

Mitford Bertram

The Luck of Gerard Ridgeley



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Chapter One. Crossing the Durban Bar

The steamship *Amatikulu* was drawing near the end of her voyage.

A fresh breeze was ploughing up the blue waves of the Indian Ocean, hurling off their crests in white, foamy masses, casting showers of salt spray upon the wet decks of the vessel as she plunged her nose into each heaving, tossing billow, and leaped up again with a sudden jerk which was more than lively, and calculated to produce the most distressful of throes in the systems of her passengers. But these were well salted by this time, for, as we have just stated, they were at the end of their voyage.

This being so, it was pleasant work coasting along the Natal shore; pleasant to gaze on the green slopes and luxuriant tropical foliage, with here and there a planter's bungalow peeping out from the tall canes; trebly pleasant, indeed, after a month of sea and sky-line, unvaried by any sight or diversion save such as the ocean could afford; for the *Amatikulu* was not in the mail service, but owned by a private firm, and, being advertised to "sail direct for Natal," had touched nowhere save at Madeira, a week out from home.

"I reckon you two youngsters will be glad to stretch your legs ashore."

The two thus unceremoniously addressed, who had been leaning over the taffrail intently watching the coastline, turned to the speaker, one with an air of would-be offended dignity, the other with a good-humoured laugh and a word of hearty assent.

Not less dissimilar in appearance than in their manner of receiving the above greeting were these two. Both of the same age, both bound on the same errand, it was easy to see that, come good or come ill, their lines would run upon altogether different roads. One, a well-made, broad-shouldered young fellow, whose sunburnt face and muscular hands spoke of abundance of cricket and rowing, and, in short, of every healthy outdoor sport within reach. The other, of slighter build, showed, in feature and dress alike, every symptom of the budding "masher," the would-be man of the world. Thus Gerard Ridgeley and Harry Maitland respectively, as they gazed curiously at the shores of the new country, whither both had been consigned to seek their fortunes – in a word, to shift for themselves.

They were in no way related. They had become friends on board ship – up to a certain point, that is, for they had few ideas in common. Both were of the same age, however – just under nineteen, and the *Amatikulu* carried but few passengers. But she carried them at a considerably reduced rate.

"Of course, of course," went on he who had accosted the pair, a bluff, jolly-looking individual with a short, grizzled beard. "That's only natural and right. Young fellows who don't look ahead ain't worth their salt, in my humble opinion. And yet, if I know anything of life, I'll bet a guinea the time'll come when you'll find yourselves wishing all you know you were back aboard this old barkie, with the cockroaches running over you all night, and nothing to do all day but play 'bull,' and look at the sea, or quarrel to kill time."

"That's cheerful, Mr Kingsland, at any rate," said Gerard Ridgeley, laughing heartily at this terse summary of a sea voyage, no less than at the somewhat discouraging prediction which accompanied it. "But of course no one expects a bed of roses by way of a start in a new country. And now that it has come to the point, I feel in no hurry to leave the old barkie, cockroaches and all."

"That's right, my lad," said his senior, looking at him approvingly. "We haven't had such a bad time aboard the old ship after all. And she's brought us over safe and sound. No – you'll do; I can sea you'll do, wherever you are." And the speaker strolled away forward.

“Of all the bumptious old clodhoppers!” muttered Harry Maitland, scowling after the retreating form. “You seem to take things mighty cool, Ridgeley. Now, for my part, I can’t stand that fellow’s patronising way of talking to one. As if a chap was a schoolboy, don’t you know.”

“Bosh, Maitland!” said Gerard. “Old Kingsland’s not half a bad sort. He’s colonial, you know, and these colonial fellows are always blunt and outspoken – at least, so I’ve heard. He doesn’t mean any harm, and, if I were you, I’d knock off being so touchy about everything. I’m tolerably sure it won’t pay out here.”

“Hallo!” sneered Maitland. “You seem to be taking a leaf out of old Kingsland’s book. And it’s rather rich you setting up to lecture a fellow when you know about as much of this country as I do.”

“Well, we shall both know a little more about it directly,” was the good-humoured reply, “for in less than half an hour we shall be at anchor.”

The *Amatikulu* was now nearly abreast of the lofty brush-clad headland known as The Bluff, which extends its protecting arm between the port of Durban and the full force of the south-westerly gales. Signals were exchanged with the lighthouse, and, tumbling through the blue and lumpy seas, the steamer with slackened speed dropped cautiously into the roadstead. Then the rattling of the cable, as down went the anchor into half a score fathoms of water, and the voyage was at an end.

Not quite, however. There was still the “bar” to cross, before any could set foot on that beautiful land lying there spread out, an ocean of wooded hills, softly outlined in mellow distance against the cloudless blue. Dotted along the Berea, nestling amid tropical foliage, were scattered the villas of the well-to-do. Below lay the roofs of the busy town, a forest of masts rising above them from the land-locked harbour.

The *Amatikulu* drew too much water to attempt crossing this bar even in the smoothest of seas. From her decks the lines of roaring, boiling surf, the spume flying in misty clouds from each combing roller, were plainly visible. Visions of battenning down, of a horrible half-hour spent in darkness beneath closed hatchways and crushing, thunderous seas, arose in the minds of her dismayed passengers. And their misgivings underwent no abatement as they watched the puffing little tug-boat, tossing like a cockle-shell upon the great rollers, or burying her hull out of sight beneath the surf. Out she came, however, right bravely, and soon sheered up alongside, to take off the passengers.

Then followed much leave-taking. Gerard, who had made friends with everybody on board, from the skipper and his mates to the sour-visaged old quarter-master, felt low-spirited enough as he took his seat in the great basket, through the agency of which, by threes and fours at a time, the passengers were swung off the *Amatikulu* and deposited with a thump on the streaming decks of the little tug-boat. Nothing delighted the grinning salts so much as to note the aspect of each human basketful as it tumbled out, scared and flurried, or mirthful and cheery, according to temperament, upon the heaving deck of its new and uncommonly lively resting-place, and the gleeful alacrity with which they hoisted up the empty basket for a load of fresh victims, spoke volumes for the genuineness of the pleasure too many people take in the misfortunes of their neighbours.

“I say, my hearties, I must trouble you to get below,” said the parchment-faced skipper of the tug, hailing our two young friends. The boat was rapidly nearing the worst part, plunging and rolling in the furiously increasing seas.

“I’d rather stay on deck,” expostulated Gerard.

“Dare say you would – and get washed overboard. Then what’d be said to me I’d like to know?”

“Is it as bad as that?” said Harry Maitland, in a scared tone.

“It is so. Time we came out before this, we had a couple of black fellows washed clean overboard. There was a tow-rope out, luckily for them, or they’d never have come up again. Now then, get below, will you? it’s time to batten.”

Harry needed no second warning. Down he went into the dark, stuffy little cabin. But Gerard still hesitated.

“Let him stay, captain,” said Mr Kingsland, who had overheard the dialogue, and who, moreover, was acquainted with that functionary. “He’ll know how to take care of himself.”

“Oh, all right; he’ll have to, then. Here, mister, stand there forrard the companion, and lay hold of that ringbolt. Hang on to it, mind – hang on to it by your teeth and your eyelashes for all you know, or you’ll find yourself overboard in less than a duck’s whisper. We are going to get it lively in a minute.”

So saying, he jumped on to the bridge to take the wheel from his subordinate, while Gerard, resolving to follow that advice which related to “hanging on,” looked around upon the situation.

Up went the boat’s head suddenly with a smooth slide, up a great hill of water, from whose summit it seemed she must leap right on to that of the lofty wooded bluff rising on her port bow. Then a mighty plunge; the foam flew in a deafening hiss from her bows, breaking on and pouring knee-deep along her decks. There was a sharp warning cry. In her wake, rearing up higher and higher as it sped on, came a huge green wall – rearing up till it seemed to shut out the very heavens. Watching it with an awestruck fascination, Gerard marked its crest curl, then, with a terrible and appalling crash, it burst full upon their decks.

For a moment he could not have told whether he was overboard, or not. The shock, the continuous pouring rush of the mighty wave – by no means over in a moment – was so stunning, so bewildering in its effect, that his senses were utterly confused. But for his firm hold of the iron ring, he would have been swept away like a feather. Hold on to it, however, he did, and with good reason. The first shock was but an earnest of what was to follow. Crash after crash, the game little craft burying herself completely beneath the mighty seas, to rise again like a duck, only to be sent staggering under once more, as a fresh roller broke in bellowing fury upon her. The rattle of her steering chains, the harsh and laboured clank of her engines, the sharp whirr of her propeller spinning clear of the water, the stifled shrieks of terrified female passengers hermetically sealed up in the cabin below – these alone were the sounds heard through the deafening roar of the surf, the swirling din of cataracts pouring along her heaving decks. A quarter of an hour of this raging, seething cauldron of waters, of buffeting, staggering, plunging, rolling half under, and there was a sudden calm. The terrible bar was passed; and none the worse for her rough usage, the staunch little craft sped blithely over the still waters of the land-locked harbour.

Then, released from their imprisonment, the passengers came swarming on deck, and a woeful sight they presented. Pallid, shaky, grime-besmeared and otherwise the worse for wear, not a man but looked as though he had been turned prematurely out of a hospital, while many of the females were in a fainting and hysterical condition. And small wonder. Here were these unfortunate people sealed up in a square box, whose sole furniture consisted of a wooden bench let into each side, and thus, with nothing in the world to hold on to, literally shaken up as though in a cask rolling downhill, every frantic plunge of the vessel sending them tumbling over and over each other on the floor; many, too, in the wildest throes of sea-sickness; add to this the darkness, the horrible stifling atmosphere, the hoarse thunder of the great seas shivering the fabric, and the shrieks of the panic-stricken women, and it will be seen that the ’tweendecks of a tug-boat crossing the Durban bar might almost put Pandemonium itself to the blush.

“Well, Ridgeley, how did you come through it?” said Maitland, emerging very white and shaky. “I believe I’d sooner end my days in this country than go through that awful cabin experience again.”

“You’d have been better above,” said Gerard. “Although I haven’t got a dry stitch on me, and am going to land in our new country wet to the very bones!”

But the semi-tropical sun was strong and bright, and the sea-water warm. No harm would come of ten such wettings. Then the tug was moored to the quay. There was a rush of coolie porters on board, and our two friends, surrounded by all their worldly goods, planted a first footstep on the land which was to be the scene of their start in life.

Chapter Two.

Strangers in a Strange Land

“Now, young fellows. Bring along your traps this way. Got anything to declare?”

The voice proceeded from a bluff hearty individual wearing a thick grizzled beard and a brass-buttoned coat. He was standing in the doorway of the Custom-house.

“Oh, hang it, I don’t know,” answered Maitland, peevishly, and looking around rather wildly. “Those niggers have cleared out every mortal thing we possess. What they’ve done with them, Heaven only knows. There doesn’t seem to be any one to look after one’s things in this beast of a place.”

The official burst into a loud laugh.

“Any one to look after your things!” he echoed. “You’ve got to do that yourself, sonny, here. But we are going to do that too.”

“I wish you had said so before,” was the ill-tempered reply. “Well, then, I have got two portmanteaus, a saddle-case and two gun-cases; a hatbox, a handbag, and two bundles of wraps.”

“All right. Step in here,” said the official, leading the way inside. The luggage was all piled on a counter, and presently Harry, to his intense disgust, found himself nearly five pounds the poorer, which amount he had contributed to the Colonial revenue as duty upon his guns, saddle, and a few other small sundries; while Gerard, whose outfit was of a more modest order, came off considerably lighter.

“Going up-country, mister?” said the official, as, the examination over, he lit his pipe and strolled into the air again.

“Yes,” answered Gerard. “We want to get to Pietermaritzburg first, though.”

“Going to join the Police, maybe?”

“Well, I have at times thought about that, if nothing better turns up. By the way, perhaps you could tell us of some place here where they would put us up, at a low figure, for the two or three days we are here. These hotels run you up such a bill.”

“So they do. I can, as it happens, send you to a place where you’ll save the ‘chips,’ at any rate. But maybe you’ll find it a bit roughish. Wayne’s, between this and the town – almost in the town. They take in boarders there, mostly working-chaps and small storemen, but all decent respectable fellows. But Wayne won’t charge you more than half what an hotel will; and if you don’t mind it being a bit rough, you can’t do better than go there. You can mention I sent you.”

“That’ll do us first rate,” said Gerard.

“All right. I’ll send a couple of boys up with your traps on a trolley. Oh, here’s one just starting up town.”

And hailing two of the native hands, he spoke to them volubly in the Zulu language, with the result that our friends’ luggage was loaded up there and then upon the vehicle.

“Good-bye, and good luck to you, if we don’t meet again. You’ll find a tramcar outside the yard gates,” said the jolly official, holding out his hand.

“Good-bye, and many thanks,” replied Gerard, giving it a hearty shake. An example which Harry Maitland followed, but minus the heartiness.

“What a fellow you are, Ridgeley!” fumed Harry, as soon as they were alone together. “What sort of a dog-hole is it that that cad is sending us to? Why, he himself said it was full of navvies and counter-jumpers. Hanged if I go there! I’m going to the Royal.”

“You must please yourself, of course, Harry,” was the perfectly good-humoured reply. “Unfortunately I can’t afford to do that. I’ve none too much cash as it is, and when that’s gone, I don’t see the slightest prospect of getting any more until I can make it myself. So, as I’ve got to rough it

anyhow, I may as well begin now, and save the ‘chips’ at the same time. It won’t do you any harm either. Try it, for one night at any rate.”

The other sulkily acquiesced. The fact was he did not care to cut adrift from Gerard just then. He felt very much a fish out of water, in that strange country; were he alone, he would feel ten times more so. So comfort must give way to companionship, and he made no further objections.

A few inquiries soon brought them to the object of their search – a long low house standing back from the road. It was roofed with corrugated iron, and on each side were wings containing apparently bedrooms, opening onto the high *stoep*, for the doors stood wide open. In front of the house was a barren-looking garden, shaded by a couple of eucalyptus trees, growing one in each corner.

As they swung back the wooden gate which opened into the garden, the owner came out onto the *stoep*. He was a tall, loosely hung man, with the sallow complexion characteristic of the dwellers in the semi-tropical coast country of Natal.

“Good day, gentlemen. Did you want to see me? I am Wayne.”

Briefly Gerard explained the object of their visit.

“I don’t quite know what to say,” said Wayne. “We don’t care as a rule to take in boarders for so short a time, besides being pretty full up just now. However, as you’re new to the country, we’ll do the best we can for you, if you can manage with a room between you, that is; it’s not a very big one at that. Here it is.”

He showed them into one of the rooms aforesaid, opening onto the *stoep*. It certainly was not palatial, being about twelve feet square. Its fittings consisted of a small iron bedstead, a ditto washstand with a zinc basin and ewer, a rather dilapidated chair, a few pegs, and a cupboard.

“But there’s only one bed, and even that is too small for two people,” cried Harry, in dismay.

The proprietor laughed.

“That’s so. One of you will have to shake down on the floor. You can toss up which it’s to be.”

“It will do us all right,” said Gerard. “Now about terms.”

The man named a figure which seemed reasonable enough.

“You see, we could put you in lower if you were going to stop. As it is it wouldn’t pay us.”

“I see. We are quite satisfied,” said Gerard.

“Right. Maybe you’d like to stroll up into the town a bit. Tea is at seven. So long!”

“Pretty offhand, that chap,” remarked Harry, as they walked along the broad dusty road towards the town.

Lines of houses, similar to their new abode, and all built apart in their own grounds, stood on each side of the road, behind hedges of tamarisk or pomegranate. Tall bananas hung out their feathery tufts, and the verandahs twined with cactus or jessamine looked cool and inviting. A stretch of flat marshy land, extending to the blue waters of the land-locked bay, was still dotted with shaggy tufts of the “forest primeval.”

But the streets showed plenty of life in all its human varieties, black or white. The red or yellow dresses of the Indian coolies made quite a glow of colour in the dusty streets. Here and there a tall head-ringed native from some inland kraal strode down the street, his head in the air, and majestic in the proud possession of a rather cloudy check shirt, his kerries on his shoulder, and a bevy of his obedient womenkind following in his wake. At these original lords of the soil Gerard could not but look with considerable interest, as he noted with approval the massive limbs and stately bearing which seemed to raise the scantily clad savage a head and shoulders above the groups of slightly built, effeminate Orientals through which he somewhat disdainfully took his way. Whites, sallow-complexioned townspeople, there were too, standing about exchanging conversation – rather listlessly, for the close of a hot summer day in Durban is apt to find men not a little languid – and here and there a bronzed planter or farmer cantering down the street, bound for his country home among the sugar-canes or the bush.

A couple of hours' stroll, and our two young friends began to feel a little of the enervating influence of the hot moist climate. Accordingly, having hailed a tramcar, they were soon set down at the door of their new lodgings.

The evening meal had already begun as they entered. Some seven or eight men, of the class described by the friendly Customs official, were seated at a long table, making great play with their knives and forks. The landlord sat at one end of the table and his wife at the other. The latter, a wooden-faced, middle-aged person, pointed to two seats which had been kept for the new boarders, and subsided again into silence. The other inmates, after a furtive stare, resumed their knife-and-fork play.

The meal, though plain, was extremely good. It consisted of tea, roast mutton, and potatoes, followed by some splendid pineapples. There was also boiled Indian corn served up in the ear, and plenty of bread and jam.

"Never ate 'green mealies' before, eh, mister?" sung out Wayne from the other end of the table, noticing that Harry half shied at the edible in question. "You just try one; you'll find them first rate."

Some one at the same time handed him the dish. The tender, smoking ears of corn looked tempting enough. Harry helped himself to one, and without much thinking what he was doing, put it endways into his mouth, and took a bite. A shout of laughter went up from the men. They had been furtively watching him, on the look-out for this. Harry reddened with anger, then tried to look dignified and indifferent.

"Never mind, mister," cried Wayne, reassuringly. "You ain't the first by a long chalk who has to learn how to eat green mealies. Half these chaps grinning here did just the same thing at first. Why, Robertson there, alongside you, bit the mealie cob clean in half, and then said it seemed rather dry sort of forage – eh, Robertson?"

"That's just a fact, Wayne," answered the man referred to, a tall, good-humoured young mechanic, seated next to Gerard, and with whom the latter had already been having some conversation.

The incident led to a good deal of chaff and bantering recrimination among the men themselves, during the progress of which Harry managed to smooth down his ruffled feelings.

Supper over, a move was made outside. Some of the men started off for the town to amuse themselves for the evening, while the others remained quietly at home, smoking their pipes in the verandah. After the noise and steamy heat of the dining-room, this was an example our two friends were not sorry to follow.

"Well, Harry, you can have the bedstead; I'll take the floor," said Gerard, as a couple of hours later they found themselves in possession of their room. "I feel like sleeping anywhere, I'm so tired."

"I don't," grumbled the other, on whom the dearth of comfort, together with the uncongeniality of the position, was beginning to tell. "I feel more inclined to take the first ship home again than to do anything else, I can tell you."

"Pooh, man, don't be so easily put off! I suppose that's what most fellows think at first, though."

Gerard soon dropped off to sleep. Tired as he was, however, and with every disposition to adapt himself to circumstances, in less than two hours he awoke. The heat of the room, notwithstanding that the window was wide open, was suffocating, and, added to this, he awoke with the sensation of being devoured alive. A subdued groan from his companion, who was tossing restlessly upon his bed, caught his ear.

"Hallo, Harry! what's the row?"

"Ugh! I was wondering how long you would stand it. I'm being eaten – dragged out of bed. These infernal mosquitoes!"

That was at the bottom of the mischief, then. In the silence following on his companion's words, Gerard could hear the shrill trumpet of more than one of these nocturnal pests, winging his way aloft,

to lie hidden in some secure corner of the ceiling until quiet should once more prevail, and he could again descend to browse upon his victims to his heart's content and the repletion of his skin.

"Oh, that's it, is it!" cried Gerard, striking a light with alacrity. "By Jove, I'm bitten all over!" he went on, examining his hands and chest, and also becoming aware of the existence of several lumps upon his head and face.

"So am I," groaned Harry. "I haven't been able to snatch a wink of sleep this blessed night. Just look at the brutes!"

In the candlelight, some half-dozen of the tiny venomous insects could be seen floating in the air. A good many more were on the ceiling.

"Why, hang it, I always thought they gave one mosquito curtains in countries like this!" said Gerard, "and – why, Harry, you've got one. How is it we didn't spot the thing before?"

"Have I? Where? What – this thing?"

"Yes, of course. Let's see what it's good for."

There was a fold of gauze netting at the head of the bedstead. This, on further investigation, was found to be large enough to protect the head and shoulders of the sleeper, and Gerard duly arranged it as best he knew how for the benefit of his companion.

"There you are, old chap. Now you'll be all right – only it's rather like shutting the stable door after the horse is stolen. I'll tuck my head under the sheet, and dodge them that way."

He returned to his shakedown, and put out the light. He was just dozing off, when another exclamation on the part of his companion aroused him.

"What's the row now?" he cried.

"Row? I should think there was. Just listen to that fellow next door 'sawing planks.'"

A shrill, strident, rasping snore came through the partition, which was constructed of very thin boarding. A most exasperating snore withal, and one calculated to drive a light sleeper to the verge of frenzy.

"Well, I'm afraid we can do nothing against that," said Gerard, ruefully.

Nor could they. And what with the stifling heat, the mosquito bites, and that maddening snore, our two young friends had a very bad night of it indeed, and but little sleep fell to their lot. Harry Maitland, fagged and disgusted, was not slow to air his grievances to the full the next morning on meeting Wayne. But that unfeeling individual only laughed.

"So!" he said. "Yes, it's always that way. Mosquitoes are always death on a new man out from home. They don't think much of us old stagers when they can get fresh blood. But never mind. You'll soon get used to that."

Which was all the sympathy they met with.

Chapter Three.

A Friend

“Well, youngsters! And what have you been doing with yourselves since you got ashore?”

Thus a jolly voice behind them, and a hand fell upon the shoulder of each. They were returning from a couple of hours’ row among the bushy islets of the bay, and were strolling down the main street of Durban, stopping here and there to look at a shop window crammed with quaint curios and Kafir truck, or displaying photographic views representing phases of native life and scenes up-country.

“Mr Kingsland!” cried Gerard, turning with a lively sense of satisfaction. “Why, I thought you were going straight through.”

“So I was – so I was. But I ran against some fellows directly I landed, and they wouldn’t hear of my leaving Durban yesterday – or to-day either. And now you’d better come along with me to the Royal and have some lunch.”

This invitation met with cordial acceptance. Both were beginning to feel rather out of it, knowing nobody in the place. The breezy geniality of their shipboard acquaintance did not strike Harry as officious or obtrusive now.

“We shall be delighted,” he said. “The fact is, we are none too comfortable where we are. I, for one, don’t care how soon we get out of it.”

“Eh – what! Why, where are you putting up?”

“At a precious rough-and-tumble sort of shop,” answered Harry resentfully, the recollection of the mosquitoes still fresh and green. “A fellow named Wayne, who keeps a sort of boarding-house for navvies – ”

“Wayne! At Wayne’s, are you? I know Wayne well. Smartish fellow he used to be – made a little money at transport-riding¹, but couldn’t stick to it – couldn’t stick to anything – not enough staying power in him,” went on Mr Kingsland, with that open-hearted garrulity on the subject of his neighbours’ affairs which characterises a certain stamp of colonial. “And you find it roughish, eh?”

“I should rather think we did,” rejoined Harry. And then he proceeded to give a feeling account of his experiences, especially with regard to the mosquitoes.

Mr Kingsland laughed heartily.

“You’ll soon get used to that,” he said. “Here we are. And now for tiffin.”

They entered the hotel just as the gong sounded. Several men lounged about the hall in cane chairs. To most of these their entertainer nodded, speaking a few words to some. Then he piloted them to a table in a cool corner.

“And now what do you propose doing?” said Mr Kingsland, when lunch was well in progress. “Stay on here and look around for a few days, or get away further up-country?”

“The last for choice,” answered Gerard. “We have had about enough of Durban already. You see, we don’t know a soul here,” he hurried to explain, lest the other should think him fastidious or fault-finding; for there is no point on which the colonial mind is so touchy as on that of the merits or demerits of its own particular town or section.

“And feel rather ‘out of it.’ Quite so,” rejoined Mr Kingsland. “But didn’t you say, Ridgeley, you had friends in Maritzburg to whom you were consigned?”

“Not that exactly. I have a distant relative up there – Anstey his name is – perhaps you know him? I believe he manages a store, or something of that kind.”

“N-no, I can’t say I do. There’s Anstey out Greytown way; but he’s a farmer.”

¹ The carriage of goods by ox-waggon, which before the day of railways was the sole method, is thus termed.

“Oh no, that’s not the man. This one hasn’t got an ounce of farming in him. The fact is, I don’t know him. My mother – my people, that is – thought he might be able to put me into the way of doing something, so I have got a letter to him.”

“And what is the ‘something’ you are thinking of doing, Ridgeley?” said Mr Kingsland, fixing his eyes upon Gerard’s face.

“I’m afraid I must take whatever turns up – think myself lucky to get it. But, for choice, I should like above all things to get on a farm.”

“H’m! Most young fellows who come out here are keen on that at first. They don’t all stick to it, though – not they. They begin by fancying it’s going to be no end of a jolly life, all riding about and shooting. But it isn’t, not by any means. It’s regular downright hard work, and a rough life at that.”

“That I’m quite prepared for,” said Gerard. “I only wish I could get the chance.”

“Rather. It just is rough work,” went on Mr Kingsland, ignoring the last remark. “There’s no such thing as saying to a fellow ‘Do this,’ and he does it. You’ve got to show him the way and begin by doing it yourself. You’ve got to off with your coat and work as hard as the rest. How do you like the idea of that, in a blazing sun about as hot again as it is to-day? Eh, Maitland?”

“Oh, I suppose it’s all right,” said Harry, rather uncomfortably, for this aspect of the case had struck him as not encouraging. “But I don’t know what I shall do yet. I think I’ll look around a bit first. It’s a mistake to be in too great a hurry over matters of this kind, don’t you know. And I’ve got a lot of letters of introduction.”

Mr Kingsland looked at him curiously for a moment, as if about to make a remark, and then thought better of it. He turned to Gerard again.

“If I were you, Ridgeley – if I might offer you a bit of advice – I wouldn’t stop on here. Get on to Maritzburg as soon as you can and look up your relative. Anyway, you can’t do any good by hanging on here. Now, there’s a man I know starting from Pinetown with a load of goods. He’d give you a passage up there on his waggon for the cost of your keep, and that’s a mere trifle; and you’d have the advantage of seeing the country and at the same time getting an insight into waggon travelling. But you’ll have to leave here by an afternoon train. He starts from Pinetown to-night.”

“It’s awfully kind of you, Mr Kingsland,” said Gerard. “There’s nothing I should like better. How shall we find him?”

“That’s easily done. Pinetown isn’t such a big place. Dawes, his name is – John Dawes. I’ll give you a line to him. If you won’t take anything more I’ll go and write it now.”

Just before they took leave of each other Mr Kingsland found an opportunity of speaking to Gerard apart.

“Look here, Ridgeley, I don’t say I shall be able to help you in that notion of yours about getting on a farm, but I may be. You see I’ve got a couple of boys of my own, and between them and myself we haven’t room for another hand on the place. I won’t even ask you to come and see us – not just now, because the sooner you get into harness the better. But afterwards, whenever you have a week or two to spare, we shall be delighted to see you, whenever you can come, and as long as you can stay. That’s a very first-rate idea of yours to get your foot in the stirrup before you think of anything else; and when you’ve got your foot in the stirrup, keep it there. Stick to it, my lad, stick to it, and you’ll do well. One word more. This is a deuce of a country for fellows getting into a free-and-easy, let-things-slide sort of way – I say so, though I belong to it myself. Now, don’t you let any such influences get hold of you. You’ve got to make your way – go straight through and make it, and while that’s your motto you have always got one friend in this country at any rate, and his name is Bob Kingsland. Well, Maitland,” as Harry rejoined them, “ready to start on such short marching orders, eh?”

“Rather. Anything to get away from those beastly mosquitoes.”

They took leave of their kind entertainer and returned to their lodgings to pack up their traps.

“Rattling good chap, old Kingsland,” said Gerard, enthusiastically, when they were alone again.

The straight commonsense counsel, the kind and friendly interest in him and his welfare, and that on the part of a comparative stranger, on whose good offices he had not a shadow of a claim, touched him deeply. Moreover, he felt cheered, morally braced up for whatever start in life might lie before him. There and then he resolved more firmly than ever that whatever his right hand should find to do, he would do it with all his might.

Gerard Ridgeley's story was that of many another youngster who has begun life under similar circumstances. He was the eldest son of a professional man, a struggling surgeon in a provincial town, who had recently died, leaving his widow with a family of five and the scantiest of means whereon to maintain, let alone educate, the same. His father, an easy-going thriftless man, had fixed on no definite profession for him, dimly reckoning on the chance that "something was sure to turn up" when the boy was old enough. But the only unexpected thing that did "turn up" was the doctor's sudden death in the prime of his years, and the consequent straitened circumstances of his widow and family.

So Gerard was removed from school – indeed it was time he should be in any case, for he had turned eighteen. The good offices of an uncle were invoked on his behalf, and somewhat grudgingly given. He was offered his choice between a stool in a counting-house and a free passage to any British colony, with an outfit and a few pounds to start him fair upon landing, and being a fine, strong, manly lad, he had no hesitation in choosing the latter alternative. Then it became a question of selecting the colony, and here the choice became perplexing. But Mrs Ridgeley remembered that a distant relation of hers had emigrated to Natal some years earlier. It was true she hardly knew this relative; still "blood was thicker than water," and he might be able to give Gerard a helping hand. So it was decided to ship the boy to Natal accordingly.

It was hard to part with him. He was the eldest, and just of an age to be helpful. Still, there were four more left, and, as it happened, Mrs Ridgeley was not a woman who ever displayed over much feeling. She was a good woman and a sensible one, but not ostentatiously affectionate. So the parting between them, though hard, was not quite so hard as some others. One fact is certain. It was the best thing in the world for Gerard himself.

Harry Maitland, on the other hand, was the son of a well-to-do London clergyman. From a pecuniary point of view, therefore, his chances and prospects were immeasurably better than those of his companion. He would inherit a little money by-and-by, of which prospective advantage, however, he was wisely kept in ignorance. He, too, had been sent to the colonies at his own wish, and we think we have shown enough of his character and disposition to suggest grave doubts in our readers' minds as to whether he would do any good when he got there. But whether he does or not will appear duly in the course of our narrative.

Chapter Four.

John Dawes, Transport-Rider

No time was to be lost in preparing for their start, and also in informing their landlord of their change of plans. This Gerard did with some inward trepidation, knowing that they were expected to make a longer stay. But he need have felt none. That philosophic individual manifested neither surprise nor disappointment. Whether they left or whether they stayed was a matter of supreme indifference to him. He wished them good-bye and good luck in the same happy-go-lucky way in which he had first greeted them, and filled up a fresh pipe.

Though only about a dozen miles from Durban, it took them upwards of an hour to reach Pinetown. But they did not mind this. The line ran through lovely bush country, winding round the hills often at a remarkably steep gradient; now intersecting sugar plantations, with deep-verandahed bungalow-like houses, and coolies in bright clothing and large turbans at work among the tall canes; now plunging through a mass of tangled forest. Every now and then, too, a glimpse was afforded of the blue, land-locked bay, and the vessels rolling at their anchorage beyond the lines of surf in the roadstead outside.

"There lies the old *Amatikulu*," said Gerard, as his eye caught the black hull and schooner rig of a steamer among these. "We shan't see the old barkie again, and perhaps the sea either, for many a long day."

Pinetown, as Mr Kingsland had said, was not much of a place, being a large straggling village, greatly augmented by the huts and tents of a cavalry regiment then quartered there, and they had no difficulty in finding John Dawes. Him they ran to earth in the bar-room of an hotel, where, with three or four cronies, he was drinking success to his trip in a parting and friendly glass. He was a man of medium height, straight and well proportioned. His face was tanned to the hue of copper, and he wore a short sandy beard, cut to a point. He took the letter which Gerard tendered him, glanced through the contents, then nodded.

"All right; I start in two hours' time. How's Kingsland?"

Gerard replied that, to the best of his belief, the latter was extremely well.

"Good chap, Kingsland!" pronounced the transport-rider, decisively. "Say, mister, what'll you drink?"

"Well – thanks – I think I'll take a lemonade," answered Gerard; not that he particularly wanted it, but he did not like to seem unfriendly by refusing.

"Right. And what's yours?"

"Oh – a brandy and soda," said Harry.

"Mister, you ain't one of them Good Templar chaps, are you?" said another man to Gerard.

"I don't know quite what they are, I'm afraid."

"Why, teetotalers, of course. Chaps who don't drink."

"Oh no. I'm not a teetotaler, but I don't go in much for spirits."

"Quite right, young fellow, quite right," said another. "You stick to that, and you'll do. There's a sight too many chaps out here who are a deal too fond of 'lifting the elbow.' Take my advice, and let grog alone, and you'll get along."

"Well, here's luck!" said the transport-rider, nodding over his glass. "Now, you turn up at my wagon in two hours' time. It's away on the flat there at the outspan just outside the town; any one'll tell you. Got any traps?"

"Yes."

"Well, better pick up a couple of boys and trundle them across. And if I were you I should get a good dinner here before you start. I believe that's the gong going now. So long!"

Having taken the transport-rider's advice, and with the help of the landlord procured a couple of native boys as porters, the two were landed, bag and baggage, at Dawes's waggon. That worthy merely nodded, with a word of greeting, and having seen their luggage safely stowed among the bales and cases which, piled sky-high, constituted his cargo, gave orders to inspan. Then Gerard, always observant, noted how the oxen, to the number of sixteen, were driven up and ranged into line by one native, and kept there while another and Dawes placed a noosed *reim*, or thong of raw hide, round the horns of each, and in a trice the yoke was adjusted to each neck, for the animals were veteran roadsters, and each knew his place. The yoking was a simple process. Two flat wooden pegs, called "skeys," passed through the yoke on each side of the neck, which was kept in its place between them by a twisted strip of raw hide passing underneath just below the throat, and hitched in a nick in the "skey." The motive power is that of pushing, the yoke resting against the slight hump above the animal's withers.

"Trek – Hamba – ke!" cried the native driver, raising his voice in a wild long-drawn yell. "Englaand – Scotland – Mof – Bokvel – Kwaaiman – Tre-ek!"

The long whip cracked like pistol shots, again and again. As the driver ran through the whole gamut of names, each ox instinctively started forward at the sound of its own, and the ponderous, creaking, loaded-up structure rolled heavily forward. Other waggons stood outspanned along the flat, but mostly deserted, for their owners preferred the more genial atmosphere of the hotel bar, and the native servants in charge had all foregathered at one fire.

"Like to ride, eh? or would you rather walk?" said Dawes, lighting his pipe. "Maybe, though, you'll find it a bit jolty riding, at first. It's a fine night, though."

Gerard answered that they would rather walk; and, indeed, such locomotion was infinitely preferable to the slow rumbling roll of the waggon, crawling along at just under three miles per hour. And the night was fine indeed. The air was deliciously cool, the dim outline of the rolling downs was just visible in the light of the myriad shining stars which spangled the heavens in all the lavish brilliance of their tropical beauty. Here and there a grass fire glowed redly in the distance. Now and again the weird cry of some strange bird or beast arose from the surrounding *veldt*, and this, with the creaking ramble of the waggon, the deep bass of the native voices, chatting in their own tongue, made our two English lads realise that they were indeed in Africa at last. There was a glorious sense of freedom and exhilaration in the very novelty of the surroundings.

"Well, this is awfully jolly!" pronounced Gerard, looking round.

"Eh! Think so, do you?" said John Dawes. "How would you like to be a transport-rider yourself?"

"I believe I'd like nothing better," came the prompt reply. "It must be the jolliest, healthiest life in the world."

"So?" said the other, with a dry chuckle. "Especially when it's been raining for three days, and the road is one big mudhole, when your waggon's stuck wheel-deep, and no sooner do you dig it out than in goes another wheel. Why, I've been stuck that way, coming over the Berg" – the speaker meant the Drakensberg – "and haven't made a dozen miles in a fortnight. And cold, too! Why, for a week at a time I've not known what it was to have a dry stitch on me, and the rain wouldn't allow you to light a fire. Jolly healthy life that, eh?"

"Cold!" broke from both the listeners, in astonishment. "Is it ever cold here?"

"Isn't it? You just wait till you get away from this steaming old sponge of a coast belt. Why, you get snow on the Berg, yards deep. I've known fellows lose three full spans of oxen at a time, through an unexpected fall of snow. Well, that's one of the sides of transport-riding. Another is when there hasn't been rain for months, and the *veldt's* as bare as the skull of a bald-headed man. Then you may crawl along, choking with dust, mile after mile, day after day, the road strewn like a paper-chase, with the bones of oxen which have dropped in the yoke or been turned adrift to die, too weak to go any further – and every water-hole you come to nothing but a beastly mess of pea-soup mud,

lucky even if there isn't a dead dog in the middle of it. My word for it, you get sick of the endless blue of the sky and the red-brown of the *veldt*, of the poor devils of oxen, staggering along with their tongues out – walking skeletons – creeping their six miles a day, and sometimes not that. You get sick of your own very life itself."

"That's another side to the picture with a vengeance," said Harry.

"Rather. Don't you jump away with the idea that the life of a transport-rider, or any other life in this blessed country, is all plum-jam; because, if so, you'll tumble into the most lively kind of mistake."

Thus chatting, they travelled on; and, at length, after the regulation four hours' *trek*, by which time it was nearly midnight, Dawes gave orders to outspan.

The waggon was drawn just off the road, and the oxen, released from their yokes, were turned loose for a short graze, preparatory to being tied to the trek-chain for the night. Then, while the "leader" was despatched to fill a bucket from the adjacent water-hole, Dawes produced from a locker some bread and cold meat.

"Dare say you'll be glad of some supper," he said. "It's roughish feed for you, maybe; but it's rougher still when there's none. Fall to."

They did so, with a will. Even Harry Maitland, who had started with an inclination to turn up his nose at such dry provender, was astonished to find how cold salt beef and rather stale bread could taste, when eaten with an appetite born of four hours' night travel.

"Now, you'd better turn in," said the transport-rider, when they had finished. "You'll get about four hours' clear snooze. We inspan at daybreak, and trek on till about ten or eleven. Then we lie-by till three or four in the afternoon, or maybe longer, and trek the best part of the night. It depends a good deal on the sort of day it is."

A small portion of the back of the waggon was covered by a tilt; this constituted the cabin of this ship of the *veldt*. It contained lockers and bags to hold the larder supplies, and a *kartel* or framework of raw-hide thongs, stretched from side to side, supported a mattress and blankets. This Dawes had given up to his two passengers, he himself turning in upon the ground.

Hardly had the heads of our two friends touched the pillow than they were sound asleep, and hardly were they asleep – at least, so it seemed to them – than they were rudely awakened. Their first confused impression was that they were aboard the *Amatikulu* again in a gale of wind. The heaving and swaying motion which seemed half to fling them from their bed, with every now and again a sickening jolt, the close, hot atmosphere, the harsh yells, and the ramble, exactly bore out this idea. Then Gerard sat upright with a start. It was broad daylight.

"Hallo!" quoth Dawes, putting his head into the waggon-tent. "Had a good sleep? We've been on trek about half an hour. I didn't see the use in waking you, but there's a roughish bit of road just here. I expect the stones shook you awake – eh?"

"Rather. Oh-h!" groaned Harry, whom at that moment a violent jerk banged against the side of the waggon. "Let's get out of this, though. It's awful!"

"Hold on a minute. We are just going through a drift."

They looked out. The road sloped steeply down to the edge of a small river which swept purling between reed-fringed banks. The foremost oxen were already in the water. There was a little extra yelling and whip-cracking, and the great vehicle rolled ponderously through, and began toilsomely to mount the steep ascent on the other side. Gerard's glance looked longingly at the water.

"Better wait till we outspan," said Dawes, reading this. "We can't stop now, and by the time you overtook us you'd be so fagged and hot you'd get no good at all out of your swim."

The sun was hardly an hour high, and already it was more than warm. The sky was an unbroken and dazzling blue, and on every side lay the roll of the open *veldt* in a shimmer of heat, with here and there a farmhouse standing amid a cluster of blue gum-trees. The road seemed to be making

a gradual ascent. Our two friends felt little inclined for walking now, for the beat of the morning, combined with short allowance of sleep during the past two nights, was beginning to tell.

“Jump up here, now,” said Dawes, flinging a couple of rugs on top of the load of goods. “Sun or no sun, you’ll be better off than in the tent. Canvas, with the sun on it, is almost as baking as corrugated iron. Hold hard. Wait till she stops,” he warned, having given orders to that effect. “Old stagers, like me, can jump on and off while trekking along, but you’d get under the wheels – sure – and then what’d Kingsland say?”

“You see,” he went on, when they were safely and comfortably on their perch, “in getting up and down by the disselboom you have to be fairly smart. You just get inside the fore wheel and walk along with the machine, and jump quietly up. Getting down’s the worst, because, if you hit the disselboom or slip on it, ten to one you get shot off bang in front of the wheel, and then nothing on earth’ll save you, for you can’t stop one of these waggons under fifty yards, sometimes not even then.”

“By Jove! Do many fellows come to grief that way?” asked Gerard.

“Heaps. You can hardly take up a paper anywhere without seeing a paragraph headed ‘The Disselboom again.’ But generally it’s when fellows are rather full up – taken a drop too much – you understand. Not always, of course. And when you think of the weight these waggons carry – this one’s loaded close on eleven thousand pounds, now – No, you’ve no show at all.”

Then at the morning’s outspan Gerard, always observant, and now keenly thirsting for experience, noted every detail – how there was a regular routine even in this apparently happy-go-lucky species of travel; how when the oxen were turned out to graze, the “driver” set to work to build the fire, while the “leader” took the bucket and went away to fetch water from the nearest stream or water-hole; how the natives received their daily ration of Indian corn meal, subsequently to be made into a thick stir-about and eaten piping hot from the three-legged pot in which it was cooked. He noted, too, with considerable satisfaction, how Dawes produced from a locker a goodly supply of raw mutton-chops, which were set to frizzle on the fire against the time they should have returned from their swim, which with the remainder of last night’s loaf and a steaming kettle of strong black coffee, made up the most succulent breakfast he thought he had ever eaten in his life, so thorough an appetiser is open air, and novelty, and travel. And then, after a long lie-by and a nap in the heat of the day, he begged to be allowed to bear a hand in the process of inspanning, and felt as proud as Punch when he found himself holding a couple of *reims*, at the end of which were as many big black oxen, even though he had but a confused idea as to what he should do with them. Still, he was doing something, and that was what he wanted to realise.

And then, again, when they were on the move, he induced Dawes to initiate him into the mysteries of waggon-driving. These, as that worthy explained, did not consist, as many stupid Kafirs and some stupider white men seemed to think, in running alongside of the span and flourishing the whip, and frantically yelling and slashing away indiscriminately. A good driver, with an average well-broken span, need hardly yell inordinately, or use the whip at all. Each ox would instinctively start forward at the sound of its own name, and if it grew slack or negligent a touch with the *voerslag* (the cutting, tapering end of the lash.) was sufficient. A clever driver could put his *voerslag* as deftly and surely as a trout-fisher could his fly – at least, as to the latter, so he had heard, added Dawes; for he had never been in England himself – and, of course, had never seen trout fishing. But Gerard, who was a very fair fly-fisher, saw the point at once, and soon came to handle the whip in such fashion as to show promise of eventually becoming as proficient as Dawes himself. True, he managed to clip himself over the ear two or three times; but then every beginner is bound to do this, so he didn’t mind. On Harry, however, such reverses produced a different effect. He gave up the whole thing in disgust, and voted waggon-driving a beastly difficult thing and not at all in his line. Wherein, again, the diversity of their respective characters came out.

Now and again they would pass other waggons on the road, either in motion or outspanned, or would pass through a small township, where John Dawes would drop behind for half an hour for

a glass of grog with a few of his fellow-craftsmen and a chat at the hotel bar. These would always extend a frank hand and a hearty greeting to the two young strangers; for, however rough externally it may occasionally be, the bearing of the South African colonist towards the newly arrived “Britisher,” especially if the latter be young and inexperienced, is, as a rule, all that is kindly and good-natured. But it was the time of the evening outspan that these two would enjoy most heartily. Then it was that with the darkness, and the wide and to them still mysterious *veldt* stretching around, with the stars burning bright and clear in the dusky vault above, and the red glow of the camp-fire shedding a circle of light which intensified the surrounding gloom – then it was that they realised that they were indeed “camping out,” and no make-believe. And John Dawes, with his pipe in full blast, made a first-rate camp-fire companion, for his experiences in his own line had been large and chequered. He knew every inch of the country for hundreds of miles. He had been away to the north, past Swaziland, and had tried his luck on the new gold-fields in the Zoutpansberg. He had made a couple of trading trips in the Zulu country, and knew many of the Zulu chiefs and *indunas*. Many a tale and strange incident would he narrate in his own dry fashion – of flooded rivers and the perils of the road; of whole spans of oxen laid low in the yoke by one stroke of lightning, or of a comrade struck down at his side in the same way; of lively ructions with surly Boers and their retainers, when the latter strove to interfere with their right of outspan; of critical situations arising out of the craft and greed of native chieftains, while practically in the power of lawless and turbulent bands of savages during trading operations – and to these our two wayfarers listened with the most unfeigned delight.

But from Pinetown to Pietermaritzburg is no great distance even for a bullock-waggon, and on the afternoon of the second day they came in sight of the capital, an area of blue gums and straggling iron roofs, lying in a vast hollow. Both were unfeignedly sorry that the journey was over. They felt like being cast adrift again, and said as much to their new friend as they took a right cordial leave of him.

“Well, I’ve been very glad to have you,” said the latter. “Been sort of company like. What do you think you’re likely to be doing with yourselves now you are here, if I may ask?”

“I want first of all to find out a relative of mine,” said Gerard. “I’ve a letter to him. Anstey, his name is. Do you know him?”

A queer smile came into the transport-rider’s face at the name.

“Anstey, is it?” he said. “So he’s a relation of yours? Well, he’s easily found. He runs a Kafir store out beyond Howick, near the Umgeni Fall. Does he know you’re coming?”

“He knows I’m coming some time, but not to the day.”

Again that queer expression in John Dawes’s weather-beaten countenance. Gerard thought nothing of it then; afterwards he had reason to remember it.

“Umjilo’s the name of his place. You can’t miss it. Well, good-bye, both of you. We may knock up against each other again or we may not; it’s a ram world, and not a very big one either. I wish you good luck. I’ll send your traps down first thing in the morning.”

With which adieu, cordial if practical, John Dawes turned away to greet a batch of old acquaintances who had just hailed him; while his late passengers took their way townwards, both agreeing thoroughly upon one point, viz. that the transport-rider was “a downright real jolly good fellow.”

Chapter Five. Anstey's Store

"Here! Hi! you two Johnny Raws! What the devil are you doing there, tramping down all my green mealies? Get out of that, will you?" And a volley of curses emphasised the injunction, as the speaker hurried up to the scene of the damage.

The latter was a good-sized mealie patch adjoining the roadside, through whose battered and broken-down fence had plunged a horse – a stubborn and refractory horse withal, whose shies and plunges sorely tried the equilibrium of his unskilled rider. That rider was no other than our friend Harry Maitland. Gerard, who was a better horseman, had kept his steed in the road, and was shouting encouragement to his comrade, who, hot and fagged with a long ride on a somewhat rough animal, now found it all he could do to keep his seat.

The aggrieved proprietor's voice rose to a perfect yell of fury as he gained the spot and noted the havoc wrought. Mealie stalks were snapping off short, one after the other, and a broad, trampled, and broken patch, as if the place had been roughly mown, marked the passage of the horse. Mad with rage, he picked up a stone.

"Here, drop that, will you?" cried Gerard, warningly.

Too late. The stone whizzed, and striking the horse on the hind quarters, caused that quadruped to kick out wildly. Harry was deposited in a face among the broken stalks, while his steed, thus relieved, tore away snorting and kicking – crashing through the standing crop with a diabolical indifference to the feelings of its owner which made the latter foam again.

"Come out of that!" he raved, as poor Harry began ruefully and rather gingerly to pick himself up. "Come out of it. I'll have twenty pound out of you for this little bit of fun. But first of all I'm going to give you the biggest licking you ever had in your life, you spick-and-span popinjay masher!"

"We'll see about that part of the business," said Gerard, who, seeing the hostile turn of affairs, had dismounted and hitched his bridle to a convenient rail. "If there's going to be any fighting, it'll have to be done fair, you understand."

"What the blazes have you got to say to it anyhow?" cried the man, turning to Gerard, but with something of the light of battle gone out of his unprepossessing countenance as he took in the well-knit frame and determined aspect of his younger opponent.

"Just this," said Gerard. "My chum there's shaken by his fall, and I doubt if he's much good with his fists or a match for you. So if there's any licking to be done, just start here. See?"

But the man apparently did not see. He hesitated, staring at the speaker, his features working with rage. He was a hard-looking customer of about forty, with shifty eyes and a shaggy sandy beard. His raiment withal was slovenly, consisting of moleskin trousers none too clean, a collarless flannel shirt, also none too clean, and a slouch hat.

"Why don't you fence your confounded mealie-field, or whatever you call it?" said Gerard, angrily, for although a good-tempered fellow he had all the average young Englishman's objection to being bullied or crowed over. "You deserve all that's happened for keeping a place like that practically unfenced, for one can't call that broken-down thing a fence. And right by the roadside, too! Shouldn't wonder if it was left that way on purpose."

The man yelled out a fresh torrent of blasphemy. The last remark had all-unwittingly hit the right nail on the head. That mealie patch was a source of revenue to its owner beyond the mere value of its crop. But he hesitated to come to close quarters.

"Fence or no fence," he shouted, "I'm going to have twenty pound out of that paper-collared, monkey-headed son of a bandbox. His brute of a horse has done more than twice that amount of damage. So shell out, Shiny-boots!"

Harry, to whom this remark was addressed, though, as his comrade had said, somewhat shaken by his fall, was quite alive to the situation. He realised what a tower of strength lay in Gerard's thews and sinews, and was not at all unwilling that his comrade should fight his battles for him. So he answered with a spirit born of that confidence.

"Keep your confounded cheek to yourself, you dirty-looking clodhopper. Twenty pounds! Why, I'll summon you for shying stones at me and starting off my horse. And if he's lost you'll have to pay for him."

"Look here," said Gerard, "if you think you've any claim upon us, we are staying in Maritzburg, at the Imperial. I'll give you our names and addresses, and you can do what you like. But we are not going to stick fooling around here all day."

"Oh, you're not, eh? We'll soon see about that." And turning, he began bawling out something in a language they did not understand.

A house stood back from the road. This building they had at first hardly noticed. Now, from around it, a swarm of natives were pouring, about a dozen of whom, leaving the rest, came running down to the scene of the dispute.

"This is getting serious," said Gerard to himself. "I'm afraid we're in for a ripe old row."

The natives had surrounded our two friends. They were mostly well-set-up, stalwart fellows, some clad in European clothes, others wearing only the *mútya*, a sort of apron which hangs from the loins before and behind. All carried sticks.

The white man was haranguing them vehemently in their own tongue – in fact, binding them to his interests by promises of grog and tobacco. Gerard cast an eager glance up and down the long riband of dusty road, over the shimmering expanse of sun-baked *veldt*. But in vain. No help need be looked for from outside. He resolved to make one more appeal to reason.

"Look here," he began.

But the other stopped him short.

"Shut up. We don't want any more *indaba*. Are you going to fork out or are you not? because, if not, we are going to take your horse and yourselves too. There are enough of us, you see."

"Possibly there are," said Gerard. "But before you attempt anything foolish, just hear what I've got to say. My name's Ridgeley, and –"

"Eh? What!" The other was staring at him open-mouthed now. "What did you say your name was?"

"Ridgeley – Gerard Ridgeley," was the reply, in some astonishment at the sudden transition in the other's demeanour.

"Why on earth didn't you say so before?"

"Well, I tried to, but you wouldn't let me get in a word edgewise. Isn't there a Mr Anstey living somewhere about here? Umjilo is the name of his place, I believe."

"Quite right, Gerard, quite right. There is. *I'm* Mr Anstey, and yonder's Umjilo" – pointing to the house before referred to. "And so you're young Ridgeley! Well, well!"

Gerard started and stared, then stared again. His countenance exhibited surprise, relief, amazement, but no satisfaction; relief at this fortunate termination of their difference, yet a profound sense of disappointment. That this seedy, disreputable-looking rowdy should turn out to be the relative of whom he was in search was something of a shock, and that such a specimen as this should have it in its power to advance his prospects in life seemed incredible. His hopes sank to zero.

"Lord, now, to think of that!" went on Anstey. "And to think how near we came to punching each other's heads! You'd never have dreamt it, eh, Gerard? I'm a bit of a rough chap, I'm afraid. Years of this cursed country and climate are apt to touch up a man's temper and liver; but I mean no harm – bless you, no. We haven't shaken hands yet."

Gerard reddened, as he came to himself, and held out his hand eagerly. Young as he was, his natural acumen had detected a false ring underlying the assumed heartiness of the other's speech, and he feared by his manner to show it.

"Now, introduce your friend. Ah, very sorry, sir, we should have had any difference of opinion. Shake hands and forget all about it. I'll soon have your horse brought back. And now, come round to the house and have some dinner. It's a bit rough, maybe, but very much at your service."

The almost deferential tone of this apology completely availed to salve Harry Maitland's wounded dignity, and he began to see in his whilom foe, but now prospective host, an uncommonly sensible fellow, shrewd enough to appreciate to a hair his own sense of self-importance. The natives, with many surprised ejaculations over this unlooked-for turn events had taken, dispersed by twos and threes, not, however, before Anstey had despatched a couple of them to hunt up the runaway steed.

"Come on up to the house," he went on. "I dare say you've learnt not to expect much by this time – not much in the way of comfort, that is. When did you land?"

"Only a few days ago," answered Gerard. "We came straight on here at once. Travelled up to Maritzburg in a waggon, chartered a horse apiece, and came out to find you."

"Travelled up in a waggon, did you say? Whose waggon?"

"John Dawes's. A rattling good chap. Do you know him?"

"Used to. But, between you and me, Gerard, he's not really much of a chap. Did he – er – seem to know me?"

The covert anxiety of the tone brought back to Gerard's mind the queer expression which the mention of his relative had called up to the transport-rider's face. Still it was possible that the two men had but quarrelled. At the same time, do what he would he could not quite overcome a growing aversion to Anstey. This was hardly promising for their future relationship.

"This is my crib," said Anstey, as they approached the house. "The store's at the back. We'll go round and look at it presently. Come in; come in."

The house was a rough, square, one-storeyed building, roofed over with corrugated iron. A low *stoep* ran round the front of it, and the door opened into the sitting-room direct, without the intervention of any entrance hall. The floor was of hard clay covered with matting, and the furniture of the very plainest. Accommodation seemed strictly limited, for besides the room which did duty as the proprietor's bedroom there was only one other, and it was half full of lumber of every description. The whole of the back part of the house was used for the trading store, and from this came a foetid and pungent whiff, mingled with the deep bass hum of native voices.

While they dined – on a baked shoulder of mutton, with pumpkin and sweet potatoes – Anstey questioned his young guests somewhat profusely as to their plans and prospects. Gerard, whose rising aversion had engendered in him suspicions of which he was more than half ashamed, fancied he detected a slight change of manner on his host's part, as he frankly avowed his own utter lack of prospects or means, and a corresponding increase of cordiality towards Harry Maitland, who was not prone to underrate himself or his possessions.

"I remember your mother perfectly well, Gerard," said Anstey. "But I never saw your father. So they shipped you off to shift for yourself, eh? Well, we must see what can be done for you. And what are your plans, Maitland?"

"Oh, I must first go round and look up a lot of people I've got introductions to," was the airy reply. "Nothing like looking around a bit before making up one's mind, eh?"

"Quite right, quite right," nodded their host approvingly, inking another glass of grog, which, by the way, was the sixth he had taken since he came in. Then he proposed they should light their pipes and stroll round and look in at the store.

The latter was a long low room, with a counter running through it. This, as also the shelves lining the walls, was covered with goods – blankets and rugs, canisters of coffee and sugar, brass wire and bangles and every species of native "track," biscuit and paraffin tins. Strings of beads of every

conceivable hue, overcoats, and flannel shirts, and moleskin trousers hung from pegs, and clusters of *reims*, or raw-hide thongs – for rope is but little used in South Africa – in fact, half a hundred varieties of the genus “notion” for supplying the needs of customers, native or white.

The room was pretty full of tobacco smoke and natives, who suspended their conversation and nudged each other as they recognised the two young strangers against whom their aid had been invoked for hostile purposes, but who were now hand in glove with the proprietor behind the counter. A lanky youth in shirt-sleeves, with a mud-coloured, wispy face, was presiding over the transactions.

“Well, Smith, how’s ‘biz’?” said Anstey. The wispy youth shrugged his shoulders and growled some inarticulate reply in monosyllable. Then, on being introduced to the new-comers, he extended a limp paw to each, and returned to his former occupation of measuring out roll tobacco to a native, always with the same wooden and vacant expression.

“Well, how do you think you’d like storekeeping?” said Anstey, as he went through the performance which he jocosely termed “showing them round the place,” though, apart from a tumble-down stable and the historic mealie-field before described, there was no “place” to show them round.

Gerard, the recollection fresh in his mind of the dismal room and foetid atmosphere, and the generally depressing aspect of all connected therewith, replied, with an inward shudder, that he hardly thought he would care about it. He would much prefer farming. This was greeted as a huge joke.

“Pooh!” said Anstey. “Farming is a beggar’s trade compared with this. Why, bless my soul, a farmer’s a slave to all the seasons, to every shower of rain, or the want of it, even if his place and stock ain’t mortgaged up to the hilt. Again, the diseases among cattle are legion. Now, in a neat little store like this of mine, you can just coin money hand over fist.”

His listeners thought this last statement hardly borne out by the aspect of the surroundings in general. The other, quick to see this, went on.

“Ah, you think it don’t look much like it, eh? Well, I don’t wonder. But, you see, it isn’t worth my while bothering about tinkering up this place. Here it doesn’t matter how one lives. But I’m just waiting till I’ve made my pile, and then – ” And the concluding blank left scope for the most magnificent, if somewhat vague possibilities.

They returned indoors, and Anstey made the heat and the walk an excuse for another glass of grog. Then a native knocked at the door to announce that the missing steed had been found and brought back. Harry suggested that it was time to start on their return ride to Maritzburg. But of this their host would not hear.

“Stay the night, anyhow,” he said. “That is, if you don’t mind roughing it. I can knock you up a shakedown of some sort. I meant to have had the spare room arranged when I first heard you were coming out, Gerard. But I dare say you can manage without white sheets.”

Gerard, of course, declared that, if anything, he rather preferred it. That point settled, Anstey became even more the effusively genial host; but, with all his desire to be entertaining, both were sensible of a want of something – a difference between the perfectly frank and self-possessed geniality of John Dawes, for instance. They were joined at supper by the wispy-faced youth, who came straight in from his duties in the store – now closed for the night – without going through any such superfluous ceremony as washing. Afterwards, when the talk was in full swing, Anstey would constantly appeal to his subordinate for confirmation of his statements or anecdotes – “Isn’t that so, Smith?” “Didn’t I, Smith?” and so forth; whereupon the latter would remove his pipe from his mouth, and spit and remark, “*Ja*, that’s so.” Which was the full extent of his conversation.

Chapter Six.

Gerard is Launched

“Why not stay on here a bit, Gerard, and help me in the store?”

Thus Anstey, on the following day, after dinner. The two were alone. Harry Maitland had returned to Maritzburg, disgusted with the exceeding roughness of his night's quarters, which together with the booming snores of Smith, who slept in the adjoining store, had effectually hindered him from getting any sleep to speak of. Gerard, however, had yielded to his relative's urgent invitation to stay a few days and talk matters over. He, too, found his quarters none too comfortable, and he did not like Anstey – indeed, he feared he never should like him; but, he reflected with something of a sigh, beggars cannot be choosers. He was a stranger in a strange land, and after all this man was his relative, though a distant one, and showed every desire to help him.

“It is very good of you,” he replied. “But I know nothing of that sort of business.”

“Pooh! You don't want to know anything – at least – that is – I mean,” correcting himself hurriedly, “there's nothing very technical about it. You only want a little commonsense and ordinary smartness, and of that I should say you had plenty. Well, then, we'll consider the matter settled. Smith is leaving me soon, and until he does I'll give you ten shillings a week and the run of your teeth. Afterwards I'll give you more. You see, you'll be learning a useful business all for nothing – a very paying one, too – and getting a trifle of pay for it besides. The fact is, Gerard, I want a decent kind of fellow-countryman about me, an educated chap like yourself. One falls into rough ways all by one's self.”

There was such a genuine ring about this speech, that Gerard felt quite ashamed of his former mistrust. What a snob he had been to dislike the man because he was a bit wanting in polish! The thought moved him to throw an extra warmth into his expressions of thanks.

“Pooh! my dear fellow, don't say another word,” said Anstey. “By-and-by, when you are thoroughly up to the mark, I might leave you here in charge, and open another place somewhere else. Extend the business, don't you know – extend the business. Storekeeping's the most paying thing in the world if you only know what you're about. I've always intended to extend as soon as I could get hold of some decent fellow, and that lout Smith's of no good,” sinking his voice. “I'm getting rid of him. Then, when you know your business, I might take you into partnership, and we might run houses all over the Colony.”

To a practically penniless lad, who had just come out there to seek his fortune, this was very glowing, very tempting sort of talk. Gerard began to see himself already coining wealth, as the other had said “hand over fist,” and again he felt ashamed of his first unfavourable impressions of the man who was now so freely holding out to him a helping hand.

But when he set to work in real earnest, he discovered, as many another had done before him and will do again, that the royal road to wealth, if sure, was desperately slow, and to one of his temperament intolerably irksome. The whole day, from early morning till long after dark, was spent in the close atmosphere of that stuffy room, rendered foetid by the chronic presence of uncleanly natives, and such unsavoury goods as hides, sheepskins, etc., handing things over the counter in exchange for the hard-earned sixpences and threepenny-bits of his dusky customers. Now and then, too, a white traveller or transport-rider would look in to make a purchase, and the short, offhand manner of some of these would try his temper sorely. Was it for this he had come out to Natal? Where was the free, healthy, open-air life he and his young companions at home had so glowingly evolved? He remembered the envy with which his schoolfellows had regarded him when they knew he was going out to a colony. Would he be an object for envy if they could see him now? Why, he was more of

a prisoner than ever he had been when chained, as he thought, to the school desks. He had, in fact, become nothing more nor less than a shopkeeper.

Smith had in no wise seemed to resent the presence of his supplanter. He was even impassively good-natured, and in his stolid way would give Gerard the benefit of his experience. He put him up to all the little tricks of the native customers, and showed him innumerable dodges for lightening his own labour. As for books, why, there were none to speak of, or at any rate they were precious queerly kept, he said. Anstey would just clear the till when he thought there was enough in it, or when he wanted to go away anywhere; then it would fill up again as before, with like result.

"I suppose you know," said Smith, in his wooden, expressionless manner, "I've got the sack on your account?"

Gerard started.

"On my account! Surely not. Why, I thought you were going anyhow."

"So? Well, I wasn't. Soon as you came, Anstey gave me notice to clear."

"Good heavens! But that would be beastly unfair to you," cried Gerard, in great distress. "I'll tell him I won't agree. I'll go and tell him now at once."

"Sit still, Ridgeley. That wouldn't help me any. You're a good fellow, I believe, and if it was any one but Anstey, I'd say it was kind of natural to want to stick in his own relation. Still, I've done very well for him, and for less pay than most chaps would ask. But, to tell the truth, I'm sick of the berth, dead sick of it, and had made up my mind to clear anyhow. Don't you get bothering Anstey over it. I say, though. He was pretty boozy last night, eh?"

Gerard shrugged his shoulders with a look of mingled distress and disgust. He had noted with some anxiety that his relative was too much addicted to the bottle, but he had never seen him quite so bad as on the occasion just alluded to. Anstey himself had referred to this failing once or twice, declaring that the sort of life was of a nature to make any man feel "hipped," and take a "pick-me-up" too many, but that now he had got a decent fellow for company he reckoned it might make a difference. He seemed, in fact, to have taken a real liking to his young kinsman, and would sit at home of an evening on purpose to talk to him, instead of riding off to the nearest bar. Gerard had begun to think he might even be instrumental in getting him out of his drinking habits.

One day Smith, while absent for some minutes from the store, was attracted back again by something of a hubbub going on therein. Returning, he beheld Gerard confronted by three natives, the latter haranguing and gesticulating wildly in remonstrance, the former gesticulating almost as wildly, but tongue-tied by reason of his inability to master more than a few words of their language. The natives were holding out to Gerard two large bottles filled with some liquid, which he was as emphatically refusing to accept.

"What's the row, Ridgeley?"

"Row?" answered Gerard, in a disgusted tone. "Row? Why, these fellows asked me to fill their bottles with paraffin, and I did so. Now they won't pay for it, and want me to take it back."

Smith opened his head, and emitted as large a guffaw as he ever allowed himself to indulge in. Then he went to the front door and looked out over the *veldt*, and returning took the two bottles and emptied their contents back into the paraffin tin. Then he gave the bottles a brief rinse in a tub of water, and filling them up from another tin precisely similar to the first, handed them to the natives. The latter paid down their money, and stowing the bottles carefully away among their blankets, departed, now thoroughly satisfied.

"Didn't I give them the right kind?" said Gerard, who had witnessed this performance with some amazement. "Ah, I see!" he broke off, as an odour of spirits greeted his nostrils.

"You just didn't give them the right kind. Look here. When a nigger brings a bottle and asks for paraffin, and goes like this – see?" making a rapid sort of drinking sign, "you fill it out of this tin."

"But why don't they ask for it outright? Isn't there a word for it in their language? Those fellows distinctly said 'paraffin.'"

Again Smith emitted that half-hearted guffaw.

“Look here, Ridgeley. I’d have put you up to the ropes, but reckoned it was Anstey’s business. Don’t you know the law of the Colony doesn’t allow grog to be sold to niggers, even in licenced houses, but there’s a sight of it done for all that. This isn’t a licenced house, but we’ve got to run with the times.”

“And what if you’re caught?”

“Mortal stiff fine. But that would be Anstey’s look-out, not yours or mine. And I tell you what. It’s lucky for him I ain’t a chap who’s likely to bear a grudge or cut up nasty, or I might round on him properly for giving me the sack.”

This incident had set Gerard thinking, and in fact it added considerable weight to his dissatisfaction with his present position. Honest trade was one thing, but to be required daily to break the laws of the land was another. After Smith’s departure, he put the matter fairly to his employer.

“Oh, hang it! every one does it,” was the characteristic reply. “You’ll never get on in life, Gerard, if you carry all those scruples along with you. Too much top-hammer, don’t you know – capsize the ship. See? Eh, what? Against the law, did you say? Well, that’s the fault of the law for being so rotten. Meanwhile, we’ve got to live, and if the fellows don’t buy grog here they will at the next place. We may just as well get their custom as the other Johnny. Besides, it’s good for trade all round. They will always deal for choice at a place where they know they can get a glass or a bottle of grog when they want it.”

Apart from being in itself an abstraction, the “law” is a thing which stands in much the same relationship towards the average respectable citizen as the schoolmaster does towards even the best-disposed of boys – to wit, there is about it a smack of the “natural enemy.” This being so – we record it with grief – Gerard, who was young, and though a well-principled lad, very much removed from a prig, allowed his conscience to be so far seared as to accept and indeed act upon this explanation. We further regret to add that he filled many and many a subsequent bottle with “paraffin,” as set forward in Smith’s instructions, receiving the price therefor without a qualm.

He was now in charge of the whole place, and his sense of authority and responsibility had gone far towards reconciling him to the irksomeness of the life. He was able to write home with some pride, saying that he had found employment from the very first, and not only employment, but fair prospects of advancement – thanks to Anstey – which entailed upon that worthy a more grateful letter of acknowledgment than he deserved, as we shall see. He had mastered a good many Zulu words – that being the language of nearly all the natives of Natal, whether of pure or mixed race – and was getting on well all round. He had made his rough quarters as comfortable as he could, having sent over to Maritzburg for his outfit. Still, the life, as we have said, was terribly irksome. Day after day, the same monotonous round. He had no acquaintances of his own age or social standing. Now and again some friend of his employer’s would drop in and literally make a night of it, and then his disgust and depression knew no bounds. Then, too, his prospects seemed to vanish into clouds and mist. Would he, too, become one day like Anstey, stagnating out his life in a dead grey level, without a thought or interest beyond the exigencies of the hour? And he would gaze wearily out upon the open level flat of the *veldt*, which surrounded the place, and the dusty monotonous riband of road, and it would seem, young as he was, that life was hardly worth living at the price. Still, he was earning his own livelihood, and the novelty and independence of the feeling went far to counterbalance all other drawbacks.

One day Anstey said to him, “Wouldn’t you like to have some interest, some share in the business, Gerard?”

“Some interest!” he echoed, thinking that he had rather too much of that, seeing that his employer left all the burden of it to him and pocketed all the advantages himself.

“Why yes. How would it be to put something into it? It would give you a share – make you a kind of partner, don’t you see?”

“But I haven’t got anything to put into it except the mere trifle I brought out with me.”

“Wouldn’t the people at home invest something for you, eh? It would pay them and – you – a thundering rate of interest, and give you a share in the concern besides.”

But Gerard was able completely to disabuse Anstey’s mind of any illusions on that head. “The people at home” had done all they could in scraping together enough for Gerard’s passage and outfit, together with a few pounds to start him on landing. There was not the faintest chance of them doing anything further.

“How much did you bring out with you?” pursued Anstey.

Gerard was able to inform him he had brought out about thirty pounds; but what with travelling and other expenses he had not much more than twenty-five at his disposal – a mere trifle.

“A mere trifle indeed,” rejoined Anstey. “But then we all have to start upon trifles. Now, why not put that twenty-five pounds into this concern? You would get interest on it, and it would have the additional advantage of being, so to speak, under your own eye instead of lying idle at the bank. I should strongly recommend you to invest it in this. But think it well over first.”

And Gerard, after thinking it over, resolved to follow his relative’s advice, and invested his twenty-five pounds accordingly.

He had now been three months with Anstey, and the latter had kept him pretty well with his nose to the grindstone, discouraging especially any desire to visit Maritzburg. He had far better stick to business, he said. Knocking around the city might be good enough fun for fellows with plenty of coin, but one with scarcely any was very likely to get rid of what little he had. Of Harry Maitland, Gerard had hardly heard since they parted. He had received one letter stating that the writer had found a lot of friends through his letters of introduction, among whom he was having a right good time. He would ride over some day and see him. But that day never came. Harry was not going to take the trouble to hunt up a fellow who had become what he superciliously termed a mere counter-jumper. So Gerard just plodded on, determined to stick to what was a certainty as long as possible in spite of everything, the “everything” being mainly a certain change which he thought to have detected of late in his employer’s behaviour towards him – a change not for the better.

But just at this time there befell him an adventure which was destined to affect materially his after destinies, and that in more ways than one.

Chapter Seven.

Sobuza, the Zulu

The river Umgeni, at Howick, a point about twelve or fourteen miles west of Maritzburg, hurls itself over a sheer cliff, making a truly magnificent waterfall some hundreds of feet high. So sudden and unlooked-for is the drop that, crossing by the drift a little above the fall, the appearance of the river and the lay of the country would lead the casual visitor to expect nothing very wonderful. Yet, as a matter of fact, viewed from the opposite side of the great basin into which it hurls itself bodily, the Umgeni Fall is one of the grandest sights of its kind.

Now, it happened one morning that Gerard Ridgeley, riding through the above-mentioned drift, found his attention attracted by an extraordinary sound, a sort of loud, long-drawn, gasping cry, as though an appeal for help; and it seemed to come from the river. His first impulse was to rein in his steed, but his own position was not quite free from risk, for the river was in a somewhat swollen condition and the drift dangerous. So he plunged on, and, having gained the opposite bank, he halted his panting and dripping horse and sat listening intently.

Yes, there it was again, and, oh, Heavens! it came from below the drift. Some one was in the water and in another minute would be over the fall.

With lash and spur he urged his horse along the bank. The broad current swept downward swift and strong. He could see the turbid water creaming into foam where it sped in resistless rapids around two or three rock islets, and then curled over the frightful brink, and between himself and the brink, speeding swiftly towards it, swept helplessly onward by the force of the flood, was a round dark object – a man's head.

It was the head of a native. Gerard could even make out the shiny black ring which crowned it. But native or white man, here was a fellow-creature being whirled down to a most horrible death right before his eyes. Again that wild harsh cry for help rang out above the seething hiss of the flood and the dull roar of the cataract below, but shorter, more gaspingly. The man was nearly exhausted. He was swimming curiously too. It seemed as if he was treading water; then his head would sink half under, as though something were dragging him down. Gerard had heard there were crocodiles in the Umgeni. Could it be that the unfortunate man had been seized by one of these? The thought was a terrible one; but he could not see the man perish. In a trice he had kicked off his boots and thrown off his coat, and urging his horse into the river till the depth of the water swept the animal off its legs, he threw himself from its back, for it had become unmanageable with fright, and struck out for the drowning man.

The latter was about thirty yards below him, and hardly thrice that distance from the brink. Gerard was a bold and powerful swimmer, and with the aid of the current was beside him in a moment. But what to do next? The upper part of the man's body was entirely naked. There was nothing to lay hold of him by. But the cool self-possession of the savage met him halfway. The latter gasped out a word or two in his own language and held out his arm. Gerard seized it firmly below the shoulder, and, using no more effort than was just necessary for the other's support, he husbanded his strength for the final struggle.

Now, all this had taken place in a mere moment of time. It would take no more than that to decide their fate. And this seemed sealed.

For all his hard condition and desperate pluck, Gerard felt strength and nerve alike well-nigh fail him. The native was a fearful weight, heavier even than one of his size ought to be, and he was not a small man. They were now in the roar and swirl of the rapids. Once or twice Gerard's foot touched ground, only to be swept off again resistlessly, remorselessly. Several times he thought he must relax his grasp and leave the other to his fate. He could see the smooth glitter of the glassy hump where

the river curled over the brink; could feel the vibration of the appalling boom on the rocks below. In a second he – both of them – would be crashed down on to those rocks, a thousand shapeless fragments, unless, that is, he could secure a footing upon the spit of stony islet in front.

A yard more will do it. No. The current, split into two, swirls past the obstruction with a perfectly resistless force. He is swept out again as his fingers come within an inch of grasping a projecting stone. Then he – both of them – are whirled over and over in the surging boil of the rapids – the brink is in front – space.

Then it seems to Gerard that he is upholding the weight of the whole world. For a most wonderful thing has happened. The native is perfectly stationary – still as though anchored – in the resistless velocity of the current, and now it seems to be his turn to support his would-be rescuer. For the latter's legs are actually hanging forth over the fearful abyss, and but for the firm grip – now of both hands – which he has upon the other's arm, he would be shot out into space. The roar and vibration of the mighty fall is bewildering, maddening – the crash upon the rocks, the spuming mist flying away into countless rainbows before his sight. He seems to live a lifetime in that one fearful moment. He must loose his hold and —

“Here, mister! I'm going to throw you a *reim*. Can you catch it?”

Gerard hardly dares so much as nod an affirmative. He sees as in a dream a couple of bearded faces on the bank above, the owner of one of which is swinging a long, noosed cord of twisted raw hide.

“All right! Now – catch!”

Swish! The noose flies out, then straightens. It falls on Gerard's shoulder. Loosening one hand, he quickly passes it round his body. It is hauled taut.

“Now – leave go the nigger. He's all right. He's anchored.”

Instinctively Gerard obeys, and swings free. For a second he is hanging on the smooth, glassy, curling lip of the fall. Should the *reim* break – But it is staunch. He is drawn slowly up against the current, and hauled safely to land.

The native, deprived of Gerard's support, is seen to be thrown, as it were, with his face downward on the current. Something is holding him back, something which has him fast by the legs; but for it, he would be shot out over the falls. He shouts something in his own language.

“By jingo! It's just as I said,” exclaims one of the men. “He's anchored.”

“Anchored?” wonderingly echoes Gerard, who, beyond being very much out of breath, is none the worse for his narrow escape.

“Yes, anchored. He says he's got a lot of *reims* and truck tangled round his legs, and it's hitched in something at the bottom of the river. That's what's holding him back; and a mighty good thing it is for you, young fellow, as well as for him. You'd have been pounded dust at the bottom of the fall long before this.”

The while the speaker has been fixing a knife to the noosed ram, in such wise that the distressed native shall be able to detach it and cut himself loose below water. A warning shout – the noose flies outward – the man catches it without difficulty, for the distance is not great. Then, having made it fast beneath his armpits, he dives under the surface, while the two on the bank – the three in fact, for Gerard now helps to man the line – keep the ram taut. The latter shakes and quivers for a moment like a line with a heavy fish at the end; then the ringed head rises.

“Haul away – he's clear!” is the cry. And in a moment the native is dragged safe to the bank and landed beside his rescuers.

Having recovered breath, he proceeded to account for the origin of his mishap. He was on his way to a neighbouring kraal, to obtain possession of a horse which he had left there. He was carrying a headstall and a couple of *reims* for this purpose, and, thinking it a trifle shorter to ford the river below the drift than at it, had gone into the water accordingly. But the current proved stronger as well as deeper than he had expected. He had been swept off his feet, and then the *reims* had somehow or

other got entangled round his legs, which were practically tied together, so that he could not swim. It must have been the headstall which, dragging along the bottom, had so opportunely anchored him.

“Well, it’s the tallest thing I’ve seen in a good many years,” said one of the men. “*The* very tallest – eh, George?”

“*Ja*, that’s so!” laconically assented George, beginning to shred up a fragment of Boer tobacco in the hollow of his hand.

The men were transport-riders, travelling with their waggons, which accounted for the prompt production of the long *reim* which had borne so essential a part in the rescue. They had just come over the rise in time to take in the situation, and with the readiness of resource which characterises their class, were prompt to act accordingly. But the object in which Gerard’s interest was centred was the man whom he had been instrumental in saving from a most horrible death.

The latter was a very fine specimen of native manhood, tall, erect, and broad, and with exquisitely modelled limbs. His face, with its short black beard, was firm and pleasing, and the straight fearless glance of the clear eyes seemed to shadow forth the character of the man. He had a grand head, whose broad and lofty forehead was tilted slightly back, as though the shiny black ring which surmounted it were a crown, instead of merely a badge of marriage and manhood; for the Zulu wears his wedding-ring on his head, instead of on his finger, and moreover is not accounted to have attained to manhood until he has the right to wear it. His age might have been anything between thirty and fifty. His only clothing was a *mútya*, which is a sort of apron of hide or cats’ tails hung round the loins by a string.

If Gerard expected him to brim over with gratitude, and to vow a life’s service or anything of the sort, he was disappointed. The man made a few laughing remarks in his own language as he pointed to the terrible fall, whose thunderous roar almost drowned their voices where they stood. The two might have been taking a friendly swim together, instead of narrowly escaping a most frightful death.

“Who is he?” said Gerard. “Where does he live?”

As one of the other men put this question, the native, with a word or two, pointed with his hand to the northward.

“But – what’s his name?”

The question struck the onlookers as an unpalatable one.

“Name?” repeated the native, after the manner of his race when seeking to gain time. “Name? They call me Sobuza. I am of the Aba Qulúsi, of the people of Zulu. Who is he who helped me out of the water?”

Gerard told who he was. The two white men exchanged looks of surprise.

“Anstey’s relative! So?” they said. “Looking him up, maybe?”

Gerard explained his exact position with regard to Anstey. He noticed that the significance of the look exchanged between the pair did not decrease. The Zulu, however, seemed to receive the answer with but little interest. He made one or two ineffectual attempts at Gerard’s name, but the recurring “r” – a letter which none of the Bantu races can pronounce, always in fact making it a sort of guttural aspirate – baffled him, and he gave it up. Then, with a sonorous farewell, he took his departure.

“If all Zulus are like him, they must be a splendid race,” said Gerard, gazing after the retreating figure. “That’s the first real one I’ve seen, to my knowledge.”

“Ungrateful beggar!” commented one of the men, angrily. “Why, he hardly took the trouble to say ‘Thankee.’ He deserved to have been let go over the fall.”

“I’m afraid I’m nearly as bad,” said Gerard. “I don’t – or rather I do – know where I should be if it hadn’t been for you.”

“That’s nothing, mister,” was the prompt rejoinder. “Help one another’s the rule of the road – eh, George?”

“*Ja*, that’s so,” assented George again.

They chatted on for a while, and smoked a sociable pipe, and Gerard accepted an invitation to accompany his friends in need to their waggons – which were standing waiting for them at the drift higher up – and take a glass of grog, which, with the torrid heat of the sun, combined to keep off any chill which might result from his wetting. Then with much mutual good will they separated.

Gerard held on his way, pondering over his adventure, which indeed was a pretty stirring one, and the first he had ever had. He was bound on an errand of partly business, partly pleasure; namely, to visit some people he did not greatly care for on some business of Anstey's. Still the change from the sedentary round of the store was something, and, hot as it was, he enjoyed the ride. It was Sunday, and thus a sort of holiday, though even on the Sabbath we fear that trade was not altogether at a standstill.

That day, however, was destined to be one of incident, of adventure. His visit over, he was riding home in the cool of the evening. The sun was just touching the western sky-line, flooding with a golden light the open, rolling plains. There was nothing specially beautiful in the landscape, in fact it was rather monotonous, but the openness of it gave an idea of free and sweeping space, and the almost unearthly glow of a perfect evening imparted a charm that was all its own. The uncongenial circumstances of his present life faded into insignificance. Gerard felt quite hopeful, quite elated. He felt that it was good even to live.

Suddenly a hubbub of voices rose upon the evening air – of native voices, of angry voices – and mingled with it the jarring clash of kerries. Spurring his horse over the slight eminence which rose in front, the cause of it became manifest. A small native kraal stood just back from the road. Issuing from this were some half-dozen figures. A glance served to show that they were engaged in a highly congenial occupation to the savage mind – fighting, to wit.

It was a running fight, however, and an unequal one. A tall man was retreating step by step, holding his own gallantly against overwhelming odds. He was armed with nothing but a knobkerrie, with which he struck and parried with lightning-like rapidity. His assailants were mostly armed with two kerries apiece, and were pressing him hard; albeit with such odds in their favour they seemed loth to come to close quarters, remaining, or springing back, just beyond the reach of those terrible whirling blows. To add to the shindy, all the women and children in the kraal were shrilly yelling out jeers at the retreating adversary, and three or four snarling curs lent their yapping to the uproar.

“*Yauw!* great Zulu!” ran the jeers. “We fear you not! Why should we? Ha-ha! We are free people-free people. We are not Cetywayo's dogs. Ha-ha!”

“Dogs!” roared the tall man, his eyes flashing with the light of battle. “Dogs of *Amakafúla!* By the head-ring of the Great Great One, were I but armed as ye are, I would keep the whole of this kraal howling like dogs the long night through – I, Sobuza, of the Aba Qulúsi – I alone. Ha!”

And with a ferocious downward sweep of his kerrie, he knocked the foremost of his assailants off his legs, receiving in return a numbing blow on the shoulder from the stick of another. All the warrior blood of the martial Zulu was roused, maddened, by the shock. He seemed to gain in stature, and his eyes blazed, as roaring out the war-shout of his race, the deep-throated “*Usútu!*” he abandoned the offensive and hurled himself like a thunderbolt upon his four remaining adversaries. These, not less agile than himself, scattered a moment previous to closing in upon him from all sides at once. At the same time he was seen to totter and pitch heavily forward. The man whom he had previously swept off his feet had, lying there, gripped him firmly by the legs.

Nothing could save him now! With a ferocious shout the others sprang forward, their kerries uplifted. In a moment he would be beaten to a jelly, when —

Down went the foremost like a felled ox, before the straight crushing blow of an English fist; while at the same time a deft left-hander met the next with such force as to send him staggering back a dozen paces. Wrenching the two sticks from the fallen man, Gerard pushed them into the hands of the great Zulu. The latter, finding himself thus evenly armed, raised the war-shout “*Usútu!*” and charged his two remaining assailants. These, seeing how the tables had been turned, did not wait. They ran away as fast as their legs could carry them.

“*Whou!*” cried the Zulu, the ferocity which blazed from his countenance fading into a look of profound contempt. “They show their backs, the cowards. Well, let them run. Ha! they have all gone,” he added, noticing that the others, too, had sneaked quietly away. “*Whau!*”

The last ejaculation was a staccato one of astonishment. For he recognised in Gerard his rescuer of the morning.

“I say, friend, you floored those two chappies neatly. By Jove, you did!”

Both turned towards the voice. It proceeded from a light buggy, which stood drawn up on the road behind them. In this were seated a young man some three or four years older than himself, and an extremely pretty girl, at sight of whom Gerard looked greatly confused, remembering the circumstances under which she had beheld him.

“It was an A1 row,” continued the former. “We saw the whole of it. *Allamaghtaag!* but I envy the way in which you spun those two to the right and left.”

“Well, I had to,” answered Gerard. “It was five to one. That’s not fair play, you know.” And his eyes met the blue ones of the young lady in the buggy, and were inclined to linger there, the more so that the said blue orbs seemed to beam an approval that was to the last degree heterodox in one of the tenderer sex and therefore, theoretically, an uncompromising opponent of deeds of violence.

“Who’s your long-legged friend?” went on the young man, proceeding to address a query or two to the Zulu, in the latter’s own language, but in a tone that struck even Gerard as a trifle peremptory. “He’s a surly dog, anyhow,” he continued, annoyed at the curtness of the man’s answer.

“He’s a Zulu – a real Zulu – and his name’s Sobuza,” said Gerard.

“A Zulu, is he? Do you know him, then?” was the surprised rejoinder.

“I didn’t before this morning. But I happen to have got him out of one little difficulty already to-day. I never expected to see him again, though.”

“The deuce you did! Was he engaged in the congenial pastime of head-breaking then, too?”

“N-no. The fact is – ” And then Gerard blushed and stuttered, for he saw no way out of trumpeting his own achievements, and somehow there was something about those blue eyes that made him shrink instinctively from anything approaching this. “The truth is he got into difficulties in the river – a bit of string or something twisted round his legs in the water so that he couldn’t swim, and I helped him out.”

The girl’s face lighted up, and she seemed about to say something; but the other interrupted —

“By Jove, we must get on. It’ll be dark directly, and looks like a storm in the offing, and we’ve a good way to go. Well, ta-ta to you, sir. So long!” And the buggy spun away over the flat.

Gerard followed it with his glance until it was out of sight. Then he turned to the Zulu. That worthy was seated on the ground, calmly taking snuff.

“Ha, *Umlúngu!*” (white man) he exclaimed, as, having completed that operation, he replaced his horn snuff-tube in the hole cut out of the lobe of his ear for that purpose. “This has been a great day – a great day. Surely my *inyoka* has taken your shape. Twice have you helped me this day. Twice in the same day have you come to my aid. Wonderful – wonderful! The death of the water – to pass through the mighty fall to the Spiritland – that is nothing. It is a fitting end for a warrior. But that I, Sobuza, of the Aba Qulúsi, of the people of Zulu – that I, Sobuza, the second fighting captain of the Udhloko regiment – should be ‘eaten up’ by four or five miserable dogs of *Amakafula*². *Whau!* that were indeed the end of the world. I will not forget this day, *Umlúngu*. Tell me again thy name.”

Gerard, who although he understood by no means all of this speech, had picked up sufficient Zulu to grasp most of its burden, repeated his names, slowly and distinctly, again and again. But Sobuza shook his head. He could not pronounce them. The nearest he could come was a sort of Lewis Carrollian contraction of the two – “U’ Jeríji,” pronouncing the “r” as a guttural aspirate.

² A term of contempt employed by the warlike natives of Zululand to designate the natives dwelling in Natal. Probably a corruption of the popular term “Kafir,” *ama* being the plural sign.

"I shall remember," he said; "I shall remember. And now, Jeríji, I journey to the northward to the land of the Zulu. Fare thee well."

Instinctively Gerard put forth his hand. With a pleased smile the warrior grasped it in a hearty muscular grip. Then with a sonorous "*Hlala gahle*," (or farewell), he turned and strode away over the now fast darkening *veldt*.

The occupants of the buggy, speeding too on *their* way, were engaged in something of an altercation.

"It was too provoking of you, Tom," the girl was saying, "to rush me away like that."

"So? Well, we've no time to spare as it is. And that cloud-bank over there means a big thunderstorm, or I'm a Dutchman."

"I don't care if it does. And we never found out his name – who he is."

"No more we did, now you mention it," said the other in a tone of half-regretful interest. "But, after all, we can survive the loss."

"But – he was such a nice-looking boy."

"Oho!" was the rejoinder, accompanied by a roar of laughter. "So that's the way the cat jumps!"

"Don't be an idiot," answered the girl, but in a tone which seemed to say the "chaff" was not altogether displeasing to her. "But you remember the report we heard coming through Howick, about two men being nearly carried over the Umgeni Fall to-day, while one was trying to save the other. That's the hero of the story, depend upon it. I'd have got it all out of him if you hadn't been in such a desperate hurry. And now we don't even know who he is!"

"No more we do. Let's put an advertisement in the paper. That'll draw him – eh? Such a nice-looking boy, too!" he added, mimicking her tone.

"Tom, you're a born idiot," she rejoined, blushing scarlet.

The "nice-looking boy" meanwhile was cantering homeward in the twilight, building castles in the air at a furious rate. Those blue eyes – that voice – hovered before his imagination even as a stray firefly or so hovered before his path. It was long since he had heard the voice or seen the face of any woman of birth and refinement. Anstey was not wont to mix with such, and the few female acquaintances the latter owned, though worthy people enough, were considerably his inferiors in the social scale. At this time, indeed, his mind and heart were peculiarly attuned to such impressions, by reason of his lonely and uncongenial surroundings; more than ever, therefore, would a feeling of discontent, of yearning home-sickness, arise in his mind. Then, by a turn of retrospect, his memory went back to Mr Kingsland's hearty, straightforward words of advice: "When you've got your foot in the stirrup, keep it there. Stick to it, my lad, stick to it, and you'll do well." And now he *had* got his foot in the stirrup. Was he to kick it out again in peevish disgust because the stirrup was a bit rusty? No; he hoped he was made of better stuff than that. He must just persevere and hope for better times.

He reached home just as the black cloud, which had been rolling up nearer and nearer, with many a red flash and low rumble, began to break into rain. Having hastily put up his horse in the tumble-down stable, and seen him fed, he went indoors, only to find Anstey blind drunk and snoring in an armchair. Utterly disgusted, he helped that worthy to bed, and then, after a cold supper, for which he had little appetite, he sought his own shakedown couch in the comfortless lumber-room. Then the storm broke in a countless succession of vivid flashes and deafening thunder-peals which shook the building to its very foundations; and to the accompaniment of the deluging roar and rush of the rain upon the iron roof he fell fast asleep – to dream that he was rescuing countless numbers of fighting Zulus from the Umgeni Fall, over which a rainbow made up of blue eyes was striving to lure them.

Note 1. "Snake." Zulus are great believers in tutelary spirits, of which each individual has one or more continually watching over him. To such they frequently, though not invariably, attribute the form of the serpent.

Chapter Eight. Down

We referred to a change which had come into Anstey's manner as regarded his intercourse with our young friend. More than once he had returned to the charge and sounded the latter again as to the probability of his relatives being willing to invest some funds for him in what he was pleased to call their joint concern. But Gerard's reply had been positive and unvarying. So persuaded was he of their inability to do so that he would not even apply to them. Then it was that Anstey's manner began to change.

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