land melted into an indistinct blue haze – the Indian Ocean – while in the opposite direction the panorama was barred by the hump-like Kabousie Heights, their green slopes alternating with lines of dark forest in a straggling labyrinth of intersecting kloofs. Far away over the golden, sunlit plains, the white walls of a farmhouse or two were discernible, and here and there, rising in a line upon the still atmosphere, a column of grey smoke marked the locality of many a distant kraal lying along the spurs of the hills. So still, so transparent, indeed, was the air that even the voices of their savage inhabitants and the low of cattle floated faintly across the wide and intervening space. Beneath – against the opposite ridge, about half a mile distant, the red ochre on their clothing and persons showing in vivid and pleasing contrast against the green of the hillside, moved ten or a dozen Kafirs – men, women, and children. They stepped out in line at a brisk, elastic pace, and the lazy hum of their conversation drifted to the ears of the two white men so plainly that they could almost catch its burden.

To the younger of these two men the splendid vastness of this magnificent panorama, framing the picturesque figures of its barbarous inhabitants, made up a scene of which he never wearied, for

though at present a Kaffrarian stock farmer, he had the mind of a thinker, a philosopher, and a poet. To the elder, however, there was nothing noteworthy or attractive about it. We fear he regarded the beautiful rolling plains as so much better or worse *veldt* for purposes of stock-feeding, and was apt to resent the continued and unbroken blue of the glorious vault above as likely to lead to an inconvenient scarcity of rain, if not to a positive drought. As for the dozen Kafirs in the foreground, so far from discerning anything poetical or picturesque about them, he looked upon them as just that number of black scoundrels making their way to the nearest canteen to get drunk on the proceeds of the barter of skins flayed from stolen sheep – his own sheep among those of others.

As if to emphasise this last idea, cresting the ridge at that moment, they came in sight of a large, straggling flock. Straggling indeed! In twos and threes, in clumps of a dozen, and in clumps of fifty, the animals, though numbering but eleven hundred, were spread over nearly two miles of *veldt*. It was the flock in charge of the defaulting and contumacious Goníwe, who, however, having caught a glimpse of the approach of his two masters, might be descried hurriedly collecting his scattered charges. Carhayes ground his teeth.

“I’ll rip his black hide off him. I’ll teach him to let the sheep go to the devil while he hunts our bucks.” And gripping his reins he drove his spurs into his horse’s flanks, with fell intent toward the offending Kafir.

“Wait – wait!” urged the more prudent Eustace. “For Heaven’s sake, don’t give yourself away again. If you must lick the boy, wait until you get him – and the sheep – safe home this evening. If you give him beans now, its more than likely he’ll leave the whole flock in the *veldt* and won’t come back at all – not forgetting, of course, to drive off a dozen or two to Nteya’s location.”

There was reason in this, and Carhayes acquiesced with a snarl. To collect the scattered sheep was to the two mounted men a labour of no great difficulty or time, and with a stern injunction to Goníwe not to be found playing the fool a second time, the pair turned their horses’ heads and rode homeward.

Chapter Three.

Eanswyth

Anta's Kloof – such was the name of Tom Carhayes' farm – was situated on the very edge of the Gaika location. This was unfortunate, because its owner got on but poorly with his barbarous neighbours. They, for their part, bore him no good will either.

The homestead comprised a comfortable stone dwelling in one story. A high *stoep* and veranda ran round three sides of it, commanding a wide and lovely view of rolling plains and mimosa sprinkled kloofs, for the house was built on rising ground. Behind, as a background, a few miles distant, rose the green spurs of the Kabousie Heights. A gradual ascent of a few hundred feet above the house afforded a splendid view of the rugged and table-topped Kei Hills. And beyond these, on the right, the plains of Gcalékaland, with the blue smoke rising from many a clustering kraal. Yet soft and peaceful as was the landscape, there was little of peace just then in the mind of its inhabitants, white or brown, for the savages were believed to be in active preparation for war, for a concerted and murderous outbreak on a large scale, involving a repetition of the massacres of isolated and unprepared settlers such as characterised similar risings on former occasions; the last, then, happily, a quarter of a century ago.

Nearer, nearer to his western bed, dipped the sinking sun, throwing out long slanting darts of golden rays ere bringing to a close, in a flood of effulgent glory, the sweet African spring day. They fell on the placid surface of the dam, lying below in the kloof, causing it to shine like a sea of quicksilver. They brought out the vivid green of the willows, whose feathery boughs drooped upon the cool water. They blended with the soft, restful cooing of ring doves, swaying upon many a mimosa spray, or winging their way swiftly from the mealie lands to their evening roost and they seemed to impart a blithe gladness to the mellow shout of the hoopoe, echoing from the cool shade of yonder rugged and bush-clad kloof.

Round the house a dozen or so tiny ostrich chicks were picking at the ground, or disputing the possession of some unexpected dainty with a tribe of long-legged fowls. Quaint enough they looked, these little, fluffy balls, with their bright eyes, and tawny, spotted necks; frail enough, too, and apt to come off badly at the spur or beak of any truculent rooster who should resent their share of the plunder aforesaid. Nominally they are under the care of a small Kafir boy, but the little black rascal – his master being absent and his mistress soft hearted – prefers the congenial associations of yonder group of beehive huts away there behind the sheep kraals, and the fun of building miniature kraals with mud and three or four boon companions, so the ostrich chicks are left to herd themselves. But the volleying boom of their male parent, down there in the great enclosure, rolls out loudly enough on the evening air, and the huge bird may be described in all the glory of his jet and snowy plumage, with inflated throat, rearing himself to his full height, rolling his fiery eye in search of an adversary.

And now the flaming rays of the sinking sun have given place to a softer, mellower light, and the red afterglow is merging into the pearly grey of evening. The hillside is streaked with the dappled hides of cattle coming up the kloof, and many a responsive low greets the clamorous voices of the calves, shut up in the calf *hoek*, hungry and expectant. Then upon the ridge comes a white, moving mass of fleecy backs. It streams down the slope, raising a cloud of dust – guided, kept together, by an occasional kerrie deftly thrown to the right or left – and soon arrives at its nightly fold. But the herd is nonplussed, for there is no *Baas* there to count in. He pauses a moment, looks around, then drives the sheep into the kraal, and having secured the gate, throws his red kaross around him and stalks away to the huts.

Eanswyth Carhayes stood on the *stoep*, looking out for the return of her husband and cousin. She was very tall for a woman, her erect carriage causing her to appear even taller. And she was very beautiful. The face, with its straight, thoroughbred features, was one of those which, at first

sight, conveyed an impression of more than ordinary attractiveness, and this impression further acquaintance never failed to develop into a realisation of its rare loveliness. Yet by no means a mere animal or flower-like beauty. There was character in the strongly marked, arching brows, and in the serene, straight glance of the large, grey eyes. Further, there was indication that their owner would not be lacking in tact or fixity of purpose; two qualities usually found hand in hand. Her hair, though dark, was many shades removed from black, and of it she possessed a more than bountiful supply.

She came of a good old Colonial family, but had been educated in England. Well educated, too; thanks to which salutary storing of a mind eagerly open to culture, many an otherwise dull and unoccupied hour of her four years of married life – frequently left, as she was, alone for a whole day at a time – was turned to brightness. Alone? Yes, for she was childless.

When she had married bluff, hot-tempered Tom Carhayes, who was nearly fifteen years her senior, and had gone to live on a Kaffrarian stock farm, her acquaintance unanimously declared she had “thrown herself away.” But whether this was so or not, certain it is that Eanswyth herself evinced no sort of indication to that effect, and indeed more than one of the aforesaid acquaintance eventually came to envy her calm, cheerful contentment. To the expression of which sentiment she would reply with a quiet smile that she supposed she was cut out for a “blue-stockings,” and that the restful seclusion, not to say monotony, of her life, afforded her ample time for indulging her studious tastes.

After three years her husband’s cousin had come to live with them. Eustace Milne, who was possessed of moderate means, had devoted the few years subsequent on leaving college to “seeing the world,” and it must be owned he had managed to see a good deal of it in the time. But tiring eventually of the process, he had made overtures to his cousin to enter into partnership with the latter in his stock-farming operations. Carhayes, who at that time had been somewhat unlucky, having been hard hit by a couple of very bad seasons, and thinking moreover that the presence in the house of his cousin, whom he knew and rather liked, would make life a little more cheerful for Eanswyth, agreed, and forthwith Eustace had sailed for the Cape. He had put a fair amount of capital into the concern and more than a fair amount of energy, and at this time the operations of the two men were flourishing exceedingly.

We fear that – human nature being the same all the world over, even in that sparsely inhabited locality – there were not wanting some – not many it is true, but still some – who saw in the above arrangement something to wag a scandalous tongue over. Carhayes was a prosaic and rather crusty personage, many years older than his wife. Eustace Milne was just the reverse of this, being imaginative, cultured, even tempered, and, when he chose, of very attractive manner; moreover, he was but three or four years her senior. Possibly the rumour evolved itself from the disappointment of its originators, as well as from the insatiable and universal love of scandal-mongering inherent in human nature, for Eustace Milne was eminently an eligible *parti*, and during nearly a year’s residence at Anta’s Kloof had shown no disposition to throw the handkerchief at any of the surrounding fair. But to Carhayes, whom thanks to his known proclivity towards punching heads this rumour never reached, no such nice idea occurred, for with all his faults or failings there was nothing mean or crooked-minded about the man, and as for Eanswyth herself, we should have been uncommonly sorry to have stood in the shoes of the individual who should undertake to enlighten her of the same, by word or hint.

As she stood there watching for the return of those who came not, Eanswyth began to feel vaguely uneasy, and there was a shade of anxiety in the large grey eyes, which were bent upon the surrounding *veldt* with a now growing intensity. The return of the flock, combined with the absence of its master to count in, was not a reassuring circumstance. She felt inclined to send for the herd and question him, but after all it was of no use being silly about it. She noted further the non-appearance of the other flock. This, in conjunction with the prolonged absence of her husband and cousin, made her fear that something had gone very wrong indeed.

Nor was her uneasiness altogether devoid of justification. We have said that Tom Carhayes was not on the best of terms with his barbarous neighbours. We have shown moreover that his choleric disposition was eminently calculated to keep him in chronic hot water. Such was indeed the case. Hardly a week passed that he did not come into collision with them, more or less violently, generally on the vexed question of trespass, and crossing his farm accompanied by their dogs. More than one of these dogs had been shot by him on such occasions, and when we say that a Kafir loves his dog a trifle more dearly than his children, it follows that the hatred which they cherished towards this imperious and high-handed settler will hardly bear exaggeration. But Carhayes was a powerful man and utterly fearless, and although these qualities had so far availed to save his life, the savages were merely biding their time. Meanwhile they solaced themselves with secret acts of revenge. A thoroughbred horse would be found dead in the stable, a valuable cow would be stabbed to death in the open *veldt*, or a fine, full-grown ostrich would be discovered with a shattered leg and all its wing-feathers plucked, sure sign, the latter, that the damage was due to no accident. These acts of retaliation had generally followed within a few days of one of the broils above alluded to, but so far from intimidating Carhayes, their only effect was to enrage him the more. He vowed fearful and summary vengeance against the perpetrators, should he ever succeed in detecting them. He even went boldly to the principal Gaika chiefs and laid claim to compensation. But those magnates were the last men in the world to side with, or to help him. Some were excessively civil, others indifferent, but all disclaimed any responsibility in the matter.

Bearing these facts in mind there was, we repeat, every excuse for Eanswyth's anxiety. But suddenly a sigh of relief escaped her. The tramp of hoofs reaching her ears caused her to turn, and there, approaching the house from a wholly unexpected direction, came the two familiar mounted figures.

Chapter Four.

“Love Settling Unawares.”

“Well, old girl, and how have you been getting through the day,” was Carhayes’ unceremonious greeting as he slid from his horse. Eustace turned away his head, and the faintest shadow of contempt flitted across his impassive countenance. Had this glorious creature stood in the same relationship towards himself he could no more have dreamed of addressing her as “old girl” than he could have of carving his name across the front of the silver altar which is exhibited once a year in the “Battistero” at Florence.

“Pretty well, Tom,” she answered smilingly. “And you? I hope you haven’t been getting into any more mischief. Has he, Eustace.”

“Well, I have, then,” rejoined Carhayes, grimly, for Eustace pretended not to hear. “What you’d call mischief, I suppose. Now what d’you think? I caught that *schelm* Goníwe having a buck-hunt – a buck-hunt, by Jove! right under my very nose; he and three other niggers. They’d got two dogs, good dogs too, and I couldn’t help admiring the way the *schepsels* put them on by relays, nor yet the fine shot they made at the buck with a kerrie. Well, I rode up and told them to clear out of the light because I intended to shoot their dogs. Would you believe it? they didn’t budge. Actually squared up to me.”

“I hope you didn’t shoot their dogs,” said Eanswyth anxiously.

“Didn’t I! one of ’em, that is. Do you think I’m the man to be bounced by Jack Kafir? Not much I’m not. I was bound to let daylight through the brute, and I did.”

“Through the Kafir?” cried Eanswyth, in horror, turning pale.

“Through both,” answered Carhayes, with a roar of laughter. “Through both, by Jove! Ask Eustace. He came up just in time to be in at the death. But, don’t get scared, old girl. I only ‘barked’ the nigger, and sent the dog to hunt bucks in some other world. I had to do it. Those chaps were four to one, you see, and shied Icerries at me. They had assegais, too.”

“Oh, I don’t know what will happen to us one of these days!” she cried, in real distress. “As it is, I am uneasy every time you are out in the *veldt*.”

“You needn’t be – no fear. Those chaps know me better than to attempt any tricks. They’re all bark – but when it comes to biting they funk off. That *schelm* I plugged to-day threatened no end of things; said I’d better have cut off my right hand first, because it was better to lose one’s hand than one’s mind – or some such bosh. But do you think I attach any importance to that? I laughed in the fellow’s face and told him the next time he fell foul of me he’d likely enough lose his life – and that would be worse still for him.”

Eustace, listening to these remarks, frowned slightly. The selfish coarseness of his cousin in thus revealing the whole unfortunate episode, with the sure result of doubling this delicate woman’s anxiety whenever she should be left – as she so often was – alone, revolted him. Had he been Carhayes he would have kept his own counsel in the matter.

“By the way, Tom,” said Eanswyth, “Goníwe hasn’t brought in his sheep yet, and it’s nearly dark.”

“Not, eh?” was the almost shouted reply, accompanied by a vehement and undisguised expletive at the expense of the defaulter. “He’s playing Harry – not a doubt about it. I’ll make an example of him this time. Rather! Hold on. Where’s my thickest *sjambok*?”

(*Sjambok*: A whip, made out of a single piece of rhinoceros, or sea-cow hide, tapering at the point. It is generally in the shape of a riding-whip.)

He dived into the house, and, deaf to his wife’s entreaties and expostulations, armed himself with the formidable rawhide whip in addition to his gun, and flinging the bridle once more across the horse’s neck, sprang into the saddle.

“Coming, Eustace?” he cried.

“No. I think not. The sheep can’t be far off, and you can easily bring them in, even if, as is not unlikely, Góniwe has sloped. Besides, I don’t think we ought to leave Eanswyth all alone.”

With a spluttered exclamation of impatience, Carhayes clapped spurs to his horse and cantered away down the kloof to recover his sheep and execute summary vengeance upon their defective herd.

“Do go after him, Eustace. Don’t think about me. I don’t in the least mind being left alone. Do go. You are the only one who can act as a check upon him, and I fear he will get himself – all of us – into some terrible scrape. I almost hope Góniwe has run away, for if Tom comes across him in his present humour he will half kill the boy.”

“He won’t come across him. On that point you may set your mind quite at ease. He will have no opportunity of getting into hot water, and I certainly shan’t think of leaving you alone here to-night for the sake of salvaging a few sheep more or less. We must make up our minds to lose some, I’m afraid, but the bulk of them will be all right.”

“Still, I wish you’d go,” she pursued anxiously. “What if Tom should meet with any Kafirs in the *veldt* and quarrel with them, as he is sure to do?”

“He won’t meet any. There isn’t a chance of it. Look here, Eanswyth; Tom must take care of himself for once. I’m not going to leave you alone here now for the sake of fifty Toms.”

“Why! Have you heard anything fresh?” she queried anxiously, detecting a veiled significance in his words.

“Certainly not. Nothing at all. Haven’t been near Komgha for ten days, and haven’t seen anyone since. Now, I’ll just take my horse round to the stable and give him a feed – and be with you in a minute.”

As a matter of fact, there was an *arrière-pensée* underlying his words. For Eustace had been pondering over Hlangani’s strangely worded threat. And it was a strangely worded one. “*You had better have cut off your right hand... for it is better to lose a hand than one’s mind.*” Carhayes had dismissed it contemptuously from his thoughts, but Eustace Milne, keen-witted, imaginative, had set to work to puzzle it out. Did the Gcaléka chief meditate some more subtle and hellish form of vengeance than the ordinary and commonplace one of mere blood for blood, and, if so, how did he purpose to carry it out? By striking at Carhayes through the one who was dearest to him? Surely. The words seemed to bear just this interpretation – and at the bare contemplation of a frightful danger hanging over Eanswyth, cool, even-minded Eustace Milne, felt the blood flow back to his heart. For he loved her.

Yes, he loved her. This keen-witted, philosophical man of the world was madly in love with the beautiful wife of his middle-aged cousin. He loved her with all the raging abandonment of a strong nature that does nothing by halves; yet during nearly a year spent beneath the same roof – nearly a year of easy, pleasant, social intercourse – never by word or sign had he betrayed his secret – at least, so he imagined.

But that no such blow should fall while he was alive, he resolved at all hazards. Why had he come there at all, was a question he had been asking himself for some time past? Why had he stayed, why did he stay? For the latter he hated and despised himself on account of his miserable weakness. But now it seemed that both were answered – that he had been brought there for a purpose – to protect *her* from the fearful consequences entailed by the blundering ferocity of him who should have been her first protector – to save her from some impending and terrible fate. Surely this was sufficient answer.

Then a wild thrill set his pulses tingling – a thrill of joy, of fierce expectation set on foot by a single thought, the intense expectation of the gambler who sees fortune brought within his reach by the potential turn of chances already strong in his favour. They were on the eve of war. What might the chances of war not entail? Blind, blundering Tom Carhayes running his head, like a bull, at every stone wall – were not the chances of war increased tenfold *against* such a man as this? And then – and then – ?

No man could be more unfitted to hold possession of such a priceless treasure as this – argued the man who did not hold it.

“Confess, Eanswyth, that you are very glad I didn’t take you at your word and go after Tom,” said Eustace, as they were sitting cosily at table.

“Perhaps I am. I have been getting so dreadfully nervous and low spirited of late – so different to the strong-minded creature I used to be,” she said with a rueful smile. “I am becoming quite frightened to be left alone.”

“Are you? Well, I think I can undertake to promise that you shall not be left alone again. One of us must always make a point of being around the house while the other is away. But look here, Eanswyth; I really think you oughtn’t to go on staying here at present. Why don’t you go down to the Colony and stay in one or other of the towns, or even at that other farm of Tom’s, until things are settled again?”

“I won’t do that. And I’m really not in the least afraid for myself. I don’t believe the Kafirs would harm me.”

“Then why are you nervous at being left alone?” was the very pertinent rejoinder.

“Not on my own account. It is only that solitude gives me time to think. I am always imagining Tom coming to frightful grief in some form or other.”

The other did not at once reply. He was balancing a knife meditatively on the edge of his plate, his fine features a perfect mask of impassibility. But in reality his thoughts ran black and bitter. It was all “Tom” and “Tom.” What the deuce had Tom done to deserve all this solicitude – and how was it appreciated by its fortunate object? Not a hair’s-breadth. Then, as she rose from the table and went out on the *stoep* to look out for any sign of the absent one’s return, Eustace was conscious of another turn of the spear in the wound. Why had he arrived on the scene of the fray that morning just in time to intervene? suggested his evil angel. The delay of a few minutes, and...

“Would it do anything towards persuading you to adopt the more prudent course and leave here for a while, if I were to tell you that Josane was urging that very thing this morning?” said Eustace when she returned. The said Josane was a grizzled old Kafir who held the post of cattle-herd under the two cousins. He was a Gcaléka, and had fled from Kreli’s country some years previously, thereby narrowly escaping one of the varied and horrible forms of death by torture habitually meted out to those accused of his hypothetical offence – for he had been “smelt out” by a witch-doctor. He was therefore not likely to throw in his lot with his own countrymen against his white protectors, by whom he was looked upon as an intelligent and thoroughly trustworthy man, which indeed he was.

“I don’t think it would,” she answered with a deprecatory smile. “I should be ten times more nervous if I were right away, and, as I said before, I don’t believe the Kafirs would do me the slightest harm.”

Eustace, though he had every reason to suppose the contrary, said nothing as he rose from the table and began to fill his pipe. He was conscious of a wild thrill of delight at her steadfast refusal. What would life be worth here without that presence? Well, come what might, no harm should fall upon her, of that he made mental oath.

Eanswyth, having superintended the clearing of the table by the two little Kafir girls who filled the *rôle* rather indifferent handmaidens, joined him on the *stoep*. It was a lovely night; warm and balmy. The dark vault above was so crowded with stars that they seemed to hang in golden patches.

“Shall we walk a little way down the kloof and see if we can meet Tom,” she suggested.

“A good idea. Just half a minute though. I want to get another pipe.”

He went into his room, slipped a “bull-dog” revolver of heavy calibre into his pocket, and quickly rejoined her.

Then as they walked side by side – they two, alone together in the darkness, alone in the sweet, soft beauty of the Southern night; alone, as it were, outside the very world; in a world apart where none might intrude; the rich shroud of darkness around them – Eustace began to wonder if he were

really made of flesh and blood after all. The pent-up force of his self-contained and concentrated nature was in sore danger of breaking its barriers, of pouring forth the fires and molten lava raging within – and to do so would be ruin – utter, endless, irretrievable ruin to any hopes which he might have ventured to form.

He could see every feature of that sweet, patrician face in the starlight. The even, musical tones of that exquisitely modulated voice, within a yard of his ears, fairly maddened him. The rich, balmy zephyrs of the African night breathed around; the chirrup of the cricket, and now and again the deep-throated booming croak of a bull-frog from an adjacent *vlei* emphasising its stillness. Again those wild, raging fires surged up to the surface. “Eanswyth, I love you – love you – worship you – adore you! Apart from you, life is worse than a blank! Who, what, is the dull, sodden, senseless lout who now stands between us? Forget him, darling, and be all heaven and earth to me!” The words blazed through his brain in letters of flame. He could hardly feel sure he had not actually uttered them.

“What is the matter, Eustace? I have asked you a question three times, and you haven’t answered me.”

“I really beg your pardon. I – I – suppose I was thinking of something else. Do you mind asking it again?”

The strange harshness of his voice struck her. It was well for him – well for both of them – that the friendly darkness stood him in such good stead.

“I asked you, how far do you think Tom would have to ride before finding the sheep?”

“Tom” again! He fairly set his teeth. “Well into the Gaika location,” was the savage reply that rose to his lips. But he checked it unuttered.

“Oh, not very far,” he answered. “You see, sheep are slow-moving brutes and difficult to drive, especially in the dark. He’ll turn up soon, never fear.”

“What is that? Look! Listen!” she exclaimed suddenly, laying a hand upon his arm.

The loom of the mountains was blackly visible in the starlight. Away in the distance, apparently in the very heart of them, there suddenly shown forth a lurid glow. The V-shaped scarp of the slopes stood dully in relief against the glare, which was as that of a furnace. At the same time there floated forth upon the night a strange, weird chorus – a wild, long-drawn eerie melody, half chant, half howl, faint and distant, but yet distinct, though many miles away.

“What can they be up to at the location, Eustace? Can it be that they have risen already?” ejaculated Eanswyth, turning pale in the starlight.

The reddening glare intensified, the fierce, wild cadence shrilled forth, now in dirge-like wail, now in swelling notes of demon-like and merciless exultation. There was a faint, muffled roar as of distant thunder – a clamour as of fiends holding high revel – and still the wild chorus gathered in volume, hideous in its blood-chilling menace, as it cleft the dark stillness of the night.

“Oh, let us turn back!” cried Eanswyth. “There is something horrible going on to-night. I really am quite frightened now. That hideous noise! It terrifies me!”

Well it might. The deep-toned thunder note within the burning heart of the volcano is of terrible import, for it portends fire and ruin and widespread death. There were those who were then sitting on the verge of a volcano – a mere handful in the midst of a vast, teeming population of fierce and truculent savages. Well might that weird chorus strike dismay into the hearts of its hearers, for it was the preliminary rumble of the coming storm – the battle-song of the warlike and now hostile Gaika clans.

Chapter Five.

The War-Dance at Nteya's Kraal

The sun has just touched the western horizon, bathing in a parting flood of red and gold the round spurs of the rolling hills and the straggling clusters of dome-shaped huts which lie dotted about the valley in irregular order for a couple of miles. There is a continuous hum of voices in the air, mingling with the low of cattle, and the whole place seems to be teeming with human life. Indeed, such is the case; for this kraal – or rather collection of kraals – is the head centre of Nteya's location and the residence of that chief himself.

Each group of huts owns its cattle inclosure, whose dark space, girdled with a strong thorn palisade, is now filled with the many-coloured forms of its horned denizens. It is milking time, and the metallic squirt of liquid into the zinc pails rises rhythmic above the deep hum of the monotonous chant of the milkers. Women step forth from the kraal gates balancing the full pails on their heads, their ochre-smeared bodies shining like new flower pots, while their lords, *reim* in hand, set to work to catch a fresh cow – for among Kafirs milking is essentially man's work. About the huts squat other groups of natives, men smoking their queer shaped, angular pipes, and exchanging *indaba* (Gossip or news); women also smoking, and busy with their household affairs, whether of the culinary or nursery order; round bellied, beady-eyed children tumbling over each other in their romps, and dogs ever on the prowl to pick up a stray bone, or to obtain a surreptitious lick at the interior of a cooking-pot; and over all the never-ending flow of voices, the deep bass of the men blending with the clearer feminine treble, but all rhythmic and pleasing, for the language and voices of the Bantu races are alike melodious. The blue reek of wood-smoke rising upon the evening air, mingles with that pungent odour of grease and kine inseparable from every Kafir kraal.

That something unwonted is impending here to-night is manifest. Men would start suddenly from beside their fellows and gaze expectantly out upon the approaches to the kraal, or now and again the heads of a whole group would turn in eager scrutiny of the surrounding *veldt*. For strung out upon the hillsides in twos and threes, or in parties of ten or a dozen, some mounted, some afoot, come a great number of Kafirs. On they come: those who are mounted kicking their shaggy little ponies into a headlong gallop; those who are not, starting into a run, leaping into the air, singing, or now and again venting a shrill and ear-splitting whistle. From far and near – from every direction converging upon the kraal, on they come. *And they are all armed.*

The excitement in the kraal itself intensifies. All rise to their feet to receive the newcomers, each group of whom is greeted with boisterous shouts of welcome. Snatches of war-songs rise upon the air, and the rattle of assegai hafts blends with the barbaric melody. Still, pouring in from all sides, come fresh arrivals, and by the time the sun has shot his last fading ray upon the stirring scene, the kraal cannot have contained far short of a thousand men.

Near the principal group of huts stands a circular inclosure about fifty yards in diameter. Above the thorn fence bristle the great branching horns of oxen. To this point all eyes are now turned, and the deafening clamour of voices is hushed in expectation of a new diversion.

A narrow opening is made in the fence and half a dozen Kafirs enter. An ox is turned out. No sooner is the poor beast clear of the fence than it is suddenly seen to plunge and fall forward in a heap, stabbed to the heart by a broad-bladed assegai. The slaughterer steps back to his lurking position and stands with arm upraised. Quickly another ox follows upon the first. The weapon, now dimmed and reddened with blood, flashes in the air. The second animal plunges forward dead. A third follows, with like result.

Then, scenting danger, and terrified moreover by the crowd which is gathering outside, the beasts stubbornly refuse to move. They huddle together with lowered heads, backing away from the

opening and emitting the muffled, moaning noise evoked in cattle by the scent of blood. In vain their would-be drivers shout and goad them with assegais. Move they will not.

Another opening is made on the opposite side to that of the first. After some trouble two oxen are driven through. They rush out together, one falling by the hand of the lurking slaughterer, the other meeting a speedy death at the assegais of the spectators.

There still remain upwards of a dozen within the kraal, but of these not one can be induced to pass out. Panic-stricken they huddle together closer still, until at last, their terror giving way to a frenzy of rage, the maddened brutes turn and furiously charge their tormentors. The air is rent with savage bellowings and the clashing of horns. The dust flies in clouds from the rumbling earth as the frenzied creatures tear round and round the inclosure. Two of the Kafirs, less agile or less fortunate than their fellows, are flung high in the air, falling with a lifeless thud among the spectators outside; then, crashing through the fence in a body, the panic-stricken bullocks stream forth into the open, scattering the crowd right and left before the fury of their rush.

Then ensues a wild and stirring scene. Their great horns lowered, the infuriated animals course madly through the village, each beset by a crowd of armed savages whose dark, agile forms, avoiding the fierce impetus of their charge, may be seen to spring alongside, plying the deadly assegai. One turns suddenly and heads straight for its pursuers, bellowing hideously. Like magic the crowd parts, there is a whizz of assegais in the air, and the poor beast crashes earthward, bristling with quivering assegai hafts, as a pin cushion with pins. Yelling, whistling like fiends, in their uncontrollable excitement, the savages dart in and out among the fleeing beasts, and the red firelight gleams upon assegai points and rolling eyeballs, and the air rings with the frenzied bellowing of the pursued, and the wild shouts of the pursuers.

But it cannot last long. Soon the mad fury of the chase gives way to the nauseous accompaniments of a slaughter house on a large scale. In an incredibly short space of time, each of the bullocks is reduced to a disjointed heap of flesh and bones. Men, staggering beneath huge slabs of quivering meat, make their way to the fires, leaving the dogs to snarl and quarrel over an abundant repast of steaming offal.

The great joints frizzle and sputter over the red coals. Squatted around, a hungry gleam in their eyes, the Kafirs impatiently watch each roasting morsel. Then, hardly waiting until it is warmed through, they drag the meat from the fire. Assegais are plied, and soon the huge joints are reduced to strips of half-raw flesh, and the champing of hundreds of pairs of jaws around each red blaze takes the place of the deep bass hum of conversation, as the savages throw all their energies into the assimilation of their unwonted meal. It is like a cannibal feast – the smoky flare of the great fires – the mighty slabs of red flesh – the fierce, dark figures seated around – the gleam of weapons in the firelight.

(The unwonted meal. In former days, meat was very sparingly eaten among the Amaxosa races, milk and mealies being the staple articles of diet. When employed on such a scale as above described, it had a curiously stimulating effect upon a people habitually almost vegetarians. Hence it was looked upon as a preparation for war.)

At length even the very bones are picked clean, and thrown over the feasters' shoulders to the dogs. Then voices are raised and once more the kraal becomes a scene of wild and excited stir. Roused by a copious indulgence in an unwonted stimulant, the Kafirs leap to their feet. Weapons are brandished, and the firelight glows upon assegai points and rolling eyeballs. A wild war-song rises upon the air; then falling into circular formation, the whole gathering of excited warriors join in, beating time with their feet – clashing the hefts of their weapons together. The weird rhythm is led off in a high, wailing key by a kind of *choragus*, then taken up by the rest, rising louder and louder, and the thunder of hundreds of pairs of feet keeping regular time, make the very earth itself tremble, and the quivering rattle of assegai hafts is echoed back from the dark, brooding hills, and the volume of the fierce and threatening song, with its final chorus of "Ha – ha – ha!" becomes as the mad roaring

of a legion of wild beasts, ravaging for blood. Worked up to a degree of incontrollable excitement, the savages foam at the lips and their eyeballs seem to start from the sockets, as turning to each other they go through the pantomime of encountering and slaying an imaginary foe; and even in the background a number of women have formed up behind the dancing warriors and with more than all the barbarity of the latter are playing at beating out the brains of the wounded with knob-kerries. The roar and rattle of the hideous performance goes up to the heavens, cleaving the solemn silence of the sweet African night. The leaping, bounding, perspiring shapes, look truly devilish in the red firelight. The excitement of the fierce savages seems to have reached a pitch little short of downright frenzy. Yet it shows no signs of abating. *For they have eaten meat.*

Chapter Six.

Hlangani, The Herald

Suddenly, as if by magic, the wild war-dance ceased, and the fierce, murderous rhythm was reduced to silence. Sinking down in a half-sitting posture, quivering with suppressed excitement, their dark forms bent forward like those of so many crouching leopards, their eyeballs rolling in the lurid glow, the Kafirs rested eagerly, awaiting what was to follow.

A group of chiefs advanced within the circle of light. A little in front of these, prominent among them by reason of his towering stature and herculean build, was a warrior of savage and awe-inspiring aspect. His countenance bore an evil, scowling sneer, which looked habitual, and his eyes glowed like live coals. He wore a headdress of monkey skins, above which waved a tuft of plumes from the tail of the blue crane. His body was nearly naked, and his muscular limbs, red with ochre, were decorated with fringes of cows' tails and tufts of flowing hair. On his left arm, above the elbow, he wore a thick; square armlet of solid ivory, and in his hand he carried a large, broad-bladed assegai. One shoulder was swathed in a rude bandage, the latter nearly concealed by fantastic hair adornments.

A hum of suppressed eagerness went round the crowd of excited barbarians as this man stood forth in their midst. It subsided into a silence that might be felt as he spoke:

"I am Hlangani, the son of Ngcesiba, the Herald of the Great Chief Sarili (Or Kreli), the son of Hintza, of the House of Gcaléka. Hear my word, for it is the word of Sarili, the Great Chief – the chief paramount of all the children of Xosa.

"This is the word of the Great Chief to his children of the House of Ngqika (Or Gaika). Lo, the time has come when the Amanglézi (English) seek a quarrel with us. We can no longer live side by side, say they. There is no room for the Ama-Gcaléka in the land they have hitherto dwelt in. They must go.

"So they have located our dogs, the cowardly Amafengu (Fingoes), our slaves and our dogs, on the next land to ours, that we may have a continual plague to scourge us, that our sides may be wrung with the pest of these stinging flies, that our name may be spat upon and laughed at by those who were our own dogs. Thus would these English provoke us to quarrel.

"Who were these Amafengu? Were they not our dogs and our slaves? Who are they now? Still dogs – but not *our* dogs. Who will they be shortly? Not our dogs – not our slaves – but – our masters! Our masters!" roared the fierce savage, shaking the broad assegai which he held, until it quivered like a band of flame in the red firelight. "The sons of Gcaléka will be the slaves of their former slaves – the dogs of their former dogs. Not the sons of Gcaléka only, but all the children of Xosa. Not the House of Gcaléka only, but the House of Ngqika. Who is doing this? The Amanglezi! Who would tread upon the necks of our chiefs and place the fetters of their lying and hypocritical creeds upon the limbs of our young men till the latter are turned into slaves and drunkards? The Amanglezi! Who would stop the mouths of our *amapakati* (Councillors) and drown the collective wisdom of our nation in floods of fire-water? The Amanglezi. Are we men – I say? Are we men?"

A low suppressed roar ran through the circle of fierce and excitable barbarians as the orator paused. Again sounded the ominous rattle of assegai hafts. It needed all the self-control of their habitually self-contained race to restrain them from breaking forth anew into their frenzied war-dance. But a wave of the speaker's hand availed to quell the rising tumult and he continued:

"This is the 'word' of the rulers of the Amanglézi. The time has come when the Amaxosa races must be subdued. They are growing too numerous. They are waxing too strong. Their power must be broken. We must begin by breaking up the influence of the chiefs. We must put down chieftainship altogether. Hear ye this, ye sons of Ngqika? Hear you this, O Matanzima, warrior son of Saudili, the Great Chief of the House of Ngqika? Hear you this, O Nteya —*pakati* of the race of Ngqika? Hear

you this, O Nxabahlana, of the House of the Great Chief, you who have led our bands to war before the very birth of many of the young men I see before me? Hear ye this, Maquades and Mpanhla and Sivuléle, and you, Panganisi and Untíwa, of the House of Seyolo of the House of Hlambi, golden mouthed in council – in the battle-field flames of consuming fire? Hear ye this, all ye gathered here before me this night – tried warriors, and young men who have never seen war. The children of Xosa are growing too strong. They must be subdued. The power of their chiefs must be broken. Such is the word of the rulers of the Amanglezi.”

This time, as the orator paused, there was no restraining the fierce excitement of his hearers. Each warrior named, who had greeted the mention of himself with a low, but emphatic “há” – now sprang to his feet. No further example was needed. Again, the wild rhythm of the war-song rose upon the night; again the fierce thunder-roll of the tread of hundreds of feet shook the ground. Again the circle of firelight was alive with grim, threatening forms, swaying in measured time, to the unearthly chant, to the accompaniment of the shaking of fantastic adornments, to the quivering rattle of assegai hafts. For some minutes this continued – then when the excitement was almost at its height, a mysterious signal was given and the whole wild crowd dropped quickly into its listening attitude again.

“Such is the word of the Amanglezi,” went on the speaker. “Now hear the word of Sarili, your father, the Paramount Chief, the father of all the children of Xosa. Hear the word of the Great Chief conveyed by the mouth of Hlangani, the herald – ‘Lo, the time has come when we must unite in the strength of brethren. The Amanglézi are urging our very dogs on to provoke us. The Amafengu are located on our borders, to taunt and jeer at our young men – to lure our young women over into their kraals that the very name of Gcaléka may be debased and defiled. Not a day passes that this does not happen. Why do we not revenge this? Why do we not execute a sudden and fearful vengeance upon these dogs who spit at our name and nation? We dare not. The Amanglézi say: “Your dogs are now our dogs. Touch them and we shall send armies of soldiers and you will be eaten up” – But, dare we not? Dare we not? Answer me, all ye children of the race of Xosa! I, Sarili, your father, call upon you – I, Sarili, your chief. Answer! Show that the war-fire of our free and warrior race is not dead. It has been smouldering for many years, but it is not dead. It is ready to break forth as the destroying lightning leaps from the black thunder-cloud. It is ready to blaze forth in its strength and to consume all within its reach.

“Where is my father, Hintza? Where is he who was lured into the white man’s camp by fair promises and then shot down? Do I not hear his spirit calling unto me day and night. I cannot sleep, for the spirit of my father is crying for vengeance. It is crying day and night from the depths. Yet, not to me only. Who was Hintza? My father, yet not my father only. The father of all the sons of Xosa!

“Lo, the white Governor has summoned me, your chief, to meet him. He has invited me, your chief, with fair promises to visit him at his camp. Shall I go, that I, Sarili, may meet with the same dealing that laid low my father, Hintza? I will, indeed, go, but it will be with the whole array of the fighting men of the Amaxosa at my back.

“Hear my “word,” my children of the House of Nteya, *pakati* of the race of Ngqika. Hear my “word” as spoken through the mouth of Hlangani, my herald. Receive these oxen as a present from your father to his children. Eat them, and when you have eaten and your hearts are strong, stand prepared. Let the war-cry roll through the mountains and valleys of our fair land. Let the thunder of your war-dances shake the earth as the reeds by the water side quiver beneath the rushing of the storm wind. Let the trumpet tongues of your war-fires gleam from the mountain tops – tongue roaring to tongue – that the Amanglezi may hear it and tremble; for the spirit of Hintza, my father, which has slumbered for years, is awake again and is crying for vengeance – is crying and crying aloud that the time has come.”

The speaker ceased. A dead silence fell upon his hearers – a weird silence upon that tumultuous crowd crouching in eager expectancy in the red firelight. Suddenly, upon the black gloom of the

night, far away to the eastward, there gleamed forth a streak of flame. Then another and another. A subdued roar ran around the circle. Then, as by magic, a crimson glare fell upon the serried ranks of expectant listeners, lighting up their fantastic war panoply as with the light of day. From the hill top above the kraal there shot up a great tongue of red flame. It leaped high into the velvety blackness of the heavens. Splitting up into many a forking flash it roared in the air – the gleaming rays licking up into a cloud of lurid smoke which blotted out the stars in its reddening folds. The distant war signal of the Gcaléka chieftain was answered.

“Ha!” cried Hlangani, in a voice of thunder. “Ha! Now will the heart of your father, Sarili, be glad. Now have ye proved yourselves his children indeed, oh, sons of Ngqika! Now have you proved yourselves men, for the trumpet tongues of your war-flames are crying aloud – tongue roaring to tongue upon the wings of the night.”

With the quickness of lightning the warriors had again thrown themselves into formation, and now worked up to a pitch of uncontrollable excitement, the unearthly cadence of the war-song rose into a fiendish roar, and the thunder of the demon dance rolled and reverberated among the hills, while lighting up the fierce array of grim, frenzied figures in its brooding glare, the huge beacon, high above on the hilltop, blazed forth sullenly upon the night in all its menacing and destructive significance.

Suddenly, as if by magic, the mad orgy of the savages was suspended. For advancing into their very midst – fearlessly, boldly, contemptuously, even – rode a solitary horseman – a white man, an Englishman.

Chapter Seven. In the Lion's Den

Every eye was bent upon the new arrival. With a quick, instinctive movement the savages closed around the foolhardy Englishman. There was a scowl of deadly import upon each grim face. Hundreds of assegais were poised with a quiver of suppressed eagerness. The man's life seemed not worth a moment's purchase.

"Out of my way, you *schepsels*!" he cried roughly, urging his horse through the sullen and threatening crowd, as though so many hundreds of armed and excited barbarians worked up to the highest pitch of blood-thirstiness were just that number of cowering and subservient slaves. "Out of my way, do you hear? Where is Nteya? I want Nteya, the chief. Where is he?"

"Here I am, *umlúngu* (White man). What do you want with me?" answered Nteya – making a rapid and peremptory signal to restrain the imminent resentment of his followers. "Am I not always here, that you should break in upon me in this violent manner? Do *I* go to *your* house, and ride up to the door and shout for you as though you were stricken with sudden deafness?"

The chief's rebuke, quiet and dignified, might have carried some tinge of humiliation to any man less overbearing and hot-headed than Tom Carhayes, even as the low growl of hardly contained exasperation which arose from the throng might have conveyed an ominous warning. But upon this man both were alike thrown away. Yet it may be that the very insanity of his fool-hardiness constituted his safety. Had he quailed but a moment his doom was sealed.

"I didn't come here to hold an *indaba*," (Talk – palaver) he shouted. "I want my sheep. Look here, Nteya. You have put me off very cleverly time after time with one excuse or another. But this time you are *pagadi* (Cornered). I've run you to earth – or rather some of those *schepsels* of yours. That young villain Goniwe has driven off thirty-seven of my sheep, and two of your fellows have helped him. I've spoorred them right into your location as straight as a line. Now?"

"When was this, Umlilwane?" said Nteya, imperturbably.

"When? When? To-night, man. This very night, do you hear?" roared the other.

"*Hau!* The white man has the eyes of twenty vultures that he can see to follow the spoor of thirty-seven sheep on a dark night," cried a mocking voice – and a great shout of derisive laughter went up from the whole savage crowd. The old chief, however, preserved his dignified and calm demeanour.

"You are excited, Umlilwane," he said – a faint smile lurking round the corners of his mouth. "Had you not better go home and return in the morning and talk things over quietly? Surely you would not forget yourself like a boy or a quarrelsome old woman."

If a soft answer turneth away wrath, assuredly an injunction to keep cool to an angry man conduceth to a precisely opposite result. If Carhayes had been enraged before, his fury now rose to white heat.

"You infernal old scoundrel!" he roared. "Don't I tell you I have spoorred the sheep right bang into your kraal? They are here now, I tell you; here now. And you try to put me off with your usual Kafir lies and shuffling." And shaking with fury he darted forth his hand, which still held the heavy rhinoceros hide *sjambok*, as though he would have struck the chief then and there. But Nteya did not move.

"*Hau!*" cried Hlangani, who had been a silent but attentive witness to this scene. "*Hau!* Thus it is that the chiefs of the Amaxosa are trampled on by these *abelúngu* (whites). Are we men, I say? Are we men?" And the eyes of the savage flashed with terrible meaning as he waved his hand in the direction of the foolhardy Englishman.

Thus was the spark applied to the dry tinder. The crowd surged forward. A dozen sinewy hands gripped the bridle, and in a moment Carhayes was flung violently to the earth.

Stunned, half-senseless he lay. Assegais flashed in the firelight. It seemed that the unfortunate settler's hours were numbered. Another moment and a score of bright blades would be buried in his body.

But a stern and peremptory mandate from the chief arrested each impending stroke.

"Stop, my children!" cried Nteya, standing over the prostrate man and extending his arms as though to ward off the deadly blows. "Stop, my children! I, your chief; I, your father, command it. Would you play into the hands of your enemies? Be wise, I say. Be wise in time."

Sullenly the crowd fell back. With weapons still uplifted, with eyes hanging hungrily upon their chief's face, like tigers balked momentarily of their prey, the warriors paused. And the dull, brooding glare of the signal fire flashing aloft upon the hilltop fell redly upon that fierce and threatening sea of figures standing over the prostrate body of their hated and now helpless enemy. But the word of a Kafir chief is law to his followers. There was no disputing that decisive mandate.

"Rise, Umlilwane," went on Nteya. "Rise, and go in peace. In the evening, when the blood is heated, it is not well to provoke strife by angry words. In the morning, when heads are cool, return here and talk. If your sheep are here, they shall be restored to you. Now go, while it is yet safe."

Carhayes, still half-stunned by the violence of his fall, staggered to his feet.

"If they are here!" he repeated sullenly. "Damn it, they *are* here!" he blazed forth in a fresh access of wrath. Then catching the malevolent glance of Hlangani, and becoming alive to the very sinister and menacing expression on the countenances of the other Kafirs, even he began to realise that some degree of prudence was desirable, not to say essential. "Well, well, it's the old trick again, but I suppose our turn will come soon," he growled, as he proceeded to mount his horse.

The crowd parted to make way for him, and amid ominous mutterings and an unpleasantly suggestive shaking of weapons towards him, he rode away as he had come. None followed him. The chief's eye was upon his receding figure. The chief's "word" had been given. But even protected by that safe conduct, he would be wise to put as much space as possible between himself and that sullen and warlike gathering, and that, too, with the greatest despatch.

None followed him – at the moment. But Hlangani mixed unperceived among the crowd, whispering a word here and a word there. And soon, by twos and threes, a number of armed savages stole silently forth into the night, moving swiftly upon the retreating horseman's track.

Chapter Eight.

“On the Rock they Scorch, like a Drop of Fire.”

“What are they really doing over there, do you suppose, Eustace?” said Eanswyth anxiously, as they regained the house. The thunder of the wild war-dance floated across the intervening miles of space, and the misty glare of many fires luridly outlined the distant mountain slopes. The position was sufficiently terrifying to any woman alone there save for one male protector, with hundreds of excited and now hostile savages performing their weird and clamorous war rites but a few miles away.

“I’m afraid there’s no mistake about it; they are holding a big war-dance,” was the reply. “But it’s nothing new. This sort of fun has been going on at the different kraals for the last month. It’s only because we are, so to say, next door to Nteya’s location that we hear it to-night at all.”

“But Nteya is such a good old man,” said Eanswyth. “Surely he wouldn’t harm us. Surely he wouldn’t join in any rising.”

“You are correct in your first idea, in the second, not. We are rapidly making such a hash of affairs *in re* Kreli and the Fingoes over in the Transkei, that we are simply laying the train for a war with the whole Amaxosa race. How can Nteya, or any other subordinate chief, refuse to join when called upon by Kreli, the Chief Paramount. The trouble ought to be settled before it goes any further, and my opinion is that it could be.”

“You are quite a politician,” said Eanswyth, with a smile. “You ought to put up for the Secretaryship for Native Affairs.”

“Let us sit out here,” he said, drawing up a couple of cane chairs which were always on the *stoep*. “Here is a very out-of-the-way phenomenon – one the like of which we might not witness again in a lifetime. We may as well see it out.”

If Eanswyth had been rather alarmed heretofore, the other’s perfect unconcern went far to reassure her. The wild, unearthly chorus echoing through the darkness – the glare of the fires, the distant, but thundrous clamour of the savage orgy, conveyed no terrors to this strong-nerved and philosophical companion of hers. He only saw in them a strange and deeply interesting experience. Seated there in the starlight, some of that unconcern communicated itself to her. A restful calm came upon her. This man beside her was as a very tower of strength. And then came over her a consciousness – not for the first time, but stronger than she had ever felt it – of how necessary his presence was to her. His calm, strong judgment had kept matters straight for a long time past. He had been the one to pour oil on the troubled waters; to allay or avert the evils which her husband’s ungovernable temper and ill-judged violence had thickly gathered around them. Now, as he sat there beside her calmly contemplating the sufficiently appalling manifestations of that night – manifestations that would otherwise have driven her wild with terror – she was conscious of feeling hardly any fear.

And what of Eustace himself? Lucky, indeed, that his judgment was strong, his brain habitually clear and unclouded. For at that moment his mind could only be compared to the seething, misty rush of a whirlpool. He could see her face in the starlight – even the lustrous glow of the great eyes – could mark the clear outline or the delicate profile turned half away from him. He was alone with her in the sweet, soft African night – alone with her – her sole protector, amid the brooding peril that threatened. A silence had fallen between them. His love – his concealed and hopeless love for her overcame him. He could not command words – not even voice, for the molten, raging fires of passion which consumed him as he sat there. His hand clenched the arm of his cane chair – a jagged nail, which protruded, lacerating it nearly to the bone – still he felt nothing of physical pain – mind triumphed.

Yes, the anguish of his mind was so intense as to be akin to physical pain. Why could they not be thus together always? They could, but for one life. One life only, between him and such bliss

that the whole world should be a bright and golden paradise! One life! A legion of fiends seemed to wrestle within the man's raging soul. "One life!" they echoed in jibbering, gnashing chorus. "One life!" they seemed to shriek aloud in his brain. "What more easily snapped than the cord of a life?"

The tumultuous thunder of the fierce war-dance sounded louder and louder upon the night – the glare of the distant fires reddened, and then glowed forth afresh. What if Tom Carhayes had come upon the spoor of his missing sheep – and in his blind rage had followed it right into Nteya's location? Might he not as well walk straight into a den of lions? The savage Gaikas, wound up to the highest pitch of bloodthirsty excitement, would at such a time be hardly less dangerous than so many beasts of prey. Even at that very moment the cord of that one life might be snapped.

Suddenly a great tongue of flame shot up into the night, then another and another. From a hilltop the red and threatening beacons flashed forth their message of hate and defiance. The distant tumult of the savage orgy had ceased. A weird and brooding silence lay upon the surrounding country.

"Oh, what does it mean? What does it all mean?" cried Eanswyth starting up from her chair. Her face was white with fear – her dilated eyes, gazing forth upon the gushing fires, were wild and horror-stricken. Eustace, standing there at her side, could hardly restrain himself from throwing his arms around her and pouring out a passionate storm of comforting, loving words. Yet she belonged to another man – was bound to him until death should them part. But what if death had already parted them? What if she were so bound no longer? he thought with a fierce, wild yearning that had in it something of the murderer's fell purpose, as he strained his gaze upon the wild signals of savage hostility.

"Don't be frightened, Eanswyth," he said reassuringly, but in a voice from which even he could not banish every trace of emotion. "You shall come to no harm to-night, dear, take my word for it. To-morrow, though, we must take you to some safer place than this is likely to prove for the next few days."

She made no answer. He had drawn his arm through hers and the strong, reassuring touch seemed to dispel her fears. It seemed to him that she leaned upon him, as though for physical support no less than for mental. Thus they stood, their figures silhouetted in the dull red glow. Thus they stood, the face of the one stormy with conflicting emotions – that of the other calm, restful, safe in that firm protecting companionship. Thus they stood, and to one of these two that isolated position in the midst of a brooding peril represented the sweetest, most ecstatic moment that life had ever afforded. And still upon the distant hilltops, gushing redly upward into the velvety darkness, the war-fires of the savages gleamed and burned.

"We had better go in now," said Eustace, after a while, when the flaming beacons had at length burnt low. "You must be tired to death by this time, and it won't do to sit out here all night. You must have some rest."

"I will try," she answered. "Do you know, Eustace, there is a something about you that seems to put everything right. I am not in the least frightened now."

There was a softness in her tone that bordered upon tenderness – a softness that was dangerous indeed to a man in his frame of mind.

"Ah! you find that, do you?" he answered, in a strained, harsh, unnatural voice. Then his utterance seemed choked. Their eyes met in the starlight – met in a long, clinging gaze – then their lips. Yet, she belonged to another man, and – a life stood between these two.

Thus to that extent Eustace Milne, the cool-headed, the philosophic, had allowed the impulse of his mad passion to overmaster him. But before he could pour forth the unrestrained torrent of words which should part them there and then forever, or bind them more closely for weal or for woe, Eanswyth suddenly wrenched herself from his close embrace. A clatter of rapidly approaching hoofs was borne upon the night.

"It's Tom!" she cried, at the same time fervently blessing the friendly darkness which concealed her burning face. "It must be Tom. What can he have been doing with himself all this time?"

“Rather! It’s Tom, right enough, or what’s left of him!” echoed the loud, well-known voice, as the horseman rode up to the *stoep* and flung himself from the saddle. “What’s left of him,” he repeated grimly. “Can’t you strike a light, Eanswyth, instead of standing there staring at a man as if he had actually been cut into mince-meat by those infernal brutes, instead of having only had a very narrow escape from that same,” he added testily, striding past her to enter the house, which up till now had been left in darkness for prudential reasons, lest by rendering it more conspicuous the sight might tempt their savage neighbours, in their present ugly humour, to some deed of violence and outrage.

A lamp was quickly lighted, and then a half-shriek escaped Eanswyth. For her husband presented a ghastly spectacle. He was hatless, and his thick brown beard was matted with blood, which had streamed down the side of his face from a wound in his head. One of his hands, too, was covered with blood, and his clothes were hacked and cut in several places.

“For Heaven’s sake, Eanswyth, don’t stand there screeching like an idiotic schoolgirl, but run and get out some grog, for I want an ‘eye opener’ badly, I can tell you,” he burst forth with an angry stamp of the foot. “Then get some water and clean rag, and bandage me up a bit – for besides the crack on the head you see I’ve got at least half a dozen assegai stabs distributed about my carcass.”

Pale and terrified, Eanswyth hurried away, and Carhayes, who had thrown himself on the sofa, proceeded growlingly to give an account of the rough usage he had been subjected to. He must have been stealthily followed, he said, for about half an hour after leaving Nteya’s kraal he had been set upon in the darkness by a party of Kafirs. So sudden was the assault that they had succeeded in snatching his gun away from him before he could use it. A blow on the head with a kerrie – a whack which would have floored a weaker man – he parenthesised grimly and with ill-concealed pride – having failed to knock him off his horse, the savages endeavoured to stab him with their assegais – and in fact had wounded him in several places. Fortunately for him they had not succeeded in seizing his bridle, or at any rate in retaining hold of it, or his doom would have been sealed.

“The chap who tried it on dropped under my stirrup-iron,” explained Carhayes. “I ‘downed’ him, by the living Jingo! He’ll never kick again, I do believe. That scoundrel Nteya promised I shouldn’t be molested, the living dog! There he was, the old *schelm*, he and our friend of to-day, Hlangani – and Matanzima, old Sandili’s son, and Sivuléle, and a lot of them, haranguing the rest. They mean war. There couldn’t have been less than six or seven hundred of them – all holding a big war-dance, got up in their feathers and fal-lals. What do you think of that, Eustace? And in I went bang into the very thick of them.”

“I knew it would come to this one of these days, Tom,” said Eanswyth, who now reappeared with the necessary refreshment, and water and towels for dressing his wounds.

“Of course you did,” retorted her husband, with a savage snarl. “You wouldn’t be a woman if you didn’t, my dear. ‘I told you so,’ ‘I *told* you so,’ – isn’t that a woman’s invariable parrot cry. Instead of ‘telling me so,’ suppose you set to work and see what you can do for a fellow. Eh?”

Eustace turned away to conceal the white fury that was blasting him. Why had the Kafirs done things by halves? Why had they not completed their work and rid the earth of a coarse-minded brute who simply encumbered it. From that moment he hated his cousin with a secret and bitter hatred. And this was the life that stood between him and – Paradise.

Tom Carhayes was indeed in a vile humour – not on account of the wounds he had received, ugly as some of them were; for he was not lacking in brute courage or endurance. But his wrath burnt hot against the insolent daring of his assailants, who had presumed to attack him, who had, moreover, done so treacherously, had robbed him of his gun, as well as of a number of sheep, and had added insult to injury by laughing in his face when he asked for redress.

“I’ll be even with them. I will, by the living Jingo!” he snarled as he sat sipping his brandy and water – while Eanswyth, still pale and agitated from the various and stirring events of the night, bathed his wounds with rather trembling fingers. “I’ll ride into Komgha to-morrow and have the

whole lot arrested – especially that lying dog, Nteya. I'll go with the police myself, if only to see the old scoundrel handcuffed and hauled off to the *tronk*.”

“What on earth induced you to run your head into such a hornet's nest for the sake of a few sheep?” said Eustace at last, thinking he ought to say something.

“Hang it, man!” was the impatient retort. “Do you suppose I was going to let these scoundrels have the laugh of me? I tell you I spooed the sheep slap into Nteya's kraal.”

“Well, they seem to have the laugh of you now, anyhow – of *us*, rather,” said Eustace drily, as he turned away.

Chapter Nine.

A Startling Surprise

Nature is rarely sympathetic. The day dawned, fair and lovely, upon the night of terror and brooding peril. A few golden rays, darting horizontally upon the green, undulating slopes of the pleasant Kaffrarian landscape – then the sun shot up from the eastern skyline. Before him the white mist, which had settled down upon the land a couple of hours before dawn, now rolled back in ragged folds, leaving a sheeny carpet of silver dew – a glittering sparkle of diamond drops upon tree and shrub. Bird voices were twittering into life, in many a gladsome and varying note. Little meer-kats, startled by the tread of the horse, sat upon their haunches to listen, ere plunging, with a frisk and a scamper, into the safety of their burrows. A tortoise, his neck distended and motionless, his bright eye dilated with alarm, noiselessly shrank into the armour-plated safety of his shell, just in time to avoid probable decapitation from the falling hoof which sent his protective shell rolling half a dozen yards down the slope. But he now riding abroad thus early, had little attention to give to any such trivial sights and sounds. His mind was fully occupied.

No sleep had fallen to Eustace's lot that night. Late as it was when they retired to rest, fatiguing and exciting as the events of the day had been, there was no sleep for him. Carhayes, exasperated by the wrongs and rough treatment he had received at the hands of his barbarous neighbours, had withdrawn in a humour that was truly fearful, exacting unceasing attention from his wife and rudely repulsing his cousin's offer to take Eanswyth's place, in order that the latter might take some much-needed rest. A proceeding which lashed Eustace into a white heat of silent fury, and in his own mind it is to be feared he defined the other as a selfish, inconsiderate, and utterly irredeemable brute. Which, after all, is mere human nature. It is always the other fellow who is rather worse than a fiend. Were we in his shoes we should be something a little higher than an angel. That of course.

Unable to endure the feverish heat of restlessness that was upon him, with the first glimmer of dawn Eustace arose. One of his horses had been kept up in the stable, and having saddled the animal he issued forth. But the horse was a badly broken, vicious brute, and like the human heart was deceitful and desperately wicked, and when to the inherent villainy of his corrupt nature was superadded the tangible grievance of having to exchange a comfortable stable for the fresh, not to say raw, atmosphere of early dawn, he resolved to make himself as disagreeable as possible. He began by trying all he knew to buck the saddle off – but fruitlessly. He might, however, be more successful with the rider. So almost before the latter had deftly swung himself into his seat, down again went the perverse brute's head, and up went his back. Plunging, rearing, kicking, squealing, the animal managed to waste five minutes and a great deal of superfluous energy, and to incur some roughish treatment into the bargain, for his rider was as firm in the saddle as a bullet in a cartridge, and moreover owned a stout crop and a pair of sharp spurs, and withal was little inclined to stand any nonsense that morning from man or beast.

But the tussle did Eustace good, in that it acted with bracing effect upon his nerves, and having reduced the refractory steed to order, he headed for the open *veldt*, not much caring where he went as long as he was moving. And now as the sun rose, flooding the air with a mellow warmth, a great elation came upon him. He still seemed to feel the pressure of those lips to his, the instinctive clinging to him in the hour of fear. He had yielded to the weird enchantment of the moment, when they two were alone in the hush of the soft, sensuous night – alone almost in the very world itself. His better judgment had failed him at the critical time – and for once his better judgment had been at fault all along – for once passion was truer than judgment. *She had returned his kiss.*

Then had come that horribly inopportune interruption. But was it inopportune? Thinking things over now he was inclined to decide that it was not. On the contrary, the ice must be broken gently

at first, and this is just the result which that interruption had brought about. Again, the rough and bitter words which had followed upon it could only, to one of Eanswyth's temperament, throw out in more vivid contrast the nectar sweetness of that cup of which she had just tasted. He had not seen her since, but he soon would. He would play his cards with a master hand. By no bungling would he risk the game.

It was characteristic of the man that he could thus reason – could thus scheme and plot – that side by side with the strong whirl of his passion, he could calculate chances, map out a plan. And there was nothing sordid or gross in his thoughts of her. His love for Eanswyth was pure, even noble – elevating, perfect – but for the fact that she was bound by an indissoluble tie to another man.

Ah, but – there lay the gulf; there rose the great and invincible barrier. Yet, why invincible?

The serpent was abroad in Eden that morning. With the most sweet recollection of but a few hours back fresh in his heart, there rested within Eustace's mind a perfect glow of radiant peace. Many a word, many a tone, hardly understood at the time, came back to him now with startling clearness. For a year they had dwelt beneath the same roof, for nearly that period, for *quite* that period, as he was forced to own to himself, he had striven hard to conquer the hopeless, the unlawful love, which he plainly foresaw would sooner or later grow too strong for him. But now it had overwhelmed him, and – she had returned it. The scales had fallen from his eyes at last – from both their eyes. What a very paradise was opening out its golden glories before them. Ah, but – the barrier between them – and that barrier the life of another!

Yet what is held upon more desperately frail tenure than a life? What is more easily snapped than the cord of a life? It might have been done during the past night. By no more than a hair's-breadth had Carhayes escaped. The savages might on the next occasion strike more true. Yes, assuredly, the serpent was abroad in that Eden now – his trail a trail of blood. There was something of the murderer in Eustace Milne at that moment.

Mechanically still he rode on. He was skirting a high rounded spur. Rising from a bushy valley not many miles in front were several threads of blue smoke, and the faint sound of voices, with now and then the yelp of a dog, was borne upon the silent morning air. He had travelled some distance and now not far in front lay the outlying kraals of Nteya's location.

A set, ruthless look came over his fine face. Here were tools enough ready to his hand. Not a man among those clans of fierce and truculent barbarians but hated his cousin with a hatred begotten of years of friction. On the other hand he himself was on the best of terms with them and their rulers. A little finessing – a lavish reward, and – well, so far he shrank from deliberate and cold-blooded murder. And as though to cast off temptation before it should become too strong for him, he wrenched round his horse with a sudden jerk and rode down into a wild and bushy kloof which ran round the spur of the hill.

"Never mind!" he exclaimed half aloud. "Never mind! We shall have a big war on our hands directly. Hurrah for war, and its glorious chances! – Pincher, you fool, what the deuce is the matter with you?"

For the horse had suddenly stopped short. With his ears cocked forward he stood, snorting violently, trembling and backing. Then with a frantic plunge he endeavoured to turn and bolt. But his master's hand and his master's will were strong enough to defeat this effort. At the same time his master's eye became alive to the cause of alarm.

Issuing from the shade of the mimosa trees, seeming to rise out of the tangle of long, coarse herbage, were a number of red, sinuous forms. The ochre-smeared bodies, the gleaming assegai blades, the brawny, muscular limbs still bedecked with the barbarous and fantastic adornments of the night's martial orgy, the savage and threatening aspect of the grim, scowling countenances looked formidable enough, not merely to scare the horse, but to strike dismay into the heart of the rider, remembering the critical state of the times.

"Stop!" cried one of the Kafirs preemptorily. "Come no farther, white man!"

With a rapid movement two of them advanced as if to seize his bridle.

“Stop yourselves!” cried Eustace decisively, covering the pair with a revolver.

So determined was his mien, and withal so cool and commanding, that the savages paused irresolute. A quick ejaculation rose from the whole party. There was a flash and a glitter. A score of assegais were poised ready for a fling. Assailants and assailed were barely a dozen yards apart. It was a critical moment for Eustace Milne. His life hung upon a hair.

Suddenly every weapon was lowered – in obedience to a word spoken by a tall Kafir who at that moment emerged from the bush. Then Eustace knew the crisis was past. He, too, lowered his weapon.

“What does this mean, Ncandúku?” he said, addressing the new arrival. “Why do your people make war upon me? We are not at war.”

“Au!” ejaculated several of the Kafirs, bringing their hands to their faces as if to hide the sarcastic grin evoked by this remark. He addressed shrugged his shoulders.

“Fear nothing, Ixeshane,” (The Deliberate) he replied, with a half-amused smile. “No harm will be done *you*. Fear nothing.”

The slight emphasis on the “you” did not escape Eustace’s quick ear, coming as it did so close upon his recent train of thought.

“Why should I fear?” he said. “I see before me Ncandúku, the brother of Nteya, my friend – both my friends, both chiefs of the House of Gaika. I see before me, I say, Ncandúku, my friend, whom I know. I see before me also a number of men, fully armed, whom I do not know.”

“Hau!” exclaimed the whole body of Kafirs, who, bending forwards, had been eagerly taking in every word of this address.

“These armed men,” he continued, “have just threatened my life. Yet, I fear nothing. Look!”

He raised the revolver, which he now held by the barrel. In a twinkling he threw open the breech and emptied the cartridges into his hand. Another emphatic murmur rose from the Kafirs at this strange move.

“Look!” he went on, holding out the empty weapon towards them in one hand, and the half dozen cartridges in the other. “You are more than twenty men – armed. I am but one man – unarmed. Do I fear anything?”

Again a hum went round the party – this time of admiration – respect. Eustace had played a bold – a foolhardy stroke. But he knew his men.

“*Whau*, Ixeshane!” exclaimed Ncanduku. “You are a bold man. It is good that I have seen you this morning. Now, if you are going home, nobody will interfere with you.”

“I am in no hurry, Ncandúku,” replied Eustace, who, for purposes of his own, chose to ignore this hint. “It is a long while since I have seen you, and many things have happened in that time. We will sit down and hold a little *indaba*.” (Talk.)

So saying, he dismounted, and flinging his bridle over a bush, he walked at least a dozen yards from the horse and deliberately seated himself in the shade, thus completely placing himself in the power of the savages. He was joined by Ncandúku and two or three more. The other Kafirs sank down into a squatting posture where they were.

“First we will smoke,” he said, handing his pouch to the Gaika chief. “Though I fear the contents won’t go very far among all our friends here.”

Chapter Ten.

A Mutual Warning

It may not here be out of place to offer a word of explanation as to the extraordinarily cordial relations existing between Eustace Milne and his barbarian neighbours. A student of nature all the world over, he had rejoiced in finding ready to his hand so promising a subject as this fine race of savages, dwelling in close proximity to, and indeed in and among, the abodes of the white colonists, and instead of learning to look upon the Kafirs as so many more or less troublesome and indifferent farm servants, actual stock-lifters and potential foemen, he had started by recognising their many good qualities and resolving to make a complete study of the race and its characteristics. And this he had effected, with the thoroughness which marked everything he undertook. A quick linguist, he soon mastered the rather difficult, but melodious and expressive Xosa tongue, in which long and frequent conversations with its speakers had by this time rendered him nearly perfect; a man of keen intellect, he could hold his own in argument with any of these people, who, on subjects within the scope of their acquaintance, are about the shrewdest debaters in the world. His cool deliberation of speech and soundness of judgment commanded their abundant respect, and the friendly and disinterested feeling which he invariably evinced towards them being once understood and appreciated, a very genuine liking sprang up on both sides.

Of course all this did not pass unnoticed by his white acquaintances and neighbours – who were wont to look upon him as an eccentricity in consequence, and to chaff him a good deal about his “blanket friends,” or ask him when he expected to be in the Cabinet as Secretary for Native Affairs. A few of the more ill-natured would sneer occasionally, his cousin among the latter. But Eustace Milne could take chaff with perfect equanimity, and as for the approval or disapproval of anybody he regarded it not one whit.

Stay – of anybody? Yes – of one.

And that approval he had gained to the full. Eanswyth, watching her cousin during the year that he had been living with them, had felt her regard and respect for him deepen more and more. Many a time had his judgment and tact availed to settle matters of serious difficulty and, of late, actual peril, brought about by the hot-headed imperiousness of her husband in his dealings with the natives. Living a year beneath the same roof with anybody in ordinary work-a-day intercourse affords the best possible opportunity of studying the character of that person. Eanswyth, we say, had so studied the character of her husband’s cousin and had pronounced it well-nigh flawless. But of this more elsewhere.

“Who are those people, Ncanduku?” said Eustace, after a few preliminary puffs in silence. “Except yourself and Sikuni here, they are all strangers to me. I do not seem to know one of their faces.”

The chief shrugged his shoulders, emitting a thick puff of smoke from his bearded lips.

“They are strangers,” he answered. “They are Ama-Gcaléka, and are returning to their own country across the Kei. They have been visiting some of their friends at Nteya’s kraal.”

“But why are they all so heavily armed? We are not at war.”

“*Whau*, Ixeshane! You know there is trouble just now with the Amafengu (Fingoes). These men might be molested on their way back to their own country. They are afraid, so they go armed.”

“Who are they afraid of? Not the Amafengu, their dogs? Why should they go armed and travel in such strength?”

The chief fixed his glance upon his interlocutor’s face, and there was a merry twinkle in his eye as he turned away again.

“A man is not afraid of one dog, Ixeshane, nor yet of two,” he replied. “But if a hundred set upon him, he must kill them or be killed himself.”

Eustace uttered a murmur of assent. Then after a pause he said:

“To travel in a strong party like that in these times is not wise. What if these Gcalékas were to fall in with a Police patrol – would there not surely be a fight? That might bring on a war. I am a peaceable man. Everybody is not. What if they had met a less peaceable man than myself, and threatened him as they did me? There would have been a fight and the white man might have been killed – for what can one man do against twenty?”

“He need not have been killed – only frightened,” struck in the other Kafir, Sikuni.

“Some men are easier killed than frightened,” rejoined Eustace. “Last night some people from Nteya’s kraal attacked my brother, (The term ‘brother’ is often colloquially used among Kafirs to designate other degrees of relationship) stole his gun, and tried to kill him. But they did not frighten him.”

In spite of the conventional exclamation of astonishment which arose from his hearers, Eustace was perfectly well aware that this was no news to them.

“That is bad news,” said Ncandúku, with well-feigned concern. “But it may not have been done by any of our people, Ixeshane. There may have been some Fingo dogs wandering about the land, who have done this thing in order that the English may blame us for it.”

It was now Eustace’s turn to smile.

“Does a dog wander to the mouth of a den of lions?” he said, keenly enjoying the notion of turning the tables. “Will a few Fingoes attack a guest of Nteya’s within the very light of the fires of the Gaika location?”

“Your brother, Umlilwane, is too hot-headed,” answered the chief, forced to shift his ground. “Yet he is not a young man. Our young men, too, are hot-headed at times and escape from under the controlling eye of the chiefs. But Nteya will surely punish those who have done this thing.”

“Let your friends proceed on their way, Ncandúku,” said Eustace suddenly, and in a low tone. “I would speak with you alone.”

The chief assented, and at a word from him the Gcalékas rose to their feet and gathered up their weapons. With a respectful salute to the white man they filed off into the bush, and soon the faint rattle of assegai hafts and the deep bass hum of their voices faded into silence.

“Now we are alone,” began Eustace after a pause. “We are friends, Ncandúku, and can talk freely. If there is trouble between the Gcalékas and the Fingoes, surely Kreli is able to take care of his own interests. Why, then, should the Gaikas have lighted the war-fires, have danced the war-dance? The quarrel is not theirs.”

“The wrongs of the Paramount Chief are the wrongs of the whole Xosa race,” answered the Kafir. “See now. We love not your brother, Umlilwane. Yet, tell him to collect his flocks and his herds and to leave, to depart into a quieter country, and that speedily; for the land will soon be dead.” (Native idiom for war.)

“And what if he refuses?”

“Then he, too, will soon be dead.”

For some minutes Eustace kept silence. The Kafir’s remark had added fuel to the fire which was burning within his heart. It seemed a direct answer to lurid unspoken thoughts which had been surging through his mind at the time of his surprise by the at first hostile party.

“Umlilwane is an obstinate man,” he said at length. “What if he laughs at the warning?”

“When a man sits inside his house and laughs while his house is burning, what happens to him, Ixeshane?”

“He stands a fair chance of being burnt too. But listen, Ncanduku. You have no quarrel against the *Inkosikazi*. (Literally Chieftainess. In this instance ‘lady.’) Surely not a man of the House of Gaika would harm her!”

The chief shook his head with a troubled expression.

“Let her go, too!” he said emphatically. “Let her go, too, and that as soon as possible. When the red wave of war is rolling over the land, there is no place where the delicate feet of white women may stand dry. We are friends, Ixeshane. For your sake, and for that of the *Inkosikazi*, tell Umlilwane to gather together his cattle and to go.”

“We are friends, indeed, Ncanduku. But how long can we be so? If war breaks out between our people how can I sit still? I cannot. I must fight – must fight for my own race, and in defence of our property. How, then, can we remain friends?”

“In war-time every man must do his duty,” answered the Gaika. “He must obey the word of his chief and fight for his race and colour.”

“Truly spoken and well understood. And now a warning for a warning. If I had the ears of your chiefs and *amapakati* (Councillors) this is what I should say: Do not be drawn into this war. Let the Gcalékas fight out their own quarrel. They stand upon wholly different ground. If they are vanquished – as, of course, they will be in the long run – the Government will show them mercy, will treat them as a conquered people. But you, and the other tribes within the colonial border, are British subjects. Queen Victoria is your chief, not Kreli, not Sandili, not Seyolo, not Ndimba – no man of the House of Gaika or Hlambe, but the White Queen. If you make war upon the Colony the Government will treat you as criminals, not as a conquered people, but as rebels against the Queen, your chief. You will be shown no mercy. Your chiefs will very likely be hung and your fighting men will be sent to the convict prisons for many a long year. That when you are beaten. And how long can you carry on the war? Things are not as they were. The country is not as it was. Think of the number of soldiers that will be sent against you; of the police; of the settlers, who will turn out to a man – all armed with the best breechloaders, mind. And what sort of weapons have you? A few old muzzle loaders more dangerous to the shooter than to his mark. What can you do with these and your assegais against people armed with the best rifles in the world? I am indeed your friend, Ncanduku, and the friend of your race. Let my warning sink deep in your mind, and carry it to the chiefs. Let them be wise in time.”

“The words of Ixeshane are always the words of wisdom,” said the Kafir, rising in obedience to the other’s example. “But the young men are turbulent. They will not listen to the counsels of their elders. The cloud grows darker every day. I see no light,” he added, courteously holding the stirrup for Eustace to mount, “Go in peace, Ixeshane, and remember my warning.”

And gathering up his assegais the chief disappeared among the trees, following the direction taken by the larger party.

Chapter Eleven.

“The Tail Wags the Dog.”

Eustace had plenty to occupy his thoughts during his homeward ride. The emphatic warning of the Gaika chief was not to be set aside lightly. That Ncandúku knew more than he chose to say was evident. He had spoken out very plainly for one of his race, who dearly love veiled hints and beating around the bush. Still there was more behind.

Especially did the chief's perturbation when Eanswyth was referred to strike him as ominous to the last degree. Even in war-time there are few instances of Kafirs seriously maltreating white women, and Eanswyth was well liked by such of her dusky neighbours as she had come in contact with. Yet in the present case so thoroughly hated was her husband that it was conceivable they might even strike at him through her.

Why had Carhayes not fallen in with the armed party instead of himself, thought Eustace bitterly. That would have cut the knot of the difficulty in a trice. They would not have spared him so readily. They were Gcalékas, Hlangani's tribesmen. Hlangani's wound would have been avenged, and Eanswyth would by this time be free.

Very fair and peaceful was the aspect of the farm as the last rise brought it full into the horseman's view. The bleating of sheep, mellowed by distance, as the flocks streamed forth white upon the green of the *veldt*, and the lowing of cattle, floated upon the rich morning air – together with the sound of voices and laughter from the picturesque group of native huts where the farm servants dwelt. Doves cooed softly, flitting among the sprays of mimosa fringing the mealie lands; and upon the surface of the dam there was a shimmer of silver light. All seemed peaceful – happy – prosperous; yet over all brooded the red cloud of war.

Eustace felt his pulses quicken and his heart stir as he strained his eyes upon the house, to catch maybe the flutter of a light dress in the veranda. Many a morning had he thus returned from a ride without so much as a heartstirring. Yet now it was different. The ice had been broken. A new light had been let in – a sweet new light, glowing around his path like a ray of Paradise. They understood each other at last.

Yet did they? How would she receive him – how greet him after the disclosure of last night? Would she have thought better of it? For the first time in his life he felt his confidence fail him.

“Hallo, Eustace! Thought you had trekked off somewhere for the day,” growled Carhayes, meeting him in the doorway. “Been looking up some of your blanket friends?”

“Where are you off to yourself, Tom?” was the reply. For the other was got up in riding boots and breeches, as if for a journey.

“To Komgha – I'm going over to lay an information against Nteya. I'll have the old *schelm* in the *tronk* by to-night.”

“Not much to be taken by that, is there? Just come this way a minute, will you? I've heard something you may as well know.”

With a mutter and a growl Carhayes joined him outside. In a few words Eustace conveyed to him Ncanduku's warning. It was received characteristically – with a shout of scornful laughter.

“Gammon, my dear chap. I never funk'd a nigger yet and I never will. And, I say. You'd better take a ride round presently and look after the sheep. I've been obliged to put on Josáne's small boy in Goníwe's place, and he may not be up to the mark. I daresay I'll be back before dark.”

“Well, the sheep will have to take their chance, Tom. I'm not going out of call of the homestead while Eanswyth is left here alone.”

“Bosh!” returned Carhayes. “She don't mind. Has she not been left alone here scores of times? However, do as you like. I must be off.”

They had been walking towards the stable during this conversation. Carhayes led forth his horse, mounted, and rode away. Eustace put up his, and having cut up a couple of bundles of oat-hay – for they were short of hands – took his way to the house.

He had warned his cousin and his warning had been scouted. He had struggled with a temptation not to warn him, but now it came to the same thing, and at any rate his own hands were clean. The journey to Komgha was long, and in these times for a man so hated as Tom Carhayes, might not be altogether safe, especially towards dusk. Well, he had been warned.

Eustace had purposely taken time over attending to his horse. Even his strong nerves needed a little getting in hand before he should meet Eanswyth that morning; even his pulses beat quicker as he drew near the house. Most men would have been eager to get it over; would have blundered it over. Not so this one. Not without reason had the Kafirs nicknamed him “Ixeshane” – the Deliberate.

Eanswyth rose from the table as he entered. Breakfast was over, and Tom Carhayes, with characteristic impulsiveness, had started off upon his journey with a rush, as we have seen. Thus once more these two were alone together, not amid the romantic witchery of the southern night, but in the full broad light of day.

Well, and then? Had they not similarly been together alone countless times during the past year? Yes, but now it was different – widely different. The ice had been broken between them.

Still, one would hardly have suspected it. Eanswyth was perfectly calm and composed. There was a tired look upon the sweet face, and dark circles under the beautiful eyes as if their owner had slept but little. Otherwise both her tone and manner were free from any trace of confusion.

“I have put your breakfast to the kitchen fire to keep warm, Eustace,” she said. “Well, what adventures have you met with in the *veldt* this morning?”

“First of all, how good of you. Secondly – leaving my adventures in abeyance for the present – did you succeed in getting any rest?”

He was looking straight at her. There was a latent caress in his glance – in his tone.

“Not much,” she answered, leaving the room for a moment in order to fetch the hot dish above referred to. “It was a trying sort of a night for us all, wasn’t it?” she resumed as she returned. “And now Tom must needs go rushing off again on a fool’s errand.”

“Never mind Tom. A little blood-letting seems good for him rather than otherwise,” said Eustace, with a dash of bitterness. “About yourself. I don’t believe you have closed your eyes this night through. If you won’t take care of yourself, other people must do so for you. Presently I am going to sling the hammock under the trees and you shall have a right royal siesta.”

His hand had prisoned hers as she stood over him arranging the plates and dishes. A faint colour came into her face, and she made a movement to withdraw it. The attempt, however, was a feeble one.

“I think we are a pair of very foolish people,” she said, with a laugh whose sadness almost conveyed the idea of a sob.

“Perhaps so,” he rejoined, pressing the hand he held to his cheek a moment, ere releasing it. “What would life be worth without its foolishness?”

For a few moments neither spoke. Eanswyth was busying herself arranging some of the things in the room, adjusting an ornament here, dusting one there. Eustace ate his breakfast in silence, tried to, rather, for it seemed to him at times as if he could not eat at all. The attempt seemed to choke him. His thoughts, his feelings, were in a whirl. Here were they two alone together, with the whole day before them, and yet there seemed to have arisen something in the nature of a barrier between them.

A barrier, however, which it would not be difficult to overthrow, his unerring judgment told him; yet he fought hard with himself not to lose his self-control. He noted the refined grace of every movement as she busied herself about the room – the thoroughbred poise of the stately head, the sheen of light upon the rich hair. All this ought to belong to him – did belong to him. Yet he fought hard with himself, for he read in that brave, beautiful face an appeal, mute but eloquent – an appeal to him to spare her.

A rap at the door startled him – startled them both. What if it was some neighbour who had ridden over to pay them a visit, thought Eustace with dismay – some confounded bore who would be likely to remain the best part of the day? But it was only old Josáne, the cattle-herd. His master had told him to look in presently and ask for some tobacco, which he had been promised.

“I’ll go round to the storeroom and get it for him,” said Eanswyth. “You go on with your breakfast, Eustace.”

“No, I’ll go. I’ve done anyhow. Besides, I want to speak to him.”

Followed by the old Kafir, Eustace unlocked the storeroom – a dark, cool chamber forming part of an outbuilding. The carcass of a sheep, freshly killed that morning, dangled from a beam. Piles of *reims*, emitting a salt, rancid odour – kegs of sheep-dip, huge rolls of Boer tobacco, bundles of yoke-keys, and a dozen other things requisite to the details of farm work were stowed around or disposed on shelves. On one side was a grindstone and a carpenter’s bench. Eustace cut off a liberal length from one of the rolls of tobacco and gave it to the old Kafir. Then he filled his own pipe.

“Josane?”

“*Nkose!*”

“You are no fool, Josane. You have lived a good many years, and your head is nearly as snow-sprinkled as the summit of the Great Winterberg in the autumn. What do you think of last night’s performance over yonder?”

The old man’s shrewd countenance melted into a slight smile and he shook his head.

“The Gaikas are fools,” he replied. “They have no quarrel with the English, yet they are clamouring for war. Their country is fertile and well watered, yet they want to throw it away with both hands. They are mad.”

“Will they fight, Josane?”

“*Au!* Who can say for certain,” said the old man with an expressive shrug of the shoulders. “Yet, was ever such a thing seen? The dog wags his tail. But in this case it is the tail that wags the dog.”

“How so, Josane?”

“The chiefs of the Gaikas do not wish for war. The old men do not wish for it. But the young men – the boys – are eager for it. The women taunt them, they say; tell them they have forgotten how to be warriors. So the boys and the women clamour for war, and the chiefs and the old men give way. Thus the tail wags the dog. *Hau!*”

“And what about the Gcalékas?”

“The Gcalékas? It is this way, *Nkose*. If you shut up two bulls alone in the same kraal, if you put two scorpions into a mealie stamp, how long will it be before they fight? So it is with the Gcalékas and the Fingoes. The land is not large enough for both. The Gcalékas are ready for war.”

“And Kreli?”

“The Great Chief is in one of his red moods,” answered Josane, in a different tone to that which he had employed when speaking of the Gaikas. “He has a powerful witch-doctrress. I know her. Was I not ‘smelt out’ by her? Was I not ‘eaten up’ at her ‘word’? The toad! The impostor! The jackal cat! The slimy fish! I know her. *Ha!*”

(Eaten up: Idiom for the total sequestration of a person’s possessions.)

The old man’s eyes glared and his tone rose to one of fierce excitement at the recollection of his wrongs. Eustace, accustomed to study his fellow-men, took careful note of the circumstance. Strange things happened. It might serve him in good stead one day.

“The Gcalékas will fight,” went on Josane. “Perhaps they are fighting now. Perhaps the *Baas* will have some news to bring when he returns from Komgha. The telegraph is quick, but the voice of the bird in the air is quicker,” he added with a meaning smile, which convinced his listener that he knew a great deal more than he chose to say.

“The fire stick is even now in the thatch,” went on the Kafir, after a few more puffs at his pipe. “There is a herald from the Great Chief among the Gaika kraals.”

“Hlangani?”

“Hlangani. The Gaikas are listening to his ‘word,’ and are lighting the war-fires. If he can obtain the ear of Sandili, his work is done. *Whau*, Ixeshane,” he went on, slipping into the familiar name in his excitement. “You English are very weak people. You ought to arrest Matanzima, and several others, and send a strong Resident to Sandili, who should always keep his ear.”

“We can’t do that, Josane. There are wheels within wheels and a power behind the throne. Well, we shall see what happens,” he went on, rising as a hint to the other to depart.

He did not choose, for reasons of his own, to ask Josane direct how imminent the danger might be. To do so would be ever so slightly to impair his own *prestige*. But in his own judgment he decided that the sooner they set their affairs in order against the coming storm the better.

Chapter Twelve.

“Ah, Love, but a Day!”

Pondering over what the old Kafir had said, Eustace busied himself over two or three odd jobs. Then, returning to the storeroom, he filled up a large measure of mealies and went to the house.

“I’m going down to the ostrich camp, Eanswyth. Do you feel inclined to stroll that far, or are you too tired?”

“Yes and no. I think it will do me good.”

Flinging on a wide straw hat she joined him in the doorway. The ostrich camp was only a couple of hundred yards from the house, and at sight of them the great birds came shambling down to the fence, the truculent male having laid aside his aggressive ferocity for the occasion, as he condescended, with sullen and lordly air, to allow himself to be fed, though even then the quarrelsome disposition of the creature would find vent every now and again in a savage hiss, accompanied by a sudden and treacherous kick aimed at his timid consort whenever the latter ventured within the very outskirts of the mealies thrown down. But no sooner had the last grain disappeared than the worst instincts of the aggressive bully were all to the fore again, and the huge biped, rearing himself up to his full height, his jetty coat and snowy wing-feathers making a brave show, challenged his benefactors forthwith, rolling his fiery eyes as though longing to behold them in front of him with no protecting fence between.

“Of all the ungracious, not to say ungrateful, scoundrels disfiguring God’s earth, I believe a cock ostrich is the very worst,” remarked Eustace. “He is, if possible, worse in that line than the British loafer, for even the latter won’t always open his Billingsgate upon you until he has fairly assimilated the gin with which your ill-judged dole ‘to save him from starving’ has warmed his gullet. But this brute would willingly kick you into smithereens, while you were in the very act of feeding him.”

Eanswyth laughed.

“What strange ideas you have got, Eustace. Now I wonder to how many people any such notion as that would have occurred.”

“Have I? I am often told so, so I suppose I must have. But the grand majority of people never think themselves, consequently when they happen upon anybody who does they gaze upon him with unmitigated astonishment as a strange and startling product of some unknown state of existence.”

“Thank you,” retorted Eanswyth with a laugh. “That’s a little hard on me. As I made the remark, of course I am included in the grand majority which doesn’t think.”

“I have a very great mind to treat that observation with the silence it deserves. It is a ridiculous observation. Isn’t it?”

“Perhaps it is,” she acquiesced softly, in a tone that was half a sigh, not so much on account of the actual burden of the conversation, as an involuntary outburst of the dangerous, because too tender, undercurrent of her thoughts. And of those two walking there side by side in the radiant sunshine – outwardly so tranquilly, so peacefully, inwardly so blissfully – it was hard to say which was the most fully alive to the peril of the situation. Each was conscious of the mass of molten fires raging within the thin eggshell crust; each was rigidly on guard; the one with the feminine instinct of self-preservation superadded to the sense of rectitude of a strong character; the other striving to rely upon the necessity of caution and patience enjoined by a far-seeing and habitually self-contained nature. So far, both forces were evenly matched – so far both could play into each other’s hands, for mutual aid, mutual support against each other. Had there been aught of selfishness – of the mere unholy desire of possession – in this man’s love, things would have been otherwise. His cool brain and consummate judgment would have given him immeasurably the advantage – in fact, the key of the whole situation. But it was not so. As we have said, that love was chivalrously pure – even noble –

would have been rather elevating but for the circumstance that its indulgence meant the discounting of another man's life.

Thus they walked, side by side, in the soft and sensuous sunshine. A shimmer of heat rose from the ground. Far away over the rolling plains a few cattle and horses, dotted here and there grazing, constituted the only sign of life, and the range of wooded hills against the sky line loomed purple and misty in the golden summer haze. If ever a land seemed to enjoy the blessings of peace assuredly it was this fair land here spread out around them.

They had reached another of the ostrich camps, wherein were domiciled some eight or ten pairs of eighteen-month-old birds, which not having yet learned the extent of their power, were as tame and docile as the four-year-old male was savage and combative. Eustace had scattered the contents of his colander among them, and now the two were leaning over the gate, listlessly watching the birds feed.

"Talking of people never thinking," continued Eustace, "I don't so much wonder at that. They haven't time, I suppose, and so lose the faculty. They have enough to do to steer ahead in their own narrow little groves. But what does astonish me is that if you state an obvious fact – so obvious as to amount to a platitude – it seems to burst upon them as a kind of wild surprise, as a kind of practical joke on wheels, ready to start away down-hill and drag them with it to utter crash unless they edge away from it as far as possible. You see them turn and stare at each other, and open an amazed and gaping mouth into which you might insert a pumpkin without them being in the least aware of it."

"As for instance?" queried Eanswyth, with a smile.

"Well – as for instance. I wonder what the effect would be upon an ordinary dozen of sane people were I suddenly to propound the perfectly obvious truism that life is full of surprises. I don't wonder, at least, for I ought to know by this time. They would start by scouting the idea; ten to one they would deny the premise, and retort that life was just what we chose to make it; which is a fallacy, in that it assumes that any one atom in the human scheme is absolutely independent – firstly, of the rest of the crowd; secondly, of circumstances – in fact, is competent to boss the former and direct the latter. Which, in the words of the immortal Euclid, is absurd."

"Yet if any man is thus competent, it is yourself, Eustace."

"No," he said, shaking his head meditatively. "You are mistaken. I am certainly not independent of the action of anyone who may elect to do me a good or an ill turn. He, she, or it, has me at a disadvantage all round, for I possess the gift of foresight in a degree so limited as to be practically *nil*. As for circumstances – so far from pretending to direct them I am the mere creature of them. So are we all."

"What has started you upon this train of thought?" she asked suddenly.

"Several things. But I'll give you an instance of what I was saying just now. This morning I was surprised and surrounded by a gang of Kafirs, all armed to the teeth. Nearly all of them were on the very verge of shying their assegais bang through me, and if Ncanduku – you know him – Nteya's brother – hadn't appeared on the scene just in the very nick of time, I should have been a dead man. As it was, we sat down, had an *indaba* and a friendly smoke, and parted on the best of terms. Now, wasn't I helplessly, abjectly, the creature of circumstances – first in being molested at all – second in Ncanduku's lucky arrival?"

"Eustace! And you never told me this!"

"I told Tom – just as he was starting – and he laughed. He didn't seem to think much of it. To tell the truth, neither did I. Why – what's the matter, Eanswyth?"

Her face was deathly white. Her eyes, wide open, were dilated with horror; then they filled with tears. The next moment she was sobbing wildly – locked in his close embrace.

"Eanswyth, darling – my darling. What is it? Do not give way so! There is nothing to be alarmed about now – nothing."

His tones had sunk to a murmur of thrilling tenderness. He was showering kisses upon her lips, her brow, her eyes – upon stray tresses of soft hair which escaped beneath her hat. What had become

of their attitude of guarded self-control now? Broken down, swept away at one stroke as the swollen mountain stream sweeps away the frail barricade of timber and stones which thought to dam its course – broken down before the passionate outburst of a strong nature awakened to the knowledge of itself – startled into life by the magic touch, by the full force and fury of a consciousness of real love.

“You are right,” she said at last. “We must go away from here. I cannot bear that you should be exposed to such frightful peril. O Eustace! Why did we ever meet!”

Why, indeed! he thought. And the fierce, wild thrill of exultation which ran through him at the consciousness that her love was his – that for good or for ill she belonged to him – belonged to him absolutely – was dashed by the thought: How was it going to end? His clear-sighted, disciplined nature could not altogether get rid of that consideration. But clear-sighted, disciplined as it was, he could not forego that which constituted the whole joy and sweetness of living. “Sufficient for the day” must be his motto. Let the morrow take care of itself.

“Why did we ever meet?” he echoed. “Ah, does not that precisely exemplify what I was saying just now? Life is full of surprises. Surprise Number 1, when I first found *you* here at all. Number 2, when I awoke to the fact that you were stealing away my very self. And I soon did awake to that consciousness.”

“You did?”

“I did. And I have been battling hard against it – against myself – against you – and your insidiously enthralling influence ever since.”

His tone had become indescribably sweet and winning. If the power of the man invariably made itself felt by all with whom he was brought into contact in the affairs of everyday life, how much more was it manifested now as he poured the revelation of his long pent-up love – the love of a strong, self-contained nature which had broken bounds at last – into the ears of this woman whom he had subjugated – yes, subjugated, utterly, completely.

And what of her?

It was as though all heaven had opened before her eyes. She stood there tightly clasped in that embrace, drinking in the entrancing tenderness of those tones – hungrily devouring the straight glance of those magnetic eyes, glowing into hers. She had yielded – utterly, completely, for she was not one to do things by halves. Ah, the rapture of it!

But every medal has its obverse side. Like the stab of a sword it came home to Eanswyth. This wonderful, enthralling, beautiful love which had thrown a mystic glamour as of a radiant Paradise upon her life, had come just a trifle too late.

“O Eustace,” she cried, tearing herself away from him, and yet keeping his hands clenched tightly in hers as though she would hold him at arm’s length but could not. “O Eustace! my darling! How is it going to end? How?”

The very thought which had passed unspoken through his own mind.

“Dearest, think only of the present. For the future – who knows! Did we not agree just now – life is full of surprises?”

“*Au!*”

Both started. Eanswyth could not repress a little scream, while even Eustace realised that he was taken at a disadvantage, as he turned to confront the owner of the deep bass voice which had fired off the above ejaculation.

It proceeded from a tall, athletic Kafir, who, barely ten yards off, stood calmly surveying the pair. His grim and massive countenance was wreathed into an amused smile. His nearly naked body was anointed with the usual red ochre, and round the upper part of his left arm he wore a splendid ivory ring. He carried a heavy knob-kerrie and several assegais, one of which he was twisting about in easy, listless fashion in his right hand.

At sight of this extremely unwelcome, not to say formidable, apparition, Eustace’s hand instinctively and with a quick movement sought the back of his hip – a movement which a Western

man would thoroughly have understood. But he withdrew it – empty. For his eye, familiar with every change of the native countenance, noted that the expression of this man's face was good-humoured rather than aggressive. And withal it seemed partly familiar to him.

"Who are you – and what do you want?" he said shortly. Then as his glance fell upon a bandage wrapped round the barbarian's shoulder: "Ah. I know you – Hlangani."

"Keep your 'little gun' in your pocket, Ixeshane," said the Kafir, speaking in a tone of good-humoured banter. "I am not the man to be shot at twice. Besides, I am not *your* enemy. If I were, I could have killed you many times over already, before you saw me; could have killed you both, you and the *Inkosikazi*."

This was self-evident. Eustace, recognising it, felt rather small. He to be taken thus at a disadvantage, he, who had constituted himself Eanswyth's special protector against this very man! Yes. He felt decidedly small, but he was not going to show it.

"You speak the truth, Hlangani," he answered calmly. "You are not my enemy. No man of the race of Xosa is. But why do you come here? There is bad blood between you and the owner of this place. Surely the land is wide enough for both. Why should your pathways cross?"

"Ha! *You* say truly, Ixeshane. There *is* blood between me and the man of whom you speak. Blood – the blood of a chief of the House of Gcaléka. Ha!"

The eyes of the savage glared, and his countenance underwent a transformation almost magical in its suddenness. The smiling, good-humoured expression gave way to one of deadly hate, of a ruthless ferocity that was almost appalling to contemplate. So effective was it upon Eustace that carelessly, and as if by accident, he interposed his body between Eanswyth and the speaker, and though he made no movement, his every sense was on the alert. He was ready to draw his revolver with lightning-like rapidity at the first aggressive indication. But no such indication was manifested.

"No. You have no enemies among our people – neither you nor the *Inkosikazi*" – went on Hlangani as his countenance resumed its normal calm. "You have always been friends to us. Why are *you* not living here together as our friends and neighbours – you two, without the poison of our deadly enemy to cause ill-blood between us and you – you alone together? I would speak with you apart, Ixeshane."

Now, Eanswyth, though living side by side with the natives, was, like most colonial people, but poorly versed in the Xosa tongue. She knew a smattering of it, just sufficient for kitchen purposes, and that was all; consequently, but for a word here and there, the above dialogue was unintelligible to her. But it was otherwise with her companion. His familiarity with the language was all but complete, and not only with the language, but with all its tricks. He knew that the other was "talking dark," and his quick perception readily grasped the meaning which was intended to be conveyed. With the lurid thoughts indulged in that morning as regarded his cousin still fresh in his mind, it could hardly have been otherwise.

He hated the man: he loved the man's wife. "How is it going to end?" had been his unuttered cry just now. "How is it going to end!" she had re-echoed. Well, here was a short and easy solution ready to hand. A flush of blood surged to his face, and his heart beat fiercely under the terrible temptation thus thrown in his way. Yet so fleeting was it as scarcely to constitute a temptation at all. Now that it was put nakedly to him he could not do this thing. He could not consent to a murder – a cold-blooded, treacherous murder.

"I cannot talk with you apart, Hlangani," he answered. "I cannot leave the *Inkosikazi* standing here alone even for a few minutes."

The piercing glance of the shrewd savage had been scrutinising his face – had been reading it like a book. Upon him the terrible struggle within had not been lost.

"Consider, Ixeshane," he pursued. "What is the gift of a few dozen cows, of *two hundred cows*, when compared with the happiness of a man's lifetime? Nothing. *Is it to be? Say the word. Is it to be?*"

The barbarian's fiery eyes were fixed upon his with deep and terrible meaning. To Eustace it seemed as if the blasting glare of the Arch fiend himself shone forth from their cruel depths.

"It is *not* to be. The 'word' is No! Unmistakably and distinctly No. You understand, Hlangani?"

"*Au!* As you will, Ixeshane," replied the Kafir, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders. "See. You wear a 'charm'," referring to a curious coin which Eustace wore hanging from his watch-chain. "If you change your mind send over the 'charm' to me at Nteya's kraal this night – it shall be returned. But after to-night it may be too late. Farewell."

And flinging his blanket over his shoulder the savage turned and strode away into the *veldt*— Eustace purposely omitting to offer him a little tobacco, lest this ordinary token of good will should be construed into a sort of earnest of the dark and terrible bargain which Hlangani had proposed to him – by mere hints it is true – but still had none the less surely proposed.

Chapter Thirteen.

”...And the World is Changed.”

They stood for some moments watching the receding figure of the Kafir in silence. Eanswyth was the first to break it.

“What have you been talking about all this time, Eustace? Is it any new danger that threatens us?”

“N-no. Rather the reverse if anything,” and his features cleared up as if to bear out the truth of his words. “I don’t see, though, why you shouldn’t know it. That’s the man we fell foul of in the *veldt* yesterday – you remember the affair of the white dog?”

“Oh!” and Eanswyth turned very pale.

“Now don’t be alarmed, dearest. I believe he only loafed round here to try and collect some compensation.”

“Is that really all, Eustace?” she went on anxiously. “You seemed very much disturbed, dear. I don’t think I ever saw you look so thoroughly disturbed.”

There was no perturbation left in his glance now. He took her face lovingly between his hands and kissed it again and again.

“Did you not, my sweet? Well, perhaps there has never existed such ground for it. Perhaps I have never met with so inopportune an interruption. But now, cheer up. We must make the most of this day, for a sort of instinct tells me that it is the last we shall have to ourselves, at any rate for some time to come. And now what shall we do with ourselves? Shall we go back to the house or sit here a little while and talk?”

Eanswyth was in favour of the latter plan. And, seated there in the shade of a great acacia, the rich summer morning sped by in a golden dream. The fair panorama of distant hills and wooded kloofs; the radiant sunlight upon the wide sweep of mimosa-dotted plains, shimmering into many a fantastic mirage in the glowing heat; the call of bird voices in the adjacent brake, and the continuous chirrup of crickets; the full, warm glow of the sensuous air, rich, permeating, life-giving; here indeed was a very Eden. Thus the golden morning sped swiftly by.

But how was it all to end? That was the black drop clouding the sparkling cup – that was the trail of the serpent across that sunny Eden. And yet not, for it may be that this very rift but served only to enhance the intoxicating, thrilling delights of the present – that this idyl of happiness, unlawful alike in the sight of God or man, was a hundredfold sweetened by the sad vein of undercurrent running through it – even the consciousness that it was not to last. For do we not, in the weak contrariety of our mortal natures, value a thing in exact proportion to the precariousness of our tenure!

Come good, come ill, never would either of them forget that day: short, golden, idyllic.

“Guess how long we have been sitting here!” said Eanswyth at last, with a rapid glance at her watch. “No – don’t look,” she added hurriedly, “I want you to *guess*.”

“About half an hour, it seems. But I suppose it must be more than that.”

“Exactly two hours and ten minutes.”

“Two hours and ten minutes of our last peaceful day together – gone. Of our first and our last day together.”

“Why do you say our last, dear?” she murmured, toying with his hair. His head lay on her lap, his blue eyes gazing up into her large grey ones.

“Because, as I told you, I have a strong inkling that way – at any rate, for some time to come. It is wholly lamentable, but, I’m afraid, inevitable.”

She bent her head – her beautiful stately head – drooped her lips to his and kissed them passionately.

“Eustace, Eustace, my darling – my very life! Why do I love you like this!”

“Because you can’t help it, my sweet one!” he answered, returning her kisses with an ardour equalling her own.

“Why did I give way so soon? Why did I give way at all? As you say, because I couldn’t help it – because – in short, because it was *you*. You drew me out of myself – you forced me to love you, forced me to. Ah-h! and how I love you!”

The quiver in her tones would not be entirely suppressed. Even he had hardly suspected the full force of passion latent within this woman, only awaiting the magic touch to blaze forth into bright flame. And his had been the touch which had enkindled it.

“You have brought more than a Paradise into my life,” he replied, his glance holding hers as he looked up into her radiant eyes. “Tell me, did you never suspect, all these months, that I only *lived* when in the halo-influence of your presence?”

“I knew it.”

“You knew it?”

“Of course I did,” she answered with a joyous laugh, taking his face between her hands and kissing it again. “I should have been no woman if I had not. But, I have kept my secret better than you. Yes, my secret. I have been battling against your influence far harder than you have against mine, and you have conquered.” He started, and a look of something like dismay came into his face.

“If that is so, you witching enchantress, why did you not lift me out of my torment long ago,” he said. “But the worst is this. Just think what opportunities we have missed, what a long time we have wasted which might have been – Heaven.”

“Yet, even then, it may be better as things have turned out. My love – my star – I could die with happiness at this moment. But,” and then to the quiver of joy in her voice succeeded an intonation of sadness, “but – I suppose this world does not contain a more wicked woman than myself. Tell me, Eustace,” she went on, checking whatever remark he might have been about to make, “tell me what you think. Shall we not one day be called upon to suffer in tears and bitterness for this entrancingly happy flood of sunshine upon our lives now?”

“That is an odd question, and a thoroughly characteristic one,” he replied slowly. “Unfortunately all the events of life, as well as the laws of Nature, go to bear out the opinions of the theologians. Everything must be paid for, and from this rule there is no escape. Everything, therefore, resolves itself into a mere question of price – e.g., Is the debt incurred worth the huge compound interest likely to be exacted upon it in the far or near future? Now apply this to the present case. Do you follow me?”

“Perfectly. If our love is wrong – wicked – we shall be called upon to suffer for it sooner or later?”

“That is precisely my meaning. I will go further. The term ‘poetic justice’ is, I firmly believe, more than a mere idiom. If we are doing wrong through love for each other we shall have to expiate it at some future time. We shall be made to suffer *through*

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