The Lost Heiress: A Tale of Love, Battle and Adventure

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Chapter 1  The Will

MR. J. MILDMAY DALSTON was one of those men whom nobody liked, because he regarded everyone with suspicion, and shaped his conduct accordingly. The world upon which he looked through his little piggish eyes was a mean world moved by the lever of selfishness on the fulcrum of dishonesty. His manner was brusque and overbearing—he took life by the throat and squeezed out what he considered to be his due.

The nervous and sensitive nature of the timid girl he scared into marrying him soon withered under his blustering manner; his son, who inherited his temper without his coarseness, had left the parental roof in anger; and he had ruined his own brother’s prospects in life by unfounded accusations.

This last circumstance was brought home to him as he sat in his city office reading a legal document, but there was no sign of regret in the expression of his broad red face. On the contrary, the sight of his brother’s name had thrown him into a fury.
“If it had not been for him,” he growled, shaking the document angrily, “and for his brat of a girl, the whole of this property would have come to me. There’s that fool Nicholson, too; why the dickens did he die without seeing me? I’ve no patience with the man. A bottle of bay rum, too, and a receipt for the gout—pshaw, it makes me ill!”

“Henry!” he bawled, with such savage energy as to thrill every clerk in the long room to the backbone.

“Yes, sir, coming, sir,” said the messenger, who was accustomed at this hour to get his master’s luncheon, “jugged hare, curried prawns, sir.”

“Curried lawyer, you juggled rascal!” roared Mr. Dalston, one of whose peculiarities it was to coin phrases. “Tell Mr. Smooth I want him at once, d’ye mind.”

In a few minutes Mr. Smooth appeared, softly closed the door after him, approached his fuming client on tiptoe, and imprisoned the big coarse hand in both of his own downy paws.

“Ah, my dear sir—my very dear sir—has some unprincipled person been taking advantage again of your good nature?”

“’Pon my word, Smooth, if I were a sea captain I’d give you regular employment. You’ve got enough oil in your carcase to still a forty-foot wave.”

“Facetious as ever, I see; pity we are not all possessed of your fund of spirits.”

“Fund of spirits be hanged!” said the other, irritably. “I’m not a cellar, nor a cask, nor a butt either, so drop your soap-and-water foolishness and listen to this.”

“Pray proceed,” said the lawyer, sitting with his back to the window, so that his client’s face should be in the light while his own was in the shade.

Mr. Dalston rapped the document smartly—then read the contents in a hard metallic voice:—

“Last will and testament of John Nicholson, of Prospect Ranche, Texas.

“I, John Blaine Nicholson, give and bequeath my ranche—Prospect Place—together with all stock and effects thereon—and the sum of £35,000 to my nephew, Sydney Blaine, on condition that within two years of the date hereof, he marries Kate, only daughter of my much loved, but maligned and misunderstood friend, William Dalston, whose forgiveness I here humbly crave. Should Sydney Blaine not comply with this condition, or should he be already married, the property to be sold, and the proceeds to be divided evenly between my nephew, Drummond Dalston, and the said Kate Dalston. Further, I direct, that the contents of this will be made known to
Sydney Blaine within twelve months of the date hereof, by James Mildmay Dalston, whom I appoint sole executor, and to whom I leave, in recognition of his treachery to my brother, my undying contempt, together with a bottle of bay rum for his baldness, and a specific for the gout.

“‘Signed March 25th, 1879, and witnessed’.”

“May the old bear be eternally bay-rum’d!” ejaculated Dalston, rubbing his hand over his bald crown, “for such an ungrateful return for my kindness in warning him against my brother’s arts. What are you grinning at, eh?”

“My dear sir—I was merely expressing surprise.”

“Surprise! can’t you give me something more practical? I’ve a good mind to wash my hands of the matter, and decline to act as executor.”

“Softly, softly, my friend. The will is not such a bad will.”

“Isn’t it?” sneered the other. “Show me a good point in it.”

“Certainly.”—The lawyer took the will in his hand, and smoothed it out. “In the first place—young Blaine may be married—or he may be dead. Secondly—he may not choose to marry Miss Dalston.”

“Rubbish! what sane man would not marry £35,000 and a cattle ranche?”

“Thirdly,” continued the lawyer unmoved, “Blaine may not be able to find Miss Dalston within the time stated. Do you know where she is?”

“No, and what is more—I don’t want to know.”

“Ah! that is a mistake;” the lawyer looked craftily into the other’s eyes, and then proceeded, in tones significant of hidden meaning, “You could easily place her in the hands of friends where she would be secure from untimely attentions.”

Dalston’s small eyes twinkled at this suggestion. “Go on,” he said, brusquely.

“Fourthly—if this Blaine is like other young men, he is open to temptation, to flattery, to the wiles, whatever course they may take, of a shrewd agent.” The lawyer paused.

“I do not see your point,” said Dalston, mopping his brow.

Smooth edged his chair nearer. “We presume Blaine gets into debt, and falls into the power of a certain party who can enforce any conditions he pleases; or suppose he compromises himself with a female agent; or—which I take to be the most feasible case—we will presume that he is assisted by an agent to marry the girl of his choice, for he is bound to have some love affair in progress. Hot blood will have its course, you know.”
“But it is stated herein that he must be informed of his good fortune within twelve months.”

“Let Blaine compromise himself, or marry first, and then make the will known to him. Your son can then marry Kate, and the whole fortune passes under your control.”

“Good,” said the merchant, with a heavy thump of his hand. “You have the makings of a Lord Chancellor in you. Now, what course do you propose—eh, you sly fox?”

“Now you touch upon unsafe ground,” said the lawyer, with a soft smile. “A will is a very delicate matter—a very delicate matter indeed to meddle with.”

“Will £100 destroy the delicacy?”

“Sir, you wound my professional honour.”

“Professional cupidity, you mean. You forget that I can act upon the advice you have already given me, without further assistance from you.”

“Certainly, my dear sir,” said Smooth, taking his hat, “nothing more simple.” He looked up at the ceiling and murmured in a soft voice, “As a matter of professional interest, I would take pains in seeing how you succeeded. I have a friend at the Probate Court who would be glad to have the history of the case.”

“Curse you for a pettifogging brief-snatcher! Would £500 satisfy your scruples?”

“I make no bargain, sir. If you must have my advice, I would value it at £1,000, to be included in my account against you for past services, and spread over the whole in the shape of additions to each item.”

Dalston stifled down his passion and signified his assent to these terms.

“Now—what course do you propose?”

The lawyer leant back in his chair, lost in thought. “Let me see, both Blaine and your son are in the Colonies?”

“Yes, they are fighting in Zululand.”

“Splendid! Providence is playing into our hands, and may well end our difficulties by spitting this young fellow on a spear.”

“We cannot trust to accident or chance,” muttered Dalston, angrily, as his grasping mind dwelt on the prospect of losing the fortune.

For a moment or two Smooth seemed in a quandary.

“No, we—that is, you cannot.” The lawyer walked softly to and fro. “I have a man in my eye, a reckless ruffian who called on me in reference to
this very Mr. Nicholson. He had come over here from America with Mr. Nicholson, and got into trouble through swaggering about with a revolver.”

“A likely man—some Yankee sharper! What is his name?”

“Rowe—Cob Rowe, I think he styles himself. Looks as fierce as an untamed wolf, and positively made me feel in dread of my life. Money will purchase his services.”

“And what am I to do with this filibuster if I engage him?”

“Prime him up with whisky, give him £50 down, book his passage to South Africa, and see him off next week.”

“But what must I tell him to do when he gets to the end of his journey?”

“Ah! a man of your shrewdness, my dear sir, will know what to tell him. You are playing with me. Tell him you will give him £500 for his services—but do not let him know that Blaine is entitled to property under the will. The man has no conscience, and you may safely trust him to carry out any plan. I will send him to you to-morrow with a letter setting forth the services you require him for.”

Smooth went off, but presently returned, and observed, as though mentioning some trifling incident—

“That Rowe is an excellent shot with a revolver.”

“What does he mean by that now?” said Dalston, uneasily. “I’d wager my dinner there is more in that last remark than in all his rigmarole about an agent. Good shot with a revolver. Umph! Can the devil mean—no—pshaw!”

Dalston knitted his brow, and looked around uneasily.

“No, no,” he muttered, as the shadow of a dark thought fell upon his heart. “No. It can’t be done. Any other way but that. But if the other ways fail, then”—

The cunning eyes looked wild, the blood left the flabby cheeks, and the man trembled so that he had to grasp at the table to steady himself.

Mr. Dalston was not a man of any imagination, and dreams never troubled him. He had entered into a contract with nature for eight hours’ sleep, and he grudged a minute given to idle fancies; but that night he could not escape from the horror of nightmare. He was haunted by the spectral image of a terrible tragedy. Through the portals and chambers of his brain there went a man-hunt, the pursuer threatening the pursued with a pistol, until at last, with a wild scream, the hunted creature fell, shot in the back. Dalston woke up with a cry of terror that seemed to him to be the echo of the death-wail, and he crept in a state of abject alarm to the cupboard for brandy—the resort of the coward.
The vision had come to him as a warning, a mysterious flash from the inscrutable into the veil of the future, and at the moment he solemnly resolved to let the will take its course. But with the daylight his rapacity resumed full sway.

At his office he spent the morning in scheming out all possible plans for depriving Sydney Blaine of his rights.

At noon a stranger sauntered into the clerks’ room, a thin wiry man, with a sallow complexion, high cheek bones, thin firm lips, and a particularly hard look in his steel-grey eyes.

A titter greeted his appearance, which was rather singular in those surroundings. His headgear was a broad-brimmed wide-awake, and he was finished off in top boots, while his coat was of deer skin.

“Behold the last of the Mohicans,” remarked one youth, in an audible whisper.

“Es the boss in?” demanded the stranger.

“Who are you?” asked Henry, the messenger, in astonishment.

“Why, the wild man of the woods,” interrupted the facetious clerk. “Don’t you see his hair?”

“Is the boss in, cuss yer?” repeated the new-comer in a sharp voice.

“Eh, who?”

“The chief slave-driver. The boss of this hog pen.”

“If you mean Mr. J. Mildmay Dalston, he is in.”

“Wal, I reckon some of him’ll do. Lead on; and see here,” he continued, turning to the clerks, with a sudden fierce sparkle in his eyes, “ef you don’t shet, some of you’ll get badly hurt.”

Henry, in a state of mingled delight and terror at the manner of this remarkable visitor, flung open the door of the inner office, with this audacious announcement—

“A gentleman curio from the circus, sir. A—eh—regular circussian.”

“Here, git!” cried the stranger, and Henry was fired out with what he considered to be undue violence.

“What is the meaning of this intrusion?” roared Mr. Dalston. “If that boy is injured, I hereby make a claim upon you for damages.”

“Go slow, old hoss. Your name is Dalston—mine is Rowe, Cob Rowe. I hear yer hev some money ter hand over.” He spoke coolly, with a drawl and twang evidently exaggerated.

Mr. Dalston eyed his visitor suspiciously, then he waved him to a seat.

“Mr. Smooth directed you here. Did he give you a letter?”
“Here it is.”
Dalston slowly read the letter through. “I see by this that my lawyer has informed you fully upon the service you are required to fulfil.”
“I reckon not.”
“What’s that! What is the nature of the service?”
“Wal, it’s a mighty easy way of making a thousand dollars. As I understand, yer want me to deliver a sealed letter to a certain party within twelve months from now.”
Mr. Dalston looked at his man attentively.
“Is that all?”
“Wal—isn’t it?”
“No, sir,” growled the merchant. “You know very well it is not all. Any fool could deliver a letter in twelve months—and you are not a fool by any means.”
“I guessed the sleek coon was playing possum; had a Jack, so ter speak, up his sleeve. There is something more.”
“There is something more, and I will come to it at once. I want you to prevent this Sydney Blaine here mentioned from marrying my niece, Miss Kate Dalston.”
“I knew it. The trail of the skirt is over us all. Parceed, Colonel, to par-ticklers.”
Mr. Dalston fairly chuckled to think how easy it was to shape out a plan.
“You must understand, my man, that by Mr. Nicholson’s will I am appointed guardian of my niece—and as I have good reason to understand that this Blaine is a rascal, it is my duty to put a stop to his designs. You understand?”
“Cert’nly. You pay two thousand dollars to prevent a man hitching to your niece. It’s generous, but it aren’t reasonable. See here, how could old Texas Nicholson appoint you guardian of your own niece?”
“You are too——curious!” blustered Dalston, falling from exultation to annoyance. “He appointed me executor, and as executor I must see the girl fairly treated. Are you willing to undertake the work?”
“Where is the gal?”
“Never mind where she is. All you have to do is to find Blaine and to stick to him for two years, unless be marries before that time, or is killed. You’ll be paid as soon as he is settled. The sooner he is settled the better,” he added, darkly.
Rowe looked at the merchant keenly for some moments.
“So!” he said, “I understand.”
“And you agree?”
“I agree.”

Mr. Dalston breathed a sigh of relief, and smiled with satisfaction at his cunning.

“There is one other point,” he continued, shaking his finger impressively. “I must warn you that my son is in Zululand, and I will instruct him to keep a watch on you and Blaine. You may confide in him if you find him trustworthy, but he is too confident and rash to be entrusted with any responsible part. He knows enough, however,” he repeated with a look of great cunning, “to see that you act fairly to us.”

“Wal, Colonel,” said Rowe, calmly, “if you act fair ter me, I will be straight with you, and I won’t go back on my words.”

“There is one other matter I must mention out of consideration for your safety. Blaine is a headstrong and quarrelsome man; he may use violence towards you.”

“That es encouragin’; I like that better ’en all you’ve said.”

“You can shoot, I suppose?”

“You bet!”

“Well, that is good. Better be armed, you know.”

They discussed money matters, then went round to the shipping company and booked a berth by the mail steamer leaving for South Africa the following week.

When Rowe was alone a curious expression came into his face.

“The old man was playin’ me fer a sucker, I see. I reckon there’s some-thin’ deeper’n he told me. I remember about Dalston and Nicholson being mighty thick at one time, when this here man made mischief between ’em.”

He walked along up the Strand, pondering over the matter, when he chanced to look up at Somerset House.

He turned in, as if on a sudden impulse, and paid a fee to glance at the last will and testament of John Nicholson.

As he left that stately pile he chuckled to himself, saying, “I ken see the galoot’s hand! Cob Rowe, yer must quit ahead of this game.”

Chapter 2  Rowe Has Some Excitement

SIX WEEKS after the events recorded in the first chapter, Cob Rowe, mounted on a white horse, rode out of the famous little fort at Rorke’s Drift, where a few weeks before a handful of British soldiers had held back a thousand Zulus.
“It will be a dangerous ride,” said an officer at his side; “but if you must take that line, keep a sharp look-out, and beware of deserted kraals.”

“I’ve fit Injuns,” replied Rowe, with his exaggerated twang assumed at times, “and I guess they’re more dangerous than these yer Zulus.”

“I have not fought Indians,” remarked the other, drily; “but I will guarantee that a Zulu will give you all your work to beat him, whether at fighting or in bush cunning. Keep to the left of that range of mountains—and look out for a solitary peak, some twelve miles from here. When you reach that, you may consider yourself safe.”

“Twelve miles only? I reckon George Washington and me’ll clear that in the face of the Zulu nation.”

“Well, good luck to you, for it’s only luck that will save you.”

“Good-bye, Captain. Come along, Wash.”

“There goes a man to his death,” muttered the officer, watching the free play of the horse as he galloped away. “Well, I warned him, but the fellow looks upon a Zulu as beneath contempt.”

Rowe had learnt that Sydney Blaine was with General Wood’s column in north Zululand, and he was determined to take the nearest cut. At the same time, he was not so reckless as he appeared. He had not fought on the western plains without learning something of native wiles, and the grassy country through which he was passing was not unlike the undulating prairie where he had encountered Apache.

He kept a wary outlook as he sharply advanced, scanning the horizon and the banks of “dongas,” or fissures cut deeply into the friable ground by wind and rain. Moreover, his horse, though of the worst possible colour for warfare, was fleet and powerful, a fiery broncho of the wiry Basuto breed, famed for endurance and surefootedness.

In a short time he crossed the Blood River, and passed into a shallow valley rising gradually in the distance to a “nek,” or ridge. Not a sign of human life did he see; nothing but a few deserted huts, with gaunt dogs that looked furtively at him before slinking away, an abandoned maize patch here and there, and cattle “kraals.” Desolation brooded over the scene.

“Not a livin’ crittur,” muttered Rowe, “but the circling vulture above, and the slinking cur beneath. It ’ud be a real treat to see a human.”

He went on, threading the dongas, and growing more careless as he advanced, until at last he met with an awkward reminder. His horse had stopped dead at the brink of a running stream, and pawed uneasily at the water, which just covered the pure white sand.
“Come up!” shouted Rowe, digging the spurs, and the plucky little horse sprang forward, sank up to the knees, the next plunge found him up to his girths, and at the next, he rolled over on to his side with a mighty snort of disgust and fear. He was caught in a quicksand.

For an hour Rowe worked to get his horse out, cutting bundles of the rushes from the banks to make a footing, and cursing himself all the time for his carelessness. When, at the end of that time, he brought his horse to the bank, the little fellow was weakened from his struggles.

“All right, my boy, I’ll give you a rest when we pass the ridge.”

They climbed the ridge at a walk, passed a village of huts neatly arranged in semicircular clusters of four and six, with the cattle kraal in the centre.

As horse and rider slowly picked their way down the other side into another shallow valley, a Zulu warrior crept out from one of the huts, and looked after them. Then with rifle and assegai in hand he followed cautiously after.

At the next maize (or mealie) garden, Rowe gathered a few cobs of green corn for roasting, stopped to fill his tin at a brook, and halted on a small kopje which commanded a view of the country round. Here he off-saddled and knee-halted his horse, with a double hitch of the neck rein above the left knee. This brought the head down and lifted the leg up—an effective means of preventing a horse from straying, while giving him full liberty to graze.

The fire was crackling under the “canteen,” the green corn was turning a nice brown, when a curious booming sound broke on the silence. It was as though some enormous bee was bearing down at express speed; but before Rowe could determine what sort of an insect it was, with a whizz, whir, boom, the thing struck the tin plump in the centre, and scattered the firebrands in every direction.

Rowe fell over his saddle, and his booted feet wildly pawed the air, then spitting out cinders and dust, and rubbing the ashes out of his eyes, he regained his feet.

“What in thunder—wal, blame me—” There lying in the centre of the scattered fire was a pot leg, an inch or two of solid iron, broken off a Birmingham three-legged pot. This was the new sort of insect, sent on its mission out of a gun-barrel.

“Things is getting interesting. I guess I’d better get into the saddle again.” But as he started after the horse, another pot leg came booming along, and a tall Zulu immediately stepped into view from behind a rock on an adjoining hill, to witness the effect of the shot.

“Ef there’s only one of ’em, I guess I’ll fight it out,” muttered Rowe, hesitating. Seeing this, the Zulu threw away his rifle with a gesture of disgust,
came down the hill armed only with the stabbing assegai, a long-bladed, short-hafted spear.

“Blame me, if that isn’t cheek; I’ll try his nerve for him.” He drew his revolver and fired five successive shots, but at each one the Zulu simply lifted his spear. Rowe had, with all his experience, made the usual mistake of under-estimating the distance in the brilliant light and clear atmosphere.

“Seems a pity to drop him, seein’ he’s not armed, but it must be done. Hullo!” He hurriedly felt in his pouch, and then looked very serious. The pouch was empty! Every cartridge had fallen into the quicksand.

The conditions were altered now with a vengeance. What was a bowie knife, the only weapon left him, compared with the formidable assegai?

“Wal—I was hankerin’ for excitement, and here it is. By gosh! I wish I were inside a triple-plated biler—that spear’s long enough to skewer a hog. Anyhow, here goes for a fight.”

He drew a heavy bowie knife from its sheath, wrapped his saddle cloth round his left arm, and then watched the approach of the Zulu.

The warrior, a man of splendid build, was perfectly naked save for the kilt of blue monkey skin about his loins. His head was unshorn, showing that he belonged to one of the unmarried regiments, and a long crane feather marked him as a chief; his circlets of black and white hide around the wrists and ankles proved him a warrior of the famous Nkobomakosi regiment. Pride was manifested in the haughty carriage of his head, strength in the play of his corded muscles, under his satin skin of rich mahogany hue, and proofs of his courage were given in innumerable old scars, and in one recently healed gash right across his breast.

These details Rowe noticed as the warrior, without a moment’s pause, came striding up the hill. He threw himself into position to receive an attack, expecting that the Zulu would make a rush—but when twenty yards off the latter paused.

He rested his hands on the butt of his assegai and silently took stock of his opponent. The fierce black eyes ranged slowly over the white man’s form, then dwelt fixedly on his face.

A slight quivering of the wide nostrils, and the stiffening of the muscles on the naked limbs, warned Rowe of the coming rush. Then, with a sudden fierce growl, the warrior sprang from the ground and bounded forward.

Rowe escaped the lightning thrust by a rapid spring, and struck with his heavy knife. The point just ripped the black skin below the armpit.

“Yoh!” exclaimed the warrior in astonishment, as he realized that his blow had failed.
With the light of battle in his eyes, he again leapt forward like a tiger on its prey, and the long blade flashed in the sun as it shot forth.

Rowe sprang back, throwing his left arm across his breast. The point of the blade pierced the muscles and was withdrawn stained with blood. “Sutu!”8 shouted the warrior, giving the tribal war-cry, and again he struck. With a desperate attempt at defence, Rowe struck out swiftly, and just in time cut through the haft of the spear above the blade.

In an instant the Zulu’s long fingers closed upon Rowe’s uplifted arm, and the two men glared at one another. Rowe waited for the other to begin the struggle, reserving his strength, but in that moment’s interval the Zulu grasped the fallen blade between his toes, reached it, and sprang away before Rowe realized what was going on.

The latter, however, was the better armed, and a grim smile played about his lips.

“I will give him something to do now,” he muttered viciously, and manoeuvred round the motionless Zulu for an opening. At last he saw his chance, he feinted, then changed position rapidly, and lunged upwards.

The warrior was prepared for the blow, which spent its force on the air, and before Rowe could recover, a fearful blow fell on his head, cutting right through the thick hat with its band of leather, and causing the blood to stream over his eyes.

Through a red mist he saw the Zulu raise his arm to stab. His head swam, but with a mighty effort he hurled his knife full at the warrior’s head, then fell to the ground senseless.

Chapter 3  The Dogs of War

WHEN ROWE RECOVERED consciousness, he was very much surprised that he was alive. In fact, with the first flutter of his senses, he felt as though his soul had taken leave of his body, and it was not until he sat up and looked around that he fully satisfied himself he was in the land of the living.

There could be no mistake about it, for his enemy, the Zulu, was a few yards off, also very much alive, and beginning to move.

The heavy haft of the bowie had struck the warrior full between his eyes. A white man’s skull would have cracked under the force of the blow, but the thick frontal bone of the native had withstood the concussion; and the only effect was temporary unconsciousness.

The Zulu, being in the very perfection of condition, hard as steel, and without superfluous flesh, was the first to recover. He picked up the bowie and the assegai blade, and, with one in either hand, stepped up to Rowe. The latter held his breath in that supreme moment; a curious sensation mani-
fested itself at a spot below the right ear, where he felt the point of the knife would enter, while his eyes, dulled by pain, were fixed on the shining blade. As a tiger gloats over his prey, the Zulu gloated over the helpless white man, and deferred the death-stroke.

“Strike!” said Rowe, hoarsely. “Strike, you devil!” The throbbing on his neck increased, until it seemed as though all the nerves in his body were concentrated at the spot. He placed his finger on his neck, and bent his head to one side.

“Strike!”

The Zulu’s eyes grew bloodshot, his nostrils expanded and, with the war-cry leaping from his lips, he raised the knife above his head.

A wild cry, as if in response to the war-whoop, quivered through the air. The blow was arrested. The warrior turned his head to listen—and then, from some unaccountable reason, he let his hand fall to his side.

It seemed to Rowe that he was to have a new lease of life, and his neck ceased to throb.

The cry was repeated, and was echoed from another quarter, and taken up again and again. The Zulu stood in a listening attitude, with all the ferocity gone out of his face—he looked down at Rowe, saying something in Zulu. He swept his arm round, placed one hand at his throat to indicate that something had seized him, and struck at an imaginary foe with the knife. His dramatic action betokened a desperate resistance, and Rowe shuddered under a vague apprehension of dread. The Zulu’s next action was yet more inexplicable: after looking again more seriously at Rowe, he gave back the bowie, and what was stranger, showed no suspicion that the weapon would be used against him. In fact, he crouched down with his back towards his enemy.

The cries that had been lulled for a few seconds broke out again, and swelled on the evening air in a chorus of fearful howls.

“Dogs,” muttered Rowe, with great relief, as he distinguished an unmistakable yelping. He touched the Zulu on his naked shoulder, and as the latter turned his head he imitated the bark of a dog.

The Zulu nodded his head in assent, with a look of gloomy resolve on his face.

“Wal, to think a fightin’ man like this should be afraid of a passel o’ curs!”

The chorus increased in volume, and now the yelps and growls of individual animals could be distinguished from out the din, next the snapping of teeth, and then the rush and patter of many feet. The Zulu gathered a few stones together hurriedly, and Rowe for the first time felt a thrill of dread.
The next moment the leaders of the pack swept into sight over the swell on the hill, and after them, with vicious snarls and snapping yelps, came the main crowd. At the sight of the two men the whole pack halted; then the leaders, with their eyes closed and their noses pointing skyward, gave vent to a long, blood-curdling howling. At the signal all the pack squatted and howled in unison.

Rowe laughed at the sight, but his laugh died away with a merriless ring. There was something in the aspect of the dogs that sent his blood cold.

He realized suddenly what these gaunt brutes were—the outcast, homeless dogs of a hundred abandoned kraals. Half famished, and desperate from hunger, they had left their holes, rushes, and caverns in the hills. Dogs of war, they had fought over the fallen soldiers on the bloody field of Isandlana; they had howled in delight over their dead masters at Kambula; they had followed the wide trail of many a wounded wretch to some still pool, and hemmed him in, licking their jaws, and staring at him with wild eyes. They had tasted human flesh, and now they had run up the wind on the scent of human blood, and had found their victims.

The two men, by the power in the steady look from their eyes, held the pack back; but only for a time.

A large yellow brute began barking in a mad, frenzied way, jerking his head from side to side, and champing his fangs until the foam dropped from his jaws. The others, excited by this, barked themselves into the same mad fury, and now one and then another would dash out and bite at the stones and grass.

There was something hideous in the ravenous gleaming in the yellow eyes beyond anything in Rowe’s experience, and he watched the narrowing circle with a feeling of sickening disgust.

“What a dog’s death!” he muttered, bitterly.

Suddenly one brute sprang upon Rowe’s saddle, and in an instant a score of maddened creatures were tearing at the leather, tumbling over each other in their blind rage, and biting savagely at anything within reach, until their bodies were spattered with blood.

Rowe sprang up, staggered a moment from a dizziness in his head, then, with a wild cry, fell upon the fighting mass, striking furiously with his knife. The dogs opened up at his attack, and then closed upon him with a rush that swept him off his legs. As he fell, they crowded upon his body, but in such numbers that they impeded one another, and could not make play with their teeth.

The Zulu might have escaped had he chosen; but instead, he hurled a rock at the dogs, then springing over those near him, seized one by its hind
legs, and, using it as a club, swept the others from off the white man’s body. Then, picking up the bowie knife, he stood over the prostrate man, a weapon in either hand, and shouted in Zulu—

“Hamba!” (that is, “go”).

For a moment, the furious pack quailed under the look and voice of the warrior, then they came on again.

Rowe regained his feet, picked up the stirrup leathers with the iron stirrup attached, and stood with his back to his rescuer.

The shadows of evening lengthened out, and the grey dusk was falling, and still they kept off rush after rush. Soon, however, it would be dark, and the dogs would have them at an advantage. The dogs themselves seemed to understand this. They ceased their outcry, and withdrew for a few yards, some lying down and panting, others licking their wounds, and a few moving round the circle, but all with their hungry eyes fixed upon the two dark forms in their midst. The stars broke out from the darkening sky, and the first gust of the night wind moaned over the land. It brought with it the strong, sweet odour of the avand bloom (evening flower), and it brought, too, a wild clamour.

Another pack was approaching!

Chapter 4  Rowe’s Escape

AT THE OUTBURST of yelping denoting the approach of another pack, the dogs which had borne the heat and burden of the fray showed renewed signs of fury. They had no intention of allowing the new-comers to share in the approaching feast, and gathered together for a desperate rush.

The two men saw that the final moment had arrived, and the Zulu placed his hand upon his companion’s shoulder while he spoke in his deep voice. Rowe did not understand, but instinctively he felt for and took the warrior’s hand in his nervous grasp. “Real grit—real grit,” he repeated; “it’s something to die with a man.”

The dogs set up a wild, unearthly howl, and rushed forward. Above the din rose the shrill scream of a horse in his terror, and a white object loomed out of the darkness.

“My horse!” cried Rowe, and stepped forward, striking furiously at the brutes that beset him on all sides.

The Zulu passed him like a dark shadow, reached the horse, severed the knee halter, and leaping on the bare back, rushed by Rowe. As he passed he caught the white man by the collar of his deer-skin coat, and with a mighty effort swung him to the shoulders before him.
Down the hill flew the white horse, mad with terror, and then thundered over the hard ground into the darkness. The dogs were soon left behind, but their wild howlings still filled the air, and acted like spurs upon the horse. His hoofs struck out sparks as he flashed in a streak of ghostly white, without a fault or stumble, over the rough ground. The two riders pressed their knees in and waited for trouble. An accident of some sort was bound to come, but the rush of air against their heated brows, and the knowledge of their narrow escape from a shameful death, gave them a sense of elation. Another wild burst from the dogs, as the two packs came into collision, startled the horse to a renewed burst—he tripped, stumbled, and then fell headlong.

Rowe, after lying on the broad of his back for a minute or so, slowly rose up—sore in every bone of his body.

He heard the sound of retreating hoofs. The horse had gone, then! He groped about for the Zulu, and called out—he could find nobody, and there was no response. The Zulu had gone also!

He sat down on the ground, and took his head between his hands. He was sore from top to toe—bleeding from a dozen wounds, faint from loss of blood, and tired to death. Eight hours only had elapsed since he had left Rorke’s Drift, strong and confident; now he was as weak as a child.

“Wal, Rowe—Cob Rowe,” he muttered, “I guess you’re pretty well played out.”

As though in mocking reply, the long quavering howl of a jackal rose and died away. It seemed to Rowe as though the creature cried, “I smell a sick Yankee—whe-ah, whe-ah—he-ah—he-ah.”

The night before he would have been indifferent to the cry of a leopard—now the howl of a sneaking jackal made him shudder. He rose up and staggered away into the night; moving blindly, and forcing one leg after the other by a stubborn resolution screwed to a point of tension and kept there. It was an effort that few men in his state, and under the circumstances, could have made; but he stumbled on, tripping over stones, and colliding against ant-hills, reeling more and more as he went, from the dizziness caused by the wound on his head.

Thirst then added a fresh torture; he went down on his knees and licked the dew from the scattered blades of grass, crawling eagerly from tuft to tuft.

At last, utterly worn out, his limbs refused to act, and he lay outstretched with a twig of shrub between his parched lips. A torpor stole over him, and with the last glimmer of reason he made an effort to shake it off. In his despair he closed his teeth like a steel trap over the shrub. Immediately from the bruised bark a sharp pungent essence arose to his brain. He chewed vigorously; as he did so the torpor fled, and his brain became clearer. The heav-
en-sent dew had led him to the buchu, a herb possessing great medicinal qualities. With his mind invigorated, he could now hear the ripple of water near by, and he crawled to it.

A tiny rill was gurgling into a round pool, whose still surface reflected the stars.

Rowe drank deeply of the cool refreshing water, then washed the blood and dust from his face, and plunged his head in.

As he sat up, he felt that he was upon a smooth stone; and, feeling about, he traced the outline of a beaten path; and what was more, where the ground had been softened he discovered the print of a naked foot, by the touch of his finger-tips lightly drawn over the ground.

He was, then, at a well near some habitation. Was it occupied by friends or enemies? That was the question he asked himself, but without any response from his dull and throbbing brain. Should he investigate?

At any rate, he would chance it. He accordingly rose up, having regained a little of his strength, and went along the path. Suddenly he stopped.

Against the faint sky line there stood out, abrupt and solitary, a lofty peak like a huge blot, and at its foot glimmered a tiny spark of light.

And as he stood hesitating what to do, a deep growl warned him that he had been discovered.

“Doggone the country,” he muttered, in bitter disgust; “it’s made of dogs.”

The growling continued, increasing in fierceness, and suddenly a brilliant shaft of light streamed out from the base of the hill.

“Halloo!” hailed Rowe, in desperation.

“Halloo yourself!” came the reply.

“Thank God, a white man! Say, come—give us a hand.” His voice died to a whisper, he swayed to and fro and fell, overcome by a second spell of weakness.

“What is it, father?” another voice sounded dreamily in Rowe’s ears, as he lay stretched on the ground, tired out beyond the power of movement.

“I don’t know, child; step in out of the light. Some ‘mission’ Zulu, perhaps, with a smattering of English; they are worse than the others.”

“It sounded to me like a man in trouble,” said the same sweet voice again.

“Here, Carlo—search.”

Rowe heard the dog approaching, followed by silence; then a cold nose touched his face, and with an effort he raised his hand to the dog’s head. He heard the steps retreating, and then the gentle voice again.

“It is all right, father; see—Carlo beckons us to follow.”
“Stay here, then, while I go. There may be treachery.”

Rowe was picked up, and soon found himself on a couch, in a small, plainly furnished room, where he was subjected to a brief but searching inspection from the man who carried him in, and from a girl whose presence at that frontier outpost seemed out of place.

Father and daughter, as they evidently were, did not waste any time in idle speculation about this torn and battered stranger. The case was one for action, and with only a whispered word of direction or inquiry, they set about preparing remedies. They gave him first a warm strong drink to restore his strength, then the girl, with a white face, that betokened pity, but without any nervous trembling, cut away the long black hair from about the edges of the jagged wound.

“He must have some leaves of the onion root, father,” she whispered; and, taking the lantern, she went out into the night. Through the open door Rowe, by turning his head, could trace her course by the twinkling of the swinging-lamp.

He pointed after her.

“Coyotes,” he muttered feebly, fixing his feverish eyes upon the man. “Coyotes—call her back.”

The words and accent seemed to strike the rescuer.

“It is all right, Carlo is with her,” the other answered, after a long pause, in which he looked curiously at Rowe. He leant forward, and felt the latter’s deer-skin coat.

“I see,” he said, in explanation of his movement, “you are from America. I was on the plains myself once.”

Then he busied himself about his patient with the same silence and gravity as before.

By-and-by the moving point of light in the pitchy darkness without increased in brightness, and the girl stepped into the room, bearing in her hand a fleshy bulb as large as a Spanish onion, the coatings of which she peeled off, while her father placed them upon the various wounds.

“That will draw all the poison out of those bites. He must have strayed into some occupied kraal, and been attacked by women and dogs.”

A ghost of a smile flickered for a moment over Rowe’s thin lips.

“If the crittur that whopped me was a woman, I guess I’ll quit before a man comes along.”

With that, he closed his eyes, and fell into the profound sleep of exhaustion.
Chapter 5 The Solitary Peak

THE OCCUPANTS of this lonely house, so dangerously near to the Zulu border that from the doorway one could trace the smoke rising from the kraals, were Peter and Mary Rath. Not much was known about them by the few Dutch farmers in the neighbourhood, for the father had shunned all intercourse since he settled there under the shelter of Kopje Alleen (the Lonely Hill); and moreover, few men, white or black, cared to enter into the dark shadow of that lonely peak. A crime had been committed there, and the place was haunted.

The legend ran that two young Boers, Gert and Hendrik Graaf, loved the same girl. Gert had the most sheep; Hendrik had the best riding-horse and the best looks. The sheep had all the best of the running until the last day, when the damsel capriciously decided in favour of the "mooi raai paarde" (fine riding-horse), and the pleasant face of Hendrik.

The two brothers soon after this decision—but before Gert was aware of his bad luck—went out after eland. Their hunt led them to Kopje Alleen, where Hendrik must needs go boasting of his good fortune. A herd boy after straying cattle saw the brothers approaching, and watched them from among the rocks of the hill. He saw Gert lift his hand threateningly, as if to strike, but instead dropped it heavily to his side, whereat Hendrik laughed mockingly. As they came on, Gert stopped to fumble with the thong of his veldschoens; then, while still kneeling, he steadied his long roer, and shot his brother in the back as the latter reached the shadow of the hill, shouting as he did so—

"Hendrik Graaf, gij zijt naar uwe graf" ("Hendrik Graaf, you are at your grave").

The murderer rose, and leisurely advanced towards the dying man. As the heavy footfalls came near, Hendrik staggered to his feet, shot his brother dead, and, with a terrible cry, fell on the prostrate body.

This was the awful tragedy that had given a bad reputation to the pillar of rocks, and made the name of Kopje Alleen a reproach and a warning to jealous lovers and flighty maids.

Under the shelter of the grim hill rising abruptly out of the plain Peter Rath had built his homestead, and thither had taken his little daughter ten years before this story begins. He had gone his way after his own manner, respected by the Zulus as an umtagati, or wise man, and by the Boers, themselves a serious and heavy people, for his grave and upright bearing.

It was not a proper place to bring a child to, and sometimes Rath would reproach himself for his selfishness, and would make preparations for removing, which he always deferred. In the mean time the little child adapted her-
self to the strange, melancholy surroundings, imbibing into her nature some of the sadness of the dreary scene, and some of the gravity of her father; finding playfellows in animals, and amusement in her garden. She had her pets in the *muishonde* (small red cats with bushy tails), a protector in the huge wolf-hound, Carlo, and a companion in a Zulu girl, Dabulala—whom she called Pala.

Pala’s mother had been charged with witchcraft, and, with her little baby, had escaped from the kraal in the night, under dread of a violent death. She had braved the terrors of Kopje Alleen, and sought protection of Mr. Rath. Here she remained until death claimed her, and after her death the little motherless Pala had been taken under the wing of the motherless white child.

Together these two, under care of the shaggy hound, would wander over the veldt, looking with large-eyed wonder at the locusts, and the lizards, and the wild-voiced birds of the plains. The chameleon, *trap sweetjes* (slow mover) as he is graphically named, was severely scolded by the little wanderers; for had not Pala’s mother told them that the shortness of man’s life here below was due to the deliberate tardiness of this goggle-eyed creature? The Great Spirit had intended to give to man the secret of immortality, and despatched the chameleon as his messenger. Afterwards repenting of his act, he sent the lizard off to countermand the order—and of course the swift lizard overtook the chameleon.

As they grew older they had wandered farther afield, and had even met with stirring adventures. Once they came upon a huge grass python, from whose coils they had only been saved by the courage of Carlo; at another they had been suddenly surrounded by a band of warriors out on an expedition to “eat up” a headman, who had grown too “fat” for the king. The childlike trust of the little children struck some chord in the savage hearts, and the men clapped their hands in sign of good will. Two of them crossed their shields, and gave the little girls a ride home, while the others came after chanting a song of the hunt. They set the two down within sight of Kopje Alleen, and a young warrior, quite a boy, with a crane’s plume denoting chieftainship in his hair, took from his neck a ring of beads which he slipped over the head of Pala.

“Some day,” he said, “I will claim you;” whereat Pala showed her teeth, and the warrior laughingly saluted her as “Inkosikasi,” a princess.

Thereafter Mary would often make pretence of paying court to her dusky companion, and the two, after the manner of their sex, wove a romance about the giver of the bead necklace. Pala, too, sometimes strayed to the nearest “kraals,” remaining away for days at a time, but had never met her youthful lover—now perhaps dead, or, worse still, married to five wives.
The monotony of such an existence would have sunk deeply into Mary Rath’s nature, and made of her a phlegmatic and mindless woman, had it not been for her father’s patient care, and also, in a great measure, to a natural strength of character and sweetness of disposition.

Old Rath, in the long drowsy afternoons when other men slept, would sit in the shade of a drooping willow down by the well, and there discourse to his daughter of all things in earth and heaven as far as they came within the ken of his knowledge. A tinge of bitterness marked his teaching, but on the whole it was broad, wise, and gentle, and Mary’s sweet nature expanded under her father’s zealous care.

When war was declared by the English against Cetywayo, little change was made in the daily round. Mr. Rath turned a deaf ear to all who counselled his retreat, and believed he was safe while he remained under the Lonely Hill, while Mary regarded the Zulus as hardly used, and feared no ill-treatment from the compatriots of her trusted Pala. After Isandlana, it is true, Mr. Rath had consented to act as guide to General Wood’s column, but he constantly visited his daughter, and had made a flying visit on the very day Rowe had set out on his perilous ride from Rorke’s Drift.

On the following morning Rowe awoke in a low fever, and in the afternoon he became delirious. In his delirium he was back in Texas, in all the excitement of a ranchman’s life, cutting out steers, doing cattle-guard, taking part in some mad revelry, and acting over and over a prominent part in a wild tragedy. “Remember, boys,” he kept repeating, in a breathless whisper, “he had a mother; jest let him skip.” And all through these old memories of his past fresher recollections broke in, so that he mixed up the doings of yesterday with his cowboy experiences, and introduced Dalston as an actor in the scenes. It was a curious medley.

Old Rath was seriously disturbed by the sick man’s incoherences. He paced up and down the little room continually, with a frown upon his brow, and an angry light in his deep-set eyes, that told of unpleasant thoughts.

Mary saw at once that her father was put out, and she laid her hand upon his arm.

“What is it, father?”

He turned his weather-beaten face towards her, a face bearing in every line the mark of long suffering, and sighed deeply.

“He has awakened an old pain that should have been dead and buried out of all chance of revival. But that,” he added, “is of little consequence. I am uneasy about this man.”

“Poor fellow!” murmured Mary, with a pitying glance at Rowe. “Is he very ill?”
“I am not troubled about his condition, my child. He is one of those men who don’t die easily. It is of you I am thinking. The Colonel goes out on a reconnaissance, and he expects me to act as guide. You know the Colonel must be served, but how am I to leave you alone with this stranger?”

Mary looked gravely at her father a moment.

“Don’t worry about me. It is you who are going into danger. I know that dreadful Colonel will lead you into some awful place. He always does.”

Mr. Rath smiled at his daughter’s reference to the famous leader of Irregular Horse, but he started as Rowe broke into a wild cry.

Sitting up in his couch, and glaring wildly round, the suffering man cried—

“Call off the yelping fiends, Dalston; call ’em off, I say! I’ll do none of your dirty work."

Then, with a deep indrawn breath, he sank back on his pillow.

Rath, with a singularly grave look on his face, watched the man into a sleep.

“Mary,” he said, decisively, “I will wait until to-morrow. If he sleeps on as he is now, he will get his strength back, and will bear removal to camp.”

That night the dog howled mournfully at the door, and would not venture out.

“If Pala were here, father,” said Mary, “she would say the brothers Graaf were walking, and would prophesy trouble.”

But Rath did not answer in words. He kissed his daughter on her smooth, broad forehead, and laid his hand upon her head. The dog howled again, then crawled along the floor to Mary’s feet.

What was that mysterious consciousness that passed like a cold wave through the heart of man and dog, giving them an inkling, vague and shadowy, of impending doom? We call it a presentiment; but whether it comes from some subtle cause apparent only to a finer organism or is spiritual, who can tell?

Certain it is, that when Mr. Rath rode away to the camp next day, after satisfying himself that Rowe was better, he was greatly depressed.

Rowe’s native vigour and energy, grafted on a frame of iron, enabled him to rally with surprising speed. He ate a hearty breakfast, and turned over into another sleep, from which he awoke ravenous. A savoury odour of venison and green corn gave promise of a good repast.

“A square meal,” he said, snifing hungrily, “will make a round man of me. As there’s no one around to do the honours, I’ll begin at once.”
A deep growl warned him to keep where he was, and he looked about him suspiciously.

“So you are on watch, eh?” he muttered, in disgust, as he saw the big dog regarding him with an unfriendly eye. “Blame the country! I’d swap it for a yellor dog, an’ hang the dog. Cuss the flies! They’re a darn sight more curious than wimmin. I kinder forgit how I came here,” he continued, in a puzzled way. “Seems ter me there were a lovely young angel about, with hands cool as ice, an’ soft as velvet, and eyes like a well of comfort; but ’pears I mus’ a bin dreamin’, surely. No woman ’ud hang out here. It’s a mighty queer stamping ground for angels, too,” he added, reflectively.

He looked longingly at the fire, then drew the kaross of jackal skin up to his eyes and tried to account for things.

Presently the dog growled, and Rowe, listening, detected the regular stroke of a horse’s hoof. The horse came on at a rapid pace, and was reined in only at the open door, and the rider, leaning forward, looked into the room.

“How do, stranger?” said Rowe, cheerfully. “Come in, an’ bring your horse. Don’t stand on ceremony.”

The rider’s bold black eyes swept over the room, lighted an instant on the dog, and rested steadily on Rowe’s beady grey eyes, which were alone visible under the covering.

“Who the devil are you?” he said; “and where is Miss Rath?” Some sound from without attracted his attention, and without waiting for a reply, he turned his horse and galloped away.

“Mighty funny,” observed Rowe, scratching the point of his nose meditatively. “Seems ter me I’ve seen that feller before. Got a pleasant way with him, too—cuss him.”

The hound stirred uneasily, went to the door, then returned, and placed its paws upon Rowe’s body.

“All serene, Jedge. I’ll be as quiet as a sleepin’ alligator, ef that’s what yer mean. Not that? Wal, I guess I’ll follow you. I’m not partial to dogs, anyhow—but they’ve got some sense.” He steadied himself against the wall, and walked across to the door, the dog wagging its tail in delight.

“What next, ole wolf-snatcher?” Rowe steadied himself against the door and looked around. Before him was the open country, with no living object in view—to the right the ground sloped away to a large garden enclosed by a high quince hedge. The dog, with many halts to see if Rowe followed, went towards the garden. Rowe soon heard the sound of voices, and his indifference and weakness gave place to anxiety and energy, for he detected the tones of a voice that had come so softly to his ear in his sickness.
A few seconds brought him to the corner of the fence, and through an opening he saw the horseman confronting his angel and barring her passage from the well.

“What is the use of being so coy?” the new arrival was saying, with irritation. “You know that I love you, and you know, too, that you have encouraged me.”

The young girl looked him calmly in the eyes. “I have given you no encouragement that I did not give to any other of my father’s visitors. You are presuming too much, Captain Dalston.”

“The devil!” muttered Rowe.

“Your father’s visitors! What a perfect coquette!” laughed Dalston. “I suppose that miserable scarecrow at the house is another of your victims.”

“Scarecrow, eh?—wal, I’ll mebbe scare you,” was the indignant comment from the spectator.

“Be kind enough to let me pass,” said Mary, with dignity. Her little feet were enclosed in rough *veldschoens*, her dress was only a cotton gown, and her head was uncovered, yet she looked a sweet picture of queenly beauty and womanly modesty.

Dalston for a moment quailed, then he looked at her insolently; and then he smiled and laughed, whereat the red blood left her cheeks, but gathered about her heart to strengthen it.

“Sweetheart,” he said, tauntingly, “you must pay toll with kisses before you pass.”

Mary drew herself up still more proudly, and motioned him to stand aside.

“Nay, that I will not,” he hissed and stepped forward to seize her.

Chapter 6  The Escape

CAPTAIN DALSTON had not advanced a step towards Mary before he was ignominiously rolled over by the hound. Springing to his feet, he furiously drew his sword.

Mary threw her arms round the neck of her protector. “For shame, sir—and you a soldier!”

“A man who’d be coward enough to insult a helpless girl would be mean enough to run the dog through,” said Rowe, stepping forward.

Dalston was abashed by Mary’s action, and by the look of pained surprise in her clear eyes, but at Rowe’s contemptuous words he turned upon that individual with a dark and threatening look. Then sheathing his sword he stepped aside for Mary to pass, throwing into his attitude and features an appearance of deep humiliation.
“Now, sir,” he said, haughtily, “to what troop do you belong?”

“None.”

“What brings you here then?”

“To this partikler spot?—you did. To this infernal country?—still you, in a sort of way, and I’m glad I’ve met you. Shake,” said Rowe, with a sudden assumption of friendliness.

Captain Dalston did not show any enthusiasm, and ignored the prof-fered hand.

“Still ashamed, eh?” continued Rowe, with a glitter in his eyes that belied the assumed friendliness of his speech. “Wal, it must be embarrassing to be caught like that. I’ve a letter for you—ef it’s not bin chawed up. Ah! here ’tis.”

Captain Dalston read the letter, and abated something of his haughtiness.

“You had better come with me to camp.”

“Not yet, Captain. I’m hungry, an’ there’s a fine haunch browning up at the house. I won’t invite you in because you might feel awkward. Besides, Captain, I’ve no hoss.”

“I will send a trooper up for you in half-an-hour.” The Captain rode away to his men, who had off-saddled some distance off; and, passing Mary, murmured a humble apology, to which she listened gravely but in silence.

She waited upon Rowe attentively at dinner, smiling occasionally at his quaint remarks, but showing an evident sense of sadness, which touched his tough heart.

“Young lady,” he said, when the trooper rode up with a led horse, “you have been good to me. I’ve felt your sweet face hovering over me, so to speak, when I was weak. Don’t think I’ll forgit it. Times are rough. This place is not a safe home for you. Ef you ever are in danger—ef you ever want a friend to help you—remember Rowe, Cob Rowe, and send for him, and yer can just bet something will have to give way before a hair of yer head is touched.”

Mary gave him a smile of thanks that actually brought something like a flush to his hollow cheeks.

“I will remember you,” she said. “My friends are not many.” Rowe looked ferociously as he mounted the spare horse, and startled the trooper by his fierce ejaculation—

“By God! if any one harms that girl I’ll kill him.”

Captain Dalston’s troop of irregular horse filed away in a long column from Kopje Alleen across the grass veldt. The Captain called Rowe to his side, and the latter explained as much of his mission as he thought necessary. The Captain listened without comment, but looked out of the corner
of his eyes at his companion with suspicion, and smiled once or twice rather grimly.

“If I understand aright,” he said, coldly, “my father, for reasons of his own, with which I have nothing to do, wishes you to be near Captain Blaine?”

“He does, in your interest.”

Dalston waved his hand in dissent.

“I am no friend of Captain Blaine, but I will endeavour to secure you a place in his troop. You can then do as you like; but understand, for once and all, I am not responsible for this absurd and paltry scheme, nor will I be bound by my father’s promises.”

With that he dismissed the subject, leaving Rowe to his meditations, which were not altogether encouraging as regards the success of his mission.

“I guess,” he mused, “if Captain Dalston don’t care more’n a tinker’s cuss for the will, I may as well let things slide. There’s some sand in the man, after all, or mebbe he’s lying low and playing a bluff game to throw me off my guard.”

The signs of the near vicinity of the camp drove these thoughts from his mind, and he gave his attention to the movement of men and beasts.

Scattered about, over rounded hill and shallow valley, were herds of oxen, lean and long-horned, and troops of small, wiry ponies, cropping at long grey grass, slightly tinged with red.

On points of vantage, beyond the grazing limit, were small groups of mounted men, doing cattle guard, and beyond them again were pickets. In between roamed men on foot, soldiers in red coats and pith helmets, irregular troops in corduroys and “smashers,” friendly natives, clad in airy costume of a strip of skin, returning from washing clothes, or engaged in doing nothing.

Down the gentle slope of a distant ridge wound a sinuous black line, marking a troop of horse on the return from reconnoitering or foraging.

The lowing of a discontented ox, the neighing of a horse, from time to time sounded clearly above the continuous low murmur from thousands of men. Then, loud and clear, with a stirring note, rang out a bugle call, and next minute Rowe topped a hill, and saw stretching before him the whole camp, with its straight lines of bell tents gleaming white in the sun, and its “laager” of heavy waggons.

The scene was full of animation. Men moved about in between the tents, others sat smoking at tent doors; here an energetic colonel of horse was putting his untrained men through foot drill, and beyond the square of wagons the “friendlies” squatted on their hams and chatted volubly.
The flag waved over the head-quarters, where the band of the regiment had gathered, and presently the peaceful strains of a lively waltz broke out in strange contrast to the martial scene. Laughter, snatches of songs, and hearty interchange of jokes told of a jovial and careless disposition. The horror and earnestness of grim war were banished, as though bloodshed were unknown, and death a remote possibility; yet every mess had its vacancies, and every man had lost a friend.

On entering the camp they filed by a tent, near which was tethered a lean and hungry horse, who had cleared every vestige of grass within a radius of twenty yards, and was now pawing at the ground.

“What in thunder has the poor brute done that he should be starved?” asked Rowe.

“Oh,” said a trooper, “that is the Chaplain’s horse. Keeps him tethered to be handy in case the Zulus come. It’s a beastly shame. Ought to be chained up himself, and kept short of grub.”

Captain Dalston at once took Rowe to Commandant D’Arcy, of the Frontier Light Horse, in whose ranks Blaine held a command, and with that distinguished officer he left him.

Commandant D’Arcy, a man of fine presence and reckless courage, put a few questions to his new recruit.

“I see you have already been in a scrimmage, from those scratches—not a canteen brawl, I hope? We don’t care for quarrelsome men,” and the officer eyed the new-comer from head to foot.

Rowe gave a brief account of his fight.

D’Arcy laughed heartily at the other’s exaggerated description. “Well, you’ll do. Captain Blaine will be glad to have you in his troop. You can, of course, ride and shoot?”

“Try me, sir.”

“Good,” said the stalwart commandant, slapping Rowe good-humouredly on the shoulder. “I will. Richards,” he called to a passing trooper, “is the white horse in the troop?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Has any one succeeded in mastering him?”

“No, sir. He bucked two men off this morning.”

“Bring him here at once.”

“If you’ll allow me, sir, I’ll fetch him myself,” said Rowe, “and ride him without saddle.”

“The devil you will! All right, take care that you fall lightly.”
Rowe went off, after filling the chambers of his revolver, remarking that he would try his marksmanship at the same time.

The news that a stranger was going to ride the white horse, and ride it bare-back, spread around, and very soon a crowd of officers assembled about D’Arcy—while troopers, and even “friendlies,” came to enjoy the fun. One native—whose face was coloured red with clay, as a protection against flies—was so interested that he joined the group of officers.

Rowe entered the troop of horses, and made direct for the white animal—whose colour made it conspicuous. He stopped short in astonishment, then a smile spread over his face, and he winked.

“Wal, blame me, ef it ain’t George Washington. Old hoss, you and me can show ’em a trick.”

“Here, you,” growled a big trooper, who was doing horse guard, “watch-er doing?”

“Gwine to ride this hoss.”

“No, you don’t. You loose him—and loose him smart, d’ye hear; want no horse thieves here.”

Rowe unfastened one end of the neck rein, and took a twist with the slack round the animal’s jaw, leaving a loose end for a rein.

“Leave off meddling, or I’ll knock the stuffin’ out of yer, ef there is any in that lean carcase.”

Rowe snatched the trooper’s broad-brimmed hat, whirled it into the air, and, whipping his pistol out, fired twice.

The trooper picked up his smasher, looked curiously at the two neat perforations in the crown, and whistled.

“Take the old horse, and may he break your neck! He bucks like Satan.” At the same time the trooper, with an artful leer, placed a “doublejee” betwixt the seat of the rider and the horse’s back.

A “doublejee” is one of those eccentricities of nature which, like the tarantula, seem made for nothing but pure cussedness. It is a seed capsule armed at four corners with a sharp spike. When the model boy in a South African school rises to receive his master’s approval, his envious class companions strew “doublejees” on the form to surprise him when he resumes his seat, and it serves the same purpose as the bent pin of civilization’s youth.

It happened accordingly that when the white horse had gone a few paces, he felt an unaccustomed pricking on his back. To get rid of it he quickened his stride, and flew towards the camp. He cleared the yawning donga at a terrific bound that threw Rowe on to his neck, and relieved the irritation.
“Well done!” “Splendid!” “Hurrah for the Frontier Horse!” Such were the shouts that greeted this feat from the spectators, but Rowe himself felt that his horse was putting too much energy into the performance.

“Go slow, Wash,” he expostulated, as he wriggled back into the seat, bringing the pressure to bear again upon the spike.

George Washington felt that this was going beyond a joke. He got his head down between his knees, amid a warning cry of “he’s going to buck,” stiffened his legs, arched his back, and sprang from the ground. Once, twice, thrice he bounded into the air, but Rowe shut his thin lips, and stuck like a limpet.

The horse now had got its spirit up. It trembled violently, then sprang from side to side, reared, plunged and bucked again, several times in succession, the last bound carrying it right up to the crowd.

“Bravo!” was the cry; and Rowe, with the perspiration streaming from his face, and every muscle aching with the strain he had put upon it, was about to dismount. He glanced first at the excited crowd of officers, and among them he recognized his enemy the Zulu!

There could be no mistake. Though the man’s face was disguised by the coating of red clay, there was the superb figure which would mark the man out of an army, and there the scars upon the arched breast.

A quick look shot from the black eyes, a look of half-defiance, half-entreaty. Rowe shut his lips upon the word that was about to escape from him, but some one else had marked the swift glance, and attention was fastened upon the Zulu.

“Who are you that force yourself among us?” demanded an officer of native levies.

“Who am I?” replied the Zulu, looking proudly round, and seeing detection was certain—“I am Sirayo!” 20

A bombshell could not have caused greater consternation for a moment, for the name was that of the greatest Zulu warrior; then a dozen voices shouted, “Seize him!”

At the wild shout, the white horse bucked again, and taking Rowe unawares, shot him head first in among the struggling crowd.

Profiting by the confusion, the Zulu wrenched himself free, and bounded away between the tents. In his path was the Chaplain’s horse.

The Chaplain himself, alarmed at the hue and cry, tumbled out of his tent, and, seeing the fierce Zulu bounding towards him, thought the catastrophe had happened at last. Frantically he mounted his patient steed, and dug his heels into the ribs. Unfortunately, however, he had forgotten to pull up the
stake that held the horse, and that ill-used animal, finding himself brought up, when he had stretched the rope to its fullest extent, ran round in a circle. The fearful Chaplain closed his eyes, and clasped his horse round the neck, while his coat-tails flew out behind.

At this extraordinary spectacle there was a wild yell of laughter from the crowd of pursuers, but the pursued himself had no time for mirth.

Seizing the unlucky Chaplain by the leg, he hurled him off the seat; then drawing the peg, he vaulted to the horse’s back, and sped away, trailing the rope from his hand.

“To horse, to horse!” shouted the pursuers, “or he will escape. No, he cannot! See, there are some ‘friendlies’ in his way.”

That was true. The cry had reached the sharp ears of the natives, and a dozen of them seized their assegais and rushed forward to bar the way.

Those who had pursued now paused to watch the impending tragedy.

A body of men rushed to meet the flying horseman, leaving two to stop him in case he escaped the first attack.

Sirayo dashed on, drawing in the rope until he held the heavy stake in his hand. The men opened and let him enter, but with a sudden pressure of his knee he made the horse swerve to the right, thereby keeping all the men on one side. At the same time he hurled the stake at them; a fruitless effort.

The assegais were poised—then they flew to the mark, and the crowd waited to hear the thud of the spears and the shriek of the dying man.

It was not to be. At the critical moment Sirayo slipped from his horse, and ran along by its side, catching an assegai by its shaft, as it flew above him.

The men, thus deprived of their prey, started in pursuit, and rapidly gained on the fast-wearying horse. Seeing this, Sirayo let go the rein, and trusted to his own fleetness to escape. Before him were two armed men, beyond was the open prairie, and behind were a dozen warriors and a score of mounted men, ready to hunt him down if necessary. It was a thrilling moment.

Escape was hopeless, but he would make the attempt. The first of the two men stepped forward to meet him, and for a second he paused.

Those in the camp marked the proud lift of his head—then, clear and distinct above every other sound, pealed forth the Usutu war cry.

Those looking on saw the “friendly” native quail, they saw his assegai pass harmlessly over the Zulu’s head, then they saw his arms go up as the spear was driven into his heart.

The other man turned and fled, and those who pursued hesitated like a band of jackals suddenly confronted by a lion.
Sirayo, even in this moment of danger, cut the skin across the abdomen of the dead man, lest his spirit should haunt him, and then he bounded on again.

“To horse—to horse—he will escape—shoot him!” were the hoarse cries that burst forth now that the pent-up excitement was free.

Several men came forward with rifles, and tiny puffs of dust marked where the bullets struck about the flying warrior.

“Cease firing!” thundered D’Arcy—“don’t shoot a man down like a dog. If he is the Zulu chief, he must be taken alive. The fellow deserves to escape,” he added, under his breath.

A young officer had caught Rowe’s white horse, and bridled him. Now, with his sword drawn, he rushed by, the horse entering into the fierce excitement of the chase. The rider’s blue eyes flashed, and his lips were parted.

A cheer greeted his appearance. “Go it, Blaine! Hurrah for the Frontier Horse!”

Away flew the horse, passing the laggard “friendlies,” passing the dead man, passing the outermost line of huts, and flying on the heels of the Zulu.

Another cheer, as another officer, on a powerful black steed, dashed by—“Bravo, Dalston! Macdonald’s Horse for ever!” Dalston smiled as he rushed by, cool and confident.

Between the Frontier Horse and Macdonald’s Troop there was a keen rivalry, and a greater interest entered into the scene. A hush of expectation fell upon the camp, and the tension of feeling showed itself in the white faces, burning eyes, and pressed lips.

“See, he will surrender!” The Zulu looks round as the thunder of the rushing steeds warns him of a fresh danger.

He stops, turns, and waits for the white horse.

“He will give himself up—no, by God—he will fight! Now, Blaine, look out!” are the cries that burst out like pistol cracks.

Blaine’s sword flashes in the sun, and, like a streak of fire, descends upon the Zulu’s head.

“He is dead—no! Blaine, look out, look out!” A groan goes up. The sword has glanced off the spear, and, as Blaine passes, the Zulu grasps him by the leg, and runs by the side of the furious horse. A few paces he keeps up at this terrific speed. He cannot use his assegai, but with a mighty effort he hurls the young officer to the ground. The impetus of his rush carries him on, and when he turns to finish his work he finds another enemy upon him.
Dalston’s hand is on his revolver butt, he draws it from his leather case, his arms stiffens, and at the crack the Zulu throws up his arms, bounds into the air, and rolls over.

Another fierce cry from the camp as from one throat.

Dalston does not fire again. Both hands are on the reins, and curbing his horse, he turns back to where Blaine lies insensible. He dismounts, and to the great relief of the hundreds now rushing up, they see Blaine stagger to his feet.

A second later, and every man stands rooted in blank astonishment.

The Zulu has risen again, and before a single note of warning is uttered, he is astride the white horse, and flying like the wind.

Then a perfect hurricane breaks forth, as every man shouts himself hoarse. Dalston vaults into the saddle, and starts again in pursuit.

Away they fly over the grey country, and swiftly fade from sight.

At night Dalston returns, leading his charger, whose deep chest is white with foam, and he himself bearing evidence of his hard ride.

“Where is the Zulu?” he is asked.

He turns his black eyes on his questioners with a scowl, but says nothing, from which they know that Sirayo has escaped.

Chapter 7 The Warning

MARY RATH was a lovely picture as she leant against the doorpost, with her hands clasped at the back of her head, showing the dimple in her rounded elbows, where the loose sleeve fell back; with her chin raised sufficiently to give a glimpse of the whiteness of her throat. She looked dreamily out of the half-closed eyes, not upon the familiar stretch of country, which seemed intolerably empty of interest, but upon the pictures and fancies woven by a restless mind.

She had of late been growing discontented. The war had suddenly overthrown her peace of mind. The gay, restless, laughter-provoking soldiers, who had called at the house to see and wonder at the charms of the young hostess, herself alone unconscious of the object of their visits, had awakened her to a new life. They were so different from the ponderous old Dutchmen and bashful young Boers with whom she had been familiar, and their visits had touched the idle chords in her nature, and set them vibrating with new emotions.

Captain Dalston’s insulting words had been the first jar, and she had reproached herself bitterly for her disloyalty to the old order of life, which
had flowed on peacefully with scarcely a ripple. But that unruffled calm could not return—a stormy brook had shot into its course.

She dismissed her reflections with a sigh, and with returning consciousness to outward things her eyes rested upon a moving object far away—a tiny speck of black that came steadily on; and settling down to watch its progress, she saw it grow and take human shape. Then she noticed the swing of an arm—now the left, now the right—as the other was raised to steady some burden carried on the head.

“It is Pala.”

There was no doubt about that, for while still a long way off the Zulu girl raised her voice in greeting. With a rapid swinging gait that sent her short kirtle of braided skin swishing right and left, Pala approached, straight as a dart, with rounded limbs and bust of Venus; her only ornament the famous necklet from the young chief, and a deep edging of vari-coloured beads to her kirtle. From her head she lifted a heavy earthenware pot of native make, filled with amasi (thick milk). Then she stood with hands clasped and eyes downcast.

“Well, Pala, have you heard bad news, that you have forgotten to smile?”

“My heart is heavy,” said Pala, in a melodious Sesuto tongue.

“What is it, little one, tell me?”

Pala looked up into the white girl’s face, then, with a preliminary sweep of her arm round the horizon, she began her story, emphasizing every point with graceful gestures, and pausing to let her words sink deep.

“I found two old women shelterless on the hill-side. The white man had burnt their huts, and left them in the cold of the night wind. I gave them food. It is not that which oppresses me.

“I went on lamenting, but sorrow awaited me at the kraal of Inanda. The mealie pits were opened in the cattle kraal, and the baskets that the women had woven for the crops were torn asunder. The place was empty, and a dog howled because of the desolation. It is war. It is not for that I am sad.

“I went on, weeping, up to the caverns in the krantz beyond. There I found the women and children. They were hungry; they cried aloud that their flocks were scattered and their homes destroyed. It is war.”

“War is cruel,” said Mary, gently; “but happiness will come again.”

Pala shook her head.

“Have you lost your chief?” added Mary, with a swift insight into the other’s trouble.

“It is true. I found him, and behold he is gone.” She drew herself proudly up, and her eyes flashed.
“He was Sirayo, the great chief, the fighter, the leader of the army. It was he who gave me this necklet—now he is dead.”

She showed no sign of grief. “It is war,” she added, after a long pause. “He has washed his spear in the blood of his enemies, and his name is a terror. It is not for that I am sad.”

“I sorrow for you, Pala,” said Mary, gently.

“Grieve not for me, white girl. It is for yourself I mourn.”

“For me!”

“It is so, mistress. Did you not give shelter to a white man?”

“Surely—he went but this morning; but what has that to do with me?”

“It was he who slew Sirayo,” said Pala, fiercely. “But it was not a fair fight, for, by his arts, he called to his aid the spirit of his fathers, who came in the bodies of dogs.”

“That cannot be, Pala, for the white man himself was torn by the dogs.”

“Then where is Sirayo? They found his gun, the blade of his assegai—but no sign of him—not the least. It was umpagati” (witchcraft).

“Nonsense, Pala! You are still a child. But what has this to do with me?”

“Ah! his people traced the white man here. They would have slain you in the night, but that the dog howled, and the spirit of the dead walked. You must fly, mistress! You must fly—fly—fly!” Pala’s forced calmness gave way to excitement. Her eyes flashed, her body writhed, she gesticulated. “They are coming—men with spears, fierce, relentless as tigers. They will destroy everything here—even my beloved sister.”

“No, Pala, they would not touch me; I am safe.”

“No—no—do not shut your eyes. They are no longer men, I tell you. They are wolves—tigers”—

Mary looked pityingly at the excited girl. “Sorrow has made you weak. Sit down and rest while I prepare the evening meal.”

“Talk not to me of eating. I would not cry down my own people; and my own sorrow I have subdued to keep my mind clear to warn you. Hearken to me—what I say is true.”

“You are mistaken, Pala; your people would not raise a hand against me. But,” she added, after a pause, during which she looked around over the quiet scene, “if it be true; and they do come, they will find me here. Nay—say no more!”

“Well, mistress, we will die together,” said Pala, solemnly; and then she went down to the well to draw water, intoning a monotonous chant.
Nothing more was said about the subject, and the two girls ate their meal, Pala taking hers sitting in the doorway. When she had finished, she rose up and looked towards the setting sun, shading her eyes. Long she looked, then stretched forth her arm.

“Behold, they come!”

Mary looked out, and saw a thin black line approaching. They stood watching in silence. There could be no doubt.

A hundred warriors were advancing straight upon the homestead!

Chapter 8  An Anxious Time

“THERE IS YET time to fly, my mistress,” urged Pala. “Your horse is in the kraal.”

“And whither shall I fly?”

“To the camp, where your friends are.”

“My friends!—one woman among three thousand men! No. And what would become of you?”

“What is life to me, that I should want to live? My sun has gone down, and I am ready to follow.” The Zulu girl fixed her eyes on the broad disc, setting blood-red behind the Isandlana ridge.

The level rays struck across the country, glanced along the blades of the assegais, gleamed on the line of ox-hide shields which the advancing warriors carried on their left, then flooded the doorway with a rosy hue. The Zulu girl’s sombre eyes caught the glow, and Mary’s wavy tresses framed her pale face as with a cloud of gold. Surely no men would use violence against them.

“They will not harm us, Pala; why should they?”

“Oh, white girl, we are already in the shadow of death. Because you have been kind, you think they will spare you. I tell you a tigress robbed of her young is not more terrible than these men robbed of their chief. Blood is in their eyes, and they see red.”

For the first time Mary realized her danger, and her composure gave way to action. Her training had, fortunately, fitted her for an emergency of the kind, and, after the first wave of fear, she braced herself up.

“You are right—we must fly, Pala.”

“Of what use is it now, when they are already upon us?” But the Zulu girl nevertheless shook off the apathy that had been stealing over her.

“Come,” said Mary, “we will hide among the rocks of Kopje Alleen.”

Pala shuddered, and hung back. “The place is bewitched.”
Mary pulled her in by sheer force, locked the door, and together they slipped through the back door, which Mary also locked. Away they flew, hidden by the homestead from the Zulus, and reaching the foot of the hill as a fierce shout announced the attack on the house. From rock to rock they passed, crouching low, until they were half-way up, then they waited, trembling and breathless.

The Zulus about the house shouted to those who they supposed were inside to come out and meet their fate. They then broke the windows and battered the door, and after an interval their yell of disappointment warned the fugitives that a search would now be made.

Mary, secure from detection owing to the dark shadow on the hill, looked over the rock. She saw a knot of Zulus, one of whom was violently gesticulating and pointing in her direction.

The others evidently did not agree with him, or else the dread of the Lonely Hill was too great, for they turned away. The other man, however, came on alone, right up to the base of the rocks, and even ventured to ascend a few feet, but the gloom of the place, the dark shadows among the huge rocks, oppressed him, and he halted. A sigh wrung from Mary in the suspense of the moment completed his terror, and he fled from the accursed spot.

Scarcely had he disappeared, however, when another source of alarm arose. A sudden wild hubbub broke out. The Zulus called to one another eagerly to follow “the dog.”

Mary, through the gathering gloom, saw Carlo tear round to the back of the house. A Zulu raised his spear against the hound, but another man ward ed the weapon off, and the warriors gathered round to see if the dog would take up the scent.

The great hound growled menacingly at the men, glaring from one to another, and a movement on their part would have led him on, but they remained still.

Mary’s heart beat fast. “Come, Pala,” she said, with suppressed emotion, “we must climb higher.” The Zulu girl, more terrified at the shadows than because of the warriors, crept after Mary until they reached the very topmost rock, and crouched there in a natural hollow scooped out by the wind and rain through hundreds of years.

Peering over, Mary saw the dog fling up its head as it detected the scent, and then watched it rush towards the hill, with the silent band of warriors following close behind.

The dog paused and whimpered a moment at the base, then crept up, winding in and out, his tawny hide making a faint streak of light in the gloom. Behind him came dark figures, flitting like shadows.
Mary clutched Pala by the arm, and her frame trembled. Was there no hope? She turned her burning eyes to the east, where the camp lay but a few miles off—that camp whose shelter she had despised. Against the silvery light in the eastern sky she could even now trace the columns of smoke arising from many fires, and far away on the plain she caught a glimpse of horsemen. Sweeping her gaze over the nearer veldt, she saw something moving rapidly, white, but indistinct.

“What is that, Pala?” she whispered, pointing with rigid arm.

Pala turned her head slowly, and fixed her dull eyes on the object.

“It is a horse and its rider,” she muttered, indifferently, and was turning her head again, when, as though swayed by a sudden impulse, she looked again, this time long and fixedly.

What could one horseman do against a hundred Zulus! With a sharp sob, Mary peered over the rock, and would have drawn back, but that the power of movement seemed gone from her limbs. Her eyes had met the gleaming orbs of a savage, who was standing motionless on a shelf below.

A scrambling noise behind her told her that Carlo had reached the summit; the next moment she felt his cold nose upon her neck, and then was almost deafened by his joyful bark.

As if it were a signal resolved upon, the warriors below shouted in triumph.

The leading savage withdrew his gaze from Mary’s white face; and thus relieved from the fascination of his stare, she wriggled back, and buried her head in her arms. The next moment the man reached the top of the rock, standing out in silhouette to his comrades below, who greeted his appearance with a yell.

Before he could raise his assegai to stab the shrinking girls, Carlo flew at his throat, and together they fell. The man next to the summit was knocked from his feet by the falling bodies, and those below, after the first alarm, had to turn their attention to the now furious hound.

Mary raised her white face, and as she heard the savage snapping of Carlo give way to the sharp cry of pain she prepared herself to die, shaking off the numbing sense of fear.

“Let us lift our hearts to God, Pala, for the time is at hand.”

The Zulu girl paid no heed. Her eyes, in which glowed the light of a great hope, were fixed on the gathering darkness below; she seemed scarcely to breathe as she listened, with a look of fixed and awful intent on her face.
“Pala,” said Mary, gently, as she looked closely into her companion’s face, with a new dread at her heart—“Pala, awake; join with me in that prayer my father taught us.”

Pala did not hear, but raised herself on her arms and craned her neck. An assegai whizzed by her head. She did not heed it.

“Oh!” murmured Mary, in horror.

She heard footsteps approaching, heard the sharp clatter of assegais as they rattled against the rocks, heard a man drawing himself up, felt a grasp upon her arm, and then in the fearful pause heard the voice of a Zulu hailing from below, a voice that came swelling up with the clearness of a trumpet note.

“It is he—the chief!” rang out an exulting voice, as Pala leapt to her feet.

The man on the rock stayed his hand and shouted, “Sirayo!” Every warrior took up the cry, until the word rolled and thundered round the Lone-ly Hill.

“Ay!” shouted Pala, proudly—“my chief, my lord. Now get ye to him at once, lest he slay ye for warring against women!”

The men, all the fury gone out of them, went down the hill abashed; then Pala turned her attention to Mary, who at last had swooned away under the long-continued strain.

When she regained consciousness she found herself back in her room, and thought she had been through an awful dream. No—there were the broken windows, and there in the doorway was a tall warrior, whose eyes were fixed intently on her face. She started up in terror.

“Do not fear, mistress,” said a soft, sibilant voice, “it is the chief.”

Mary turned her head, and saw Pala standing with downcast looks and drooping head, her whole appearance betokening the greatest shyness.

“Where are the others?” asked Mary in Zulu, still suspicious.

Sirayo moved his arm. “I bid them go home, lest I should have killed them in my anger.”

“Are we safe, or—are you an enemy?”

Pala gave a sigh of protest, but did not speak.

“They will trouble you no more,” he said, gravely, in his deep voice, “and I will go when I am rested.”

“Who brought me here?” was Mary’s next question.

“You were dead, mistress,” whispered the bashful Pala, “and the chief car-ried you.”
“It was good of you,” said Mary, gratefully. “The way is rough and dark—it was a heavy task. What can I do for you?”

The chief waved his arm with a dignified gesture, and as he did it Mary saw blood drop from his wrist. Her dress, too, she noticed, was stained red.

His dark eye followed her glance. “I could not stop the blood from touching you, for the wound was open.”

Mary walked to the chief and took his sinewy arm in her hand. The left wrist, she saw, was pierced by a pistol ball, and the blood trickled slowly out through some clay and grass with which he had plugged the hole.

“How is this?” said Mary, turning to Pala. “Why did you not dress the wound?”

The Zulu girl, at this sharp reproof, covered her eyes with her hand, and cried silently.

“Truly,” thought Mary, “the ways of a girl in love are beyond reason.”

She busied herself briskly, and soon had the wound properly cleansed, anointed, and bound. Then she got some food for the chief, and when the man, utterly tired out, fell asleep, she bade Pala throw a kaross over him.

The Zulu girl also slept, but Mary dared not close her eyes; and fortunate it was for Sirayo that she did not.

Chapter 9  Running the Gauntlet

AS MARY SAT thinking over the events of the evening, with many a shudder at the terrors that marshalled themselves, again taking visible shape in the dark corners of the room, and with many a whispered prayer of thanksgiving, she was startled by a deep-drawn sigh from the door.

Long she sat, with a fearful glance fixed on the doorway, before she could force herself to look out, and when she did, a low moan was wrung from her lips—for something white confronted her. Next moment she saw it was the white horse, from the sudden lift of his head, and he put her fears to flight by the joyful whinny or rather rumble of greeting that a hungry horse makes when he thinks his food is coming. Mary disappeared into an inner room for a moment, and then came out with a tin of mealies, which she emptied on the ground. As the horse fed, she patted his shoulder, feeling relief in his company.

“How was it,” she thought, “Carlo was not there?” Then like a flash it occurred to her how the gallant dog had rescued her from the uplifted assegai, and she blamed herself for not having thought of it before.

He might be dead, or dying among the rocks.
She looked towards the dread mass, and nerved herself to the task before her. Then, without waiting, lest she should dread the enterprise, she darted away, and scrambled breathlessly up the hill, disturbing the stones, which clattered down with a fearful noise. The hollow echoes that arose unnerved her, and she was about to fly when a low whimper reached her. Guided by the sound, she was soon at the side of the hound, who tried to raise himself at her approach, but fell again with a pitiful growl.

She was on her knees at his side in a moment, petting him, crying over him, and feeling about for his hurt. Her hand touched something cold, and she started back with a cry. The dog was lying on the dead body of a Zulu. Horrified, and sick at heart, she staggered away from the spot, and reached the bottom of the hill, where she seated herself, and with what voice she could command called out to the dog to wait. For a spell the superb courage of this brave girl seemed to waver, but she nerved herself to the situation.

The alarms of the night were not yet over. She had not advanced a yard, when out of the darkness a voice came quick and threatening—

“Halt! Who comes there?”

Mary gasped and stood still. She heard the click of a revolver, and it unlocked her tongue.

“Me. Don’t, please don’t.”

“Good God!” muttered the unknown, in alarm, “a woman’s voice.”

Mary heard a horse approaching, and soon saw the dark outline of a mounted trooper.

“Who are you, and what are you doing here? No larks. If you’re one of those infernal ghosts, I’ll blow your brains out.”

Mary regained her courage, as she saw the new-comer was himself afraid. She even laughed at the thought of a ghost having brains.

“I am no ghost. Now, please tell me what you are doing here.”

The man leant from his saddle, with his revolver still ready, and peered into Mary’s face.

“Well, I’m hanged!” was his remark. “Hi, Captain, here’s something up.”

Another horseman rode up.

“Well, what have we here?”

“Pears to me mighty like a woman,” said the trooper.

The Captain dismounted, struck a match, and held it before Mary’s face, which looked pale enough for a ghost, if it were not for the light of life in the large brown eyes.
He was struck with wonder at the vision, and held the sight until the flame scorched his fingers.

“Tаге уоur pardon,” he саid, “but this is a strange place and a strange time for a lady to be abroad.”

“My house is but a few yards away,” said Mary; “I had better lead the way there.”

“Сеrtаinly, madam,” he саid, with grave deference, as though she had satisfactory accounted for her appearance. “I will call up my troop. We had just halted when we heard a noise оf falling stones from the hill. We are in pursuit of a Zulu spy.”

It flashed across Mary’s mind that Sirayo, the man whose arrival had saved her from a fearful death, was in the house. He must be saved. Her woman’s wit rapidly reviewed the chances оf escape.

“Oh!” she саried, “before you come оn to the house I wish you would save my dog. He is up the hillside above, wounded by a Zulu аssegai. A few оf your men could carry him to the house, and I will go on to show a light.”

“It will be done—but first tell me about it. How did the Zulu—”

Mary was out of hearing. And the Captain, still marveling at the wonderful vision he had seen by the light оf his match, called up his troop, and himself went in search оf the dog.

In the meanwhile Mary had reached the house and shook the tired Zulu, who sprang to his feet.

“Fly,” said Mary, “the soldiers are here.”

The chief looked searchingly at the white girl, listened a second at the door, and then glanced at the still sleeping Pala.

“Tell her,” he саid, his deep voice softened, “that I have not forgotten the little maid оf the necklace, but war is no time for love-making. When it is over I will claim her, but she can hear оf me at the Nek. And you, оh white girl—I thank you for the life you have given me this night.” He sprang on to his horse and vanished into the darkness.

When two men on foot, carrying the dog, came up to the door, and after them the Troop оf Horse, guided by a light that Mary held, she kept the Captain busy helping her bind the fearful gash in Carlo’s shoulder.

When the task was done the officer looked searchingly round the room, noting the broken door.

“Will you please explain to me what has happened, and how it is you are at this post оf danger?”

Mary glanced into the frank eyes and received encouragement from them.
“A party of Zulus, who thought that their chief was dead, attacked the house, and then traced me to the hill where I had sought shelter with my girl. Thanks to Carlo, poor dog, and to the timely arrival of the chief, we escaped death.”

“Good Heavens! Is it possible! Do you know the name of the chief?”

“Sirayo!”

“The very man. Are you sure of it?”

“He carried me from the hill to this room.”

“Then he has been here. Where has he gone?”

“To the Nek, I believe.”

“Has he been long gone?”

“About half an hour,” said Mary, weariedly.

“Thank you.” The officer thought for a few moments, then stepped to the door. “Sergeant,” he cried, “remove your men a few hundred yards to the left. Let them dismount, and loosen girdles, but don’t off-saddle. We shall advance before the dawn.”

The sergeant gave his orders to the men, and the troop withdrew in a solid dark mass, to the sound of champing bits.

“If you will allow me, young lady, I will keep watch while you rest. The events of the night must have worn you out. I am surprised you should bear up as you do.” He looked at her with mingling respect and compassion.

Mary did not reply, but rested her elbow on the table, and buried her chin in the hollow cup of her hands, while she studied his face, without any idea of boldness. There was something frank and pleasant in it, that gave her a sense of restfulness.

His bronzed cheeks flushed under the scrutiny of her large grave eyes, then he laughed, a short mirthful laugh that made her lips open with a smile.

“Do you know,” he said, “I cannot get over the feeling that I am under some spell—and that you are a spirit.”

“Oh, no,” she answered, simply, “I am only Mary Rath.”

“Of course you are. What an ass I am, not to have remembered. Mary—I beg your pardon, Miss Rath, I have heard of you so often,” and he smiled easily.

“Do they speak of me as Mary?” she asked, with a look in her eyes that quelled the taint of familiarity in his manner.

He flushed again under the steady gaze, but this time with annoyance, and he blamed himself for a double-barrelled idiot not to have seen at once that this strange girl was not a person to be made light of.

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“Who calls me Mary?” she continued, relentlessly, with a touch of bitterness.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Rath, for my foolish slip. No one worthy of your friendship would ever think of taking a liberty with your name.” He spoke warmly.

“Was it Captain Dalston?”

“Who calls me?” answered a harsh voice. “Miss Rath, I apologize for intruding. Blaine—how are you?” Captain Dalston himself stepped into the room, and looked darkly from Mary to the young officer, then, as he noted the marks of violence in the room, he reeled as though struck. “What,” he asked hoarsely, “has happened?”

Mary gave a brief account of the attack, and of Sirayo’s coming—catching her breath at the finish, but just stopping short of a sob.

Dalston said nothing, but his black eyes burned, and his strong hand gripped the sword. “Ah!” he muttered, in a sort of gasp, “if I could only have been there!” He drew his hand across his brow, and then, with a quick look under his brows at Blaine, he abruptly said, “I have brought up my troop to assist you.”

“Thanks,” said Blaine, coldly. “My force was quite sufficient for the purpose.”

“The Colonel thought differently,” said the other, with thinly disguised sarcasm. “He will himself follow with a hundred men to-morrow. What do you purpose doing?”

“I intend moving on to the Nek just before dawn.”

“Why upon the Nek, if I may ask?”

“Because Sirayo is there, and my orders were to capture him. You are not here to countermand them, I suppose?” he demanded, haughtily.

“You would not suppose, Miss Rath,” said Dalston, with a gloomy smile, “that I had saved this young gentleman from Sirayo’s assegai.”

Blaine felt the rebuke all the more because Dalston had reminded him of the obligation. Mary was absorbed with other matters, and did not answer.

“Do I understand that you are going to capture the Zulu chief?” she asked, in a low voice.

“I will make the attempt, Miss Rath, and shall have to thank you if I succeed.”

Mary winced. She rose up and placed her hand upon his arm.
“Don’t,” she said, earnestly—“don’t—pray don’t take advantage of my information. Nothing would have forced it from me if I had known your object.”

Blaine quivered at her touch, and looked uneasily at Dalston. That individual gave him no support, but turned away with a frown. Miss Rath had never rested her hand upon his arm.

“Remember,” she continued, with a tremor in her voice, “he saved my life.”

Blaine flinched under her look of entreaty, a look that haunted him for many a day; but the lines about his mouth hardened.

“Say you will not go. At least, wait till it is daylight.”

“I cannot,” said Blaine; “it is my duty.”

“Duty!” she replied, with scorn, while her eyes flashed. “Is it your duty to place upon me the stigma of treachery?”

Blaine hesitated a moment, and Mary, detecting his hesitation, sighed with relief.

She turned from him to Captain Dalston. “You, sir—cannot you help me?”

Now was the opportunity for him to regain her good opinion. He looked at her eagerly, then, with an effort that left his face pale and rugged, he restrained himself. “Captain Blaine is right,” he said, steadily; “and it is time to advance.”

The two men lingered a moment, as though they would fain say something to remove the sting of their refusal, then they hurried away, and left Mary listening to their departing steps with an intense feeling of mortification at her heart.

It was no time for delay, however. She roused Pala, who had evidently been feigning sleep, for the black girl lost no time in asking for explanations.

“Pala, you must fly to the Nek and warn the chief. The soldiers are in pursuit.”

Pala rose to her feet, but staggered at her first step. Her ankle was swollen. She had sprained it in descending the hill.

The two girls looked at one another in despair, then Pala’s face hardened.

“You must go, mistress. It was you who told the soldiers, and you must warn the chief. He saved you, and if he dies—his blood and mine be on your head!”
Mary’s eyes dilated under the stress of this new danger that was coming upon her, then she turned and flew to where her horse was secreted in the garden.

“Mistress! my sister! oh, I did speak idly—do not go!” thus wailed Pala, but Mary was out of hearing.

The two officers had nearly reached their men, when a sound of hoofs made them stop. The sound quickly approached.

“Stop!” thundered Blaine. But the horse and its rider swept by unheed- ing, and the flame from two pistols flashed in the darkness. The horseman continued on, unhurt.

“See to your rifles!—The enemy escapes!—Extend to your left!” were the orders that leapt from Blaine’s lips.

A murmur of voices from the excited troop below broke out, and the two officers heard the hurried steps as the men ran forward, stumbling in the darkness.

A flash of light broke out. The end man had opened fire; then another flash below, and another, until the air echoed with the sharp rifle cracks.

At that moment, above all the din, a woman’s voice rang out: “Don’t shoot! It is she—my mistress!”

Pala had dragged herself to the door, and in horror had cried out in ner- vous English, her usual hesitancy disappearing in the moment of supreme need.

Blaine heard the cry, and did not comprehend; but Dalston reeled as if one of the bullets had struck him.

“Cease fire, for God’s sake!” he cried.

“Eh?” said Blaine, angrily. “What do you mean by that order?”

“Good Heavens above, man, you would not shoot Miss Rath, would you?”

“I don’t understand,” gasped Blaine. “Surely that was not she who dashed by?”

Dalston did not reply; he had turned back to the house.

Chapter 10  The Pursuit

BLAINE CLAPPED his spurs in and galloped down to his men.

“Mount, and follow me!” he cried, then spurred on madly after the retreating horse. If it were Miss Rath, he would save her from the consequences of her rashness—if it were the Zulu, he would capture him. With these thoughts firing his mind he gave no heed to his men.
They, however, were not moved by his impetuosity. The sergeant in command, a grizzled old warrior, gave his orders deliberately—“Prepare to mount!—Mount!”

The men sat in their saddles waiting the next order.

“Where are we going, sergeant?” asked a trooper.

“Foller the captain.”

“Yes, but where to?”

“We’ll see. Walk!—Gallop!”

“It’s all very well to say gallop,” grumbled one man, “but how in thunder are we to gallop when it’s as dark as the inside of a blacking pot!”

In five minutes two horses stumbled, and in ten the sergeant himself disappeared with a startled oath. The troop halted, and one of the men dismounted to see what had happened. He found the sergeant’s horse at the brink of a donga, but that worthy was not in evidence, excepting for a volley of muffled oaths, which rolled up from the bowels of the earth. They found the old soldier fast jammed between the shelving walls of the donga, and cut him out. When he was once again in his saddle the sound of hoofs, which was their only guide, had died out.

Mary Rath was essentially a womanly woman, sweet and gentle; but a vein of sterner stuff, like a thread of steel in a silken skein, ran through her nature. She hardened now under its influence, and she rode away on her mission with something like a fierce sense of elation.

She had blanched under the first volley from the officers’ revolvers, and nearly reeled from the saddle; then she steadied herself again, and faced the line of rifle fire. Each lurid flash, each sharp rifle crack, each venomous ping of the bullets had its effect on her nerves in an electric thrill and spasm of agony. For months after, she could not hear a report without experiencing a sudden shock; but at the moment the recurring waves of terror had no power to weaken her resolve. Her body might tremble, and her nerves wince; but her eyes, in which glowed the strong spirit within, were fixed steadily before her. Her horse, accustomed to the way, swept on without guidance from her hand—himself, by some strange power of sympathy which dumb animals experience, imbued with her spirit.

Away they flew, passing without hurt beyond the range of chance bullets, and Mary drew a long breath, almost like a sob. Her relief was short. Her quick ears detected the rush of a horse in pursuit, and her mind became curiously divided—now fixed intently on the object before her, now anxiously concerned with the pursuer behind her, obeying exactly the swift movement of her horse’s ears, which would now be turned and now pricked forward. After a time she detected a slackening in the hoof-beats behind,
until the sound was almost merged into the murmur of the wind; but before she had time for congratulation, again the regular strokes of hoofs broke out crisp and clear, and this time it was evident that there was more than one pursuer.

Blaine at first had been so intent on the chase that, beyond the word of command as he dashed by his men, he had not given further heed to them. But presently, when his horse swerved from some rock or ant-hill in his path, and he shouted out the accustomed warning, the absence of a response suddenly aroused him to the unwelcome fact that he had outpaced his troop. He accordingly slowed down, then halted and listened. While he was about turning to go back he heard a horseman advancing at a gallop. Soon he could trace the approach by the flash of sparks struck from the stones.

“Who is that?” he asked for the third time that night.

The other dashed up without replying, curbed his horse with a strong grasp, and peered into Blaine’s face. It was Dalston.

“Where is she?” he asked, hoarsely. “Is she safe?”

“Who is she? Good Heaven, man, is that really Miss Rath ahead?”

“Yes, and we have driven her to it by our accursed folly.”

“She will warn Sirayo?”

“Warn Sirayo! Why, don’t you see she will be killed? We must stop her before she reaches the kraal.”

“Shall we wait for my men?” asked Blaine, who was confused.

“Wait! Yes, wait, you dog!” cried the other, in a burst of passion. His great horse, with a snort of pain at the vicious thrust of spurs, bounded forward.

Blaine paused a moment, then he too followed, Dalston’s insulting words ringing in his ears. Suddenly the pale face of the girl he had seen at Kopje Alleen seemed to look at him from out the air, her large brown eyes fixed reproachfully on him.

“Good God!” he said, “how could I have driven her out into the night! I fired at her, too,” he muttered, horror-stricken.

He pressed his horse, and was soon riding side by side with his gloomy companion. Each man knelt over the saddle, reckless of all danger, intent only upon first reaching this girl.

They gained upon her at every stride; and now, in the greyish light of the dawn, they could see a dim figure before them.

Mary shuddered with the feeling of a hunted creature. She called to her horse, but he simply pricked his ears to her cry. She looked up, despairingly, and, through a rift in the rising mist on the left, she saw the rounded outline of a hut. Her goal was near.
They also saw the hut, and raised a low warning cry to her to stop.

It flashed through her mind that there was a shorter way to the kraal than
by the path she was riding—a way, however, traversed by a deep donga, and
dangerous in that uncertain light. She would try it. It was a desperate case.

Turning the horse, she galloped away to the left. Blaine was the first to
detect that she swerved from the course, and he turned also; but, from the
pace he was going, he overshot her line. Dalston was soon up with Blaine
on the fresh track, but with a startled exclamation, for Mary had suddenly
disappeared from view.

Her horse had reached the brink of the yawning donga, with no more
thought of leaping it than he thought of flying. There was no path down the
slanting sides, but, obedient to his rider’s command, he spread out his fore-
legs stiffly, gathered his hind-legs together under his belly, and slipped down.

Once at the bottom, however, he declined to mount the opposite side.
Mary heard the rush of her pursuers. After all, she would be too late. Then
her heart stood still as she reflected that at the speed they were travelling
they must fall headlong into the chasm.

She scrambled up the bank in breathless haste, and cried out to them to
stop. Just in time, for Blaine’s horse was so close upon the brink that his fore-
feet beat the air over it as he was thrown back on his haunches.

A moment Mary looked to see that they were safe, then she hollowed her
hands and called aloud in Zulu to the people in the kraal—

“The soldiers are upon you. Fly!”

Trained as she had been, by Pala, to practise the deep chest notes that the
natives use in chanting, her voice travelled far.

The first response came in the bark of a dog, then there was a hubbub of
women’s voices in alarm, and then silence. Already the women of the kraal
were flying to the caves in the precipice on the hill beyond. Were there any
men there? and if so, would they come down upon them? Even now, in their
silent way, they might be stealing down.

Blaine thought of this. “Miss Rath, this is not safe. Where is your horse?”

“At the bottom of the donga.”

“Take mine,” said Dalston, dismounting. “You will find him quiet.”

“Who is that calls out a warning in the night?” asked a deep voice, from
the other side of the donga.

With a start the three looked across, and there they saw the figure of a
man looming gigantic in the morning mist.

Mary recognized the voice. “It is I, the white girl from Kopje Alleen.”
“Yoh!—and who are those with you?”

“They came after me, to prevent me warning you. For Pala’s sake I have done this thing—also because you saved my life.”

“Hear it!” He paused a moment to consider this new phase in warfare, but again expressed his surprise in the emphatic ejaculation, “Yoh!”

“I will not forget it,” he said, then turned and stalked away, while Blaine and Dalston bit their moustaches, and looked at one another askance, to know what should be done.

Meanwhile, Mary’s horse, grown tired of remaining below, scrambled up, with many a grunt, and fell to eating the shrub. Both men were eager to help her to the saddle, but as each hesitated in favour of the other, she did without their assistance. The two officers could only stare at her supinely. At last Blaine found his voice.

“Miss Rath,” said he, with a quiver of emotion, “you have done a noble deed, and I thank God, from my heart, for His mercy in bringing you safe through.” He raised the hand that dropped listlessly at her side, and pressed his lips on it. It was the homage of a chivalrous man to a brave woman, which she did not resent.

Dalston sighed as he saw this. He dared not do that. With him, he felt now it would be a liberty. He cleared his throat to speak, but could not, and with a savage glance at Blaine, he vaulted into his saddle.

Mary did not answer at once. She felt a weakness at her throat, and a yearning at her heart for sympathy. That touch upon her cold and nerveless hand had nearly been answered with a sob.

With an effort she gathered up her reins, and rode on. They placed themselves one on either side.

“Thank you,” she said, wearily. “I can find my home alone. Please leave me. You have been the cause of all this trouble.”

They reined in without a word, and in silence watched her out of sight. Then they faced about, looking long and sternly into each other’s eyes—a look that told of mutual dislike and enmity.

Then, as if obeying one impulse, they sought for a way across the donga, and rode up to the kraal. Mary’s rebuff had struck them to the heart; they wished to forget her words, and the only way was to plunge into the excitement of a fight. They hoped, with a fierce longing, that Sirayo and his men would be at the kraal to meet them.

They were, however, fortunately for themselves, disappointed. The kraal was abandoned. Dalston raged about from hut to hut, kicking over the earthenware pots with savage energy, and winding up by firing the village.
It took the patient labour of several weeks to build each hut. The long, pliant wands were cut miles away on the Tugela, the thatch was woven in by skilled hands, the floor was stamped and polished after days of labour, but in ten minutes all that remained was a heap of smouldering ashes.

On their way to the hill above, the Zulu women and men turned to watch the destruction of their homes—which, to them, were as dear as the homes of their white enemies.

Mary, warned by the reflection on the mist, turned to watch, and tears gathered in her eyes as she looked. Blaine’s troop of Horse marked the beacon of fire, and advanced at a trot.

Sirayo also saw the leaping flames, and his black eyes seemed to reflect the glare, for they shone like coals of fire.

“Some one will die for that. The hand that fired it has lit his way to death. I have said it.”

Chapter 11 The Son of Destiny

AMID THE ASHES of the burnt village, Blaine’s troop took their breakfast, gathering cobs of green corn from the feathery-tipped maize-stalks to roast on the embers.

There they waited for the Colonel to come up; while above them, on the ridge, was a handful of Zulus looking down upon their ruined homes.

A column of Horse moved up the valley at a leisurely pace, and the sun was well up when it joined Blaine’s advanced troops. The hungry troopers were soon busy clustered about a dozen fires, roasting corn and boiling water for a steaming pannikin of black coffee. Between sips, the men would glance up at the small groups of Zulus above them, and they speculated on the chance of a brush.

“It would be a mighty tough place to tackle,” observed Rowe, running his eye over the boulder-strewn track. “A score of men should hold it against a hundred, and it’s no place for cavalry to swarm up.”

“So it seems, sure enough,” answered a trooper, who was chewing a stalk of imphi (sweet cane). “But trust the Colonel—if he goes up, well, he goes up, that’s all.”

Rowe went off to study the leader, whom every one in camp called the Colonel, and who, as he had already discovered, inspired the most implicit confidence in his men. He saw a tall, lean-limbed man, dressed in plain grey riding-dress, and broad smasher, bound round with a strip of red, and wearing no weapon but a revolver, suspended from a wide leather belt.
This was Colonel Redvers Buller—an officer who has since shown his
generalship on the sands of Egypt. His extraordinary coolness in danger,
accompanied by a point of absolute indifference, had caught the admiration of all
men in the army; his strong individuality had given him an influence which
his rank at the time did not warrant; and his self-reliance, readiness, capac-
ity for endurance, and marvellous “eye for the country” had won the con-
fidence of his men. Where he led, they would follow without question and
without hesitation.

His eyes were grey, rather small, but keen and commanding. His nose was
thin and long; his lips thin, with an expression about them habitually stern
and at times ill-tempered. His voice was sharp, quick, and clear, and when
raised in reproof, it fell like the lash of a whip, making the offender quail.
There was nothing genial about the Colonel; he was essentially a leader of
fighting men, grim and hard, with muscles of iron that defied all fatigue.

Near him was another notable figure, engaged, like a good horseman,
in attending to his charger, a fine, splendid grey. He was running his open
hand, rather white and delicate, over the animal’s coat, and stopping where
he felt a swelling to pick out a “tick,” which had secreted itself under the
hair, and was swelling itself out with blood.

Stop a moment and look at horse and rider, for the latter is Prince Impe-
rial of France, and the horse is the same that led him to his death.
Unlike the other officers of Irregular Horse, the Prince wore a sabre in
addition to his revolver, and a pith helmet in place of the usual smasher. His
slight but well-built figure showed him to possess uncommon activity, and
the care he gave to his horse was evidence of a thoughtful and kindly dis-
position.

Now he rubs his hand over the horse’s muzzle, and turns to the Colonel.
His oval face is grave and purposeful; the small mouth is sensitive; the clean-
cut jaw and chin show signs of power; the delicately chiselled nose is one of
the true Napoleon shape: but the eyes are the charm of the face. They are
large, grey eyes, calm in their gaze, yet with a tinge of sadness in them, and
that look of destiny which is seen in the expression of some men.

Presently a hubbub of voices announced that something unusual had
occurred. A number of men were eagerly glancing up at the ridge where the
group of Zulus had been joined by a man on a white horse.

One of the officers possessed a field-glass, and this was eagerly in demand.
It was in time handed to the Prince, who stood on an ant-hill, and looked
long and earnestly.
The man on the white horse was trying to encourage the Zulus to show fight. He rode up and down, and his arm could be seen in violent gesticulation.

“Who is it?—some chief, I suppose.”

A Basuto of Cochrane’s Horse—a picked lot of native horsemen—glanced up a moment, and immediately pronounced the man to be Sirayo.

“The same spy who escaped from the camp?” queried the Prince. “We may hope to take him prisoner, if he will only stand.”

What strange fate has thrown the heir of Napoleon across the path of the descendant of Chaka, the Zulu conqueror?—the one reared in the midst of glitter and pomp, in the brightest palace of the brightest city in the world; the other born in a hut, reared in a cattle kraal, and trained to warfare from the time he could hurl a stick. Twice they met, and the second time one of them was left dead on the ground.

The Colonel glanced up—“There will be no fighting today,” he said.

Cans were put away; great-coats that had been used in the morning ride, because of the keen air, were rolled up, and strapped to the saddles. Troopers fell into line, and in three columns the force went up the hill.

The Basutos acted as an advance, and with them rode the Prince, his pale cheeks flushed with red, and his eyes alight with the glow of battle.

The Colonel was right. There was to be no fight that day. The heart had gone out of the Zulus, their women were in the caves, their homes were burnt, and they were outnumbered. They melted away, and when the Basutos on their wiry ponies topped the ridge, a score of black forms were flying across the tableland to the caves in the krantz precipice, on the other side of the mountain.

They might be overtaken and shot down before they reached their refuge in the rocks; but their chief remained to save them, by drawing the chase upon himself.

He lured the Basutos after him by taunts, and led them in a direction away from his dispirited followers. For a short time the Basutos gained on the chief, but when they were shouting in their exultation, the white horse suddenly shot away like an arrow.

The baffled pursuers looked to their long Martini rifles when the gallant grey passed them with its long strides, and the Prince alone went in pursuit.

Yard by yard he gained upon the flying chief, the laggard horsemen behind watching with breathless interest, when Sirayo again disappointed their expectations. Suddenly swerving from the plain, he went headlong down a rocky path on the farther side of the hill.
The Prince had to draw up on the brink, and by-and-by was joined by
the others. The men dismounted and fired at the flying horseman, but he
rode on unhurt, and presently reaching a small kopje, he paused to shake
his assegai, then was lost to view.

The scene from the flat top of the mountain, robbed of its human ele-
ment, was one of quiet beauty. Below the sheer drop of the precipice nestled
a native village, the smoke still rising from the fires, and the cattle grazing
quietly around. A rushing mountain stream foamed in a broad white line
round the huts. Beyond was the open grass veldt stretching away to lofty
hills, with other hills and ridges beyond lined with a dark line of forest trees.

The village below, however, was abandoned. Its frightened owners were
now flying across the veldt, leaving behind all their simple household effects,
as much treasured by them as if they were as priceless as rare ornaments in
European mansions. The calm, pure air rattled to the sound of rifle reports
as the troopers, with many a jest, fired aimless shots at the flying people, to
make them run the faster.

War has its epics—it’s heroes and heroisms—it’s acts of sublime abnega-
tion, like that of Sir Sydney Smith\(^2^6\)—but it is often cruel, vindictive, and
cowardly.

Down the steep, rough track which Sirayo had traversed wound the troop,
each man leading his horse, with the exception of the Prince, who had a fit
of recklessness upon him. They off-saddled on the banks of the noisy stream
and some of the marksmen amused themselves in shooting the few head of
cattle left behind by the Zulus.

The poor brutes received the bullets that were fired into them by unprac-
tised hands in a silent stupor, pitiful beyond the power of expression. A buf-
falo would have charged down upon its slayers, but these patient creatures
met their death where they stood, their bodies shrinking under the shock of
each leaden missile, until, weakened from loss of blood, they swayed with
deep moans, and fell. This is war!

The huts were specimens of careful construction and housewifely care.
The long wands were placed so close together that it was almost impossible
to stick a knife between, and they were polished smooth with beeswax. Out-
side the door of one, on a patch of clean sand, was a pathetic sight. Only a
little kraal, made of smooth pebbles, with knuckle-joints from goats and deer
for cattle—but it was the work of little children, their innocent laughter min-
gling with the voice of the brook as they played their games in the morning.
While still engaged at their happy play the warning had come, their mothers
had snatched them up, and now they were hiding in some wolf’s hole, where
they trembled in fear of the approach of the fierce white man.
The torch was placed to the huts, and they flamed on high. So that village, too, was left in ruins, to mark the track of the civilized foe; while the blood from one ox, slaughtered while he drank, stained the pure stream a deep red.

As the mounted men left the place, the Prince leapt over the burning fence of thorn which had formed the ring of one cattle kraal. He was reckless with a purpose, so it seemed: eager to show that no taint of fear was in his blood.

It was that restless, reckless spirit, the desire to do some feat of arms, that brought him again into that fatal meeting with the warrior he had chased that day.

Chapter 12  A Snake in the Grass

GUIDED by the Colonel’s unerring instinct, the troop covered miles of the deserted country without a fault.

What is it that guides the elephant on a bee line at dead of night from one feeding place to another, a distance, maybe, of thirty miles, or keeps the whale on its true course through the trackless ocean for thousands of miles, or the frigate bird on its unresting flight, or directs the hunter across the pathless prairie? Who shall say?—Some delicate sense not yet accounted for, of an essence so subtle that it surpasses the wit of man to explain.

The Colonel could lead the guides themselves. He found his line by the trend of the water, the dip of the land, and by a dozen natural sign-posts which escape ordinary observation.

That night the men bivouacked under the shelter of a rocky hill; but it was a cheerless bivouac without fires, since the light might have attracted the attention of the enemy. The horses stood with their backs to the cold wind, their hind-quarters drawn in, and their heads drooping. The men crowded together for comfort, using their saddles for pillows, and the horse-cloths to cover their legs.

Sleep for most was impossible, but the old stagers remained quiet and kept their warmth. The inexperienced tossed about, and let the wind circulate about them with chilling effect.

Ever and anon a man would get up, stamp his feet, blow upon his fingers, look disconsolately around into the darkness, and up to the clear bright stars, then with a sigh stretch himself again on the ground.

The Prince was one of these unfortunates, but he bore his discomfort in patience, like a soldier.

“Here,” said Blaine, who had been disturbed by the noise of stamping feet, “pray wrap yourself up in this blanket.”
“No, certainly not. I have only myself to blame, and I must learn. The sun was so bright when we started that I could not believe the nights would be so cold.”

“No, certainly not. I have only myself to blame, and I must learn. The sun was so bright when we started that I could not believe the nights would be so cold.”

“Do take it; I have slept, and will relieve the guard. You must be almost solid with cold.”

The Prince, thus pressed, rolled himself up in the heavy military blanket, and was soon at rest. One or two men lifted their heads to see what had happened, and then drew their knees up to their chins, in a renewed attempt to get snug.

Blaine relieved the sentry, and stood listening to the drowsy grumbling of a trooper, and to the occasional sighing of a tired horse. Then, as these sounds quieted, his ear was alert to the melancholy voices of the night: to the moaning of the wind, to the cry of the goat-sucker, and to the far-off wail of a jackal. Then the bushes near him took on fantastic shapes as they were shaken by the wind, and he had to strain his eyes to detect that they were really only inanimate objects.

The post of sentry in the country at night is one that might well try the nerves of the strongest, for the straining ear gives warning to the brain of the approach of a stealthy enemy at every sound that strikes upon it, and the watchful eyes see moving persons where none exist.

Blaine moved briskly up and down, to shake off a feeling of sadness that stole upon him; and as he walked he thought for comfort upon the sweet face of Mary Rath, and he wondered why a girl of her grace and beauty should be imprisoned in this out-of-the-way retreat. He must see her again and learn her history.

Engaged in this absorbing train of thought, he gradually lengthened the range of his beat, and was farthest away from the troop, when a sharp sound from the grass at his feet rooted him to the spot.

“By Jove!” he muttered, “it is a puff-adder.”

He stood listening for the rustle of the deadly snake; but, hearing nothing, he lifted his foot.

With a furious note that thrilled him through and through with dread there sounded three sharp puffs, as the reptile ejected the air through its nostrils right from between his feet.

He dared not move, he scarcely breathed, but stood with every muscle strained, expecting each second to feel the curved fangs strike into his leg. For several seconds—it seemed to him hours—he remained, motionless, and the snake also was quiet, awaiting the movement that would send its needle-pointed fangs of death into its enemy.
Then it began to move, and Blaine heard its sluggish body slither over the grass between his feet. He felt its weight upon his foot, and then, with a sickening fear, felt it rear its flat head along his boot and up to his knee. In imagination he could see its forked tongue darting along his rough riding-trousers to feel what manner of creature it was that had disturbed it, and could almost see the venomous glitter of its cold, unwinking eyes. He stood almost paralysed.

Then he heard footsteps approaching, apparently from the camp, but dared not turn his head, lest the slight movement should cause the snake to strike.

The steps came on quickly, and the snake lowered its head. Blaine felt it move over his foot, and heard it glide away. He breathed a deep breath of intense relief, turned to see who it was approaching, when a fearful blow descended on his head, and he fell to the ground insensible.

The treacherous assailant leant over the prostrate body for a few minutes, then stood up. Twice he raised the weapon in his hand to strike, but each time his arm fell nerveless to his side. He searched about a little while, then, lifting the body, carried it a few yards to where some scrub bushes grew amid rocks, and there hid it. This done, he returned stealthily to the bivouac under shelter of the horses, where he waited patiently to satisfy himself that no one was watching.

His next movement was strange, for he loosened Blaine’s horse from the bunch, and led it away with the utmost caution, until he had got the wind with him, when he sent the animal adrift with a sharp crack to hurry its movements. Satisfied that the brute would go on until it found shelter from the wind, he slipped again into camp, and deliberately fired off his revolver into the air.

In two minutes every horse was saddled, and every man was in his saddle, and looking wildly about for the cause of the alarm.

“Who fired that shot?” demanded the Colonel, in his sharp voice.

There was no answer, and the men, after casting many uneasy glances into the night, peered silently into one another’s faces.

“Who was on sentry?”

“I was, sir, but”—

“You were asleep, I suppose?”

“No, sir. Captain Blaine relieved me an hour ago. Said he might as well keep watch, as he could not sleep.”

The Colonel waited a minute for Blaine to come forward. “Well,” he said, with an ominous ring in his voice, “why does not Captain Blaine speak?”
Again there was no answer—and each man looked at his neighbour curiously. It was strange that the fearless young officer did not respond.

“Kurnel, the Captain’s gone.”

“Who’s that?”

“Rowe—Cob Rowe. Here’s the Captain’s saddle on the ground but his horse is gone.”

“And here is his blanket,” said the Prince, “which he kindly lent me about midnight. He seemed then very wakeful.”

“Bugler, sound the recall!”

The bugler’s lips were numbed, and he could not make his instrument speak, except in snatches of awful discord. At last, the quick, clear notes rang out loud and shrill.

The men listened, and the faint echo of a distant neigh came up against the wind.

“That’s in the direction of the camp,” said the Colonel, quickly.

“Ah! I know he wanted to be in camp to-morrow,” said a voice, “to be in time for the post.”

“Yes, but why should he leave his saddle, and go without orders? And that does not explain the pistol shot. It may be a senseless joke. Well,” added the Colonel, grimly, “now we are mounted we will march.”

He struck into the night, the captains of the companies gave the command, and the men, growling at the discomfort of a dark march, filed away.

There were two men in the column who did not cease to think over the disappearance of Captain Blaine. These were Cob Rowe and Basuto Dick of Cochrane’s Horse.

They had struck up a sort of friendship, which owed its origin, in the first place, to the admiration which Dick had for Rowe’s deerskin coat. When Rowe had shown his horsemanship, the Basuto, a born rider, felt his respect for the coat extend to the man who wore it, and Rowe himself took a liking to the good-tempered, well-built, and fearless black scout.

They rode along together in silence for some time, Dick chewing a sweet cane and spitting out the fibre at regular intervals, while he occasionally glanced askance at his saturnine companion.

“You no like Captain Blaine ver mooch, eh?”

“What—why?”

“Oh, nuttings. I see Skin-jacket sometimes look Captain Blaine when he not looking.”

“What are you driving at, you animated stick of black sealing-wax?”
“What say! Some mens like see Captain Blaine out of way.”
Rowe started. “Wake up, you nigger boy; you’re still asleep.”
“Not nigger, Basuto me. Skin-jacket, I no sleep in de night. Seems to me it is not right about de Captain.”
“No, Dick, it is not right. I believe he’s bolted.”
“Soh!” Dick looked curiously at his companion, and then went on chewing at his cane.
“What are you chewing for at this time of the night? It makes my jaws ache to hear you champ, champ, champ. Wait till the sun shines and I’ll help you.”
Dick chuckled. “White man very clever, but Basuto he more as clever. See, it is yet dark, I cannot mark de trail; but this what I spit out it is good trail.”
“What do you want a trail for?”
“Wait a bit, Skin-jacket, an’ I show you.”
Towards afternoon the column approached the camp, and the first thing met was Captain Blaine’s horse, with the rein trailing from its neck.
The column halted, and a murmur arose from the men. Dick took off his hat, and approached the Colonel, with a request.
“Yes,” said the Colonel, in reply, “you can go back, but keep a sharp lookout, for Zulus always follow our track.”
“Now, Skin-jacket, you see why I left dot trail,” said Dick, as he rode by.
“Good, nigger boy; I’ll go back with you.”
They rode away briskly, with the cheers of their comrades to encourage them, but they had not gone far when, to the annoyance of Rowe, Captain Dalston overtook them. “I think my presence is necessary,” he said, briefly, “to keep my friend Captain Blaine from further injury if he is still alive.”
“What is the cuss driving at?” muttered Rowe.
The three rode on in silence, the Basuto leading, and picking up the trail easily by the little balls of chewed cane which he had ejected from his mouth.
“Must first go to last night’s sleep place,” he said, in reply to Dalston.
As the troop had only traversed the country at a walk, and as the three horsemen went back on the trail at a gallop, they soon reached the scene of the bivouac.
Rowe and the Basuto dismounted, and cast around like pointers in search of partridge. Soon Rowe discovered signs where the long grass had been pressed down by a heavy body, and he called to the Basuto.
Dick, with his nostrils wide open, seemed to scent the trail, and after a few yards, he pointed to a splash of blood on a blade of grass. In a few moments
he parted the thick scrub among the rocks and gave an exclamation of sur-
prise.

Somebody had lain there; there were stains of blood about; but now there
was nothing.

Rowe looked at the Basuto inquiringly. But Captain Dalston said impa-
tiently—

“How do you know Captain Blaine was there? He may have gone off on
his horse.”

“No go,” said Dick, decisively; “he was knocked down, put here. See!”
He picked up a small object, which he examined, and then passed to Cap-
tain Dalston.

“What is this?”

“Zulu snuff-box. No good look more, mus’ go back camp.” Dick mount-
ed his horse.

“Why, what is the matter?”

“Nuttings, only Captain been taken by Zulus. Dead jus’ now, sure—ef not
gone to Cetewayo.”

Chapter 13 Captured

WHEN THE COLUMN, with the Colonel leading, had left the night’s camp-
ing-ground, it filed by a maize-garden, with the inevitable huts and cattle
kraal adjoining. Owing to the circumstances under which the departure was
made the huts had escaped observation.

When the sun rose with a sudden bound, characteristic of its burning
energy in southern latitudes, its broad shafts of light fell upon an apparent-
ly deserted village.

Soon, however, the genial warmth stirred the hidden life into activity. A
lizard came out from the dark recesses of a hut and sunned himself in the
doorway. He had always found free quarters there, for was not his glitter-
ing body the home of a departed Zulu warrior, and was not his every move-
ment an omen of good or ill?

Then a gaunt yellow cur came sneaking out from another hut, with his
sharp nose sniffing the air for the taint of the dreaded white man.

After this, some living thing moved in the kraal. The cow-chips, which
covered the surface to a depth of several inches, were upheaved at one quar-
ter, a flat mass of woven grass was thrown back, and a woolly head cautiously
appeared up to the level of the eyes, which rolled about suspiciously. There
being nothing in view except the yellow dog, whose presence was itself a
sign of safety, the head and shoulders followed, until at last the whole body
appeared, and a Zulu stood up and stretched himself.

He had taken shelter in a maize-pit, which the Zulus sink to a depth of
several feet in their cattle kraals, for the safe storage of grain. The inside of
the pit they smear with wet cow-dung, which forms, when dry, a protection
against insects and damp, while the narrow, bottle-shaped opening they her-
metically seal.

The warrior, with his accustomed stabbing assegai, stole softly out of the
kraal and looked under the shade of his hand across the veldt. With their
backs to him he marked the mounted men moving over a distant rise. He
watched them out of sight, then went down to the scene of the bivouac, to
see if there was anything worth picking up.

He was in luck’s way, for the men, in their alarm when the pistol shot was
fired, had left several things in the grass. A bag of coffee, a stick of tobacco,
a hunk of biltong (jerked venison), a tin of jam—these were treasures indeed,
and he began to sample them straight away, alternating a chew of tobacco
with a mouthful of jam.

Whilst thus pleasantly engaged, his dog was also nosing about, and soon
came across something which needed prompt attention. He looked back at
his master, but that worthy, for once, paid no heed, and he determined to
follow up the adventure himself.

With his nose to the ground, and his big ears erect, the dog looped along,
guided by the strong scent of fresh blood, until he stood among a tumbled
mass of rocks.

Should he go in or should he not? It was evident that there was something
among the bushes, but the question was whether the something was dan-
gnerous. Caution was the best policy; and after inhaling the powerful scent,
with his eyes shut and his mouth watering, he ran back to his master, and
wagged his thin tail until it nearly snapped off.

His master was half-way into the jam-pot, and admonished the dog with a
kick, that his presence was not needed. Accordingly the animal went gloomi-
ly back, with a determination to investigate matters, or perish in the attempt.
Softly, lifting one foot at a time, he crawled in, the scent getting stronger
and stronger, until, with a low quiver of excitement, he found himself in the
presence of the quarry.

A devil of a white man! One of the accursed race that had caused his mas-
ter to bury himself in a hole! Here was a discovery. He was about to give
tongue, when all power of barking was taken away from him by the sudden
opening of the white man’s eyes, which at once, by some power of attrac-
tion, became fixed on his.

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The dog’s fierce yellow eyes were riveted on the white face—and the blue eyes, with a startled expression in them, were fixed on the dog. Then the latter slowly withdrew backwards, until he was out of the range of the fearful object, when he sat down on his haunches, like any frightened human being, and fairly trembled.

There was something fascinating in his fear, however: once again he went in to see whether the dead thing had actually come to life.

Yes, between the twigs he caught the glint of the blue eyes, brighter than before—and he felt a queer sensation down his backbone, even to the tip of his drooping tail. Once more he drew backwards, with a pucker between the eyes, that told of a puzzled brain. He started to go to his master, but when half-way down he looked over his shoulder and saw the white face above the rocks. So the thing was watching him. It was too much. He would go back again and bite the creature! Accordingly he cautiously retraced his steps.

Blaine, all this time, had been slowly regaining his scattered wits. The blow on his head had fallen within a hair’s-breadth of his temple, and must have been struck with the butt-end of a heavy revolver, from the circular bruise it left. After the total blank of insensibility there had been a buzzing in his brain, increasing in intensity and volume to the wild roaring of the waves. With a wild feeling that his head would burst he had opened his eyes, only to meet the startled gaze of the dog.

At the second visit he had a glimmering of reason, and when he lifted his body to look around, and saw below him a Zulu warrior where he had left his comrades, he understood enough to know that he was in peril of his life.

When he heard the dog steadily creeping through the bush for the third time the perspiration gathered on his forehead, and his eyes were contracted in the effort upon his nerves to keep absolutely still.

This time the dog came nearer, but was evidently more frightened than before, by the intensity of the gaze fixed upon him. His legs trembled under him, and the lids of his eyes moved up and down, to shut out that strange magnetic influence which seemed to stream into his brain.

Blaine felt that he could frighten the animal off, and rolled his eyes fearfully. The effect was excellent at the moment. With a whimper of fear, the dog turned and bolted.

The spell, however, was broken. Once outside the bush, he jumped about and barked himself almost inside out.

Blaine kept quiet—a quiet through which the beating of his heart seemed to quiver in waves of sound—hoping against hope that no search would be made; but a sound warned him. Glancing up, he saw a sight which caused a smile to flit across his face—a smile that saved his life. For looking down
Upon him was the face of a Zulu, with broad red stains of currant jam across his cheeks and on the end of his flat nose.

The warrior’s assegai was lifted to thrust, but the feeble smile and the evident helplessness of the white man altered his purpose. Instead of killing Blaine, he lifted him up in his powerful arms and carried him up to the kraal, where, after binding him, he proceeded to examine his captive with great gravity.

The two sat in silence for a long time, the inspector and the inspected, the former ever and again stretching out a lean finger to touch the circular bruise on the other’s forehead.

It passed his comprehension how the wound was made and by whom. Finally he gave it up as a hopeless puzzle, and turned to something which he could understand—the examination of his prisoner’s arms and pocket treasures. These included a watch, a single treasured cigar, a photograph of a silver-haired, mild-eyed, gentle old lady, and a photograph of a little girl with beautiful brown eyes.

These pictures caused the warrior unbounded astonishment. He clapped his hand against his mouth several times, scratched his head with a pointed claw of ivory which he took from the lobe of his ear, and finally returned them to Blaine’s pocket.

The cigar, which had been reserved for the quiet noonday smoke, was ruthlessly broken up, and ground down to a snuff between two rounded stones. The spoon-shaped butt-end of the ivory scratcher served to ladle the snuff into his wide nostrils. Having satisfied himself, he again turned his attention to his captive, and shovelled a spoonful of dry snuff up his nostrils.

The act was well meant. It signified, too, that for the present at least the prisoner could consider himself safe. But Blaine nearly sneezed his head off, and he fully appreciated how vile a thing a cigar was when not put to its proper purpose.

The watch was regarded with great awe as a sort of portable god, and was suspended from the kraal-post to ward off evildoers.

Thus far Blaine had no cause to fear any present hostile intent, and had begun to cast about for a chance to escape, though he could scarcely think for the violent throbbing at his temples; but the next movement of his captor prepared him for the worst.

The Zulu took a smooth flat stone from one of the huts, and, squatting on his hams, fell to sharpening his assegai, rolling his eyes fiercely upon his captive.
Chapter 14  Pala Goes on a Mission

AT KOPJE ALLEEN, Mary Rath had spent a restless week. The dangers through which she had passed on that awful night when the Zulus attacked the house, had left their mark.

The look of sweet content was gone out of her eyes, and the repose out of her movements. She flitted about without method, trifling now with one thing, and leaving it undone to attend to another—a shiftless habit which, in the old orderly life, she would have scorned.

That old life was shed like the discarded skin of a snake; its memories were already losing their bloom, as the colours of the skin fade away in a day.

Her eyes were bright, but they were bright from the reflection of the new light within: the fire of romance, of aspiration, and awakened yearnings, whose direction she could not yet trace.

She had spells of loneliness, when she would sit with nerveless hands in her lap, looking with wide-opened eyes at the glittering woof of fancy, which shut out the dreary stretch of land with a veil of glory. She had spasms of gaiety, when her laughter and song awakened the gloomy echoes in the Lone-ly Hill to semblance of mirth; and in turns she scolded and petted the Zulu girl, Pala, into a state of blank surprise.

Sometimes, too, she would talk of Sirayo to please Pala; who, after hanging her head like a shamefaced child, would begin to sing the chief’s praises, accompanying her voice to the clapping of fingers against the palm of her hand and by a sidelong swing of her body, which sent the heavy beaded kirtle knocking against her shapely limbs.

She helped Pala to make her wedding dress—a wonderful garment, consisting chiefly of bands of beads and thin strips of hide the size of boot-laces. Pala’s idea of wedded life was not ambitious. She hoped to be the chief wife—to bear many daughters who would bring in lobala (dowry)\(^29\) to her husband—to have “supports” to her hut in the shape of other but inferior wives—to have plenty of milk and mealies.

“Do you love the chief very much, Pala?”

“Oh, mistress!” replied the girl, softly, “I could die for him; for is he not a great warrior, terrible as the lion, yet kind as a cool wind on a hot day, and pleasant to the sight as a pool of water in a dry place? See, O white girl, as the lizard basks in the sun, I could bask in his love while youth lasts; and if it pleases him to look upon another, I could live on what had been—and be content.”

“Is that love, Pala?” mused Mary. “I thought it was a tyrant that could brook no rival. I do not think I could be content to see my place usurped.”

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“It is our custom, mistress. Give to me my husband when I am young and he is young, for I have all his heart, and I would not grudge the favour which in after years he may show to young girls.”

“Suppose the young wives scoff and make merry at the older women they have supplanted?”

Pala smiled and snapped her fingers. “They dare not—the first wife has the power.”

“I see—she holds the keys.”

“She keeps the milk-pots, the beer, and the meat.”

“Well, Pala, I wish you all the love and all the power, and I hope you won’t keep your ‘supports’ short of milk; but I should not care for the power if I had to share in the love.”

“Is my mistress thinking of taking to herself a husband?” asked Pala, slyly.

Mary laughed with a ripple of gaiety that would have cured a surly man of his temper had he heard it.

“Whom shall I take for a husband, Pala?—the old man Stoffel, at Utrecht?”

“Now you are playing, mistress. Those two white chiefs who were here—their eyes told the wish that was within their hearts. They are both great warriors—but he with the sun dancing in his eyes, he is the one.”

“Nonsense, Pala! What makes you think of such idle dreams?”

“I have eyes, mistress. And am I not in love? Surely I know,” and Pala put on an air of vast experience, which brought another ripple of laughter from Mary’s lips, though a flush was on her cheek.

“It is well to laugh,” continued Pala, shaking her head; “but I say it, those men have not forgotten mistress; she is with them every day, like the memory of a rare flower in a desert place. They think over her, and the more they think, the more they wonder at her, and long to know more concerning her.”

Mary looked at the Zulu maid in astonishment.

“Where have you learnt all this, Pala? Not from me, for I have got my lessons to learn—if perchance I learn them at all.”

“It is not a thing to be learnt, mistress, but grows like the bloom on a peach from the ripening within; and from the warmth of love from without, like the glow of the sun.”

“Truly, Pala, love makes a singer of you. Tell me how it does come.”

“I know not, mistress. Tell me what the perfume of the flower is like. It sweetens the air, but you cannot see it. The murmur of the flowing water delights the ear, and the wind among the reeds makes a pleasant sound, but
we ask not whence the water comes, or whither the wind goeth. Enough that the pleasure is there.”

Pala went away to the garden chanting; and Mary sat in the doorway wondering if it was true that she had entered into the thoughts of others.

It was true she often thought of Captain Blaine and Dalston, but not kindly; and she smiled to think that if they viewed her in the light in which she regarded them, their thoughts of her could not be agreeable. She had, perhaps, made a distinction in favour of Captain Blaine, and her resentment towards him was dying out.

“It is not likely,” she told herself, “that I shall see either of them again, after the dismissal I gave them—even if I cared to see them.”

Upon this point she was wrong. If she did not care to see Captain Dalston, he longed to see her; and, on the pretext of patrolling the frontier, he soon called at the house.

She came to the door, and put the big man at his ease by the quiet courtesy of her manner, for he had feared a repulse.

“I was passing, and ventured to call to see if all was safe. After your recent experience, Miss Rath,” he continued, earnestly, “you should not remain here. Your friends are anxious about you.”

“I am quite safe, if only my friends will leave me in peace. You must know that Sirayo has given out that this house is sacred, and my father is content to let me stay on.”

“You are severe on your friends,” said Dalston, gloomily; “but with cause, I sadly admit. Let me tell you,” he continued, earnestly, “now how terribly I have suffered for having driven you into that risk—the thought of it has kept me sleepless. If you had been hit, I would have shot the man who gave the wound—even if it had been myself.” He ended with a lowering of his black brow and a snap of his heavy jaws that spoke more than words of his resolve.

Mary shuddered slightly, then made a movement with her hand. “Let it pass,” she said; “you did your duty, and I did mine. What became of the chief?”

“He scuttled away like a fox, and we burnt his huts to light him on his way.”

“If I were a soldier,” said Mary, with an angry flush on her cheeks, “I would scorn to burn the houses of the enemy, and chase the women and children into the rocks.”

“It was war, Miss Rath; and you know all is fair in love and war.”

“No, sir; wanton cruelty is not fair in war—neither, I imagine, would treachery be in love.”

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He flinched strangely under her direct gaze, then with a forced smile, and a voice he tried to soften, said—

“I am afraid you are a rebel, Miss Rath.”

“So I am,” she replied, with a change of manner. “I wonder you do not report me to your Colonel; I am sure he would place me under arrest.”

“By the way, talking of arrest, do you know that Rowe, the man whom you and Mr. Rath befriended, is under arrest?”

“What! Not for protecting me against you?” she said, quickly, not judging her words. “Oh, I’m sorry,” she said, as she noted how he shrank.

“No,” he said, with an effort; “not for that. Good heavens, Mar—, Miss Rath, you must not think so meanly of me! I was mad then, and hoped you had forgiven and forgotten. No; he was arrested on suspicion of an attempt to murder Captain Blaine.”

“Murder Captain Blaine!” gasped Mary.

“Yes; Captain Blaine was struck down the night after you last saw him, and it is supposed that this man Rowe was the assassin.”

“How horrible! And I was so cruel to him! How wicked you men are!”

Dalston winced again, and plucked fiercely at his moustache.

“And where is Captain Blaine now? Is he recovering?”

“No one knows where he is, Miss Rath. It is supposed he is a prisoner among the Zulus—if, that is, he be still alive,” he added, darkly.

Dalston did not stay much longer; he had, as usual, blundered, and had to retire after having created a lively sympathy for the man he detested.

“Curse the fellow!” he muttered, gloomily, with an oath. “Why did he want to cross my path?”

Mary did not speedily recover from the shock which Dalston’s sudden revelation had caused her. And when she did, she remembered how Captain Blaine had looked at her with his face close to hers when he held the lighted match in his hollowed hand, and she felt his parting kiss upon her hand.

The tears came into her eyes at the thought, and she reproached herself for her harshness to him; then, with a glow of resolution, she sprang up and went in search of Pala.

“Pala,” she said, “I did a service for you; I want one of you.”

“Speak, mistress,” said Pala, straightening herself, “and lo! I will do it.”

“You know Captain Blaine?”

“Him with the sun in his eyes? Is it as I said?—will the mistress seek him in marriage? And she will have me to go as mediator?”
Mary smiled at Pala’s simplicity and eager anticipation. “No, child; the task I would have you do is more dangerous. The young man is a prisoner; you must find him.”

Pala showed no emotion at this abrupt demand upon her to enter upon a search without a given point of the compass to guide her.

“How does the mistress know he is alive?” she asked, with cruel directness. “The Zulus spare not. If he was taken captive, he is now lying on the veldt, face upwards.”

Mary shuddered. “No,” she murmured; “he is alive, and you must find him. Surely you would not refuse me in this?”

“I will go, mistress—eh, even to Ulundi; but if I find him, and he lives, what then?”

Yes, what then? What could a helpless girl do?

“Tell him—tell him his friends will take steps to save him. And, Pala, see Sirayo, and ask him to spare this man.”

“I will go. But hear me. I cannot spy upon my people. If he is alive, and I find where he is hidden, mistress must not set the white soldiers upon the kraal.”

“Trust me, Pala; you and I will find means to get him away.”

“There is one thing I cannot understand. If mistress has not set her heart upon this man, why should she trouble about him? He is a soldier, and is prepared to die—then let him die!”

“Oh, Pala, you are cruel! He must not die. He shall not—I feel that I must see him, and cannot tell you why I would.”

“Ah!” said the girl, shaking her head, “that is love. Now I am content—the white girl saved my chief, so I swear I will save her chief.”

She rolled up her sleeping-mat, took an assegai to act as a stick and weapon of defence, and went away with a swinging stride, turning once to salute her mistress, who stood watching her vanishing figure.

**Chapter 15  Rowe in a Fix**

WHAT CAPTAIN DALSTON had said was true. Rowe was under arrest.

An inquiry had been held into the disappearance of Captain Blaine, and suspicions of foul play were aroused, even before the return of Captain Dalston, Rowe, and Basuto Dick from the scene of the bivouac.

The missing officer’s horse had been caught, and attention was at once drawn to the fact that the rein had not been used as a bridle. It was plain
that the horse could not have been mounted, for the rider would have been helpless to guide it.

The Colonel resolved to hold a court of inquiry on the following day, and on their arrival in camp, Captain Dalston, Rowe, and Dick were directed to attend.

On the following afternoon proceedings opened in a large mess tent, the plain wooden table on trestles forming a bench, which divided the court from the witnesses. Captain Dalston found a seat on a camp-stool, where he sat with folded arms and an unmoved expression. Rowe and Dick stood.

The Basuto was the first to be examined, giving his evidence in his native tongue with sonorous accent and a wealth of gesture, waiting with hand uplifted while his replies were interpreted.

The court was composed of Commandant D’Arcy, Colonel Baker, and the Colonel.

“You asked the Colonel for leave to go back to the night’s bivouac. What reason had you for going back?”

“I went back for spoor. When a hunter goes after a wounded beast he goes straight to that place where he last saw it.”

“True; but Captain Blaine was not wounded.”

“How does the chief know that?” demanded Dick, quickly, becoming himself the examiner.

“I am asking you. You went back to find the spoor. What spoor did you expect to find?”

“Blood spoor!” said Dick, in his deep voice, and with a fierce roll of his eyes.

“What! Did you think Captain Blaine had been wounded? If so, by whom?” The officers of the court leant forward. Their suspicions of foul play were evidently to receive confirmation.

Captain Dalston flashed his black eyes a moment upon the witness, then shifted his glance to Rowe, who looked unmistakably moved.

The Basuto lifted his arm. “The night was cold,” he began, “and my blanket had a hole in it—a large hole.”

“Yes, yes!” said the examiner, irritably; “never mind your blanket and the hole. Come to the point.”

Dick had no intention of coming to the point. He had something to tell, and he meant to tell it in his own way.

“The night was cold,” he continued, “very cold, and the wind stole like a thief through the hole in the blanket, which is an old blanket, and might be
replaced by a better one. Men got up and stamped their feet—some walked about until it was far into the night. Then for a time there was a silence, and in that silence I heard the voice of the lost spirit calling aloud—even the spirit that inhabits the body of the night-locust. I drew my blanket over my head, and was afraid. Some one was to die."

“What nonsense is this?”

“Let him go on, sir,” said the interpreter. “This man is no fool. Some one was to die—who was it?”

Dick shook his hand above his head. “I listened. Some one rose up. It was Captain Blaine; he talked a little, then went away, and by-and-by the sentry came back. I listened, for well I knew that now the spirit had called him out there into the darkness. Presently another arose softly, and like a snake it stole away. My ear was to the ground now, and I heard one exclaim in affright—such a noise as a man makes when he is surprised by some terrible thing. I knew the spirit terrified him; then I heard a blow, and I again covered my head. That is all.”

“So you believe that Captain Blaine was knocked down—whom by? Who did it, a locust or the spirit?” asked the examiner, angrily.

Dick looked grave. He did not like any one to make light of serious matters, and would give no more answers.

Rowe was now questioned, but he had not much light to throw upon the matter. All he could tell was that they had actually found traces of blood, and signs which led to the supposition that the missing officer had been captured.

“It is my opinion,” said Rowe, “that Captain Blaine was knocked on the head by some prowling Zulu, and that he is now alive.”

“There is some reason in that view,” observed one of the court.

“It does not account for the pistol-shot, however, nor for the loosening of Captain Blaine’s horse,” interposed the Colonel. “Do you think the Zulu carried out the whole plan?”

“Wal, it would be like the cussed savage to play such a trick.”

“You forgot,” interposed the Colonel, grimly, “that the Zulu, even if he had been cunning enough, would not have been able to select Captain Blaine’s horse from the troop.”

“I cannot understand why the horse was driven away or why the pistol was fired,” remarked an officer.

“If you will allow me a word,” said Dalston, calmly, “I may account for that mysterious circumstance. The assassin did not want any search made. He accordingly, I imagine, turned the horse adrift to give colour to the idea
that Blaine had purposely ridden away, and he fired the shot to cause an alarm, which would lead to an early march from the spot."

"Yes, that is an explanation which fits the scheming of an accomplished rascal, but not of a Zulu. Possibly the man may have thought that Blaine’s absence would have been attributed to his fear of an attack."

"Exactly," replied Dalston. "He calculated upon our thinking that Blaine had bolted under fear."

"If that view is to be accepted," said D’Arcy, warmly, "the man who struck the blow could have known nothing of Captain Blaine. He is not a man to run."

"Yet it does not bring us any nearer to an explanation of the affair. Captain Blaine, I believe, was a very popular officer among all ranks, and I cannot conceive why this treacherous attack should have been made upon him by one of his comrades."

"The thing is monstrous!" said Commandant D’Arcy, hotly. "Blaine had not a single enemy. My belief is that a Zulu planned the whole affair; watched us approach, marked Blaine out—you know he was a noticeable man on his big bay—and tracked him down after creeping among us."

"In that case," said Dalston, "he would have killed Captain Blaine and escaped, without running the perfectly senseless risk he did in getting the horse away."

The examiners were puzzled. Turn which way they liked, they could find no clue to the mystery.

"You see, too," said D’Arcy, "supposing one of our men had been dastard enough to do this deed, he would not have left his work unfinished; whereas, we have the explanation that he must have recovered and is now a prisoner."

Rowe made a movement as if he would speak.

"Well, what is it?"

"It seems to me I have struck a clue. The Prince was with us. The Zulu may have known it; what if he was ordered to take him prisoner, and mistook his man? Captain Blaine talked to the Prince before going on sentry, and was very much of the same height."

"By Jove! the man is right," said Baker.

This theory was turned over and examined; and the more they examined it, the more the officers were inclined to think they had hit upon the right explanation.

"A devilish deep plot!" remarked one. "I think we had better postpone the inquiry, and meanwhile send out spies to ascertain whether or no the Zulus have made a capture."
The court was rising when Captain Dalston, who had been in deep thought, suddenly raised his voice.

“I have a statement to make, which may or may not be of importance.”

“Proceed, sir,” said the examiners, resuming their seats.

“It involves a personal explanation, but you must kindly forgive that. The only ground you have apparently against the view that our unfortunate friend was basely and treacherously attacked by one of our men, is the absence of motive. I happen to know that one man has a strong interest in the death of Captain Blaine. He was, under circumstances which I can fully account for in private, sent out to spy upon Captain Blaine’s movements, and to prevent him complying with the conditions of a will, which I can also set before you. If he succeeded in his work, he was to receive a large sum of money. He was with us on patrol, and my firm belief is that he attempted to murder Captain Blaine in order to get rid of the trouble of watching him, and to make sure of his reward.”

“And that man is—”

“Private Rowe!”

“It is a thundering lie!” Rowe, who had been listening with a look of surprise in his eyes, sprang at his accuser and struck him a heavy blow.

“Put him under arrest,” said the Colonel, sternly, “for mutiny. The other charge will be inquired into.”

Rowe was seized, disarmed, and marched away.

Chapter 16 Among the Enemy

WHEN THE ZULU who had made such an easy capture of Blaine finished putting an edge to his assegai, he tried its sharpness by drawing it quickly across his captive’s riding-boots, with a grunt of satisfaction at each gaping gash made in the leather.

Then he poked the point of the spear in an absent, preoccupied way at the body of his captive, while he debated whether he should straightway kill his man, or slay him by inches, with intervals for a noonday nap, and a dinner off the remainder of the booty.

The idea of a long-drawn-out programme so tickled the Zulu that he made a harder thrust than he had intended, which exasperated Blaine. He drew his feet up and sent his heavy boots full into the other’s stomach.

The Zulu drew his knees up and squirmed in the dust, helpless as a maimed worm, but, happily for himself, safe from his now desperate captive, who, struggle as he might, could not loosen the bands that secured him to the post at his back.
The yellow dog, who probably thought his master was in a fit of silent mirth, rushed round and round, barking in great appreciation at this unaccustomed fun.

With a quavering, indrawn breath, that gave him an impression that he was swallowing knives, the warrior passed his hands over the pit of his stomach. He had never been so much surprised before in his life, and, as he moved his hands gently over the painful spot, he looked at Blaine reproachfully. Other prisoners he had taken in tribal warfare had not behaved so unreasonably. They had always awaited death with calmness, even indifference. It was just like a white man to kick like a dying buffalo.

Gradually he raised himself to a sitting position, and relieved his mind by calling the cur by every slanderous epithet he could remember under the trying circumstances. A black man, unless previously instructed by his Christian brother, does not possess the gift of swearing, but he is a professor in the use and application of insults.

The man drew so extravagantly upon his imagination for a supply of appropriate epithets that his mind was left as dry as the palm of his hand, and he resolved to take counsel with others as to the fittest way of killing the inconsiderate white man.

Accordingly, in a few minutes he was escorting his captive across the veldt in a direction due south.

They walked on steadily until the afternoon, with only one rest for refreshment, which consisted of a drink of water from a running stream and a bite of biltong.

Captain Blaine had scanned the horizon round and round time after time, but not a single human being had appeared within the radius of that wide circle. The silence over the land weighed upon him, subduing the gallant spirit of defiance into a feeling of dull despair. The very birds were voiceless. The knorhaans lowered their heads and ran through the grass out of his path; the great white-breasted pauws raised their long necks to watch him and his silent companion, or whirled away for a short distance on heavy wings.

Every step was taking him farther away from his friends and nearer to his fate, for he had no doubt that his death was but deferred, and he guessed that he was being taken to some spot where others, as well as his capturer, might see him die. And ever between those sombre thoughts there obtruded another.

“How,” he asked himself again and again, “had he become a prisoner? Who had stolen upon him and struck him down? What had become of his friends, and why had they not discovered him?”
These questions were beyond explanation, and only added bitterness to the despair in his heart.

Towards evening they passed between The Fingers, two conical-shaped hills, overlooking the tiny threadlike course of the Ityosi—a stream fateful to the house of Napoleon.\textsuperscript{33}

Soon after, the warrior raised his voice in a shout that rolled through the still air, until the waves of sound echoed against the front of a square mount, quite a mile away.

Back came an answering call, and the savage from his deep chest sent a reply—as a woman might send a snatch of gossip across a narrow street to a friend opposite.

The native, in his home upon the plains, does without telephones or electric wires; he can shout his message by word of mouth from hill-top to hill-top, in a thundering roll that no civilized man can imitate.

Blaine lifted his weary eyes, and saw a circle of huts at the base of the mountain. That, then, was to be the end of his journey—and the finish of his life. He looked upon the grim mountain a moment and it faded from his view. In its place he saw an old familiar room in his English home far away, and in it the image of his grey-haired, sweet-faced mother, as she looked upon him with lips that moved in silent prayer the day he said good-bye.

They crossed a wide horse-shoe-shaped donga which formed a natural moat about the mountain, and the young officer saw something which drove the greyish tint from his face and the weakness from his heart.

The warriors of the kraal had evidently been engaged at Isandlana. They had brought back from the field two of the heavy transport waggons packed high with booty. Blood-stained helmets, belts, and boots, stripped from the dead, were scattered about the ground.

One of the long yokes attached to the heavy “trek” chain had been set on end, with the “skeis” (throat-pieces) still in. On the summit was a battered helmet, and rigged out below, on the skeis, was a red coat gashed in a dozen places with broad assegai stabs.

As Blaine’s eye fell upon this grim scarecrow they lit up with a sudden flame, for he read in it a story of heroism. That torn and bloody coat told of one who died fighting to the last against overwhelming odds.

He could see in fancy the grim, stern face of the soldier—his back braced to a rock. He could see the steely flash of his eyes, the fixed and silent mouth; he could almost hear the clash of the bayonet against the spears, and the dull thud as spear or bayonet struck home. He could see the dark blood trickling from broad wounds on that gallant breast; he could hear the low, hoarse cries of the fierce-eyed Zulus. He could see how the end came to the great fight—
how the bright eyes grew dull; how the bayonet-thrusts flagged from loss of blood, and how the dark-skinned warriors drew away from their dead, and looked with awe on the man who had met death without a cry. The bulldog courage that makes no noise is the most unquenchable of all.

The survivors had stripped the coat from the body, and here exposed it; not in mockery maybe, but to remind them of the fight—each gaping wound a diploma of honour to him who could say, “Here my assegai went in.”

Blaine faced with calmness the crowd of reckless young warriors who gathered about him. They glared into his eyes, flourished their assegais before his face, and tried the firmness of his nerves in a variety of ways, but without effect.

His capturer expostulated. One of these careless young ruffians might spoil the fun at any moment by trying the quality of his assegai, so Blaine was taken at once to the chief, who was standing among his indunas.

As the chief and the prisoner exchanged glances, the one recognized Sirayo, and the other saw before him the officer who had pursued him out of the camp. A silence of several seconds ensued and Blaine saw a ring of glittering eyes fixed intently upon the chief. Evidently the men were waiting for the order to kill, and he braced himself up for the death-blow.

Sirayo, whose tall erect figure was draped in a kaross of blue monkey skins, showed none of the fierce eagerness of his followers. His face was impassive; if he felt any curiosity about the capture of the young officer, he did not show it.

The silence was growing unbearable to Blaine, when his capturer broke in upon it with a thrilling whoop. Then he bounded into the air without any warning, and raised a cloud of dust by his subsequent movements. He hurled imaginary assegais, avoided imaginary bullets, dodged, leapt, struck, stabbed at the air, and finally, with a terrific blow of his knobkerrie, brought down an imaginary foe.

The man was not mad. He was merely explaining in his exaggerated way how he had put a body of the enemy to flight and captured Blaine. His dramatic, acrobatic performance was greeted with shrill whistlings, and handfuls of dust were thrown at him in testimony of his bravery.

Sirayo listened courteously to this well-acted lie, then uttered a few words, and Blaine was taken to one of the huts, in whose dark and smoky interior he passed the night, and the next day and night, without any incident to relieve him, or any sign, beyond the gleaming eyes of his sentry, and a calabash of amasi, that he was remembered.
On the second day of his imprisonment, as he lay bound, with his face to the small door, so that he could look over the sloping ground, he saw a native woman coming up with swinging stride.

He watched her coming with a vague interest, wondering at her upright figure and lithe movements, and noting how the young warriors drew from her path or smiled upon her stealthily, as though afraid to show their admiration openly.

She came in silence right up to the kraal, when she uttered one word of greeting, and stood resting with her hands upon her stick and her eyes downcast.

An induna demanded her business, and in the conversation that ensued Blaine gathered that in some way he was the object of her mission. An uncomfortable feeling passed through him that she had come to claim him to afford sport for the women of some kraal; then, with a keen start of pleasure and surprise, he recognized in her the Zulu girl of Kopje Alleen.

After a while the girl and man walked on; and as she did not again appear, the hope that Miss Rath was in some way working for his release died away. The heat of the noonday sun, too, almost stifled him; and the inverted bowl-shaped roof above him was like an oven. He envied the bare skin of the savage at the door, and would have sold his life for one delicious plunge into a pool of ice-cold water.

As he stretched himself out, with his cheek to the hard floor for the coolness in it, he presently felt a spray of water on his head. He sat up in astonishment, without speaking, while the cool moisture was sprinkled over his face, and on his parched tongue, which he thrust out as boys do in a shower.

A low laugh added to his astonishment, a laugh bright with mirth, but yet soft and melodic.

“Who are you?” he asked, breathlessly.

“I am Pala, Inkose—but come out into the light, and we will talk better.”

Blaine followed the dark figure of the girl into the light, and looked at her hungrily, as one who has many thoughts, yet knows not which to give utterance to. Pala continued to sprinkle water over his face with a bundle of bushes, which she drew from a calabash of water.

“Now, Pala, unbind my arm; I won’t attempt to escape. That’s it! Now I can listen to you. First, tell me about your mistress.”

“Ah!” said Pala, with a cunning smile, “that is good. I was waiting for you to speak of her. She is well; it is she who sent me to you.” Pala paused, and drew a deep sigh. “She is sad at heart because you are not with her. Have you many cattle?”
Blaine started at this unmistakable confession. “Eh—what—cattle—do these people here require ransom?”

“Oh, I forget! The white men do not give cattle for a girl when they marry. Never mind, my mistress has many sheep, and she can keep you in comfort and idleness.”

Blaine smiled feebly. Was this an offer of marriage that was being made to him?—if so, the young woman was going to the point with a vengeance. He glanced around for inspiration, and caught the fierce eyes of a jealous warrior fixed on him. “Humph!” he thought, “the conditions are not favourable to matrimonial schemes.”

“Did your mistress ask you to mention this matter to me, Pala?”

“Yes,” said that mendacious young woman; “a woman who loves is anxious until the man of her choice is secured. Is that not so?” she demanded, triumphantly.

“Well, they are not usually so rapid in their plans.”

“Oh, yes, I know!” exclaimed Pala, with a snap of her fingers, “they do not tell it you in words, but they show it in other ways; only men, whether they be black or white, are dull of vision.” Here she flashed her dark eyes swiftly towards the chief’s hut.

“My mistress wishes you to be of comfort. If she can secure your escape, she will—and only she can, for not the whole army could take you alive from Sirayo. I will see the chief to-night,” she went on, shyly, with drooping lashes, “and perchance he may be graciously inclined. In the mean time, give me some message to take to my mistress, that she may know I have really seen you.”

Blaine thought upon what he should say, but he felt, with a tinge of annoyance, how difficult a thing it was to shape even one brief message that would convey his thanks for her kindness and his sense of her regard for him. The blunt directness of Pala’s message appealed to him for an equally plain reply, but his good feeling saved him from sending a message which would have mortally offended the self-respect of Miss Rath.

At last, by a happy inspiration, he drew out the portraits of his mother and his little sweetheart.

“Quick!” said Pala, hurriedly, “we must not talk longer. The men are growing angry.”

Blaine, with a sigh, passed over his treasures; and Pala, as she took them, looked upon the two faces anxiously.

“Yah!” she exclaimed, in astonishment, as she gazed on the brown eyes of the little girl, “this is she herself, my mistress!”
Chapter 17  A Quarrel

CAPTAIN BLAINE, at the startled exclamation of the Zulu girl, tried to recover the photographs, to trace the likeness that had impressed her, but his wrist was sharply struck by a kerry—and he was bound, and hurried once again into the hut.

He sat awake that night, trying to recall the face of Kate Dalston, the little sweetheart who had been set apart for his wife by his grim old uncle Nicholson, but there was always some feature that would not fit in with the perfect face of Mary Rath. The two were alike, yet unlike; sufficiently alike to account for Pala’s mistake, yet to be dismissed as one of those curious resemblances so commonly met with.

As he looked out on the shimmer of silvery moonlight sparkling on the dewy grass, he became aware of two people slowly moving to and fro. Their voices were low, sibilant, and musical, and one of them laughed shyly as the other bent his head down. With a sense of the unfitness of things that would strike one at the spectacle of a tiger in love, he noticed that one was the dreaded chief, and that the other was Pala.

Here, truly, was something astonishing; and the young officer, who looked upon the Zulu as a man without sentiment, thought he had made a discovery.

There he made a mistake. The day of romance for the savage may be brief, but it is full of warmth.

“Gi—ya—tanda ni” (“I love thee”), said Sirayo, bending his proud head to look down into the glowing eyes upturned to his.

That melodious phrase rang in Blaine’s ear, and soothed him into dreams as full of the promise of happiness as though his couch were not a thin mat and his pillow a curved piece of wood.

“Gi—ya—tanda ni!” The melody in some subtle way linked him closer to Mary.

His awaking rudely dispelled these visions. In fact, he was dragged out of the hut with such violence that he expected the final moment had arrived. A group of young warriors gesticulated and shouted in a manner which plainly showed that Sirayo was not in the kraal. Blaine looked about for Pala, but could not see her, until, following the gaze of a love-sick youth by his side, he saw a small body of men, with them the chief’s white horse, disappearing in the distance, in the direction of Kopje Alleen.

Pala’s mediation with Sirayo had, then, been of no avail, and he was to be left to his fate.
One of the young warriors thrust his hand violently into Blaine’s face, and in his disgust he dashed his bound and clenched hands into the Zulu’s face, laying the latter on his back.

The other warriors laughed loudly, which so exasperated the discomfited Zulu that he made a vicious lunge at Blaine with his assegai, which would have finished the young man’s career at once if a ringed Kaffir had not thrown his shield across the prisoner’s body.

A tremendous hubbub ensued. The young warrior abused the ringed man, and the quarrel spread to the others, the married men ranging themselves on one side and the unmarried men on the other. A moment the two lines stood facing, heads up, nostrils expanded, shields on the left, and assegais at the ready, then with a shout they rushed together. Shield struck against shield, and the long sharp blades flashed in the sun. The dark mass swayed to and fro, then the ringed men, outnumbered, turned and fled, some to the right and some to the left. With a yell of victory the others started in pursuit, and Blaine was left alone, with half-a-dozen dead and dying men about him.

The suddenness and wild fury of the fight had left him spellbound, but the fierce shouts of the pursuing warriors brought back his faculties, and he felt that now was his chance or never.

A swift glance around showed that his only chance of escape lay up the face of the mountain, and in a few moments he was among the boulders at its base. Crouching down and keeping under shelter of the rocks and bushes, he struggled up until the steepness of the ascent baffled his movements, hampered as he was by the rheims about his wrists.

With feverish haste he tore with his teeth at the knot, but as this made no effect, he sawed the rheim against a jagged edge of the rock, cutting his skin severely. With his hands free, up he went, cautiously as he could, using feet, hands, and shoulders, the blood streaming from his hands and the sweat from his face, until, utterly exhausted, he threw himself on a flat rock on the summit.

A wild shout from below made him peer over the ridge, and he saw that his escape had been discovered. Warriors were casting round in circles for his spoor, and others—pursuers and pursued in the recent fight, their senseless fury gone—were hurrying back.

The fugitive allowed his eyes to wander over the plain, which stretched away from the mountain like a map, every hut, stream, and hillock distinct and clear in that bright atmosphere.

Before him, distant some eight miles, he saw the white speck in the midst of the small black mass, marking Sirayo and his men. The chief had stopped, and beyond was a tiny dot, which Blaine put down as Pala. As he watched,
Sirayo and his men moved towards the east, and took up a position by a small hillock, as though they sought protection.

Sweeping his eyes to the east, Blaine’s heart swelled with hope within him, for there, not six miles away, was a body of mounted men, led by some one on a grey charger. The flashing of a scabbard and the order of the march in column told him these were scouts from the army. They numbered about twenty, and were marching leisurely along, utterly unconscious, evidently, of the presence of the small band of Zulus to their right, and of the larger body in their immediate front.

The mountain was shut from the troop by a low range of hills—but before reaching that, the leader turned from his course and rode across the trickling Ityosi to a small kraal and maize-patch situated in the cleft of a ridge. Here the troop halted and dismounted.

“Surely,” muttered Blaine, “they will not off-saddle there.”

No, they did not intend to off-saddle, and Blaine breathed more freely, so keenly had he felt the blunder they were about to make. But with a sinking of the heart he saw from the smoke of the fires that the men were halting.

“Good Heavens!” he exclaimed, “why, they are not even posting a vedette on the beak above their camp. A whole army could steal upon them without their being any the wiser.”

He swept his gaze to where Sirayo should be, and saw the chief with his small body of men stealing swiftly down upon the troopers.

He jumped to his feet in his excitement, waving his arm and shouted out, “Look out! Look out!” forgetting all about the Zulus below, as well as the fact that his voice could not travel to the troopers.

A bullet whizzed by his ear. A startled glance revealed to him the presence of a score of Zulus swiftly ascending, the first not fifty feet below.

Escape by flight was out of the question. He looked around for a place of concealment. A fissure in the rock attracted his attention, and without a moment’s hesitation he slipped in, and disappeared from view.

**Chapter 18  Sirayo Accounts for One**

THE DAY BLAINE ESCAPED from the clutches of the Zulus, owing to the fighting devil in them, the Prince Imperial, with Lieutenant Carey and some score of Irregular Horse, had gone out on a flying reconnaissance.

The Prince was burning to prove his mettle. The amusements of the camp, such as they were, had no attraction for him. He was not content to idle away his time in genial companionship until the slow march of the col-
umn brought on a collision with the enemy; he would go out of his way and seek adventure.

With his ardour, and the magnetism he was even now exercising over his comrades, he would have proved another Rupert37 as a leader of cavalry. But his very eagerness bred in him a species of reckless daring which unsuited him for any scouting duty against a cunning and relentless foe. Had his adventurous nature been understood, he would not have been sent out on a mission requiring caution above everything.

He struck away for some twelve miles into the rolling grasslands without seeing a solitary Zulu, beyond two helpless and homeless old women, whom the Zulus, with the indifference of savages to old age, had abandoned to their foes, and whom those foes, with the wanton cruelty of war, had deprived of shelter.

The two old people, with bleared eyes and feeble limbs, crouched under the cover of a bush beside a smouldering heap of ashes, where their home had stood. There, exposed to the biting winds of the early morning and the dews of the night, without food, they had lingered on for some days.

These were the only enemy the Prince encountered, and they blessed him for the pity in his large grey eyes, and for the food he gave them from his wallet. This was no heroic action; but the mumbled gratitude of the forlorn creatures was something to be more valued then, had he but known it, than the smiles of beauty.

About the time when Blaine had seen the troop the men were hungry, and the time had come to make the inevitable coffee. The Prince turned aside and rode up to a kraal, snugly built in the cleft of a sharp stony ridge. A small stream ran through the cleft, and glided into the sandy bed of the little Ityosi river. A circular cattle kraal of stone, with a semicircle of huts, spanned the mouth of the ravine, and at the back, blocking up the little gorge, was a thick high growth of maize and imphee. The feathered tufts of the sweet cane and maize stood well above the head of a tall man, and the patch could have given shelter to a hundred.

Between the stone ring of the kraal and the huts was an open space, and here the men dismounted. Not a vedette was posted on the ridge above, not a man was sent into the patch of maize, not a single precaution was taken.

Contempt for the foe, and a careless disregard for the ordinary watchfulness of a scouting party, distinguished the little group. They started fires, boiled the water in their canteens, sipped the hot coffee, smoked, chatted, and laughed with the contagion of good-fellowship, and in the genial abandon of lusty youth.
They did all that they should not have done, and bitter were the consequences.

While they laughed, the enemy, grim and earnest, stole upon them.

While they kept no outlook, the quick sight of the ever-watchful Sirayo had detected them. While the young leader, confident in his unquenchable spirit, laughed at the idea of a surprise, another leader of men had seen the opportunity afforded by the other’s carelessness, and was prompt to take advantage of it.

Sirayo had watched the body of mounted men halt at the mouth of the ravine, and making a detour to escape observation, he galloped down to within half a mile of the spot, and leaving his horse in a donga, ran swiftly down to where the patch of maize showed green on the side of the ravine.

Stepping into the stream, he went up cautiously yard by yard, moving his feet without lifting them out of the water, so that there should be no splashing, until he was at the very edge of the plantation. One of the troopers, a Frenchman, trolled out a snatch of a song; and under cover of the noise, Sirayo stepped out and advanced up the narrow pathway.

Between the thick green stalks of the maize his eyes gleamed upon the happy, careless group, and his lips were drawn back over his strong white teeth in a snarl that boded mischief. As he watched, a native servant with the troop looked round uneasily, not liking the position, and Sirayo drew back into the corn.

He had just done so when the servant stood up and went down to the stream, over the very path the chief had traversed. His quick eye detected the footprints, and, with a look of grave anxiety, he hurried back to warn the Prince that Zulus were about.

The warning was disregarded. The finger of fate was working, lulling the mind of the gallant young soldier into a fatal sense of security. The black man, however, sniffed danger in the air, as the wild buck scents the storm afar off, and he slipped away, never more to be seen.

Sirayo glided back through the maize, and waved his hand to his men. They rushed down like greyhounds. Each was appointed his place, and the small band slid into the green corn like shadows, noiselessly as serpents, and as deadly. The feathered plumes of the imphee waved above them violently. A watchful eye might have noticed that they were not shaken by the wind.

Silently they wriggled along, their ears alert, their muscles strained like whipcord, their lips twitching with the eagerness of hounds, and their eyes fixed before them. In their left hands were the stabbing assegais, in the right the Martini rifles taken at Isandlana.
At last they have reached the very edge of the maize, and some of them are so near to the unconscious troopers that by reaching out their spears they could touch them. The troopers have tightened girths, and buckled up their canteens. They are waiting the order to mount.

Sirayo is about to make the signal, when the Prince, with his hand upon the pommel of his saddle, in his clear calm voice, gives his order—“Prepare to mount! Mount!” They are his last words.

As the men swing into their saddles, their ears are stunned by a thunderous volley from their feet. For a moment they are amazed, then a panic seizes them, and every man looks to himself. Wild with terror, the horses fly by the huts and up the stones beyond.

The Prince, however, does not follow. At the startling report, his spirited grey makes a wild plunge forward. The Prince runs by its side a score of yards, then, with his hand on the pommel, makes a desperate bound. It was not to be. The treacherous leather rends, and he falls beneath his horse’s feet. The grey dashes away riderless, snorting in alarm.

In a moment the Prince is on his feet. His comrades, who should have turned to save him, are flying in craven fear. A trooper by his side, whose horse has been shot, is struck down with an assegai, and the wild Usutu war-cry rings out as the warrior withdraws his reeking blade. Another trooper on the left is next overtaken, and as the Prince passes him, he hears the sickening thud of the assegai as it drives into the body.

He draws sword and revolver as he runs, looking about for some place where he can stay at bay. There is the spot, a grassy hollow wide enough for two men to cross swords, and here the son of France takes his last stand.

His grey eyes flash; his finely-shaped head is thrown proudly back as he awaits the onset. They come with fierce shouts, their assegais all red, for each has washed his spear in the bodies of the dead troopers.

One man falls wounded before the steady aim—another reels—and yet a third. Then the pistol is thrown aside as useless, and the bright sword flashes in circles as the Prince parries thrust after thrust.

But see—with a bound another foe comes on the scene, and the warriors draw back to let their chief do battle. Assegai against sword—the trained arm of the foremost master of the spear against the accomplished fencer—the leader of a hundred fights against the young, ardent, but unpractised soldier.

Foot to foot, breast to breast, face to face, they stand, warriors both by training, widely separated, yet akin in one thing—that neither knows fear. The grey eyes, stern and unflinching, meet the furious glare from the black eyes; but in the one is the sad, haunting spirit of destiny, in the other the
consciousness of victory. A moment they front each other, then the fight rages—and is over.

A few lightning strokes are made; the Zulu chief springs to one side, and the end comes. The blade is driven with such terrific force that the point of it comes out under the right shoulder-blade, and the young Napoleon falls without a groan.

A wild shout is raised over the fallen hero, and every warrior strikes his spear twice into the body, with that terrible hoarse shout of “Usutu!” with a twist of the wrist as the spear drives in. Then they take the Prince’s sword, his helmet, his uniform, leaving only a golden chain about his neck, with a tiny locket suspended thereto.

Across his abdomen a keen blade is drawn, severing the skin to a length of some six inches, and the body is left on the grass face upwards, with the arms outstretched in the shape of a cross, and twenty-five gaping wounds in the white skin.

There it lies through the afternoon and long night, gleaming in the pale moonlight like a marble figure; and there it is, undisturbed, next morning when Commandant Raaf and his scouts from General Wood’s column discover it, and when the Lancers, with their pennons waving, come after with the ambulance waggon.38

The men stand around, speaking low, softened by the calm look on the upturned face, saddened beyond expression by the pity of it, and yet with a feeling of bitter shame underlying their grief.

After one long look, each man goes away to be alone with his thoughts for a few moments.

“I wish to God,” says one, “I had never seen this—it will be with me to my dying day.”

“And I wish I had not lived to see it,” says another.

A chaplain in his white surplice stoops, and with his knife cuts away a piece of the blood-stained grass from beneath the body, and puts it away in a match-box—a sacrilege which not one of the rough soldiers around would have been capable of.

The lieutenant was met by General Wood and Colonel Buller, on that fatal First of June, three miles from the spot, still flying.

He drew rein to give a breathless account of the attack by an overwhelming force of Zulus.

“Where is the Prince?” asked the Colonel.

“I do not know, sir.”
“You ought to be shot!” said the Colonel, sternly, with a snap from his cold, grey eyes.

Sirayo, afraid lest he himself should be surprised and overwhelmed, gave the order to retreat, and the warriors left the bodies of the two troopers unstripped.

Destiny had claimed her son. If ever fate overrules the actions of men, it had shown its influence here: in selecting the only spot for an ambush for miles around; in lulling the Prince into a false security; in finding the implement ready to carry out its inscrutable work; and in leaving him—alone out of his troop dismounted—when a second of time would have saved him.

“One is dead,” said Sirayo, fixing his bloodshot eyes on his dripping spear—“one of those who pursued me. The other two must die also, and tonight I will slay the one who is prisoner at the kraal.”

It was well for Blaine that he had escaped, but he himself did not think so at that moment.

**Chapter 19  A Terrible Position**

WHEN BLAINE SLIPPED through the fissure in the rock he dropped quite ten feet, falling to a thickness of sand which had drifted in through the opening above for ages past.

A shaft of light from the opening spread in a haze of greyish hue, by which he could dimly make out that he had fallen into a cavern. As his eyes grew more accustomed to the gloom, he saw that the side walls were perpendicular and smooth to a height of eight feet, when they suddenly narrowed to the fissure, and that they almost closed on the end nearest the heart of the mountain. The other end, towards the face of the mountain, was shrouded in deepest darkness, and on groping his way towards it, he found there was a large hole leading farther away.

He made these observations swiftly, and then drew back against the wall, for he heard voices above.

From the startled exclamations, it was evident that his pursuers did not know what to make of his mysterious disappearance. He could hear them thrusting their assegais into the bushes, and trace their movements, whenever they came near the opening, by the hollow rumbling in the cave.

At last they all came back from their hopeless search, and from the constant recurrence of the word “umpagati” he knew they attributed his disappearance to witchcraft.

Then a fierce cry, followed by quick and excited speech, warned him that they had made some discovery. Presently he caught the word “soldiers” in
Zulu, followed by the name of Sirayo, and he guessed that the men had detected the presence of the troop of Horse.

On leaning forward and looking up, he saw the head of a warrior bent forward in absorbed inspection of some scene which was being played. Blaine guessed what that scene was.

In the strange look of expectation in the Zulu’s face, in the twitching of his lips, he could almost trace the stealthy movements of Sirayo upon the doomed troopers; and when the warrior suddenly held his breath, he knew that the supreme moment had come; and when in uncontrollable exultation the man shouted his war-cry, Blaine, forgetting all, groaned aloud.

There was a movement above, and another Zulu, who had been sitting on the rock, leant over and peered into the fissure. Blaine made sure he was detected, for the man seemed to look straight upon him, and in his alarm he drew back hurriedly, making a noise with his feet.

The quick ear of the savage detected the sound, and his “Yoh!” of surprise, shouted into the hollow cave, rolled with a weird, booming sound, and went dying away in a hollow groan through the opening at the far end.

A few words were spoken above, and from the sound Blaine could tell that several Zulus had stretched themselves flat on their stomachs above. The bars of shadow on the curtain of light told him that they were looking down, but he knew that, look as long as they liked, they would not be able to pierce the darkness.

For several minutes they listened in complete silence, until he made certain they would hear the loud beating of his heart.

Then in that intense silence there came another sound, at first low, then more and more distinct.

As he listened intently, trying to locate it, he found that the noise came from something within the cave, and next it came from the hole at the far end.

It was of a slithering sound, coming from a soft, sliding, stealthy movement, that had something in it of a treacherous nature; and as he listened to it, he felt an unaccountable horror steal over him. He knew not why, but it seemed to him that something awful would soon break upon his sight.

The strange, soft noise was evidently detected by the sharp ears above—for some of the men spoke in low tones, and their voices, descending again, re-echoed through the cavern.

As the sound rolled away in sullen murmurs, Blaine noticed with relief that the slithering movement had ceased. He lifted his hand to his throat, which felt dry and parched, when a sharp hiss from the corner forced an exclamation of alarm from his lips.
The Zulus heard it, and their tongues moved freely as each gave his opinion as to the cause of the noise, and the best way of investigating the mystery.

There was apparently a difference of opinion, one holding out that it was *umpagati*, while the others laughed at this. At last silence was again restored, and then a sudden blaze of light descended into the cave.

A Zulu had fastened a piece of tinder to the end of an assegai and lowered it.

This spark of light was a comfort to Blaine; but though he would have looked long at it, his eyes were drawn away to the hole at the end.

He saw the dark circular outline, and that was all. No—within the dark circle something shone with a hard metallic lustre. As he looked, this dull reflection grew brighter, and resolved itself into two fixed points of light.

The stealthy, slithering noise was resumed, the lights flamed with greater brilliancy, they reached the pale radiance cast by the flaming tinder, and then, with horror, he saw the hideous head of a huge snake appear.

This flat head was thrust out a yard from the hole, on the muscular neck, from which the skin hung in folds, and there it was held still as death, except for the darting of the silken tongue.

The fixed stare of those lidless eyes was terrible. He tried to look them down, but they flamed with a fearful greenish hue of malignant rage, and to escape their influence he turned away, feeling the strain upon him in a stupor of the brain. He reeled and clutched at the assegai, but this was snatched away, and the Zulus above shouted in triumph as they saw his body sway into view.

He stood below, once again, in darkness; a rifle barrel clanged in the fissure above, and a bullet almost grazed his head. The report confused him by its terrible reverberations, as it rolled round the enclosed space.

Then, blended with the roar of the report, he caught the fierce hissing of the boa, and he sprang to the farther end of the cave.

He had just leapt away, when another torch of tinder was lowered; and the Zulus peered down to see the effect of their shot.

The snake ceased its furious hissing at the appearance of the light, but its head swayed about from side to side, with its red jaws distended.

The spectacle was appalling, and, though a brave man, he felt his heart die within him at the thought of the awful fate in store.

With a swift movement the reptile darted its head along the floor of the cave, until it lay stretched out half its length in dark, sinuous curves. Blaine crouched back against the wall; the boa raised its head, and glared at him.
The light from its eyes crossed, and seemed to pierce his brain in one lurid flame.

He felt its hot and foul breath on his face, and then, as it swayed to and fro before him, he could tell that the huge coils were gathering one on the other in preparation for the last spring.

In his agony he shouted out, and struck the creature in the mouth. With a furious hiss it dashed its head against his face, and he fell back almost blinded. With his back in the crevice of the rock, he was for the moment safe from the coils, but at any moment it might seize him in its jaws and drag him out. Even now he saw the horrible red throat above him, when another report rang out, and the snake writhed in pain, hissing furiously.

The same instant there was a movement above, and when once again a waning spark of light was lowered, Blaine saw a huge Zulu hanging by one arm from the rock, an assegai in the disengaged hand, while his flashing eyes searched the gloomy cavern.

One instant the savage hung suspended, then in a second his body was caught in the coils of the serpent.

With an awful shriek the warrior fell to the ground, and his companions above fled with the cry of “Ikanti!” (the Evil One).

Blaine was paralysed with horror. He fixed his eyes wildly on the bottom of the cave, where there was an indistinguishable mass of moving coils and twitching muscles. Ever and anon he distinguished the swaying of the hideous head through the pale shaft of light, and once he caught the fixed and awful stare of human eyes.

He heard the Zulu gasp under the tightening strain, then a low moan of intense agony reached him, and he knew that he was alone in that dark hole with a dead man and his destroyer. He listened a moment to the horrible sound as the serpent compressed its muscles, then slipped to the ground in a stupor, with the sickening noise of crunching bones in his ear.

When he gathered his senses, he found the cave in intense darkness, and looking up through the faint line in the roof above, he caught the glimmer of a star. A deep sigh from the other end of the cave sent a cold thrill through him. This was followed by a regular succession of gasps of a nature that brought a cold sweat to the brow of the young officer, for he realized that the serpent was in the act of swallowing its victim.

In its straining efforts, the great coils of the snake writhed about the floor, and in one of these movements the thin tail struck against Blaine’s leg, round which it coiled in a firm twist. He dared not move, and sat from hour to hour while the python used his leg as the lever, when it wanted to bring its constricting powers into play.
Chapter 20  A Rescue

THE HORRORS of that awful night left a lasting impression on the young British officer; they dried up the fount of merriment in his nature, and made sleep almost a terror to him for many months.

Some time in the night—it seemed an age—the pressure round the leg relaxed, and the coils were drawn slowly over the sand for a few feet, when the regular breathing of the gorged reptile warned him that it slept.

He attempted to change his position, when his leg bent under him, and he had to rub it vigorously to restore the blood which had been forced out by the pressure.

When he rubbed, he pondered over his position, but the more he dwelt upon it, the more hopeless it appeared. Get out through the fissure he could not, and remain in that horrible hole for another night was impossible.

There was only one chance of escape that presented itself to him, and that was of the slightest. It was through the hole by which the python had entered. The chance was indeed small. In the first place, the hole was probably not large enough; in the second, he was not sure that it led to any opening; and lastly, its passage was barred by the serpent.

Finally, however, he made up his mind to take the desperate course, and at the first ray of light which struggled through the crack above he warily moved forward, feeling about with his toe gently, to locate the sleeping monster.

He struck against something hard, and picked up the assegai which the Zulu had dropped. With the butt of this he softly probed the cave ahead, and could not suppress a shudder as he touched the coiled body.

The creature hissed at the touch, and its great diamond-shaped head was slowly advanced a yard or two, until it rested on the spot where the ray of light shone on a dark stain of blood.

Its forked tongue darted out from the grim jaws menacingly, but its stony eyes were dull, and the muscles along its neck were flaccid.

A wave of disgust and rage surged through Blaine; he poised the assegai, then drove it with a fierce thrust right through the prone head, and before the writhing coils could overwhelm him, he darted head first into the hole beyond.

He wriggled along in mad haste, with an awful sense that the serpent would seize him from behind, darted into a nest of large eggs, which smashed under his weight, releasing a number of half-hatched pythons, which hissed and squirmed. With a groan of horror he scrambled on, the tunnel narrowing at every foot, until it caught him fast by the shoulders.
Here he remained, panting and fighting for breath, unable to advance, and afraid to retreat, with a strong musky smell assailing his nostrils, and foul, damp air passing into his lungs at every laboured breath. Intense darkness completed the horror of his position, and a strange sensation of light-headedness came over him. In another hour, if he had remained in that state, he would have grown delirious, if not mad.

Fortunately, some of the young pythons, in their blind movements, followed him, and the cold touch on his legs acted upon his nerves like a spark on a barrel of gunpowder. With a cry of disgust, he forced himself through the narrow place, leaving a part of his coat behind, and found himself able to move more freely.

Then a cool draught gave him renewed strength, and the next instant, with his lungs drinking in the pure air and his eyes blinking at the glorious light of day, he found himself on the face of the precipice up which he had climbed the day before. He rested on a ledge of rock, pressing his lips against a cold stone for the moisture in it, then gradually roused himself.

He looked below upon the circle of huts, and saw a number of dark-skinned warriors clustered about fires at the morning meal, and then he glanced over the country, which stretched like a map before him to the Isandlana range on the left and Hlobane Mountain to the right. Afar off he saw two black specks moving abreast, but at wide distances apart. He settled himself to watch these with a lingering hope that they were friends.

As they advanced, there came into view behind them three dark lines, and he drew a deep sigh of relief. Buller and his rough Horse were evidently out in force, and very soon it was plain to him that they were making direct for the stronghold below.

The scouts thrown out in advance took a zig-zag course as they swerved to right or left to mount a ridge or search a donga, but the mass behind came on steadily at a brisk walk. One of the three troops, it was soon apparent, was not composed of rough Horse. The waving pennons and the large English horses marked that column out as a detachment of Lancers.41

At the kraal below the Zulus had no suspicion that an attack was imminent. They sat about the fires chatting with that wealth of gesture and redundancy of description which characterizes the savage man, for whom time has little importance.

When the leading scout of the advancing force topped the ridge facing the square mount, and his shadow, outlined in gigantic shape by the young sun, was thrown almost up to the kraal, they did not see him.

The man remained but a moment in dark silhouette against the blazing dawn, then galloped at full speed back to the main body, which paused
to receive his news. The other scouts were called in, and the column crept along the ridge, disappearing from Blaine’s sight, and he eagerly waited for their reappearance.

Soon they topped the ridge in extended line, paused a moment, then thundered down to the donga.

As the roar of the charge broke suddenly on the ears of the Zulus, they jumped up, seized their assegais, shields, and rifles, and clustered together in an excited mob. Then a warrior, standing high above his fellows, lifted his hand for silence, and at his deep words of command the men spread out like a fan, and fell back upon the rocks at the base of the mountain.

There they formed up in a half-moon, with the horns resting on the donga at either side, the formation plainly visible to the watcher above, but utterly hidden from the view of the horsemen.

These crossed the donga at two points, and rushed up to the kraal, which they found deserted. Blaine now caught the word of command, “dismount,” sounding clear in the ominous silence, and again cheered his comrades as they ran up on foot to fire the huts. His voice was drowned by a tremendous volley, as the hidden Zulus suddenly poured in their fire, and for a moment the troopers wavered in face of the pelting hail of bullets. Then a tall officer—Blaine recognized D’Arcy—advanced with regulation stride, and paused before the centre hut, a mark to the enemy. The bullets struck about his feet, but the Commandant heeded them not, and proceeded to fill his pipe. This done, he lit a match on the sole of his boot, puffed out a few whiffs, and applied the nearly burnt-out match to the dry thatch, while his men, encouraged by his coolness, faced the storm.

The Colonel, a few yards in advance, to get clear of the driving smoke, studied the position of the enemy with his quick eye, but could see no opening. As he stood, the dust was thrown up between his feet by a well-aimed bullet.

“Here, my man,” he said to his orderly, “lend me your rifle a minute.”

There was a sharp crack, a loud cry from a Zulu, and the rifle was handed back with the remark, “That fellow should have aimed better.”

A few officers gathered about the Colonel, persuading him to try and carry the position by a charge.

“Well, gentlemen, if I held that mountain, I would defy a brigade to dislodge me without guns; but if your men would like to make an attempt, well and good. Let two companies of the Light Horse protect the right and left wings. Advance!”
Blaine saw the men spread out in skirmishing order, and charge up to the rocks; but at the same time he noticed the Zulus slipping away from the centre to strengthen the horns.

When the troopers poured up over the rocks there was not a Zulu to meet them, but while they looked about a voice rang out in trumpet tones, giving some order in Zulu, and a swarm of black warriors closed in at a rush, from right and left, overlapping the flanks. They were held back for a moment by the two companies, then they rushed in.

Amongst the rocks the heavily-booted troopers were at a disadvantage. They could have held the position only at the loss of their horses, and the order to retire was given.

There was one sharp collision, a series of fierce hand-to-hand fights, and the troopers regained their chargers. They mounted and charged upon their foes, who melted away, and again formed up behind the rocks. The men would have dearly liked another brush, but the Colonel, having proved the hopelessness of a charge against a wily foe in such a position, would waste no more men or ammunition.

The Zulus left their retreat with mocking cries and shouts of “ju” (victory), and some of them rushed off towards the smouldering ashes. Looking to see what was the object of their haste, Blaine discovered a wounded trooper crawling along on hands and knees. This man, seeing he was pursued, turned slowly round, rested his carbine on an anthill, and dropped the leading Zulu in his track. The others, however, rushed on, and it was evident that a few seconds would see the end of the tragedy.

Blaine looked towards the slowly retreating column to see if help would be afforded, and at the instant an officer turned his head to look back.

In a second his horse shot out from the ranks and swept up. Blaine felt his heart go to his mouth, as he watched the race. His eyes glanced feverishly from the leaping stride of the Zulus to see the rush of the horse. The distance which separated the rescuer from the wounded man was treble the distance which lay between him and the Zulus, but the horse, a magnificent black charger, swept over the ground like the wind.

The horse was first at the spot, but his terrific speed carried him by, and the Zulus, letting him pass, rushed on to their victim. This man, however, meant to die hard. A bullet from his carbine dropped another Zulu, and he faced the others with his revolver. As they paused to make the final rush, the horse and its rider swept down upon them again, and the sharp crack of the revolver made them look to their safety. The rider rose in his stirrups and hurled his pistol at the head of one Zulu, who fell like a log, then with his sword he fought like a demon, his mighty strength forcing the guard of his enemies, who came thicker and thicker from the main body. Now he
sprang from the saddle, lifted the wounded man to his vacant seat, and with his hand on the stirrup ran by the side of his horse through the thick of the enemy, who thrust at him with their spears.

Escape for either seemed impossible, but with a ringing hurrah the Lancers charged to the rescue, Drury Lowe on a small yellow pony at their head; and after a short struggle the Zulus rushed back to their retreat before the thunder of the great horses.

The Lancers closed around the gallant trooper and the man he had saved, and retreated in companies of four, to the lively sound of the bugle; two companies with lances erect and ready, always facing the enemy. It was a fine spectacle, but it had its sad aspect in the load which one charger bore—the lifeless body of the adjutant shot dead in the charge.

Blaine’s gaze was fixed on the retreating force with a strange look on his face. He had forgotten about his own desperate position, and was thinking of other matters, for in the rider of the black horse he had recognized Captain Dalston, whilst Miss Rath’s father was the rescued man.

**Chapter 21  An Alarm**

“SEE HERE, DICK—if there’s any charge against me, why in thunder don’t they bring it, ’stead of letting me mope around like a sick bar in a cane-brake!” Cob Rowe had been forgotten in the consternation caused by the death of the Prince Imperial, and was becoming restive.

General Wood’s column, known as the “flying” column, because it could march five miles in a day at a stretch, had gone back for provisions, and Rowe had been transferred to Lord Chelmsford’s camp.

Rowe was not pleased with himself. He felt that he had been overreached at every point since he arrived in Zululand. First he had lost his horse, then he had barely escaped with his life, and now he had lost his liberty, with a prospect of being shot for mutiny and murder.

“Look here, Dick,” he continued, “I give you warning, I mean to escape.”

“Or right, baas,” said the Basuto, calmly; “why not did it afore?”

Dick had no particular regard for his office as guard, which kept him from the keen delight of scouting expeditions. Rowe was supposed to employ his time digging trenches, but he always stretched himself on his back, with his sombrero over his face, and Dick never interfered.

“Why not run away now?—nobody looking,” resumed Dick.

Rowe shifted his sombrero from his eyes, and looked at the Basuto—“Wal, that beats creation. What would you do if I bolted?”
Dick tapped his rifle, and his eyes glistened. “Shoot,” he said—“perhaps hit, perhaps miss—ne'er shot a white man. You run—gif you long start. See that bush”—pointing to a bush two hundred yards off—“well, when you there—bang! I fire. Come, git along.”

Rowe sat up, to get a good look at his extraordinary guard, and then burst into laughter.

Dick looked disappointed for a minute, then a smile spread over his shiny black face. “No good, eh?—well, Skin-jacket, you run to-night. I leaf you alone in der tent.”

“Why do you wish me to escape, Dick?”

“Oh, dunno. Tired doing this work. Come here fight—not mind white man. Maybe think Skin-jacket no hit Captain Blaine.”

“You're right there, Dick. I'm not the man to strike another in the dark. The man who struck that blow was Captain Dalston.”

“So—how you know?”

“I've been thinking it over, and although I have not proof, I believe that if any one struck Blaine it was Dalston.”

“No duce, baas,” replied Dick; “dey'd ruther belief Cap'n Dalston dan you or me either; un' if you doan escape you es killed. You listen me—you run to-night.”

Rowe, on the whole, was disposed to take Dick's advice. His mission had failed. There was nothing to keep him in the country beyond the excitement of campaigning, which was now closed to him, and he had not the patience to wait the slow course of court-martial. His untamed nature chafed under his imprisonment.

That night events favoured him. All troops, and more especially untried troops, are subject to spasms of alarm, and Lord Chelmsford's column had a violent attack that night. The nerves of the men had been strung by the news of the Prince's death, and the imagination of the young soldiers had been fed upon awful tales of Zulu fierceness and cruelty. Moreover, since Isandlana, Lord Chelmsford himself had been painfully apprehensive of a fresh reverse, and his nervous state in a measure affected his men. The elaborate precautions he took, even to the extent of stretching wires and laying dynamite without the lines, gave the men an exaggerated idea of the prowess of the enemy. It is bad to despise an enemy, but it is worse to over-estimate him.

Sentry duty should be done by a trained body of experienced men. When raw recruits or young soldiers take to sentry-go in time of war, they are apt, by their blunders, to throw an entire army into confusion. It was so on this night.
A sergeant and three of his men were guarding a front of a hundred yards, facing towards the south, from which a Zulu impi would most probably come. The moon was shining brightly, and they had no trouble at first in clearly distinguishing objects within a radius of fifty yards. Beyond that the shimmering light deceived the sight; but the country was free from bush, and every man was certain he could spot a Zulu easily at a hundred yards, and an impi at half a mile.

By-and-by, however, as the melancholy noises of the night rose from every side, imagination began to work, and they spoke in whispers of the terrible mutilations which the Zulus practised on their victims.

Said Private Denning, a saturnine fellow, with a love for the horrible, “First they crawl, and crawl, and crawl like a nasty slimy snake, then they watches you till you are off guard. Then ‘souch’ goes that ugly-lookin’ stabbing spear into you.”

“I say, Bill—don’t! It makes me shiver.”

“Yes; then they twist the blade round in yer inside to let the blood run out more freely; and then the black devils rip you open—so,” digging his thumb into the other’s stomach with an upward movement to explain his meaning.

“Shut up, Denning,” said the sergeant; “don’t you see you’re making Joe tremble like a leaf? Wish I could get within a yard of a Zulu with my bayonet,” he muttered, glaring viciously over the veldt. “Why, what’s that over there?” he continued, eagerly.

“Don’t, sergeant,” said Joe, wiping his brow; “it ain’t fair to make game of me.”

“I’m not making game of you, lad. Do you see anything over there?” and the sergeant pointed straight ahead.

His men gathered about him, following the direction of his finger with straining glances, and, as is usually the case in the moonlight, becoming more puzzled and confused the more they looked.

“It’s a root,” said one.

“No, it ain’t; it’s a bush.”

“Stow that, you fool! There was no bush there when we came. It’s some sneaking Zulu—that’s what it is.”

“And look,” said Denning, “there’s something to the right; and blow me if there’s not a dark mass right behind!”

“So there is,” said the sergeant; “and it’s coming at a quick rate.”

A dark mass, with a front of about five hundred yards, was rapidly bearing down upon the men, and the moaning of the wind seemed to bring to their ears the sound of approaching steps.
“We’ll give ’em a volley first, men,” said the sergeant, grimly. “That will warn the camp, and maybe drop a couple of ’em.”

The rifles were brought to the ready, and each man stood with muscles quivering.

“See,” whispered Denning, “that cuss just ahead is on the move, sergeant.”

“He’ll stab me,” said Joe. “I’ll shoot him. The hull Zulu army are coming—let’s cut.”

At that instant the light grew dim, and the sergeant, sending a glance aloft, saw a cloud crossing the face of the moon.

“Don’t fire!” he shouted; “that army is only the shadow of a cloud.”

He was too late. Joe’s nerves had been tried too much, and he pulled the trigger.

The crack of the rifle turned the peaceful camp as by a stroke of magic into a centre of wild tumult. The three thousand men within the laager leapt from their blankets on the ground, and rushed to the walls, dressed or undressed, as they were. Most were without boots, all without hats; some were only in their shirts, others had blankets wrapped around them. The profound silence of a minute ago was now broken with wild commands of officers. Men collided with one another, tripped over tent-lines, or got inextricably mixed up among the cattle. Those who were sleeping in the trenches, inside the walls of sods, fired their rifles aimlessly.

“Lie down!” shouted the sergeant. “Lie down,” he screamed, “or they’ll shoot you.”

Some of the sentries obeyed, others rushed in, and the sound of their approach completed the scare.

“Here they come!” shouted the men at the walls, and crack went a score of rifles.

“Keep steady, men!” shouted the officers. “Steady, men, and fire low!”

The sentries, yelling at the top of their voices, dashed in, barely escaping being stabbed: two or three of them, including the unfortunate Joe, received flesh wounds.

Then followed a truly mad scene. Twenty-four thousand rounds of ammunition were fired off, and the guns roared two rounds apiece from the four corners of the laager. The officers, in their shirt-sleeves, worked hard in carrying out the ammunition and in encouraging their men to be steady. Notwithstanding this advice, some men actually fired into the bottoms of the waggons, lying on their backs to do so, and pointing the muzzles of their
guns skyward. The Lancers, who were in an adjoining camp, had to seek
shelter in the trenches, while their tents were riddled with bullets.

After the men had fired in volleys three times from the four sides of the
square, some one discovered that no bullets were coming into the laager,
and the bugle sounded the order to cease fire.

Then the deluded army looked out upon the waving grass and the silvery
stretch of moonlight, but not a single Zulu was to be seen. The language that
followed this discovery was eloquent and expressive; while the tall, black-
whiskered Commander-in-chief passed his thin hand across his white brow,
and the staff looked on, their mortification eating their hearts out.

Men climbed from the waggons, and went out in parties to look around,
in a hopeless, dazed sort of way.

Basuto Dick, with a broad grin on his face, led Rowe out of the tent where
he was kept prisoner, slipped him through the cattle, gave him a rifle and
ammunition that he had picked up in the confusion, and told him to go. This
Rowe did, calmly walking off into the veldt, and no one paying any atten-
tion to him.

“Rayther expensive amusement that,” he muttered, “firin’ all that powder
at nothing at all. Hullo! who goes there?” He threw his rifle forward as he
saw some dark object in the grass.

“Friend,” was the reply. “I’m Captain Blaine, of the Frontier Light Horse.
I am trying to reach camp, but they have greeted me rather warmly,” the
young officer added, in tones of surprise.

**Chapter 22  Rowe’s Pistol**

AT THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE of Captain Blaine, as unexpected as
though he had risen from the grave, Rowe was amazed and almost speech-
less.

“Well!” was all he had to say.

“Have you all grown daft?” said Blaine, irritably, after a lengthy pause.
“The whole column practises with ball cartridges at midnight. Gad, I never
spent such a bad quarter of an hour!”

“Wal,” exclaimed Rowe, with a smile, as the grim humour of the thing
struck him, “I s’pose it does seem to you rayther strange to receive sich a
warm welcome back, but I tell you, Captain, they’ll be right glad to see you.
You were given up as dead. Thunder! ain’t I glad you’ve turned up!”

“I think I know you. Are you not Rowe of my troop? Take me to our lines;
I’m tired out, and in want of food.”

“I dursn’t, Captain.”
“Why not, if I command you?”

“Captain, they say I struck you down that night of the patrol, and I am making tracks.”

“I do not understand,” Blaine answered, wearily. “What object could you have for getting rid of me? I have done you no injury.”

“Ah, that’s it. There was a motive, Captain Blaine, and that gave colour to the charge against me. I must tell you all now, for I’ll not go back into camp to be charged with attempt at escape, mutiny, and the devil knows what else. Come into the donga here, and I’ll tell you all, if I lose the chance of two thousand dollars.”

Rowe pointed to the donga, but the other drew back with a growing suspicion against the man before him.

“How do I know you would not murder me if I followed you? You say you are a deserter; I ought to raise the alarm at once.”

“Here, sir,” replied Rowe, calmly, “take my rifle. Now follow, and after you have heard what I have to tell, do what you like with me.” He moved off, and the young officer followed without another word.

“Now, Captain Blaine,” continued Rowe, when they had reached the shelter of a donga, “you asked me what motive I had for getting rid of you. You stood betwixt me and fortune, or the beginnings of a pile. The story’s in a nutshell. Under the will of Mr. Nicholson you are entitled to £35,000, and a ranch in Texas worth with stock about £50,000, on condition that you marry Miss Kate Dalston within two years; failing which, the property is to go in equal parts to the young lady and Captain Dalston.”

“Well, sir,” said Blaine, as the other paused, “that is a singular story; but I fail to see how it gives you any interest in my death.”

“I was sent out to prevent you marrying the young lady. If I succeeded, I was to be paid well. That was a motive strong enough to make a hard man put you out of the way.”

Blaine turned the matter over in his mind. The story had some degree of probability in it, for he knew perfectly well that it had been the wish of his uncle, Mr. Nicholson, that he should marry Miss Dalston, whom he had learned to think of as his little sweetheart.

“Some one,” he said, suspiciously, “must have known this story if it is true, else they would not have suspected you.”

“Captain Dalston knew it,” said Rowe, darkly. “And, sir, you must find your enemy in him or me. His motive was bigger than mine by a long way.”
"It appears to me," answered Blaine, coldly, though the suggestion in Rowe’s words was not unfamiliar to his mind—"it appears to me that you are not the man to throw suspicion on others."

"You have the drop on me, Captain; but remember this, I have spoken you fair as a man, and I expect to be judged fairly by proofs, and not by suspicion. I did not strike you, Captain Blaine."

The young officer wavered a moment, then, obeying a sudden impulse, he thrust out his hand. "I believe you, Rowe. Come back with me, and I will stand by you."

"No, Captain, I’ve done with the business. Besides, there’s too much discipline, and mutiny is an ugly word—uglier than murder."

"Nonsense, man! If you are not captured as a deserter, you will fall into the hands of the Zulus."

"Not me, by gosh! If I start now I’ll be at Kopje Alleen at daybreak."

"Kopje Alleen! What will you do there?"

"Dunno, Captain, ’cept look after that sweet young lady there, who’s in a mighty dangerous position, it seems to me."

"Here’s your rifle, Rowe, and good luck to you. Keep due north, and you’ll reach the place all safely. If any danger threatens Miss Rath, let me know if possible."

Rowe smiled. "After what I told you, Captain, you will surely give up thoughts of Miss Mary, though I reckon there’s no other girl can approach her either for looks or goodness, or sand either."

"Don’t say a word about that will, Rowe. Now, hurry on, or you’ll be seen by Zulu scouts before you get there."

"Good-bye, Captain, and see here—if you want to send me a message, send it by Basuto Dick, of Cochrane’s Horse. Good-bye, I’ll tell the young lady you have not forgotten her."

"God bless her!" said Blaine, as he turned away to the camp, which he entered safely after some trouble with the sentries.

In the excitement and chagrin which still held sway over the minds of the thoroughly aroused men his presence was overlooked, but by-and-by his brother officers awakened to the astonishing fact that their missing friend had returned.

He was then surrounded by a troop of eager men, who plied him with questions until his head reeled.

"Here, you thundering dolts!" shouted a red-faced surgeon, shouldering his way in, "if Blaine has escaped the stabbing assegai, don’t kill him with
your blamed curiosity. Get some brandy, some of you, and then go to bed. You’re perfectly dangerous, awake.”

With a volley of red-hot abuse indiscriminately bestowed, for the doctor had been stitching up the wounds of the unfortunate sentries, and was boiling over with indignation, he led Blaine into a tent. In a few minutes the young officer was in a sound sleep. The doctor stood looking down on the drawn and haggard face for some minutes before he sought his own couch.

“By gad! the poor fellow has passed through suffering, more mental than physical. That’s a curious wound on his forehead. Well, well, I’ll not trouble him any more to-night.”

Next day Blaine sat out in the sun and told his story.

“Who was it struck you, and what was the weapon used? Here, doctor,” shouted the questioner, “come and give us your opinion.”

The doctor examined the circular wound carefully, and then glanced at the ring of faces with a look brimful of importance.

“He has discovered something, you may judge from that vacant stare which he fondly hopes is fruitful of profound meaning,” observed a flippant lieutenant. “He’s swelling visibly.”

“I find,” said the doctor, solemnly, “a contused wound with a circular abrasion of the skin, caused evidently by some blunt weapon used with great force.”

“What a pompous old fellow he is! Why, doctor, that’s as plain as a flagstaff. Tell us something we don’t know.”

“Well, boys, the weapon was a revolver, used with the butt-end; but observe, it was not a military weapon.”

“Explain!”

“Why, you see the wound is perfectly round, without a dent. It was accordingly produced by a smooth surface. Now, the butts of the regular revolvers are furnished with rings for straps.”

“By Jove! the doctor is right for once. The weapon used must have been one of Yankee make. By the way, I believe Dalston carries the identical weapon.” The speaker, a young lieutenant, could have bitten his tongue off for the maladroit remark, for glancing up he met the gloomy eyes of the very man fixed on him.

“What is that?” the new-comer asked. “Oh, Blaine, I heard of your arrival. I’m heartily glad to see you again.” He took Blaine’s hand in his strong grasp and shook it warmly.
“Now, sir, what about my weapons?” Dalston asked, with a vicious glance at the officer who had spoken.

“It was a mere slip of the tongue. The doctor says the weapon which produced that wound on Blaine’s head was a smooth-butted revolver, and I remembered that you carried a weapon of that kind. I need scarcely say,” he added, “that I meant nothing.”

Dalston looked at the speaker steadily, without a muscle moving, then said in his hard tones, with a slightly bitter accent, “Yes, you were right, I had such a weapon; but unfortunately I lost it yesterday in the scrimmage.”

A flush of shame came to the brow of the garrulous lieutenant as he recalled the incident which caused Dalston to lose his revolver.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, impulsively; “that was a gallant action of yours in saving Rath.”

“Thanks,” he said, coldly. “It might have occurred to some of you to examine the man Rowe’s revolver.”

Immediately some one ran off, and presently returned with a long-barrelled weapon. The butt was smooth, and exactly fitted the bruise.

“Where is Rowe himself? Let us have the villain up.”

“He has escaped,” said Blaine.

“Impossible!” said the doctor. “Why, I saw him last night, and he appeared to be the only man who was not excited about our gallant encounter with a shadow.”

“Anyhow, I met him last night beyond the pickets, and he told me he was deserting.”

“The devil he did!” remarked one. “Had we not better pursue him? Which direction did he take?”

“Why didn’t you capture him, Blaine?”

“You mean,” replied Blaine, drily, “why did he not capture me. If, as you think, he gave me this blow with the object of murdering me, why did he not finish his work last night, when he was armed and I was not, and when, if he had shot me, no one could have said that I had not fallen to the volley fired from the square?”

“If Rowe did not strike you, who did?” demanded Dalston, suspiciously.

“I wish I could tell you, Captain Dalston. It was not a Zulu, for the man who struck me wore heavy boots.”

“Of course it was Rowe,” said the man who had first drawn attention to Dalston’s pistol. “What do you think, Dalston?”

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“It was Rowe,” replied the officer, decidedly; “he did not finish his work last night because his game had been exposed, and he had no object in committing murder.”

“That settles it. Let us saddle and spur. What direction did he take, Blaine?”

“Towards Kopje Alleen.”

“I will go with you,” said Dalston, promptly.

Chapter 23 Mary

CAPTAIN DALSTON placed himself at the head of the party more with the object of seeing Miss Rath than of capturing Rowe, but when he reached Kopje Alleen he showed a strange reluctance about approaching the homestead.

Big and bold as he was, he yet mistrusted himself, and was afraid to face Mary, lest he should not acquit himself properly. Upon this point he dwelt with a morbid intensity since he had so coarsely insulted her, incited there-to by his experience with a class of women who had rather encouraged that kind of rough address.

In contrast to those in whose company he had coarsely joked and deeply drunk, this farmer's daughter was of another mould. It was well for him he could recognize the difference, and it would be well for him if his dark and stormy nature were to be irradiated by her love.

Mary came to the door at the sound of hoofs, and ran up to the black charger with a wonderful look of gratitude in her deep eyes and a trembling about the lips.

“Oh, Captain Dalston, I am so glad you have come! Father has told me how you rescued him from the Zulus, and I have so longed to thank you. Give me your hand.”

He stretched his big brown hand down to her, half bashfully because of her, half defiantly because of the grin which he could feel was spreading from mouth to mouth in the troop behind him.

She shook the hand in both of hers, and the man's heart swelled into his throat as a warm drop fell upon it.

“And the gallant horse, too, I love him.” Her hand stole along the arched neck, and with a sudden impulse she pressed her lips to his velvet muzzle. There was no coquetry in the act intended, and she shot no glance at the rider, but for all that there was not a man who saw the act who did not somehow feel that there had been a sad misdirection of affection.
One trooper indeed put the feeling into words, as he fetched a deep sigh and whispered, “I wish I’d been that hoss.”

Dalston sat erect, looking down upon the shining of the hair where the sun fell on the waving coils, and a strong passion of love swept through him. He could have caught her up to the saddle before him, and ridden madly away.

Instead of doing anything so foolish, he said through his moustache, in a deep growl, “How is your father?”

“He is well, and I must thank you also for sending him on at once to my care.”

“He would go, Miss Rath. We were obliged to send him on at once, otherwise he declared he would drag himself into the saddle and ride to you.”

“He was always strong-willed,” she said, simply, “but there was wisdom in his action—for I have already lulled him to sleep, after he told me all about his escape. How can I ever repay you?”

“Repay me!” he broke out, passionately, while his eyes gleamed with the fire of hope within him, but quickly as it flamed it died away. Her start of surprise at this exclamation told him the opportunity had not yet arrived.

“Repay me, Miss Rath, by numbering me among your friends,” he said, in his solemn way.

“Ah! that I will; and as a first slight token of my friendship, I will have you dismount, and have dinner with me, and all your men as well.”

She said this aloud to the men, with a smile of welcome that brought back an instant response in a loud chorus of thanks.

“Bless her little heart!” said an old warrior, in a voice so gruff that he could not soften it, “she does not know what thundering appetites we’ve got. I could eat her myself!”

“Hush, you old fool!”

Mary heard and laughed softly, a storm of ha, ha, ha’s ripped out with the suddenness of a thunder-clap, and the men hummed with subdued delight as they off-saddled.

It is a gracious gift with some women that they charm without any effort. The men had been prepared to admire her for the ride she took that night to warn Sirayo, but now they worshipped her.

There was one man whose face was not the brighter for her presence. Dalston followed her swift graceful movements with a yearning glance, but there was no smile in his eye. He resented the gaiety of his men, and he scowled when one of his brother officers gaily offered his services to Miss Rath. For him the bitterness of it was that she was unconscious of his pain,
and even added to it by ordering him off to fetch water from the well, where he would be unable to watch her.

As he marched off with his stiff military stride, a bucket in each grasp, his men were hard set to keep from laughter at the evident reluctance with which he, the young captain who had accompanied the troop, was making himself useful and trying to set about his task.

A blesbok, newly skinned, hung from the fork of a tree, and this Pala, the Zulu girl, proceeded to cut into joints.

“Where did you get the buck from, Miss Rath?”

“I shot it.”

“You did! Great is Diana of Kopje Alleen! Did you find the creature asleep?”

“Yoh!” exclaimed Pala, with a snort of supreme contempt. “Missy shoot him in de hind leg as he run, and Carlo caught him.”

“By Jove! Miss Rath, you surprise me. You know, you do not look like that sort of girl. Excuse me for saying so, but you puzzle me; you are so out of keeping with the surroundings, the conditions, don’tcherknow,” and he smiled vaguely. “You know what I mean.”

Mary smiled. “Yes, I suppose I do. Captain Blaine made the same remark, and it rather surprised me.”

“Do you know Blaine is back? He turned up safe and sound last night. Singular thing,” he went on, unconscious of the effect his words had produced, “whom should he meet when coming into camp but the very man who murdered him—tried to murder him, I mean. By Jove! we clean forgot to ask you if you had seen him.”

“Seen whom?” asked Mary, bewildered, but still keeping her face over the fire. It had turned white, and was now rosy red.

“Why, that rascal Rowe. He deserted, you know; and Blaine told us he was coming towards Kopje Alleen.”

“No, I have not seen him. Is Captain Blaine all right?” she asked, steadily.

“Well, rather groggy and run down, you know; but he’ll be as fit as ever soon. What an accomplished young lady you are, Miss Rath—the odour from the venison is delicious. Does it require any stuffing, d’ye think? Pity we’ve no port wine and black-currant jelly. I’ve peeled the pumpkin; what shall I do now?”

“Peeled the pumpkin!” said Mary, horrified; “why, you silly boy, you’ve cut off all the part fit to eat and left us with the worthless seeds!” She laughed merrily, with a heightened colour and a sparkle in her eyes, for the news he brought was welcome.
The “silly boy” searched for his eye-glass, which he needed to give effect to his wounded feelings. It was not the wreck of the pumpkin he felt, but the indignity of being called boy by a lovely woman. Missing the moral support of the eye-glass, he capitulated at once to the humorous side of the affair.

“Don’t laugh any more, pray, but go off and help Captain Dalston bring in the water. He is very lazy over it. Pala would have been there and back, boiled the water, and made the coffee in the time.”

Soon the feast was spread, and the men gathered around in a hollow square. There was no crockery, no polished cutlery or snowy cloth; but a level patch of ground swept clean by Pala for table, and great chunks of damper for plates; whilst clasp-knives did double duty as fork and knife. It was rough, but there was a picturesqueness in the rows of squatted figures, and character in the bronzed faces of the men.

Mary stayed a minute to see that all were served, then left the happy fellows to the satisfaction of their appetites, while she took her place at the head of the table, where the officers sat in stately but somewhat solemn dignity.

They wondered in their own minds how this girl, reared in a lonely farm, could adapt herself, without effort and with such perfect grace, to the strain of such unexpected hospitality.

She showed, too, a wonderful tact in drawing these young men from a light persiflage into reminiscences of their home, and listened to their stories with such rapt and eager attention as to induce at least one of them to open the inner door of his heart, and to talk freely of the hopes and fears of his widowed mother.

Dalston sat and watched, and the music of her low voice sank into his heart. Though he might live for years, and never see her again, he had taken in the impress of her beauty, and could never forget her. For him henceforth the one overmastering object of his life was to win her love; and woe to him, and perhaps to her, if he failed.

After the men had eaten, they smoked contentedly lying on the broad of their backs, with sombreros tilted over their noses and spiral clouds of smoke slowly ascending.

When the word to mount came, they formed up in a long line, every man erect as though on review; then in column of two they filed at a walk past Mary, giving her the cavalry salute, the young officers saluting with flashing swords.

There was something in this silent token of respect that brought the tears into her eyes. The gallant bearing of the men, their martial appearance, the warlike trappings, the resolve that blended with the chivalrous respect for her—called to her mind vividly the dangers of their calling, and her heart.
swelled for their womenfolk at home. To-morrow, or the next day, or the day after, these men might be stricken down in death. With a smile on her lips and unshed tears in her large eyes, she watched them move by.

“Trot! Gallop!” rang out the order, and away they went with a thundering roll, sweeping round Kopje Alleen, and turning their heads before passing out of view to look back at the figure of their hostess.

While yet she stood there listening as the beating of the hoofs faded into an indistinct murmur, she saw a man and dog come out of the shelter of the Lonely Hill.

Chapter 24  Rowe Meets Mary

THE DOG was Carlo, but the man she did not recognize until he spoke.

“Wal, Miss Mary, I reckon you’ve had a powerful good dinner to-day, and ef thar’s any left I guess I could find room for it.”

Mary recognized him then, and looked at Rowe long and steadily, judging him for the crime he had been charged with.

“You know me, Miss Mary,” he said, with a wistful look in his keen grey eyes.

“I know you,” she answered gravely; “you are he who struck down your officer treacherously. Why do you come here?”

The hard thin face of the toughened ranchman quailed under the accusing glance, then he straightened up.

“You make me feel a mean man, Miss Rath, and I’m glad I stand here innocent of that blow.” He gave a deep sigh, as though expelling a weight from his heart, then he looked at her gravely. “I am not the man, and Captain Blaine himself believes that.”

Mary relented somewhat, but she was not satisfied.

“Why, then,” she asked, “did they accuse you?”

“Wal, now, Captain Blaine put that same question. That venison smells well; I guess some of it would sort o’ oil my speaking machinery.”

Mary smiled faintly, and directed him to the table.

When he had satisfied his starvation appetite, he fashioned a pipe from a maize cob, and then observed reflectively that it would look well with tobacco inside.

Mary brought him a twist of Boer tobacco, and when he had shaved off a pipeful, Pala was at hand with a live coal.
He crossed his legs and puffed away contentedly, with eyelids half closed to the view to enable him the better to devote his mind to a problem which had arisen.

Should he, or should he not, tell Miss Rath about the will? If he did, it would prevent the budding into love of the sympathy which existed between her and Captain Blaine. If he did not, the young couple might perhaps fall into love without hope of marriage. Both would then suffer. Whereas, if they married, Blaine would forfeit his inheritance, and be unable to support a wife. Thus Rowe ruminated while Mary stood waiting not indifferently for his story, for the best of women are curious, but always with that joyous singing at her heart, since she had heard of Blaine’s return.

“Wal, Miss Mary,” he said, having come to a decision, “it is this way: Captain Blaine comes into a fortune if he marries a certain young lady. If he does not marry her, because of some one else, you see, he loses his chance of a fortune, which goes to another person. I was sent out to prevent him from marrying the young woman, and they said that I had made away with him to finish my work thoroughly.”

“Does Captain Blaine know this?” asked Mary, coldly.

“Yes, miss,” said Rowe, with a swift glance at her, “he does, and so does Captain Dalston. It was he who accused me.”

“And how could you lend yourself to such a base plot?” she demanded, suddenly, with a flush on her cheeks.

“I dunno about lending myself—I was hired; but there’s no harm come of it ’cept to me, unless you reckon on that knock on Captain Blaine’s head, which you may say is balanced by the news I gave him. You see, Miss Mary, I did him a powerful square turn in telling him about his chances, for he might have fallen plump in love with the first pretty face he met, and right ther’d be an end of his fortune. Now, of course, he kin wait, and look for that young woman I spoke of when the war is done.”

“When the war is done! Oh, this cruel, cruel war! it has brought nothing but ruin, desolation, and sorrow. We were happy before the troops broke in upon our loneliness with their trumpet calls, now the loneliness weighs upon us, and all is changed for the worse. I wish I had never seen them.” The blow had struck her, and she spoke in her bitterness; then she raised her head, with the old, calm look on her face.

“It strikes you that way now, Miss Mary, but you are young, and there is plenty of happiness awaiting you. It must be so,” he said, turning his eyes, with a look of rough sympathy, on the sweet face.
“And what do you intend doing? I will do nothing to prevent your escape,” she said, hiding her own sorrow and looking only to the welfare of the fugitive.

“Wal, Miss Mary, I guess the first thing I’ll do’ll be to tend to your melon patch. It wants weeding.”

Mary looked at him in astonishment. “You had better think of getting into the Transvaal, and leave the melons to take care of themselves.”

“After tending the melons,” he went on, calmly, “maybe I’ll gather in the ripe corn, draw water, purvide for the larder, amouse your father when he can sit outside, and generally see that no harm befalls you. I guess that’s about all. I’ll put in some work at onct.”

He hunted up a hoe, and started off for the garden, while Mary watched him with a slight smile that rather heightened the wearied look in her eyes. The world that had been so bright a minute ago was now dull and gloomy.

Rowe carried out his self-set duties faithfully. He hoed the garden, carried water, and went out every afternoon after game. In the evenings he talked to old Rath, who had a vague idea that Rowe was one of the hospital staff told off to help his daughter. In the nights he slept among the rocks at Kopje Alleen, saying he preferred the company of ghosts to the chances of being captured if he slept at the homestead.

Meanwhile, Blaine was eating his heart out at the camp, in the enforced idleness consequent on the continued absence of General Wood’s column. He had given up speculating about the identity of his enemy, and devoted his mind to the news which Rowe had given him.

The more he dwelt upon it, the more distasteful did it seem, until he regarded the will and the arrangement made for his matrimonial future with loathing.

“Kate Dalston was a nice little girl, as far as I remember her; but why, in the name of common sense, should I be forced to marry her, or she be tied to me, whether we like it or not? What right has any man to stretch his hand into the future, and tie a knot that may prove a veritable curse? It is not natural, and, with all respect to uncle, I will not be bound by it.”

Having arrived at a conclusion, he felt much more comfortable for a few hours.

Then he discovered that he had not really got at the root of the disease which bothered him. After all, Rowe might have been misinformed, and at any rate the will had no binding weight upon him; there was something else, and it was very soon borne in upon him that the real cause of his misery was Mary Rath.
When Dalston and his men returned from Kopje Alleen, the young lieutenant was full of enthusiasm about the “rare and radiant maiden” he had discovered in an out-of-the-way corner.

“By-the-way, Blaine, she was interested in you; but, lor’ bless you, man! you need not flatter yourself—she is just as genuinely concerned about every one of us, from the Captain downwards. Gad! Blaine, you should have seen Dalston, he glowered upon us like Othello. Betwixt you, me, and the tent-pole, he has left his heart at Kopje Alleen, and a mighty gloomy penthouse of shady memories it is.

“Not going, are you? I say it would be an infernal shame if that black-browed individual won Diana—dash me, if I would not enter the lists against him if I were a marrying man! I say, Blaine, take up the running; you’re a good-looking enough fellow, don’tcherknow, if you’d only drop that dashed melancholy, greeny-yallery look that’s come over you lately.”

Blaine put himself out of the range of that clattering tongue, and looked more gloomy and melancholy than before.

“I’ll get leave and visit her,” he muttered finally, and went straight off to the Colonel’s tent.

“Yes, go, but be back in four days’ time, as there’ll be some fighting afoot. I am tired of this sitting down behind mud walls. You had better take a couple of men with you, and keep along the line of forts.”

In another hour Captain Blaine, feeling like his own gay self again, was galloping away with Basuto Dick behind him.

“Hullo, Blaine’s in harness again!” said Dalston. “What duty is he on, do you know?”

“Duty!” said the young lieutenant, ready to tease the unpopular captain; “why, he’s on leave. Going to Kopje Alleen. Believe he means to propose. Knew her before, you know.”

Dalston looked black at his tormentor, then strode away to some point where he could watch Blaine out of sight. He mounted his horse, then, with the avowed intention of inspecting the outlying pickets, but when he reached the farthest point, he tracked Blaine for an hour through his field-glass.

“He has left the road and shaped for Kopje Alleen,” he muttered. “I will be there to-morrow, too, and let him beware how he crosses me!”

Chapter 25 The Photographs

WHEN CAPTAIN BLAINE and the Basuto left the beaten track and branched off to Miss Rath’s homestead, they climbed a sharp ridge, which runs along the northern boundary of Zululand. A few miles to the north stood out
Kopje Alleen, with the white walls of the farmhouse gleaming near it in the
sun; while to the south they glanced back over the rolling, sun-seared, water-
worn plain, to another ridge, out of which loomed the square mount so full
of painful memories to Blaine.

“Well,” murmured the young officer, turning his back upon the mountain,
and looking down upon the little white house, “I am leaving the darker side
behind, and entering on a new and, I hope, a brighter path.”

As he spoke, there flashed out suddenly a brilliant ball of light from the
rocky summit of Kopje Alleen. A moment it gleamed like a planet from a
dark sky, something marvellous, and then vanished.

“Yoh!” exclaimed the Basuto. “Did baas see—wot was it?”

“A star of hope,” said Blaine, with a smile at the suddenness with which
the strange beam had answered his train of thought.

“Wot star doin’ there?” said matter-of-fact Dick. “No, sieur, dat am spir-
it eye—spook. Dot’s so.”

“It is a friendly spook, any way,” and Blaine headed his horse down a
steep incline.

As he approached the lonely house he noticed the smoke curling up in a
thin blue line from the chimney, and marked signs about (in the stack of fuel,
in the wicker cage filled with maize cobs, in the barricading of the windows,
and protection of doors by walls of sods) of the presence of some active spir-
it. He looked sharply around for other and more evident traces of this per-
son, whom he at once put down as Rowe, but could see none.

Dick had no eye but for the grim peak of stone, at which he glanced half-
timidly, as though expecting to see that strange light flame out and perhaps
scorch him up.

Blaine dismounted, and with an eager but somewhat confident look on
his face, went up to the door, the upper half of which, after the manner of
farmhouse doors, was open, swinging on its own hinges, independent of
the lower half. He knocked, but without reply; and, looking in, saw that the
room was empty.

As he turned away, disappointed, a murmur of voices from the brook
reached him; and thither he went, pausing when near to drink in the scene
he had chanced upon.

Beneath the shelter of a drooping willow, whose long, tremulous, whip-
like twigs, with spear-shaped leaves, swayed to the ground softly as a wom-
an’s hair—within the grateful shade of this canopy of green was a group of
three. Mr. Rath, the central figure, sat on a low chair, his left arm bound up
in splints, but his fine old face calm and restful as the surface of the pool
at his feet. Pala lounged on the brink of the pool, weaving long rushes into
plaits, with nimble fingers; while Mary stood leaning against the stem of
the tree, with one hand gently laid on her father’s shoulder, and the other
stretched up to a branch. Her eyes were fixed dreamily on the pool as her
mind dwelt on her father’s words.

The old man was talking with the eloquence of a man who felt deeply,
with the wisdom of a man who had read well, and with the kindliness of a
man who loved well.

He was another autocrat, not of the breakfast-table, but of the willow-tree,
with only girls for his audience. Mary, as she followed him through his wind-
ing way, looked upon the world as a remote and curious sphere with which
she had no connection.

But youth cannot expect, and should not hope, to be a spectator only.
Suddenly a pebble slipping from the bank ruffled the silvery surface, and
Mary’s thoughts changed. As the concentric rings spreading over the pool
at last lapped against the bank, so some wave of thought, finding its origin
far back, struck on her mind.

With a deep sigh she slowly turned her shapely head, and her eyes met
those of the very one for whom that sigh was spent. From chin to brow the
lovely face was suffused with blushes, then the colour faded, leaving the face
white and cold.

“Father,” she said, “here is Captain Blaine, who was captured by the
Zulus, and has marvellously escaped.”

Blaine approached, and greeted the old farmer; while Pala, with a sly look
at Mary, withdrew hurriedly, and ran towards the house, with many a look
back over her shoulder to see if she were followed. When out of sight she
stopped quickly, took something from a bag of monkey skin at her side, and
placed it under a large flat stone.

This done, she went on to the kitchen, swaying her body to a dancing step,
and clapping her hands.

Dick had watched the performance from the stable, but he gave little
thought to the stone and its hidden secret. Here was an opportunity for love-
making, and Dick was not the man to let it slip.

He carefully arranged his woolly locks, cocked his smasher jauntily on
one side, and swaggered towards Pala with an exaggerated imitation of the
cavalry roll, rubbing his cords together as he went to make a swishing noise.

Pala observed his approach with a broad stare, then busied herself with
the fire.

“Mornin’,” said Dick, crossing his legs and leaning gracefully against a
tree, “fine day dis mornin’.”
“It’s afternoon,” said Pala, with a toss of her head.

“So it are,” answered Dick, looking anxiously up at the sky—“might ’a’ known dat from de state of my stummick. Somefin nice for dinnah?” he continued, with an insidious smile.

Pala glanced at him out of the corners of her eyes. “’Tain’t dinner—it’s tea.”

“So—doan’t keer, s’long as it’s sumfin, ef you’ll jes eat out’n de same pot.”

Pala laughed scornfully.

“My, you es plump!” said Dick, driving his approaches nearer. “Now, should say your arm were bigger as mine.” He unlinked his legs and spanned Pala’s rounded arm with both of his hands. A sounding slap from her disengaged hand sent him reeling.

Dick laughed, and felt he was indeed getting on with his courtship. If he could venture to give her a return salute of the same hearty description he would feel safe.

“Not too plump to work,” he observed; “got a mighty strong arm. ’Spect, now, you could hoe de corn well in my gearden.”

Pala straightened herself, and Dick’s eyes glistened as they dwelt upon her fine figure and proud bearing. He himself was a handsome fellow, with a rollicking glance, and no doubt had played havoc in many a kraal, so that he had much confidence in his power of conquest.

“You be my wife? Got plenty cattle—plenty milk. Eh, what say?”

Pala looked him up and down. “I’m a Zulu,” she said, proudly—“you a dog—go!”

Dick’s pride was wounded at its most tender part. He went at once, with his head up, and before he knew where he was, he found himself at the base of the awful Kopje Alleen.

His first impulse was to run, but the sting of Pala’s contemptuous rejection had inoculated him with recklessness. He resolved to explore the peak, even if he were to come in contact with the spirit of the flaming eye.

He went up at first with a clatter, the noise of rattling stones giving him courage as the shrill whistling of a boy in a lonely place gives him a feeling of security; but when in the shadow of the larger rocks half-way up, the dull echo of the stones oppressed him, and he moved cautiously.

Turning a large rock, he came suddenly upon a grinning skull perched on a ledge level with his face, and at the same instant a blinding shaft of light struck aslant from above and shone through the hollow eyes.
Dick stood paralysed, his eyes standing out and his lower jaw falling away, while a gurgling noise came out of his throat.

He had no power to fly from the awful thing, and would in a few seconds have gone off in a fit, had not the flame suddenly died away. He continued to glare at the spectre in a dazed way, when a noise from above attracted his attention. It sounded like laughter—diabolical laughter, it was true, but still something he could understand.

Withdrawing his glance by a painful effort from the skull, he looked up to see what manner of spook it was. The first thing that struck him was that the spirit had a white face—a singular thing at the outset, because, as he understood, all spirits were shadowy and dark. The next strange thing about the spirit was its voice.

“Hullo, you black nigger!” it cried out; “have you got any tobacco about you?”

“Yoh!” cried Dick, “et’s ole Skin-jacket.” He gave a whoop, and shinned up the remaining distance like a chamois.

With the help of skins and rushes, Rowe had made himself a snug sleeping-place beneath a shelving rock, and from the safe retreat he could see all who approached the farmhouse. Dick was soon at ease, though it was some time before his face recovered its usual hue of polished mahogany.

His attention was given to a curious instrument which Rowe was working upon.

“So,” he observed, with awe, “dot was de ting dot made a fire troo de dead Zulu’s head.”

“Yes, that was the spirit’s eye that scared you, Dick: you watch me throw a line of light to the bottom of the hill.”

The instrument consisted of a small, circular looking-glass, such as are manufactured for native use, suspended between two wooden uprights, with a piece across to prevent it from swinging round, and a slotted stick behind to regulate its movements. It was, in fact, made on the lines of the army heliograph, which Rowe had seen flashing its signals at the camp.

He carried it into the sun, caught the rays full on the glass, then tilted it upward, by so doing throwing a shaft of light in a straight line.

“I rigged up that skull, which I found among the rocks, and I have practised shooting a shaft of light right through it, to warn off visitors.”

“Well, well!” exclaimed Dick, who had watched the operation with child-like wonder, “you es a smart man! See dot randt yonder?—well, dis morning we see dis same light from all up dere.”
“Did you? That’s good. I was wanting to test its range. If it carries so far, it’ll carry fifteen or twenty miles.”

“Wot good it do?”

“You wait, Dick, and maybe it’ll have to do some service. That is Captain Blaine who came with you, eh?”

They sat smoking for some time, until Dick felt his appetite getting too clamorous, when he went down to the house. Once on level ground again, his thoughts returned to Pala and the slight she had put on him.

“Wonder what she was doing with that stone?” he thought; “maybe hiding medicine to bewitch some people—well, let’s see.” Carelessly approaching the stone, he turned it over with a supple toe, and saw something white and flat lying amid a little colony of squirming creatures.

He picked up two pieces of cardboard, replaced the stone, and stuck his curious prizes in the band of his hat. He found his dinner ready for him at the stable, ate it, and began rubbing down his horses without further thought of the ornaments in his head gear.

Here he was when Captain Dalston rode up.

“Take my horse, rub him dry, walk him up and down until he cools, then feed him. Where is Captain Blaine?”

“Up to the house, baas.”

“When did you reach here?”

“When the sun was at dinner-time, master.”

“He has been here three hours,” thought Dalston, then glanced keenly at Dick, as though he would question him further. He refrained, however, and was withdrawing, when the singular ornamentation of the Basuto’s hat caught his attention.

“What have you there?”

“Doan know, sieur,” said Dick, with a vacuous smile.

“Let me see.”

Dick took the pieces of cardboard out, and handed them to the Captain, who glanced at them first curiously and then with a look of amazement. Holding one up in either hand, he continued for some moments to look from the one to the other. They were the two photographs Blaine had given Pala to carry to Miss Rath, and bore his writing on the back.

“‘My mother, Mrs. Blaine.’—‘My little sweetheart, Kate Dalston,’” Dalston read out the words aloud.

“The things are witchcraft,” thought Dick, “and de Capen he is bewitched.”
It looked so. Dalston glared at the portrait of the little girl fixedly, while his great chest heaved, and his lips were pressed tightly together.

“There can be no doubt,” he muttered. “She is one and the same. He has found it out, and I am too late. ’No,’” he cried, in a low voice of concentrated passion, “he’ll not have her!”

“Where did you find these?” he said, turning fiercely on Dick.

“Eh—wot—I pick ’em up. Dey belong to Pala.”

Captain Dalston returned the portrait of Mrs. Blaine to Dick, and placed that of the little girl in his pocket.

“Now,” he said, with another fierce look, “don’t you breathe a whisper about this.” He walked away, while the Basuto watched him with a pitying look on his face.

“The witchcraft es on him, surely,” he muttered.

Captain Dalston suddenly paused in his rapid walk. “If they have been playing with me,” he muttered, hoarsely, “they will repent—ay, they will repent—and before they are a week older.”

Chapter 26  The Shadow of a Crime

ALL THIS TIME, Captain Blaine had not been spending such happy moments as he had anticipated. The fact is, he had ridden out to Kopje Alleen with the intention of making what, in his inmost heart, he regarded as a magnanimous sacrifice of his prospects. His love for Mary was still unformed, a sentiment of affection lingering on the borderland of pity. Consequently, in his half-formed plans for the future, he had thought only of himself, and had taken it as a matter of course that this country girl, whom he was about to honour, and for whom he had already surrendered so much, would gratefully accept him.

He learnt that day that he had very mistaken notions of Miss Rath. He knew she was beautiful, but he did not know that when it came to a question of which should be honouring the other, he would be the honoured one.

From what Pala had so audaciously told him, he expected to find Mary overwhelmed with joy at his return; but instead, beyond that first swift rush of colour, she had been frigidly calm, with a trace of that gracious sweetness that was natural to her, and could not be suppressed.

Blaine was puzzled at first, then he set himself to win from her some sign of feeling, and in doing so his halting love grew apace.

It was hard for Mary to resist his winning ways, and to show no sign; but though her eyes were sad, and her voice sometimes trembled, she remained
true to her unspoken resolution, not to mar Captain Blaine’s prospects in life by any act of hers.

“It was kind of you,” he said at last, in desperation, “to send a message to me by Pala. I have not forgotten it, though you have.”

A trace of colour came into her cheeks. “I thought,” she said, “I might have asked a favour of Sirayo, but he told Pala that he could spare no soldier. My message, therefore, could only have raised hopes that were doomed to failure, and I bitterly regretted having raised them. A load was lifted off my mind when I heard of your escape.” She turned her eyes upon him with a deep look of thankfulness.

“I do not see,” said Blaine, gloomily, “what Sirayo had to do with your message, but you are perfectly right in saying my hopes were blighted.”

“I am so sorry,” she answered, with a slight quiver. “I told Pala to tell you that your friends were working for you, because I believed the chief would have released you at my request.”

“Was that all?” he asked, in a tone of such disappointment as to draw a look of surprise from her. “Oh, I beg your pardon; it was good of you to have thought of me, and the knowledge that you were planning for my escape cheered me. Did Pala give you any message from me?”

Again Mary blushed. “Pala, I am afraid, is a very unreliable messenger.” The fact was, the Zulu girl had brought back exaggerated messages of love from the Captain.

“Did she not give you the portraits I gave into her care for you?”

“Portraits!—no. What portraits?”

“Why, portraits of my mother, and of Kate, a little friend of mine.”

“Portrait of your mother! Oh, what can have become of it? I would have treasured it indeed. I will ask Pala about it; she has strange fancies, and may have kept them back.”

A shadow passed the window. Dalston had paused outside at the sound of voices, and overheard the last few sentences. He gathered from the words that Blaine had not connected the portrait of little Kate Dalston with Mary Rath, and that the latter knew nothing of such a person as Kate Dalston, or of the matrimonial projects mapped out for Blaine. Upon that inspiration of his he rashly determined to act.

He appeared at the door as Mary was rising to call Pala, and his presence prevented her from carrying out her intention.

She greeted him with a look of deep gratitude, which Blaine in his irritable mood mistook for another sentiment.
They sat there a silent trio, ill at ease with one another, the men tugging at their moustaches.

“I have not congratulated you yet, Blaine,” said Dalston, putting his plan into effect with brutal directness.

“I should like to know upon what you can found your congratulations, unless it is upon the pleasure of your presence.”

“That is scarcely gallant,” said Dalston, quickly; then turning to Miss Rath, with an ironical air he continued, “Our friend here has quite a romantic history. He has been lucky enough to be betrothed, quite in the old style, to an heiress, who singularly enough is my cousin. I suppose I ought to envy him, but, upon my soul, I wish him good fortune! You see why I congratulate you?”

Blaine was disgusted at the offensive manner in which this uncalled-for disclosure was made, but he replied quietly—

“I scarcely see, Captain Dalston, why you should introduce a matter of no interest, and of such an entirely personal character.”

Dalston laughed.

“Well, it is of great interest to me, for unless you marry Miss Dalston, I share in the fortune. However, I take the opportunity of relinquishing my claims, and wishing you success.”

He looked at Mary, thinking he had done an excellent stroke in knocking Blaine out of the running, and in strengthening his own claims. However, her reply enlightened him.

“I agree with Captain Blaine,” she said, gravely, “that it is scarcely just to Miss Dalston to discuss her future in the presence of a stranger like me.”

“Thank you, Miss Rath,” said Blaine, earnestly; “but as this matter, without any reason that I can imagine, has been started, I may be allowed to add a further explanation. It is true that certain plans were made for my future, but it appears to me to be just neither to me nor to the lady to continue them, and I am afraid I cannot accept Captain Dalston’s good wishes.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Dalston, gruffly.

“My meaning, I imagine, is perfectly clear,” Blaine replied. “I must apologize to Miss Rath for persisting in what must be regarded as a breach of courtesy. Don’t you think I have acted rightly?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Mary, clasping and unclasping her hands in evident agitation. “Do not act hastily.”

“You—surely you would not have two people tied together whether they like it or not?” Blaine persisted.
“No, of course not. That is—I don’t know. But there are your prospects in life.”

“Prospects!” said Blaine, with a sense of keen disappointment that mercenary views of marriage should exist in this remote place. “Pardon me, Miss Rath,” he said, with a bitter smile, “but mercenary views would not have the least influence with me.”

Mary, in her pain at being misunderstood, and in confusion at the singular development of matters, so contrary to what had been expected, gave up battling against the fates. “Forgive me,” she said, with a brilliant blush, and a look which brought the blood with a rush into Blaine’s gallant face.

Dalston watched this interchange of glances with a dark and threatening frown. His little plot had turned upon himself.

“Do you know the legend of Kopje Alleen, Miss Rath?” he asked abruptly, in harsh tones.

Mary turned to him with a shy smile.

“What makes you recall that gloomy history? The Zulus say, you know, that it is an augury of coming trouble to talk of it.”

“We are not superstitious,” he answered, with a grim smile. “Pray tell it us. I should like to hear the story while in the shadow of the hill itself.”

Thus pressed, Mary retold the tragedy of love and jealousy and fratricidal murder.

“I think,” she said, woman-like, going unerringly to the fault in her own sex, “that the girl was to blame for her thoughtless conduct.”

“Do you?” said Dalston, with a strange look—“well, you may be right. My opinion is that Gert went the wrong way to work. He should have married the girl, if necessary, by force, and need not have killed his brother, unless the young fool interfered.” He turned his dark eyes upon Blaine.

“What do you think?” he demanded.

Before Blaine, who had regarded Captain Dalston with a steadfast and searching look, could reply, Mr. Rath appeared from the other room.

Greeting the two officers gravely, he asked his daughter to see about getting coffee made, a task which took her out of the house.

“I wish to say a word to you, gentlemen. I have overheard your conversation, and detected in it a tone of hostility—nay, do not interrupt—which is due to a regard, on the part of each of you, for my daughter. I do not seek to know the measure of that regard, nor when it originated, nor can I object to any honourable sentiment towards her; but I do object to these constant visits, which may bring sorrow to my child.”

He paused, and passed his hands across his eyes.
“I do not wish to seem unkind, and especially to you, Captain Dalston, but there are reasons for a resolution which to you may appear exacting. I hope, gentlemen, you will not return here until the war is over. Then, sirs, and not until then, you may appear as suitors, and he who gains my daughter’s love will receive my consent. Understand from me, however,” he continued, firmly, “if I detect then a feeling of animosity between you, I will close the door upon you both. God knows how the curse of jealousy has marred my life, and I will not have Mary exposed to the same danger.”

“Mr. Rath,” said Blaine, “your daughter’s happiness is as dear to me as it is to you. I do not know in what way my conduct can have given you uneasiness, but I will respect your command. Good-by, sir.” He held out his hand, and there was in his clear blue eyes such a stamp of truth as to drive the worried look from the old man’s face.

“God bless you, lad!” he said. “Do not think me harsh. Say good-by to Mary, but be brief.”

Blaine bowed gravely to Dalston, and passed out. He found Mary at the back of the house, questioning Pala about the portraits. She approached to meet him, but paused with fading colour when she saw the grave look on his face.

“Good-by, Miss Rath,” he said, lifting her hand and looking long into her expressive eyes.

“Good-by!” she said—“why?”

“Your father will explain. Mary,” he continued, using her name for the second time, “I cannot say all my heart feels, but remember, I will return when the war is over—I will return for you.”

“When the war is over!” she murmured, but he had gone. With hands clasped before her, with heaving breast, and eyes fixed on his retreating figure, she stood a beautiful picture: and so standing, Dalston saw her.

“Ah!” he muttered, “it is so. He is the favoured one, but he must first reckon with me.”

“What!—are you going also?” said Mary.

“Yes, Miss Rath—but I will return,” he added, with a low laugh. “See, you are standing in the shadow of the hill. What a fool Gert was to have shot his brother when he might have run away with his lady-love. Good-by, Miss Kate—I beg pardon, Miss Mary.”
Chapter 27  The General’s Engagement

CAPTAIN DALSTON rode off to Constitution Camp, a fortified place held chiefly by Oham’s renegade Zulus; while Captain Blaine and the Basuto went off to the little Dutch village of Utrecht.

“Baas!”

“Well, Dick?”

“You know dot man Rowe—well, ’twas dot same made dot fire from Kopje Alleen.”

“Yes,” said the officer, listlessly, his mind on other matters.

“Yaas, he tole me somethin mighty curious, baas. He say he tink dere will be some troubles here by Kopje Alleen.”

“Why does he think so?” said Blaine, sharply, suddenly realizing that the Basuto had really something to tell him.

“I dunno. He tole me somethin ’bout de way Capen Dalston he look when he ride up. Dot Capen he look all about de place. ’Zamine de back door—so Rowe say, and he got a plan.”

“A plan!—what for?”

“Why, you see, baas, he make a ting which shine like a star. You know we see him from de hill. Well, you see, if so be anything happen, he show dat light from the hill, und we mus’ drap everyting und ride for Kopje Alleen.”

“That is a nice plan, Dick,” remarked the officer, with a smile. “Who is going to watch all day for the light, and how do you know that Rowe will not lead you off on a wild-goose chase?”

“No wild goose, sieur,” replied Dick, gravely—“Miss Mary, Rowe tinking about. Light will shine out when my shadder is grown so high as my knee after dinner hour.”

“That would be about three o’clock,” mused Blaine, who from the Basuto’s evidently sincere manner was inclined to give ear to his plan. “And why did Rowe tell you this, Dick?”

“Well, sieur, it was dis way: Skin-jacket is a white man, but he take snuff mit me, and when he ask me help,—‘You look after dot young missy, ef anyting happen,’—I say ‘Yes.’ Dot is so.”

Blaine rode on with his mind keenly alive to any possible danger which might beset Miss Rath, and once or twice Dalston’s inopportune reference to the Kopje Alleen tragedy, with his comments thereon, crossed his mind.

Dick dismounted to tighten girths, but when Captain Blaine had gone out of sight, he mounted and struck across the veldt to the right. An hour afterwards he overtook his officer.

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“Your horse is blown, you must have ridden hard. What have you been doing?”

“Watch Baas Dalston.”

“Watching Captain Dalston! Understand, my man, I will not have you act as a spy.”

“Yoh!” said Dick, stolidly, and without any idea of the meaning of the word spy. “Baas Dalston ride straight to dot schelme (rascal) Dwani, Oham’s induna. What for, eh?”

“Enough!” said Blaine, sternly—“fall behind.”

Dick took up his position in the rear, where he ruminated upon the stupidity of white men in shutting their eyes to awkward facts. He put the question to himself—

“Whyfore Capen Dalston go to Dwani? Cose Dwani a rascal. And why go to rascal? Cause will do rascally work. Dot is so.”

On the third day after leaving camp Captain Blaine and his attendant returned. Almost the first person they saw was Captain Dalston, and Blaine threw a look at his servant as much as to say, “Your suspicions were baseless.”

Dick that afternoon spent an hour watching the growth of his shadow. When it had stretched out to a length corresponding to the length of his leg below the knee, he fixed his eyes on the far-off ridge.

Then he marched off to the mess-tent, where Blaine with some companions was enjoying the afternoon smoke, and stood patiently waiting until he was noticed.

“What is it, Dick?” called out Blaine.

“All’s well,” remarked Dick solemnly, saluted, and marched off, leaving Blaine to bear the chaff of his brother officers at this singular address.

War has its humours as well as its terrible tragedies. On the next day there was a mingling of the two. The camp was now pitched on a slope facing the mountain with which we are already familiar in connection with Blaine’s escape. At the approach of the column, Sirayo had, of course, slipped away with his two hundred followers, and, as was known to Colonel Buller, had taken up a position among some broken hilly country behind the mountain. Some half-dozen of the huts which had escaped the torch at the assault by the cavalry a few days previously remained standing, but deserted.

They offered a tempting bait to the curiosity and cupidity of a few camp natives, one of whom was nicknamed Cetewayo, after the Zulu King, on account of his plumpness.
When the morning broke, Colonel Buller, at the head of three troops of Horse, skirted the mountain and entered into a narrow and richly cultivated valley, which opened on its far end upon the ridges occupied by Sirayo.

Some time after the departure of the rough Horse, the Commander-in-chief, through his field-glass, observed natives flitting about the huts opposite.

“What!” he thought, “Zulus actually prowling about in the open day in full sight—I must teach them a lesson!”

Orders were instantly issued. A battery of field-guns having been limbered up, a regiment of eight hundred were lined in review order. The General rode down the line, and with pleasure noted how delighted the men looked at the prospect of a fight, though they were somewhat puzzled as to the whereabouts of the enemy.

“Where on earth are we going to?” said one.

“To fight the old thief, Cetewayo. Wouldn’t I like to get a slant at him with my bayonet!” said another.

“Oh, get along! Cetewayo’s at Ulundi, ten days’ march, and we’ve not a day’s rations.”

“Well, never mind where we’re going, so long as there’s to be a scrimmage.”

The General examined the huts, to see what impression his preparations had made on the enemy.

None—absolutely none. The varlets were loitering about as though there were no British soldiers within a hundred miles.

“Plant a shell among them, sir. March!”

The guns took up position, and in a few seconds the shells shrieked through the still air like spirits of destruction.

The soldiers, now awaking to the surprising fact that the enemy was only a mile off, though evidently concealed from view, advanced with a cheer. They crossed the donga and doubled up towards the huts.

The half-dozen camp-followers at the mountain were rather curious about the preparations in camp, but when a shell dropped into a hut and scattered its fragments about them, they considered that they were in the way. Accordingly they gathered behind a large rock, from which they watched the approach of the long red line, with the glittering row of bayonets, with much satisfaction.

Their masterly retreat, however, was regarded by the General as a piece of deep strategy, and the order was given to take the position at a rush. Nothing loth, the soldiers, with a wild cheer, dashed forward—and then it dawned on
the mock Cetewayo that he and his brother friendlies were not mere spectators of a glorious promenade, but principals in a real tragedy. He imparted his suspicions to the others at the possible thought that these eight hundred fierce red-jackets, with those terrible three-edged bayonets, were coming against them: they bolted like rabbits for crannies among the rocks.

Cetewayo was too fat to run, but he held his rifle up above his head to show his friendliness. This innocent act was misinterpreted.

“See, my lord, he is going to shoot you!” yelled out one excited soldier.

“Yes,” said another, over-zealous, “he is ramming down ball!”—a feat, it may be remarked, truly marvellous, considering that all rifles in use were breechloaders.

“Kill the beggar!” they yelled, and with a rush half-a-dozen ferocious men enclosed the hapless friendly.

“Me Cetewayo, me Cetewayo, no stab!” cried out the poor fellow, in supplicating tones.

“Cetewayo, are you! Take that, then! and that!”

Luckily, the men were winded, and Cetewayo was recognized before they could transfix his naked black body. However, though he dodged about with great nimbleness, he received several severe scratches.

The men were terribly disappointed when they found there was to be no fighting; but who can describe the mortification of the General and his brilliant staff, who were mercilessly roasted that same night by the Colonel on his return? Happily, at Ulundi, in the defeat of the real Cetewayo, both General and men wiped out the memory of the practical joke unconsciously played upon them by the sham Cetewayo.

Meanwhile, Buller and his men were embarked on a more serious business. There were several small villages in the peaceful valley through which the horsemen slowly passed, and many patches of waving maize, but not a sign of human life. Women and children had fled into the gloomy depths of forest fastnesses to the south, and the men were sullenly retiring under the battery of artillery drawn up on a ridge on the far left.

When the half-squadron of Horse reached the mouth of the valley, they drew rein to look upon the panorama spread out. To the left was a dark mass, from which, at regular intervals, columns of smoke burst forth, then rolled upwards in spreading plumes. The valley opened upon ground broken up by strangely-formed hollows, forming gigantic bowls, outlined in rocks, with a higher ridge to the right.

Scattered about over this broken country, but making for one point, were the Zulus slowly retiring, gathered together in knots here and there, to watch
the course of a shell—“boom by-and-by,”49 as they called them in English—but all unconscious of the cavalry drawn up on their flank.

“Now we have them!” said the Colonel. He gave his orders with promptness, having taken in the situation at a glance. “Forward!”

The force, breaking up in three lines, swept on, and at the same instant a white horse dashed out from behind a neighbouring kopje, and took a position upon a point which commanded the best view.

The horse and rider stood motionless—the long plumes rising from the proud head above.

“Sirayo! Sirayo!” shouted the keen-eyed Basutos, and, firing as they went, away they dashed for the famous chief.

Sirayo watched their approach, then waved his hand above his head, and in that wonderful voice—like the roar of a lion—called to his men to rally round him.

Chapter 28  The Flash

FROM ALL SIDES the dark men, lithe of limb, and naked but for the light covering about their loins, rushed for the rocks about their young chief. Some were overtaken by the horsemen, and met their death in silence after a fierce fight. One man, at Sirayo’s bidding, mounted the white horse and rode away, not without much demur.

Then, at a word from the chief, the men spread out among the rocks, on a small isolated ridge of horse-shoe shape, and in some mysterious way melted from sight.

The horsemen dashed up—the Basutos in their wild excitement having broken from the column formation, and acting each independent of the other. The white troopers kept some semblance of order under the stern command of the Colonel, but they, too, were inclined to break loose. It looked as if they had got the Zulus in a trap, and were eager for the fray.

The foremost Basutos, when they reached the foot of the ridge, still kept urging on their wiry ponies up over the stones.

When half-way up, a score of dark figures slipped from their concealment, and leapt down upon the horsemen. A few wild cries, a few sharp thrusts, and a dozen ponies dashed away riderless. Rolled the war-shout “Usutu!” from the rocks, and again the warriors, with blood-stained assegais, regained their shelter.

A volley was poured upon them, and the bullets striking against the stones ricocheted harmlessly away with a shrill whistling. The Zulus from their shelter answered with taunting cries and a scattered fusillade.
“Dismount! Forward! Charge!” The orders came like pistol-shots.

With a cheer, the troopers dashed to the attack, their carbines ready, their lips tightly pressed, and eyes bright.

They reached the base amid a hot fire, and rushed up from rock to rock without further resistance, and topped the summit unharmed, then looked in vain for the foe.

“Curse them, there they go like jackals! After them, my lads!” and down the other side dashed half the troopers in hot pursuit, the Colonel’s order “to horse” falling on unheeding ears.

They dashed across a small hollow with the eagerness of pursuers and the confidence of victors, but as they began to mount another ridge, behind which the active enemy had disappeared, the terrible war-cry rang out from above, and like an avalanche the untiring warriors descended. The volley from the carbines was poured in hurriedly by the panting troopers, and before they could reload, the long blades of the stabbing assegais were rattling against their rifle-barrels. A thud now and then, a low moan, marked the death of a trooper, a smashing crash and heavy fall told that a Zulu’s skull had been broken by a blow with a clubbed rifle.

The tall muscular form of Sirayo towered in the thickest. His crane feathers were severed clean off by a sabre-cut, but the arm which dealt the blow was nerveless. His spear was reeked with blood, and his eyes rolled like those of an infuriated lion. Slowly the troopers, overwhelmed, retreated in compact order, but the Usutu war-cry rose round them from every side.

The thunder of charging horses rose above the din of strife, and the Zulus, at their chief’s command, turned and ran for the shelter of the ridge; their loss had been slight, but their assailants had suffered heavily.

The troopers were exasperated by the wiles of the foe, and measured the distance to the top of the ridge with a view to another charge.

“Captain Blaine,” said the Colonel, “take fifty men, retreat until you are out of sight, then sweep round to the rear of that ridge. Fire a volley when you are in position. We will charge, and you must check the enemy’s retreat. I give you ten minutes.”

Blaine saluted, then turned to his troop: “By your right—wheel—trot—gallop!” He rode a quarter of a mile, turned to the left, then swept round, guided by the intermittent firing kept up between the troopers and the Zulus.

The ground at the back of the ridge was broken, and he saw at a glance it was impossible for the cavalry to move with any effect. There was another plan which offered, and his soldierly instinct fixed on it at once.

A small rocky kopje rose some distance to the right rear of the ridge held by the Zulus. He saw that Sirayo would make for that vantage when dis-
lodged, and he determined to hold it himself and surprise the enemy. It was a risk, but he resolved to take it.

Telling off ten men under an experienced sergeant to approach the ridge cautiously, and to fire from its left flank in an oblique direction, with orders to fly if pursued, he himself with thirty-five men took up position in the kopje, the other five being told off to keep the horses well out of sight, behind the kopje.

The ten minutes were up, the Zulus began to break cover, when they discovered the presence of the ten troopers. They hesitated a moment, then broke away for the kopje as Blaine imagined, receiving unheeded the volley from the ten mounted men, and running with incredible swiftness.

They were at the base of the kopje, and were mounting up with springy strides, when a deadly volley was poured into them from Blaine’s men.

The surprise did what the volley itself could not have effected. A panic seized on the warriors, and they began to run. The first to turn fell under an assegai thrust.

“Dogs!” shouted the chief, “would you fly from death here to meet it in a shameful way as cowards at the kraal? Follow me.”

He leapt over the rocks, with his shield before him; and after him, with a thrilling cry, his men went, spreading out after their way in an effort to outflank the enemy.

Some of them came upon the horses at the back, and stampeded them after killing two of the guard.

The troopers poured in another volley with effect, but before they could reload the assegais were amongst them; there was a wild, sickening struggle, blood spurted high in fountains, and the Zulus disappeared over the kopje, and down the other side.

Blaine, with his sword broken near the hilt, his hat gone, a rent in his coat, and blood streaming from a cut on his shoulder, staggered after the enemy with a confused thought that it was better to die than meet the stern reproof of the Colonel for disobeying instructions.

The ten troopers whom he had sent off circled up with a spare horse that had run to them, and Blaine swayed in their direction. He mounted, reeled from side to side in his saddle like a drunken man, then with a desperate effort recovered command of himself.

“Charge!” he cried, “and revenge your comrades!”

Away they flew, and at sight of their numbers the Zulus slackened speed, opened to receive them, and then closed. Revolvers cracked, horses snorted with pain as the assegais struck them, but still the gallant troopers swept on
right through the dark mass, then turned again. One by one they fell from the saddle, some to stagger to their feet and fight on foot.

“Ju!” yelled the Zulus; “Ju! Victory! We kill! Great is our chief—cunning as a jackal—terrible as the lion!”

This song of triumph was premature. It was answered by a fierce shout, and from behind a ridge swept down a hundred horsemen, the wiry figure of the Colonel leading. Through the scattered enemy they swept, overturning, striking them down, and after them they went fighting right up to the brink of a wooded kloof. Into this the Zulus slipped, to rally again under the fierce cry of their chief, who stormed and raged at the catastrophe which had taken some of the success from his strategy.

In that short pursuit Dick shot a Zulu through the leg, and dismounted to interview his victim.

“Well, John,” he said, squatting down by the side of the suffering but proudly silent warrior, “how goes it?”

“We have killed you,” said the warrior, “two for each of us.”

“All right, but we made you run. Are they all right at the kraal—plenty of food, eh, and beer? Are your people tired of fighting?”

“You will be tired first.”

“So Cetewayo is at Ulundi, eh? Good; we’ll turn him out. Any more news?—but don’t speak if your leg hurts you. Sirayo was with you; he is a big chief.”

“Aweh! I hear that yesterday he slew Oham’s people, beyond Kopje Alleen.”

“What did they do there?”

“They had captured a white girl from the old man, the white witch-doctor.”

“Yoh! and where is she now?”

“You must ask Sirayo.”

“Good, John. Have you more news? None? Well, for what you have told me I will kill you well. Where shall I shoot you?”

“In the heart,” said the warrior, calmly, placing his hand over his heart; “first a pinch of snuff.”

Dick took from the lobe of his ear a small tube filled with snuff. The warrior poured some into the palm of his hand and sniffed it up with a satisfied air.

“Now,” he said.

Dick drew back a yard, and placed a bullet through his prisoner's heart.
After this grim business, which is no fictitious make-believe, and which to Dick was an act of kindness, the Basuto rode back towards the kopje.

He found Captain Blaine unhorsed again, but sound in mind, though weak from loss of blood, and sadly troubled about the fearful consequences of having dismounted his men.

“Dick,” he said, hopelessly, “half my brave men are lost.”

“No, baas; they died fighting—what more could they hope for? You kept the Zulus till we got up. It was good, so few against so many.”

“I wish I had been killed too, Dick.”

“No, sieur, there is work for you. It is near time. Remember Kopje Alleen and the bright fire. Come.”

He helped his officer on to his horse, and ran by his side to the nearest ridge. Blaine paid no attention to his words, but turned his eyes back upon the field of that fierce and bloody fight.

Far away on the horizon showed the blue heights of the northern frontier; Dick watched the growth of his shadow as it stretched over the burnt gorse inch by inch. At last it crept up to the mark he had placed to indicate the proper length, and then he fixed his keen, black eyes on a small peak in that distant range, wondering if the light would come.

The moment had passed, and yet another; the shadow crept an inch beyond its mark, and Blaine turned to look too.

“No duce, baas—cannot see. That Skin-jacket made his big mistake.”

He turned away to watch the troopers returning, and Blaine, with a sudden lighting of his face, leapt on the large rock and looked to the north.

“Wot is it, baas?”

“Look, Dick, can you see anything?” he said, in a startled voice.

Dick turned his eyes again to the spot.

“Umpagati!” he cried, in an awed voice; “there is the light.”

A tiny spark, like the brief light of a match struck afar off on a dark night, glowed on the distant summit.

“The Zulu was right,” muttered Dick. “Baas, we must go now. Skin-jacket calls to us.”

“No,” whispered Blaine to himself, “it is Mary, I heard her call.”

Chapter 29 Missing

CAPTAIN BLAINE felt his strength and spirit return at the silent message cast by that small spark; it made a claim upon his energy, his courage, and perhaps his life; and his first sensation was one akin to pleasure that it should
come at such a moment, when his military career seemed at its darkest. He had perhaps judged himself too severely for his failure to hold back the Zulus, but his only fault had been that he had not taken the extraordinary dash of Sirayo into consideration. Moreover, in following up the enemy, his recklessness had served its purpose, and recklessness that succeeds is never condemned.

However, in his own mind he had blundered, and he dreaded that censure which he believed the stern Colonel would mete out to him.

“Now, Dick, do you still mean to go with me to Kopje Alleen?”

“In course, baas.”

“Then we must start at once.”

“Dot is so! Baas got no horse, no rifle, no cartridges, no tobacco, no coffee, no brandy, no nothing. What baas do?”

“I have thought of that. There are many spare horses—God rest the gallant men who bestrode them last! I will take one from the guard, as well as a carbine with bandolier and cartridges. Blankets and canteens are strapped to all the saddles. We will ride on quickly into camp before the squadron, secure what provisions we think necessary, and then leave camp without delay.”

“Yah, baas. But suppose pickets see which way we go? Best ting to ride back behind mountain as if coming join squadron, then break away.”

They carried out their plan without difficulty. The guard surrendered the best of the spare chargers to the officer, together with rifle and ammunition. They rode hurriedly into camp, provided themselves with coffee, sugar, a few pounds of flour, and then left as if with the intention of rejoining the squadron.

Once, however, behind the mountain, they bore away to the right, then turned north, and rode hard for Kopje Alleen.

It was night when they crossed the ridge, and then Blaine felt how helpless he would have been without the Basuto. Dick took the lead, studied the stars a few minutes, then went forward, leading his pony down the hill into the valley beneath.

They halted here and listened, for the darkness was thick beyond any penetration to the extent of a foot, and they trusted to the ear to guide them. Blaine breathed gently as he strained his ears, but beyond the movement of the horses, as they nibbled at the herbage, there was no distinct sound in the vast vacuum of darkness.

Dick, with head bent, listened long, but without success.

“Dere is noting, baas, but the river running.”

“The house is beyond the river—we must cross it.”
“If baas says so.”

They mounted and rode, leaving their horses to pick their own way among the anthills, stones, and wolf-holes. At last they reached the river, visible in its deep bed by a sort of ghostly gleam. The horses snorted in alarm when bidden to advance, and took to the water slowly, with much pawing of their fore feet.

The opposite bank was safely reached just in time, for a dull splash and snort behind told of the arrival on the scene of a crocodile.

Dick halted again for some time, in a vain endeavour to catch a sound which would guide him.

“No duce, baas; we must leaf it to de horses.”

They did this, but their patience was tried again, for the horses began feeding, walking as they fed, first slowly, then with quick paces, as the herbage grew less to their taste. At last, Dick’s pony, who had been to Kopje Alleen twice before, pricked his ears forward, then struck away at a rapid amble to the right.

They kept on for half an hour in intense silence, broken at last by the eager whinnies from both horses.

“The house is near, sieur; if they are there they will hear and show a light.”

If they were there! The words came with the effect of a blow. Blaine had not formed any idea of the cause of the summons which Rowe had made, and had, in fact, felt some doubt as to whether there could have been any cause, since he had left Mary in such safety.

Why should they not be there? It was nonsense on Dick’s part, but it was strange that if the house was near there was no light.

“Call out, Dick.”

Dick gave a long, deep-chested, melodic call in Basuto, that rolled away, and came back again in an echo marvellously clear.

“Dot is Kopje Alleen, sir—the hill that is bewitched. The spirits threw back my words. My! I doan’t like it.”

“Hush! Dick. Listen!”

They listened intently, but the silence remained unbroken. Blaine’s horse tossed its head impatiently and neighed shrilly.

They rode on until the horses came to a stop, and, stretching out his hand, Blaine felt the door of the house.

He was off his horse in a minute, and knocking.

“Mr. Rath!” he called. “Miss Mary, are you in?”
There was no response. The silence of death rested over the place. He pressed against the door, and it yielded. He entered the dark room, and, with a cry he could not resist, stumbled over some soft body.

“Dick!” he cried, in a voice thrilling with apprehension, “a light!”

Dick struck his flint, and blew upon the smouldering tinder, until in the reflection within his hollowed hand his beady black eyes gleamed. Then he lowered his hand to the floor.

There, rigid in death, was the big wolf-hound, Carlo, blood about his iron jaws, and a broken assegai sticking from his body.

Blaine, with his face gone deathly white, but with a dangerous gleam in his eyes, motioned Dick to the inner room.

They entered almost on tip-toe, one of them with a tightening sensation at his heart, and a feeling about his throat as though he would choke.

The feeble light shone over a room much disturbed and flecked with blood, but without that dark prostrate object they had dreaded to see.

“The next room,” muttered Blaine, hoarsely.

Dick, with his eyes rolling swiftly, noting everything, paused at the inner door.

“Go on!” said Blaine.

“No, sieur, no. Dere is somefin there, I can feel.”

Suppressing a shudder, Blaine took the tinder and stepped into the room; as he entered there fell upon him an uneasy feeling, which made him stand in the centre of the room with his glance fixed upon the far corner, where some dark object lay huddled up against the bed.

“Blood!” said Dick, suddenly; and Blaine, turning with a start and an exclamation, saw the Basuto pointing to the floor.

Lowering the tinder, he saw a dark stain along the floor, leading up to a wide pool of still fresh blood.

“Mary!” he exclaimed, in a whisper of concentrated agony—“Mary!”

The next instant he was on his knees by the side of the body, bending over it with haggard face. A swift change came over his face as he looked, and then he bent his ear to the body.

“Dick,” he said, fiercely, “here! come and help.”

“Is it dead, baas? I is afraid.”

“Come. It is Mr. Rath, and he lives.”

The two men lifted the body, and carried it into the centre room, where they placed it on the table, a pillow below the head. They worked in silence;
Blaine cutting the coat away from a jagged wound in the breast, while Dick lighted a candle which he found, then started for water from the well.

When he returned, he found Blaine vainly endeavouring to stop the flow of blood, which every second brought death nearer to the unconscious man. He rushed out again, taking with him his flint, and was back in a few minutes with a root, which he crushed to a pulp between his teeth, and applied it to the wound.

“Brandy, sieur!”

Blaine ran outside after his horse, which he heard at the stable, and secured a small flask of rum from his holster.

A few drops were forced into Mr. Rath’s mouth between the clenched teeth, then Dick was outside again searching for a large bulb. He succeeded, and placed a covering of the fleshy layers over the wound, binding the whole securely with a strip torn from one of Mary’s dresses.

Blaine, with a set expression on his face, kept up with the life-restoring doses, but he could not keep his eyes from wandering restlessly around the room.

“Baas’s thinking of the young missy,” said Dick. “Wait, and I will look round the house for spoor.”

He was gone for half an hour, though it seemed an age to Blaine, who was burning with fierce impatience to be out and doing.

He heard Dick’s voice echoing through the night as he called out “Skinjacket.”

“Dere is noting, sieur—no sign. See, here is a bit of paper.” He picked a torn piece from the floor, and handed it to Blaine.

There was writing on it, brief, but full of import.

“Zulus surprised the house. Killed the old man. Carried off Miss Mary. I have gone after to save her. The darned skunks!—Cob Rowe.”

That was all.

“I am going, Dick,” muttered Blaine, hoarsely.

“So! Baas will find the spoor in the darkness? No, can’t do it, sieur. Wait till sun up.”

Chapter 30  Another Trial

DICK DID NOT TELL Captain Blaine what the Zulu had told him. He believed in working out the mystery of Miss Rath’s abduction on his own plan, before attaching any credence to what might have been only a rumour on the part of his unfortunate victim.
Blaine could not sleep, neither could he sit still, but he removed his boots, and paced up and down the little room, pausing every now and again to watch the white rugged face, dimly visible in the flickering light of the candle.

The constraint he put upon his spirit, which cried out for action, and the mental suffering he endured, burnt out the last trace of selfishness from the heart of the young officer.

In the dreary, small hours of the night, just before the dawn, when the darkness is most intense and the stillness so deep that it is almost possible to hear the movement of the grass under the dew, Mr. Rath suddenly opened his eyes, and cried out one word—

“Mary!”

“Wot is it, baas?” asked Dick, in a frightened voice.

“Dick, he has called for his daughter, and we must bring her to him.”

Almost the life of the old man had gone forth in that cry; his eyes were again closed, and he scarcely seemed to breathe.

“Baas, in one hour the light is strong, and we must go.”

“If we leave him now, Dick, he will die.”

“Et mus’ be, sieur. When the ole tree withers et mus’ fall to give the young tree life. We mus’ leaf him.”

“When we rescue his child, the first thing she would ask us would be, ‘Where is my father?’ Could we tell her that we had left him to die in order to save her? No, Dick, one of us must stay while the other goes for help.”

“All right, sieur; time is lost, but I will go now to camp by Blood River. The sun is high up befoah I come back, und the spoor is near gone den. Nefer mind.”

Dick went off to mount his horse, thinking it was a useless waste of time to try to save the life of an old man, whose days in any case must be nearly run, while Blaine maintained his patient watch.

He saw the darkness roll away before the grey dawn, and the grey brighten into opal, and the opal into a soft golden hue. Then he heard the rapid beat of horse hoofs, and going to the door saw Dick returning, with some dark object on the saddle before him.

The Basuto drew rein and dropped the bundle to the ground, where it rolled and kicked. Some skins were uncovered, and an old Zulu woman was exposed to view.

“Found it asleep,” remarked Dick, coolly. “Picked her up, and here she are. S’all right, sieur.”
On any other occasion Blaine would have laughed at the ludicrous appearance of the old dame, and at her mingled expression of alarm and anger. As it was, he could not keep from smiling; and the odd captive, gathering from his expression that she was not to be summarily despatched, allowed a grin to spread over her face.

“Do you think we can trust her to look after Mr. Rath? Would she not leave him as soon as we were gone?”

Dick spoke a few words in Zulu, and the old dame, looking much frightened, answered humbly.

“I tolle her, baas, Rath is a great witch-doctor, and he will turn her a sick dog ef she doan’t watch him well.”

“Bring her in, and I will show her what is wanted.”

The old woman listened to the minute instructions given her with hand over her mouth, and her shrewd eyes twinkling.

Then she said something, and left the room.

Dick laughed. “She say she is old enough to be your mother two times, und you know noting ’tall about medicine. She haf goned now for wild bush to make drink for sick man. We mus’ go soon as breakfast ready.”

The horses were fed and rubbed down, and the rifles looked to; then, having drunk a cup of steaming coffee, they mounted when the rays of the sun were shooting into the sky.

Blaine saw the strange nurse bending over the pot wherein her herbs were stewing, and hoped he was doing right in leaving the helpless man in her charge.

Dick struck away due north on a broad trail that was now plainly outlined in that light.

“Why, Dick,” said Blaine, “if Zulus attacked the house, how is it they are going north instead of south?”

“We soon see dot, sieur.”

They rode on at a gallop, over hill and valley, the trail sweeping slightly to the left, much to Dick’s astonishment, for Oham’s kraal was behind Utrecht.

“They are going into Natal, baas. Und see, sieur, dere is Skin-jacket’s sign.” The Basuto pointed to a ball of chewed pith by the trail. “He is like a jackal that same Skin-jacket.”

The trail, after bending to the left, took a direction due west, and ran parallel to Isandlana range, about three miles distant.

“They will come out above Rorke’s Drift,” said Blaine, “if they keep on; but why should they go into Natal?”
Dick now began to look ahead, with a growing excitement visible in his flashing eyes.

“Ah! there es the spot!” he suddenly exclaimed, pointing to some rocks and bush ahead by which the trail should pass.

He dashed on, and raised a wild shout, waving his gun above his head.

Blaine followed swiftly, and came upon an awful sight—the ground sodden with blood; sleeping-mats, assegais, and shields scattered about; and the bodies of five Zulus lying stark and naked, with fearful stabs in their breasts, and gaping gashes drawn down across their bodies.

What did it mean? He turned to ask Dick, but found that he was out of hearing, intent on examining another body some hundred paces off.

“What is it, Dick?” asked Blaine, fearfully, as he galloped up.

Dick, who had dismounted, turned the body over with his toe, revealing a truly savage face.

“Dis is Dwani! Bad ting he dead. Nefer hear now who set him catch de young missy.”

“I don’t understand,” said Blaine. “Have these men been killed by the Zulus who attacked the homestead?”

The Basuto looked at his officer, with just a trace of pity for his ignorance.

“No, sieur. Dot thief, Dwani, make the mischief mit Oham’s Zulus from Constitution Camp. Well, de oder Zulus from Isandlana see Dwani’s, and dey run down to wait for ’em. When Dwani’s come up, out they jump, kill some of his men, others run.”

“What is Miss Rath?”

“’Spec she es on way for Ulundi, but mus’ see.”

Dick led the way to the back of the kopje, where he found a broken assegai, all blood-stained, and the hoof-prints of a horse.

“See, baas, de Zulus been led by man on horse—leaf his horse here while wait for Dwani. Dot man Sirayo!”

“Impossible! Sirayo was in the fight yesterday. It was he gave me this wound.”

“It was Sirayo, sieur,” repeated Dick; “he was here two days gone—plenty time get back. See, there is the spoor,” and Dick pointed to the marks which led due south into the Zulu country.

“We must follow, Dick; right to Ulundi, if necessary.”

“Yah, sieur. Wait minute.” He went round the kopje, returning with a shield, a bundle of assegais, and a kilt taken from a dead body.
They took up the spoor, which led them in a direction at right angles to their former course. Both went on in silence, turning over in their minds the new aspect of affairs.

“Doan’t like it, baas,” muttered Dick, presently, with a shake of his head. “All right go into Natal, where all friends; noder ting go into Zululand, where all waiting to kill us.”

“I have been thinking, Dick, that if you are right in supposing Sirayo captured Miss Rath, he would have sent her to the hiding-place of his people at Isandlana. If that is so, we have not far to go.”

“I thought so too, sieur, but drop it. Sirayo haf to draw away his men to Ulundi. Can’t leaf enough at Isandlana to fight; suppose Oham sent impi to wipe out Dwani’s death? No, sieur, dey haf gone right for Ulundi. Leaf men behind, one here, another dere, watch see if any mens follow. Very bad baas, very bad, dot is so.”

“But why should Sirayo take Miss Mary to Ulundi? You know she saved him from the troops, and he promised to help her. Do you think he would break his promise?”

“Can’t say, baas. Maybe he doing her help in taking to Ulundi. Who you tink set Dwani to take missy, eh?”

Blaine had his suspicions, but he blamed himself for them. It was impossible, he thought, for any white man to have planned such treachery.

“Some one pay Dwani do this ting. Well, Sirayo take missy from dot some one.”

They had now reached the foot of the Isandlana ridge, and it appeared that Dick was right. The trail, just faintly visible to the trained eye of the Basuto, led to the left of the precipices, in the caves of which some of Sirayo’s followers sought shelter.

“Now, sieur, we ride up to the ridge, and must stop to make plans.”

“What ever plan you decide on, remember this, that I will follow on the trail, wherever it leads.”

**Chapter 31  Surrounded**

“What HAS BECOME of Rowe? Do you think he was captured?” asked Blaine.

“No, he was not yet lef’ Kopje Alleen when Sirayo killed Dwani. I ’spect we find him up on the ridge. You see, sieur,” went on the Basuto, whose faculties were at their best when engaged in tracking, and who liked to make his views known very much after the eager triumphant fashion of the hound, who gives tongue when the scent is strong,—“You see, Skin-jacket made sig-
nal yesterday, den he follow on spoor, sleep out in de veldt las’ night. Den he say to hisself, ‘Well, ef any one is coming, dey reach Kopje Alleen in de night. Come on at sun-up, be on ridge here at breakfas’ time.’ So he wait.”

The Basuto spoke confidently, and, to Blaine’s astonishment, with correctness; for, as they reached the summit, Rowe stepped forward from some rocks.

He carried a rifle with him, but he did not look the same careless trooper with the furtive glance and sly smile Blaine remembered. There was a hard, determined expression on his face, and his thin lips looked as if a smile had never visited them.

“I hev been waiting for you, Captain. You mean to go on, and Dick too?” he asked, abruptly.

“We do. And if you are with us, you can tell how this happened as we proceed.”

“It is a bloody business, and there is much about it I can’t understand; but where Miss Mary has gone, I will follow after.”

“Good, that is what I say. Dick thinks Miss Rath has been taken to Ulundi, which lies about thirty miles due south of here. All we have to do is to make for Cetewayo’s kraal, and the sooner we start the better.”

Rowe hesitated, and looked away over the undulating grass country, broken by dongas and rocky ridges, but offering little shelter.

“What do you think, Dick?” he asked.

The Basuto for reply pointed to the top of the lofty precipice on the Isandlana range to the right. They followed the direction indicated, and saw a dark figure overlooking them.

“He is on watch,” said Dick; “ef you go—he follow. See doze kopjies along dere”—pointing to the line of route they would have to take—“other men along dere. We start now, by sun-down we all killed. Wot good dot do for missy?”

Blaine stamped his foot impatiently, and looked at Rowe.

“He is right,” said the latter; “the same thing struck me as I waited for you. We must journey by night.”

“Dot es so,” said Dick, emphatically.

Blaine thought a minute. “You know what is best,” he said, gravely. “In this matter I have no experience, and will consent to be guided by you. It is enough that each one of us is determined to see that no harm comes to Miss Rath, and in this work we are comrades.”

“Shake!” said Rowe, and the two white men clasped hands. “Your hand, too, Dick.”
Dick, somewhat timidly, placed his black fingers over the two white hands, then he drew himself up and saluted.

“Now, sieur,” he said, briskly, “we must go back, else the Zulu up dere will soon bring some fighting for us. Dere is time to fight, time to run—dis is time to run.”

Suiting his action to the word, Dick turned his horse down the side up which he had just ascended, and the others followed suit. Once in the valley, they turned their faces east, and Rowe told his story. Three days ago, he had been out after rheabuck, and the chase had taken him so far that he did not reach the homestead until late at night, when the lights were out. Unwilling to rouse the inmates, he had gone straight to his shelter amid the rocks.

At daylight he went down to the house, and saw at once that there had been an attack in his absence. Entering the house, he discovered the dead hound, and, as he thought, the lifeless body of Mr. Rath, but found no trace of either Miss Mary or Pala.

Running back for his rifle, he had at once followed on the trail, right up to the scene of the fight, when, finding that the spoor led into Zululand, he had returned to Kopje Alleen, flashed his signal, and again gone out on trail, which he followed up to and beyond the ridge. Three Zulus had followed him, having evidently watched his movements from Isandlana, and he had passed the greater part of the night in dodging them.

“What beats me, is why the Zulus took such a roundabout trail to get into their country. I suppose there was considerable jealousy among them, and they settled the dispute with the assegai, the victorious party going off to their own kraal.”

Dick laughed silently. “You es smart, Skin-jacket! but I 'spect you mus' come to me.” The Basuto then explained his view of the mystery, namely, that Sirayo had captured the young lady from a party of renegade Zulus.

When they had journeyed three miles, Dick drew up.

“That will do, now. I will take the horses back to Kopje Alleen, while baas rest here and sleep. No sleep ter-night—mus' sleep now,” said Dick, as he noticed the Captain’s hesitation.

“I suppose,” Blaine said, “we must leave the horses behind.” He thought a moment, then wrote a few lines on the back of a bank-note, the only strip of paper he had: “Tell the old woman to give that to Mr. Rath, when he recovers sufficient strength. It will tell him our mission, and perhaps lessen his fears.”

In the afternoon Dick returned on foot, bringing with him a pair of veld-schoens, a couple of mats, a blanket, and several pounds of biltong. Both Blaine and Rowe had slept soundly on the soft, sandy bottom of a donga, and after a good wash in a near pool were refreshed and hungry as hunters.
After a meal taken in peace, Dick proceeded to strip and rub himself over with grease to keep out the cold, after which he fastened the girdle taken from the dead Zulu round his waist. With his shield, assegai, and rifle, he looked the image of a finely-made Zulu.

“Now, sieur,” he said to Blaine, “you take off dem boots, and put on these veldschoens.”

Blaine complied, leaving his heavy riding-boots in the donga; and the burdens being equally divided, the little party mounted to the summit of the ridge, there to await the dusk, and to fix the line of route in their minds.

Stretching for miles before them was the grey undulating country, rolling up in gradually increasing billows to high ranges far to the west and to lofty isolated peaks on the south. About fifteen or twenty miles to the south-west loomed up a great grass-covered mountain, with rounded top.

“That is Ibabinanga,” said Dick, pointing to it. “At sun-up ter-morning we mus’ be on him top.”

“On its top?” queried Rowe. “D’ye want the Zulus to find us there?”

“No find up dere—too high, too far ter get up—no caves ’bout. No use for Zulu, he can climb up shorter hill and watch.”

“Why not hide away in a donga or bush?” asked Blaine.

“Too many kraals about, baas; dogs all hunting around, come across spoor. No, sieur, must get top dot hill.”

When the darkness was drawn across the land like a heavy curtain, all three had their eyes fixed in the direction of Ibabinanga, and they waited until the stars were glowing.

Determining their course by three of the brightest stars, they moved off on their long and silent tramp.

To walk twenty miles across country is nothing of a task for lusty manhood; but to struggle for that distance, in pitchy darkness, through a rough and trackless waste, without sound to guide or light to direct, is another matter.

Dick took the lead, his naked feet falling softly on the ground, his ears and nostrils serving him for eyes; Blaine followed, and Rowe brought up the rear.

On the flat, hard ground they made no noise, the veldschoens of the white men being as noiseless as the flat soles of the Basuto’s small feet; but in rocky places Blaine generally succeeded in kicking against a loose stone, which rattled with startling effect; and in the long grass, heavy with dew, they went with a regular “swish, swish, swish,” that would have been detected by any Zulu within hearing.
They kept on, however, in perfect security, for three hours—crossing dongas, wading through small streams with treacherous sandy bottoms, stumbling over rocks—and ever and again making detours to avoid a kraal or mealie garden. Specks of light, far apart, marked the camping-place of Zulu scouts; and the occasional howling of a dog told of the neighbourhood of a kraal, while at the same time giving an uneasy sensation to Rowe, whose recollection of his first meeting with Zulu dogs was still fresh.

They had not spoken a word, but each had concentrated his faculties on keeping straight on the imaginary line of route. The shifting of a burden, a sigh, a muttered exclamation, as one or other stubbed his toe against a stone, and the steady soft fall of the feet, warned each of the other's vicinity.

Suddenly Dick halted, with a warning hiss; and the three, still as carved stone, strained their ears, with heads slightly bent. A low murmur of voices came through the brooding air, and they turned to each other for guidance.

“We mus' go round again,” said Dick. “It is a big party befoah us, and mus' make wide bent.”

He struck off to the right, passing round a small kopje which hid the Zulus from view. On turning the shoulder of the hill they saw the fires to the left, and the dark forms of Zulus crouching around. They were all so intent on watching the warm glow of the fires, that before they were aware of it, they found themselves on the edge of a mealie patch.

“Let us go through it,” said Blaine; “we can pick a few green cobs.” On he went between the tall stalks, with the inevitable result of a crashing fall, and a few stalks went down under his body, adding to the noise.

“Yoh!” came the startled cry from amid the patch. “Look out! Here is a pig! Surround the garden!” The words were yelled out in Zulu, and before Blaine could recover his feet, a number of men from the fires were rushing up.

“By gosh!” muttered Rowe, “we are in for it this time. Let us make a run for it.”

“Hist!” exclaimed the Basuto. “Lie still!”

They crouched down, listening with bated breath to the cries made by the Zulus as they swiftly took up their positions.

Blaine drew his revolver, and Rowe followed suit, determined to make a fight for dear life; while Dick grasped his stabbing assegai.

At a given signal, the Zulus from all sides began whistling and shouting to frighten the supposed pig from his retreat. This failing, they began hurling stones, one of which struck Rowe on the leg, raising his anger to such a pitch of fury that Dick could scarcely hold him back.
A lull ensued, succeeded by a loud call.

“Now,” muttered the Basuto, “we mus’ be ready—they are calling up a dog.”

Blaine, who had been silent for some time, now spoke rapidly. “I have led you into this by my stupidity. If the dog finds us, we shall all be killed. I will creep out to the edge, and then make a dash for it. When they follow me, you steal out on the other side and make for the mountain.” He rose to carry out this desperate plan.

“None of that!” said Rowe, gruffly, laying a restraining hand upon the young officer. “What ’ud be the use of us to Miss Rath if we reached her without you?”

“Yah!” said Dick, “baas must stay. Ef it come to rush, lemme go.”

A sharp bark from the dog warned them of the imminence of the danger that threatened them.

The brute ran in for a few yards, then, suddenly scenting the quarry, he stood and barked furiously.

“It is not a pig!” cried one Zulu. “Call out the dog, and I will fire!”

The Basuto groaned as he explained these words.

“Let us make a dash together,” whispered Blaine.

“Yah, sir, wait a bit—creep softly to other side, where no look for us.”

The two white men did this, while Dick remained stationary; and, as he expected, the dog, seeing the white men move, made an advance. The Basuto stabbed the animal with one swift blow, then crawled after the others, whom he overtook in the centre of the patch, sitting still.

“Go on,” muttered Dick; “mus’ be near de ridge when Zulu find dog. He shout, und other mens run up see what ’tis, den we run.”

Rowe would not move; he had hold of a large pumpkin, which he was cutting eagerly with his bowie-knife.

“Skin-jacket,” whispered Dick, fiercely, “what fool with pumpkin! Come, or will lose chance.”

A wild yell rang out, followed by a rush of Zulus.

“The dog has been stabbed—get back to your places!”

“It is too late,” muttered Dick; “I must die.”

Chapter 32 Rowe’s Strategy

“I MUS’ DIE,” repeated the Basuto—“but some of them will die too. I will go, und when you hear me cry the Basuto war-cry, you creep out und walk away softly.”
“Stay,” said Blaine, “we must fight and fall together, if we fall at all. One quick dash might save us.”

“So it might,” muttered Rowe, who was busy cutting at his pumpkin, “but we don’t want any dashing.”

“Poor ole Skin-jacket,” sighed Dick, “he is gone from hisself! Hark, sieur, de Zulus come!”

Blaine bent his head and heard a stealthy movement among the mealies. About him, however, the blackness was impenetrable; he could only tell of the presence of his companions by touch.

“Let us shake hands,” he whispered, and felt about for a hand to take the last grasp.

“Shake my elbow!” muttered Rowe.

“Poor fellow,” sighed Blaine, “perhaps it is better so. Dick, good-bye. If you escape, find out Miss Mary, and tell her my last thoughts were of her.”

“Last thoughts be darned!” muttered Rowe. “Here you, Dick—give me your assegai. Quick, man, quick!”

Dick declined; he had some grim work for his assegai.

“You won’t? Then I must use my knife. Now, a light—a light! Blow you, look alive!”

Dick merely shook his head.

The noise of the approaching Zulus could be heard more distinctly, and they were evidently crawling direct for the three, guided by Rowe’s excited whispers.

Rowe fumbled about and struck a match. It glimmered for a second, and then went out. Blaine had blown it out.

“Do you want to draw their fire upon us?” he cried, under his breath.

Rowe seized the young officer’s arm in his grasp of steel, and hissed, “If you would save Mary Rath, don’t hinder me!”

Again he struck a light; the match glowed and flared up. There was a rustle ahead, and the sharp click of a rifle being cocked.

Rowe caught up a piece of dry leaf from the lower part of a mealie-stalk and inserted it inside his pumpkin.

Suddenly, with an awful wail, he held the pumpkin up. For a moment Dick quailed at the sight, and Blaine was startled, for there glared out of the darkness a goblin head, with two fiery eyes and a wide gleaming mouth.

The crawling Zulus within the mealies saw this terrible apparition, and with cries of terror rose to their feet and rushed away, crushing the maize-stalks in their fear.
The leaf within the pumpkin, which Rowe with an inspiration had hollowed out and furnished with eyes, flickered out; but Dick, now appreciating the trick, struck his tinder, and Blaine tied his handkerchief about the knife at the point where it entered the neck of the head.

The frightened Zulus had reached their friends on the outskirts of the patch, and were pouring out an account of the “Umpagati,” when high above the topmost leaves of the mealies appeared the terrible object. Fire shot out of its open mouth, and smoke and flames curled through its eyes.

One look was enough. The warriors fled away into the night, their speed accelerated by a chorus of wild shrieks and diabolical laughter from the goblin.

The three, relieved of the strain upon them, broke into wild laughter, until they were perfectly exhausted.

“A splendid dodge, Rowe!” said Blaine, seizing the ranchman’s hand and shaking it heartily.

“It was that! Many a time, as a boy, I have played that trick upon the darkies in the States, but I never thought it ’ud save my life.”

“Ole Skin-jacket is clever as a jackal,” said Dick, admiringly; “but come ’long. Lost heap time—mus’ walk very quick now.”

They pushed through the corn, and went off with a swinging stride, feeling more confident of success.

The delay in the mealie garden, however, had lost them much time, and the fading of the stars warned them of the approach of day, while at the same time it removed their only guides. They pushed on yet more rapidly, and, thanks to the Basuto’s skill in maintaining a bee-line, finally struck the base of Ibabinanga.

The dawn was rapidly breaking, and they had yet an hour’s walk before they could reach the summit, which towered in softly rounded curves fully 1,500 feet above. They held a council as they still kept on, both Blaine and Rowe urging that they should look for a place of concealment at once. Dick, however, resisted.

“If we stay down here, Zulus on watch look down on us. Better we look down on Zulus than they look down on us. Noder ting—when bird going journey, he fly high to see track, so we mus’ climb up ter see our track. Dot es so.”

So up they went, luckily favoured by the heavy mist, which slowly crept up the grass-covered mountain in winding wraiths. The way was steep, and the footing on the damp grass slippery, so that when at last they reached the ridge, they all showed signs of weariness.
“A leetle furder,” said Dick; and along the ridge they went, to the highest point, a rounded knoll about fifty feet in diameter, covered with long, reddish grass, and hollowed in the centre to the shape of a shallow basin.

The two white men, divesting themselves of their trappings, spread their blankets on the soft grass, and were soon stretched out, with a sigh of intense relief that the long tramp had finished.

“Sleep, masters,” said the faithful Basuto; “et is all right. The grass is not beaten down. No Zulus haf been here.” Suiting the action to the word, Dick threw himself down face to the ground, and in a minute the heavy breathing showed that each one slept.

They slept on while the summit of the mountain was bathed in glory by the uprising sun, the drops of dew glowing from the waving grass like brilliants, and far into the morning, until the hot rays awakened them.

Then they sat up one by one, rubbing their eyes to get rid of the heaviness that still hung on their lids, and looked around with indifference, which fast gave way to astonishment as the sight met nothing but a vast void, with nothing to fix attention, even to the utmost range of vision.

By raising the head but an inch, however, they found points and ridges lifted into sudden view; while, far off, the broken ring of the blue horizon showed up.

The Basuto produced a stick of biltong, which he began chewing, and the two others soon followed suit, finishing their breakfast with a drink of water from the calabash.

After this they stretched themselves on their backs, with hats tilted over their eyes to keep off the glare, and lazily smoked, while planning out their line of future action.

To them presently was borne the deep chant of a Zulu song, the refrain coming from the chest with a booming note to the melancholy soft and sibilant chant.

The singer was evidently climbing the mountain and the three pipes were instantly laid aside, while looks of deep concern were exchanged.

By a mutual agreement they crept through the grass to the side opposite to that up which they had mounted, and cautiously peered over.

Below them was a deep and narrow valley, threaded by a tiny stream, on whose banks were half-a-dozen huts.

They had no eyes, however, for the quiet of the little village, so snugly concealed between high walls, for mounting the hill was the owner of the voice—a warrior, fully equipped with shield and assegai.

“There is only one,” muttered Blaine; “we can secure him if we lie in wait.”
“No, sieur,” said Dick, “look,” casting his glance to the ridge beyond.

Blaine and Rowe, looking across, saw posted there a Zulu watchman, with his face towards them.

“He would see us,” said Dick. “Lie still; maybe this man no come here.”

The Zulu leisurely continued his ascent with an easy grace, and when he reached the ridge, turned towards the watchman opposite, and shouted to him a greeting.

Then he leant on his assegai, and swept his eyes over the low-lying country to the north, bringing his gaze round to the circle of the horizon, until the summit of the mount, but a hundred yards away, intercepted his view. He took a step forward, as though he would advance to the summit—then changed his mind, and sat down on a stone to take snuff. While the three watched his every movement with anxious concern, the man turned his face towards them, and, in the stillness up there, they could hear his deep indrawn breath as he loudly sniffed the air.

“Tobacco,” muttered Dick; “he smell our smoke.”

The Zulu rose up and walked towards the summit. The three wriggled back until they could only see the ring which encircled his head. Their breath came with labour under the strain upon them, and each one grasped his rifle with tightly-clenched fingers.

They heard the swift footsteps, and expected to meet the gleaming eyes, when there came a shrill call from the valley below.

“Aweh!” replied the Zulu, and his rapidly-retreating footsteps sounded like sweet music in their ears.

Down to the huts he ran with great strides, and joined a party of women.

**Chapter 33  Sirayo and the King**

“SEE, BAAS, SEE!” said Dick, in great excitement—“there is Pala, the Zulu girl, and Miss Mary!”

Blaine, in his eagerness to see if this was true, stood up, but in a second was violently thrown down.

“You will spoil everything,” said Rowe, angrily, “by your impatience!”

“Thanks, for the lesson, Rowe; I won’t offend again—but don’t you think we three could rescue her now? A better chance we could not have.”

For answer, Dick pointed to the watchman opposite.

“He is only one,” said Blaine, hotly. “Ah! I see—you mean that he would summon others. All right, let us wait.”
There could be no doubt that Mary and Pala were down in the valley. The Zulu girl walked about freely, her mind evidently at peace with her surroundings, from the way in which she threw her arms about and clapped her hands to the snatch of a song. Mary stood aside, her fair hair gleaming in the sun, while the drooping of her head, and her indifference to her surroundings, marked a sad and dejected spirit.

Several warriors, all fully equipped, now joined the group; and accompanied by these, and by two women who carried mats on their heads, Mary and her Zulu playmate moved away up the valley, passing soon out of view to the south.

Beyond was a stretch of table-land, broken after a level stretch of a few miles by deep ravines, and running up to the lip of the great basin which enclosed the military kraals of the Zulu king.

Blaine watched the level strip, and, with a heavy heart, traced the little party in their slow progress across, until they disappeared in a ravine.

The line of route was closely noticed, and at dusk the three took up their task. The march was more difficult than it had been on the previous night, owing to the number and the ruggedness of the intercepting valleys; and though they were not placed in imminent danger of detection, the risks they ran were more numerous, because the farther they advanced, the more thickly grew the population.

However, they pushed on with a stubborn resolution, wet to the waist from constant immersions in running streams, and bleeding from numberless scratches, a thin scattering of mimosa trees having added to their difficulties.

After threading their way with extreme care through a nest of kraals, they reached a point which brought them to a halt; for Dick, whose eyes were almost bat-like, said they had arrived at the brink of the great Umfalosi basin, at whose farther side lay Ulundi.

There down into the gloom stretched a precipice of unknown depth, and the question arose how they were to proceed. They skirted the brink to the right, and were barred by the outer fence of a kraal; they turned back to the left, and again a kraal stopped them.

They were therefore in a corner, from which retreat without discovery at that hour of the morning, when the cocks were crowing, and the boys were stirring on their mats, seemed impossible. They awaited with what calmness they could the dawn which would decide their fate.

It came sooner than they expected or liked, and the great basin below them was filled to the brink with a billowy mist suffused with the most delicate pink. Up to their very feet rolled the mist, then melted away, and, melt-
ing, disclosed the earth beneath, with its thick cluster of trees, its rocks, and the wide winding river.

Dick had no eyes for the beauty of the scene. He searched the brink with swift gaze for any trace of a path, and presently saw a place where the rock had been worn smooth by naked feet.

It was a perilous descent, fit only for baboons; but there was no alternative; and slipping, sliding, and crawling in turn, they at last reached the bottom—not a second too soon, for the song of an early riser was chanted from above, and the singer himself came down. The three backed themselves against the rock, and the Zulu—luckily for him, suspecting nothing—kept on his way, and so escaped the assegai.

Moving along to the left under cover of the cliff, they struck the Umfalosi, and rested under the cover of the trees, bathing their feet in the cool water.

Before dusk they resumed their journey, calculating that no watch would be kept up in this stronghold of the nation, and came upon many head of game in their silent march: a koodoo bull, with tapering horns, keeping jealous guard over two of his harem; a wild boar, with huge tusks gleaming below his vicious little eyes; a leopard, crouching on a log; and a wild-eyed buffalo, whose massive horns curved up into sharp points, and who sent them up the nearest tree by a headlong charge, and kept them there for several hours.

Next morning, from the shelter of the thick bush, they looked upon the circumference of Ulundi, some four miles distant on the slope of a hill, and marked great bodies of men in motion. Between the King's kraal and their outlook were the great military kraals of Panda and Nodwenga; while on the opposite side of the river was yet another huge circle of huts, five deep, with the open space in the centre for manoeuvres of the regiment. That kraal, as well as the late King Panda's, was untenanted, but men swarmed out of Ulundi and Nodwenga, each one with huts sufficient for the accommodation of 10,000 men, while a smaller kraal gave shelter for some 6,000.

They were too excited to sleep, and all day long they watched the manoeuvres of regiment after regiment on the grassy slope below. Great crowds of women and children looked on, or passed backwards and forwards in a continuous stream to the river and the mealie gardens, while flocks of cattle grazed on the hills beyond.

As they looked on the great mass of armed Zulus, a feeling of depression settled on the three adventurers. They felt how great was the task they had undertaken, and how impotent they were in the actual presence of Cetewayo's men-slaying machine.
They started plan after plan, only to abandon each in turn, until Blaine found an idea through watching the string of women, whose ranks he searched for the presence of Mary.

“If we can get near the place where the women draw their water, we may see Pala and get her on our side.”

“That’s it,” said Rowe, taking up the suggestion eagerly. “Or, if we don’t find Pala, we may scare some other girl into carrying a message.”

“Where can we find hiding-place, where so many people’s about?” said Dick.

“We can take up quarters in Panda’s kraal.”

This audacious proposal fairly took the Basuto’s breath away; but Rowe jumped at it, and he had to give way.

“I doan’t like it,” Dick said, shaking his head. “Panda was great warrior—great king. Since him die no one sleep in dot kraal, und if we go there him spook find way ter drive us out.”

“Well, Dick, if we have nothing more serious to dread than spooks, we shall be safe enough.”

That night they slipped in among the deserted huts which spanned the outer edge of the great circle, four deep, and laid their mats on the floor of one near the outer fence of thornwood.

Blaine made a mistake when he said the kraal was empty—it swarmed with an army of fleas, and they all gathered to the attack. Beyond this nimble enemy they had nothing to fear, and the morning sun found them safe in limb.

They waited in vain, however, for the procession of girls on their way to the river; and, peering out through the thorn fence towards Ulundi, they saw a dense crowd gathered about the entrance to the royal kraal. While they looked the crowd divided, and through its centre pierced the head of a column, which rapidly advanced until a whole regiment stretched out in full view, then halted. After that came another, and yet another, out of the huge kraal; the three long, broad, dark columns, with the wavy lines of different-coloured shields, stretching out like three gigantic serpents ready to spring.

Then a doubtful murmur from behind came gently on the air, rising to a dull rumble, and then to a thunderous sound, which presently was stilled.

Creeping along the fence, our friends looked for the cause of this commotion, and saw yet three more regiments drawn up with faces towards Ulundi. They were warriors of the unmarried regiment, and those who faced them were ringed or married men.
Was there to be a struggle between these men, arising out of the old rivalry which had long existed between married and single, and had often led to desperate encounters?

There was a deep, hoarse cry from the ringed men as a big induna placed himself at their head, and led them on slowly across the donga, and up the slope towards Panda’s kraal. The young warriors, led by a man of great stature, also advanced, until the opposing heads of the columns almost touched just opposite the entrance to the kraal.

The big chief, a man of lofty bearing, but overburdened with fat, stood for a moment, with an angry frown upon his brow, then, touching an induna of an unmarried regiment, he bid him enter the kraal first with a single company.

At this concession the young warriors shouted “Bayate!” and lifted their assegais in salute, with a mighty roar.

Then Cetewayo—for it was he—waved his hand to an old chief in command of a married regiment, and the ringed men filed in, steady as trained troops. After him went Sirayo at the head of the famous Nkobomakosi, the young men, with heads erect, and eyes defiantly gleaming. Then another married regiment, followed by a single, until all had entered.

Twenty-five thousand warriors were now drawn up within the vast circumference of the kraal—as fine a body of men as any general could wish to lead—and Sirayo, towering in the centre, with his crane feathers waving, looked proudly on them, and they on him, for was he not their greatest and bravest?

Within the circle came Cetewayo, with slow and ponderous step, followed by Nyaman, the wary old general.

At a signal, the warriors crouched down, the crowns of their heads and their gleaming eyes alone showing above the shields held before them.

After a long silence, Nyaman began addressing the men quietly, but with emphasis, the tendency of his argument being that peace was desirable.

The ringed Zulus, being anxious to get back to their wives and cattle, assented. The young men made no sign. “We must have peace,” said Cetewayo, decisively. “Your chiefs are agreed.”

“Ask Sirayo,” said one from the ranks.

A great pause fell on the armed multitude, for it was well known that the King detested the famous captain.

“Sirayo!” he said, turning his great body round—“who is Sirayo in the councils of the nation? A boy! It was he who caused this war. What can he say?”
Sirayo looked at the King calmly.

"Give me," he said, "three regiments, and I will stop the red-coats."

A grim smile flitted across Nyaman’s crafty face, and Cetewayo, with a mocking gesture, exclaimed—

"Oh, Sirayo is a great captain! How will he do this?"

"I will attack the enemy when he is drawn out on the march. With half a regiment in his front to draw out his horsemen, and half a regiment in the rear to draw out his footmen, I would cut through his centre with two regiments, and roll him up. It can be done, and upon the ridge above, when his troops are stretched over a long way. I have said."

A wild shout, led by the Nkobomakosi, went up from the unmarried men.

"Listen, O King, to the words of Sirayo! Let him lead us, and victory shall be yours! Give us to Sirayo, he is a lion!"

Cetewayo stamped his foot with rage as he turned to the chief—"Are these young men yours or mine? You go too far, chief. You keep prisoners to yourself, and do things without permission. Let the warriors go back to their kraals; and, Nyaman, you will lead the young men—they are in want of an older head. Sirayo, keep with me!"

There were murmurs from the young men, but a gesture from Sirayo silenced them. The chief stepped aside and beckoned to a warrior.

"Take some men," he said, "and fly with the women to the reeds."

**Chapter 34  Over the Brink**

DICK, LISTENING at the open door of a hut, where the three had passed an anxious time, whispered the singular command of the chief.

They waited in a fever of impatience while the sullen army filed out, though the spectacle was imposing. The young warriors, deprived of their beloved chief by the arbitrary action of the jealous king, shot threatening glances at the ringed men, and it wanted but a word to have brought on a fearful massacre.

Sirayo, however, with his arms folded across his scarred breast, made no sign beyond a haughty stare at two ringed men, who, with assegais in position, posted themselves on his either side. The fiery Nkobomakosi, however, hailed him as they filed out, striking the blades of their assegais against their shields—a manifestation which still further incensed the king.

At any other time Cetewayo would have shown his displeasure by ordering a general attack upon the daring regiment, but now he had to temporize.

When the last man had gone, the three adventurers drew a deep sigh of relief—for three hours their discovery had been imminent at any moment.
“What was the meaning of the show, Dick?” demanded Rowe.

“Oh, sieur, de old men and the young men they doan’t see with same eyes. Young men want fight—old men want rest—but young men will fight all same. Cetewayo he doan’t like Sirayo, and he put chief with men where he no use. Cetewayo so trow away his cattle; when he do dat—trow away life—ebertying, for if Sirayo do what he like with warriors, English no reach Ulundi. Dot is so.”

“What about Miss Rath, Dick?”

“Dot I not understand. Chief tell induna run mit women to reeds. ’Cos why?—’cos he frightened Cetewayo take women himself.”

“Never mind why. What we have to do is to find these reeds, and rescue Miss Rath. Our chances will be easy, as many men will not be spared.”

“Right, Captain; we must make for the reeds at dusk. Where are they, Dick?”

“Ole hunter tole me dere was plenty reeds where the White and Black Umfalosi meet, but et was plenty bad place—full elephant, buffels, crocodile, dem sort tings.”

“No Zulus, then, are likely to enter it unless for retreat. That must be the place—how can we get there?”

“Follow de river, baas.”

They slipped into the river at dusk, and the woods on either side being too dense for quick travelling, waded in the shallow water. They calculated that if the induna had lost no time in making off with the girls he would have three hours’ start, and travelling by good paths might have reached his hiding-place.

All they hoped for was to reach the reeds before morning, and then to trust to careful tracking to find out the whereabouts of the party.

It was a weary and painful journey, and before the night was half spent they were obliged to crawl out and wait for light, for they had reached a deep valley where the darkness was appalling, and every step brought them down on their knees.

Trusting to the forbidding nature of the place, they built a fire, and warmed themselves before it, then stretched themselves on the damp leaves and slept until dawn.

Resuming their way, with clothes torn and tattered, and faces gaunt and wild-looking, they struggled on through the dreary defile, until their way was stopped by a deep water slide, smooth as glass, with precipices rising high up on either side. Before them they could see the junction of the two rivers, with a broad greyish stretch of reeds enclosed between. From where they stood
it seemed as if the reeds were but a few feet in height, and they already felt that, provided Mary were hidden there, their task was almost accomplished. How were they to get there? Below them stretched the steep slide of water fully two hundred feet deep, above were the beetling cliffs, at the back the ravine with its narrow walls, defying the surest-footed climber. To go back and round seemed the only alternative, but a bitter one.

Blaine scanned the flood beneath him for foothold, and marked a wild vine trailing its knotted lengths from a tall fig-tree on the right away to the bottom of the slide on the left, where it entered another tree.

“Is that strong enough to bear a man?” he said, pointing to the creeper. “Yah, baas, two, three men. But what good?—no reach him.”

Blaine pressed his lips, and before the others knew what he was about, had sprung downward, a mad and desperate plunge. His outstretched hands grasped the thick creeper, but his weight, tripled by the impetus of the leap, dragged the vine from some of its fastenings, and he swung heavily against the rocks.

“Good God!” muttered Rowe, in agony, while Dick turned grey.

Blaine lay still against the rocks, apparently insensible, while the water rushed against his body and over his head.

Luckily the blanket over his shoulder had saved him, but he was badly shaken, and the stock of his rifle was smashed. With a mighty effort he flung his legs over the vine, and slipped down over the smooth rock to within a few feet of the bottom. Here the vine swept up into the tree, and, his strength failing him, he could not draw himself up. With an upward look at the two men above, he let go his hold, and slipped into the deep dark pool below.

The water closed over his head, and those above watched with drawn breath for the white face to reappear.

“He has gone!” cried Dick. “My baas is drowned!”

Rowe drew a deep breath, and launched himself on the fearful slide. He caught the swaying vine as he flashed by, poised an instant above the pool, and then dropped in. He, too, disappeared.

To the solitary watcher above there came an awful time. He craned his neck to pierce the gloomy surface of the pool, but no object, living or dead, came into view. Long he waited, standing still with straining eyes, then dread seized upon him, and he wailed aloud after the manner of his people. He cried to the spirit of the place to restore his masters, then he shouted their names aloud, and lastly, in a spasm of fury, he began hurling rocks and pieces of wood down to disturb the “spirit,” whom he bitterly upbraided.
When he paused to mark the effect, he saw that no pieces of wood reappeared on the surface, and a great fear seized him. He turned and fled, the loneliness of the dark ravine adding to his terror.

Dick’s undoubted courage, however, began to protest against his abject surrender to superstition, and after a time, though still quivering with excitement, he forced himself to return to the brink of the slide.

Here he slipped over a great log, and watched it plunge into the water and disappear. Then wrapping his weapons in his blanket, with the mat wound tightly round, he secured the roll to his back, and slid down through the water. Catching the vine with his hands, he slipped along it to its utmost stretch, and then, instead of dropping into the dark pool as the others had done, he climbed up the vine into the branches of the tree.

Swarming out over one of the overhanging branches, he saw that the current from the pool made a sudden sweep to the left, passing under an overhanging ledge. This accounted for the disappearance of the white men.

He then climbed down the tree, and walked along the ledge to the left, rounding the shoulder of the krantz, and ultimately reaching the bank of the river at a spot where it foamed among a barrier of tumbled rocks. Crossing over from rock to rock, he went back to the pool, but without finding any trace of his missing companions.

Returning along the bank, and continuing by the spot where he had crossed, he soon picked up the spoor of both. Hurrying along by the side of the dashing water, he overtook them at the edge of the wood, and cried with joy to find they were uninjured.

“Baas, I tout de water spirit, Ikanti, had swallow you up, and my heart was sore. Now it is all right, I can sing.”

“It is not all right yet, Dick,” said Blaine, sadly; “look at those reeds, and tell us how we can find any one hidden among them.”

“It is worse than the cane-brakes of the Mississippi,” muttered Rowe; “but be sartin of this, Captain—where women can go, we can follow.”

“Dot is so, Skin-jacket; but haf dey goned in dis side, dot side, top side, bottom side?”

The reeds, in a waving mass of tufted heads and spear-like leaves, stretched away for six miles in length and two in breadth, with here and there a bare patch, the whole surface billowing under the wind, like the waves of the sea.

The keen eyes of the men, from out their hollow sockets, quartered every inch of the great expanse in search of some sign, for it yet appeared to them that the head of a man if he stood upright would appear above the level tops.
“See,” said Blaine, eagerly, “there is something moving on the right, near the edge!”

They all fixed their eyes on the spot, where the course of some living creature was marked by the violent swaying of the reeds, though no part of it was visible.

Slowly it came on to the very brink, and then stepped out and walked on over some high grass to an open space. The onlookers drew their breath and looked at each other in astonishment, for the creature that had been covered so completely from their view was an enormous elephant, his tusks gleaming white.

“An army of Zulus could hide in those reeds without fear of discovery,” muttered Blaine.

The Basuto shook his head gravely. “Sieur,” he said, “dot is bad place, very bad place. Dot elephant von schelme (rogue). He is worse to meet than twenty Zulus. When we go into dose reeds, we go into de grave. Dot is so.”

“Look here!” whispered Rowe, in his excitement, “isn’t that a lion in that bare patch?”

Within a bare place in the reeds, not far from the edge, was a yellow object outstretched.

“Yah, baas, dot is anudder duivel! Mah, woh! we will haf plenty trouble—plenty trouble!”

Chapter 35 In the Reeds

ARRIVED at the edge of the reeds, there was a difference of opinion. Blaine was for entering at once, and piercing right through; Rowe thought the best plan would be to skirt the edge in search of spoor; while Dick considered that they had better wait upon a height commanding the reeds, and look out for smoke.

Blaine, whose patience was exhausted, settled the dispute by plunging in, and the others followed, stifling their objections.

In five minutes they were in an atmosphere still almost as death, with no sound but the low murmur of the leaves slowly swaying, and a dull light about them speckled with shifting patches of sunlight, streaming down through the mass of moving spikes.

They spoke a few words in whispers, then moved on in silence through the aisle-like avenue, ploughed by the body of some elephant, whose deep imprints were filled with pools of water.
A cane-rat now and again crossed their path, or an iguana disappeared among the close stems with a great noise, the sudden stampede being succeeded by greater silence.

The still air within the living vault oppressed them with the sense of unseen danger, so that very soon their nerves thrilled to each sound.

“What will it be when the dark comes?” muttered the Basuto, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, while he tried to pierce the dense mass on either side for some lurking beast of prey.

“Ay, it is a mad business!” said Rowe.

“If it is mad for us who are accustomed to danger, think what it must be for a timid girl to be locked up within these awful walls,” said Blaine. “If Mary is in here, in here I remain until I find her. If you think there is better hope of finding her by watching without, return while you are near the edge.”

“Go on!” replied Rowe, gruffly.

Blaine took Rowe’s hand in his.

“Do not think, comrades,” he said, “that I despise your counsel, but I must move on. If I were to lie by and watch now, I should go mad.”

“God bless you, sonny—I understand! Move on and keep moving; we’ll find her yet,” Rowe said, cheerfully—“or die,” he muttered, under his breath.

After this brief delay the little party kept on, until the track they had followed opened into a spot where the reeds had been crushed down by a huge weight—the elephant’s sleeping-place—out of which led two tracks. They followed the one which seemed to lead straight on, but soon were in a perfect maze of tunnels. They kept on doggedly, moving sometimes in circles, sometimes to the right, and again to the left; stumbling into still pools of water, and cutting their hands against the sharp points and razor-like edges of the leaves.

At last they stood on the brink of a long, stagnant lagoon, from which heavy vapours were rising. With a grunt of alarm, a large crocodile slid into the slimy water, and another, from farther down, came slowly swimming up, his green eyes showing above the slime.

“What a place of horror for Mary to spend a night in!” groaned Blaine.

“For heaven’s sake, Dick, wake up, and tell me which way to go!”

“Where does baas want go?” asked Dick, who had been stolidly following.

Where, indeed! Of what use was it, after all, to be wandering in this wilderness of reeds without compass, or goal even?

“Lead us into the centre, if you can; from there we may get some clue.” The young officer looked wistfully into the dark face of the Basuto.
Dick’s stubborn look melted under the earnest gaze. “Bass tink blackman some good, eh?” he said, with a curious smile. “Well, baas es right: white man can hear what the book tells him; blackman find him book in the wind, in the leaves. See, sieur, dose leaves—wot do they say?”

Blaine looked up at the leaves, and shook his head.

Dick laughed. “Skin-jacket, wot dey tole you?”

“Wal, Dick, they seem to point one way.”

“Dot es so. The wind blow off the sea, blow ’em all one way—dot way we go. Come, or dot crocodile will haf us for him supper. But doan’t matter, ef he don’t haf us for supper someting else will.”

The crocodile snapped his huge jaws in confirmation of this dismal prediction as Dick moved off on a new course.

Again they plunged through narrow passages, the leaves joining over-head to blot out the sky; and again their progress was interrupted by diverging tracks and still lagoons. At last, with a note of joy, Dick struck into a wider path leading in the right direction, and, following it, they stepped into a place bare of reeds.

It was only a few yards in diameter, but to them it was an oasis in which they could breathe freely, and move, and look up to the sky and over the earth around.

They stood, as it were, on an island, with a sea of foliage stretching far on every side, the rustling of the myriad leaves blending into a low murmur expressive of intense melancholy.

They searched the level surface round and round for a sign of human life before they advanced a step; then, as their eyes fell upon the ground before them, they found they were not alone within the open.

Facing them was a full-grown lion, prone upon the ground, his forepaws thrown over the dead body of a reed-buck, his massive head erect, and the calm yellow eyes fixed steadily upon them.

Finding their eyes upon him, he lifted his head higher, and thrust out his long, curved claws, while his tail twitched with a swift uneasy motion.

Both Blaine and Rowe had lost their rifles at the pool, and Dick handed his to Blaine.

“Maybe,” he said, “if we leave him alone, he leave us alone.”

“Wal,” said Rowe, “I’ve had enough of these confounded reeds for to-day! Lion or no lion, I mean to sleep here to-night; but if he likes to keep his side of the caboose, I’m for lettin’ him alone.”

“Right,” said Dick; “ef he leave us alone, all right. Ef he doan’t, all right, just the same. Me don’t care.”
Both Rowe and Dick had arrived at that stage of weariness when they were prepared to face death with indifference.

Blaine pressed his lips together, and stood with rifle ready. He was not anxious for a struggle, but he was determined to be the victor.

Thus this strange group, within that strange sea of vegetation, remained for several minutes; then, with a low growl, the lion lowered his head, and began tearing at the buck.

“Good old hoss!” exclaimed Rowe, with a laugh. “That’s as good as sayin’ he don’t care a blank cuss about us. Let’s have something to eat, Dick.”

They gathered a bundle of dried reeds together, and Dick from out of his skin pouch took a small pinch of the treasured coffee. The tin canteen was filled with water and placed on the fire; Rowe and Dick, squatting down, were soon chewing at the biltong and sipping hot coffee, totally unconscious of their grim neighbour.

Blaine leant upon his rifle, looking away over the reeds, his worn and weather-tanned face bearing in repose the stamp of the great longing within him. The many sleepless nights through which he had passed, the privations, and the hardships of rough travelling in the darkness, had not had much effect upon his frame, trained as it had been by months of campaigning to resist fatigue; but the continued anxiety had left its mark upon his face. His eyes were deep-set and glowing, his cheeks hollow, and the mouth, which was once always ready to smile, was now fixed in the line of stern determination. Yet over the whole face there was a certain lingering expression of his old gaiety, softened down into a patient sweetness that won the hearts of his two companions.

Even now, as they ate, one twitched the other and drew his attention to the still figure; and they watched him in silence, with tenderness at their hearts, while the lion growled over his diminishing meal.

Rowe took the rifle from Blaine’s hands, and bid him rest and eat while he kept guard; and Dick stood up, stretching himself as one who has done well, then searched the horizon in his turn.

The dusk came creeping down from the mountains, and the circle of the horizon was quietly narrowing. A third time Dick quartered every span, and when he turned to the north-east, he remained fixed as a statue, except for the eager glare in his eyes.

“I see! I see!” he shouted.

Blaine was by his side in a moment.

“What was it? Have you found them?”
“There, look my master! It is smoke from their fire! Well for us had we kept on the edge.”

A thin line of smoke, so faint that it looked like a thread against the dark shadow of the hills, could be seen suspended, as it were, mid-way in the air, where the rays of the sun shone through it.

Even as they looked it died away, and at that instant the earth beneath them trembled, and their ears were deafened by a terrific roar. The lion, disturbed by their sudden exclamations, had bounded into the middle of the open space, where he stood lashing his sides.

Rowe levelled his rifle, but Blaine’s hand was upon it.

“Don’t shoot!” he exclaimed, thinking only of one in the moment of peril; “the report will disturb the Zulus. Let us face him and he will retreat.”

Rowe dropped the butt to the ground, and the three brave men faced the lion. The quality of their steadfast courage—a quality rarer than gallant daring—produced its effect. After one more earth-shaking roar, and one fixed look, the great beast turned and walked back to his prey. He sniffed the remains of the body, then, with one long look back over his shoulders at the three unmoving figures, he entered the reeds and disappeared.

“He has gone to drink,” said Dick; “will come back.”

“Wal,” muttered Rowe, “I’d a damn sight sooner fought the critter with a bowie than with my eyes. It gave me a crick down my back.”

In a few short minutes, before the night came on, they gathered armsful of reeds for keeping fires going, then stretched themselves down for the rest they so much needed.

For the first two hours, when the heat of the day was cooling off, they slept undisturbed, then they were awakened by the grunt of a rhinoceros, followed by the low growl of a lion. They sat up, for it appeared to them that the reeds, which during the afternoon had appeared to be as the haunt of the dead, were now crowded with living creatures.

From every quarter rose a loud chorus of croaking from myriad frogs, and from different points, now from the north, now from the south, again from east or west; but without intermission came the calls of beasts of prey, and the crashing noise made by the passage of great bodies through the reeds.

It was soon evident, from the diminishing power of the roaring, that the lions and the other beasts of prey in the reeds were tracking out to hunt in the woods. This gave the three some relief; but as they were again lying down, they were startled by the shrill trumpeting of an elephant near at hand.

The brute had evidently caught their wind, and was as evidently in a mighty fury.
Presently his cry was answered by a trumpeting from a distance, and a loud crashing was soon heard.

“There is a troop coming!” said Dick, hurriedly. “They will run over us if we stay.” He threw his mat to windward to attract the attention of the herd, and then crawled away, the others following.

They had barely gone twenty paces into the reeds, when, with a fearful screaming, the maddened herd, led by the first elephant, swept into the open space.

Lying perfectly still in the darkness, they heard the great brutes trampling on the ground, squealing in their rage, and crashing down the reeds about the smouldering fire. For an hour the herd remained on the spot, one and another breaking and quartering the reeds for scent. Then they moved off, and when the noise they made had died away, the three ventured to move back into the open space. They found the surface of the clearing broken up in a most extraordinary way, and the mat Dick had thrown down was driven completely into the earth.

The nature of the death they had so narrowly escaped impressed them, and they looked around with a feeling of apprehension.

Their hearts almost stood still, for there, looming against the faint light in the sky, was a great elephant, and, with a wild, terrifying scream of rage, it charged.

Rowe and Dick dashed into the reeds to the right; Blaine paused a moment, to gather the direction he should take for the Zulu camp, and vanished on the left.

Chapter 36  The Meeting

THE ELEPHANT wheeled sharply round with a quickness surprising in so huge a bulk, and crashed after Blaine. He had struck on the broad beaten track made by the herd a few minutes before, and kept straight on at a speed he could not have equalled in the day-time over a level course. Behind him came the rogue, gaining at every stride, until at last his trunk was outstretched over Blaine’s head.

Realizing his danger, Blaine sprang to one side, falling among the reeds, and before the elephant could turn, he crawled on his knees rapidly away.

The elephant, however, coming back on his track, took up the scent with another scream of baffled rage, and crashed in among the reeds, which went down before him like grass before a mower. So close did he pass to where Blaine was stretched on the ground, that a wall of reeds fell over his body. The brute crashed on for some distance, then returned, and passed on to the broad track where he had missed his intended victim, and where he stood
like a sentinel on duty. Blaine listened for a long and painful period to the
rumbling in the bull’s stomach, and to the flapping of his great ears, which
told him of the close vicinity of his foe; then, losing patience, he crept out
from his covering, and crawled away for some distance, until he felt safe
enough to stand up.

While he was debating what course to steer, he heard the roar of a lion
muffled by the reeds, followed by a dull report of a gun. The rogue heard
also, and his angry trumpeting once again broke out as he charged down in
the direction of the sound.

As Blaine listened, he caught a faint sound of a man shouting, then a deep
silence ensued, during which he heard a stealthy stirring about him as the
bent reeds struggled to straighten up. A moisture gathered on his brow as
he thought what the discharge of the gun and the shout might mean. Then
from afar off there broke out again the trumpeting of the elephant, mingling
horribly with the angry growl of a lion.

“God help them!” he murmured, baring his head and looking up to the
dark heavens—“God help those faithful hearts! I can give them no help, and
if any harm has befallen them, it is the more my duty to complete the task
they undertook with me.”

So speaking, he cast one lingering look in the direction of his missing com-
rades, then plunged on, his face still set to the north-east.

But nature claimed her debt, and as he struggled on with dogged reso-
lution, a drowsiness crept over him, so that on tripping against an old ele-
phant-hole he rolled over, and sank into a profound sleep.

There he lay like a log throughout the night, and in the morning, after
crunching a piece of biltong, and drinking of the thick liquid that had collect-
ed in an elephant track, he resumed his walk, with a dizziness in his head and
a feeling of lassitude that it required the greatest effort of his will to master.

He was first saturated by the dew, stiffened by the cold morning air, and
then steamed by the heat of day. Yet he kept on through the gloomy aisles,
sustained by one hope, and giving no heed to beast or reptile that he dis-
turbed.

In the afternoon he reached an open spot, and then something like despair
seized him, for the reeds encompassed him on every side, and the fringe of
bush on the north-east, to which he had been blindly shaping his way, was
far to his right. He had again wandered out of his course.

Here he rested, struggling against a feeling of weariness which threat-
ened to weigh him down, and then, unrefreshed, he again ventured into the
gloomy fastnesses of the myriad stems.
In the afternoon a great loneliness seized upon him, and the sameness of the reeds in their everlasting procession began to haunt him with a maddening sense of his impotence, so that he had to press his hands to his head and to close his eyes for some moments.

Then he sang in a mechanical way for companionship, until his voice failed him because of the dryness of his throat, and he fashioned a reed into a flute and blew into it, producing strange sounds and gasps, until he wondered at his performance and laughed.

After this he struck into winding paths, which took him round and round, and brought him upon his own track, where he stood glaring upon his footprints, until at the strange sensation creeping over him he cried aloud in his agony to be saved from the awful terror of madness.

In his weakness the water ran down his hollow cheeks and relieved his heart, so that he took up his task with greater determination than before, and pierced through the labyrinth of paths. Dragging one foot after the other, he at last found himself able to move more freely, and saw that the reeds were shorter and younger.

Could he be approaching the fringe? Cutting down bundles of the reeds with his hunting knife, he piled them together, and mounting on the top, saw a hill within a mile, and a column of smoke coiling up from its base. Long he looked at it, as a shipwrecked sailor might feast his eyes on an approaching sail, then plunged once more into the reeds and hurried on, blundering and stumbling in his haste, forgetting that when he reached the end he had yet to cope with a score of armed Zulus.

All he thought of was that Mary Rath was near at hand, and the fact that she was a prisoner never occurred to him in the moment of his almost delirious joy.

As he rushed on, going with greater ease as the reeds grew thinner and shorter, until they only reached to his shoulder, there was a sinuous movement ahead of him.

When at last he reached the edge, and saw the flutter of a dress above him on the hill side, black forms rose silently on either side, and he was a prisoner himself.

Stunned and stupefied by this calamity, he looked blankly into the dark faces of his captors, and then he struggled to get free. He shook off one man and felled another; but it was of no use, and, panting and bleeding, with the mud covering his veldschoens, and his clothes torn, he was led up to the place where Mary stood, gazing in wonder at the strange figure he presented.

He stood before her there, in appearance totally changed from the gallant young officer of her thoughts, looking into her eyes with a look that was piti-
ful for the despair and self-reproach and humiliation in it, at the stupid blun-
der which had led him to her a captive instead of a deliverer.

She returned his gaze, wonderingly at first, without recognition, then with
pity at his plight; then suddenly, with a gasp of her breath, she knew him,
and caught him by the hand and held it, and led him to a seat, and was con-
tent to sit by him in silence.

What a spectacle it is when a brave man weeps! He covered his eyes with
his hands, and the hot tears ran through his fingers, washing away the awful
taint of madness that threatened to sap his brain at this last terrible trial.

With a trembling of her lips, Mary bent over and kissed his forehead, and
in that way, without protestation or vows, they met and their love was sealed.

Chapter 37  Sirayo Accounts for Another

ON THE SECOND OF JULY a little party stood on the hill above Ulundi.
Three of them were together—Mary, Pala, and Blaine. Near them were a
dozen warriors. They looked down upon the vast circumference of the roy-
al kraal, with the house of the King and the large huts of his principal wives
at the apex.

In the centre of the kraal were the witch-doctors, chanting over a small
heap of charms and dried grass.

Around them in ranks, fifty feet deep, was the bulk of the army.

A long palaver took place, and some of the speakers pointed to the river;
and there, on the opposite side, were the two camps of General Wood and
Lord Chelmsford.

The day of the final struggle was evidently at hand. The British force was
within three hours’ march of the King’s kraal. What would the King do?

He had wavered much, but now he was for peace. The council was bro-
ken up, and the milk-white cows were driven away to the leader of the Brit-
ish force—a token of peace without reservation.

Mary watched them go, winding slowly among the thorns, their snowy
whiteness and the mildness of their carriage giving promise of the gentle-
ness of peace they so fitly represented.

Presently, as they neared the British lines, and when the troops came out
to watch their slow approach, a band of warriors suddenly shot out from
the river-bank and with scoffs and blows turned the gentle messengers back.

It was to be war, so the young bloods decided; and Mary sighed, for hope
had again been dashed.

Pala, with her chin resting on her hand, and her dark eyes smouldering,
 began to sing. Her joy had passed away too, but she felt no disappointment.
She chanted of Sirayo and his deeds, and the warriors about her joined in.

Presently there was a movement among the Zulus. Two regiments filed silently out of the kraal. One took up a position in a wood near the river, another crept into a donga which ran parallel with Panda’s kraal. This ambush accomplished, three Zulus daringly advanced to the brink of the river, opposite the 10,000 British soldiers, and began coolly firing into their camp. One was Sirayo—he had made one last effort to stop the enemy, and he would have succeeded had he not been opposed by the lightning genius of Colonel Buller.

Buller—who, with General Wood, had chafed at the delay in crossing the river to give battle, and who, three days previously, had in vain urged Lord Chelmsford to strike the final blow—could not stand the audacity of the three warriors.

At the head of 500 men, he crossed the river, and swept up the incline towards Panda’s kraal. His quick eye grasped the situation; and while still rushing at full speed, he sent off three of his captains—Captain Cochrane to guard his rear, Colonel Baker to hold the drift, and Commandant D’Arcy to skirmish to the left. D’Arcy struck the end of the donga, saw that it was crowded with Zulus, gave the alarm instantly, and the retreat was sounded. Baker and Cochrane held the Zulus from cutting off the retreat, and the force escaped. Another minute lost, and the body of Buller’s men would have been crushed in the coils of the Zulu regiments.

It was a splendidly-contrived strategy, and the decoy was daringly accomplished; but Sirayo was foiled by the phenomenal quickness of his formidable opponent.

He mounted his grey horse and rode up beyond Ulundi, his brow black as thunder. As he dashed up to the little party he gave one swift glance at Pala, which she met with a yearning look, then remained standing, humble and abashed. The chief gave some orders to his men, and Blaine was led away.

Mary, with head erect, fronted the chief.
“Where are you sending Captain Blaine?” she demanded.
“To yonder rock,” he said, pointing to a solitary stone half a mile away.
“Why?”
“You would not see him die?”
“Die!” gasped Mary.
“To-morrow’s sun will decide. The enemy will attack, and theirs will be the advantage. They should have been attacked before, when they were scattered,” he added, bitterly.
“Chief,” said Mary, laying her hand upon his sinewy arm, “you said you would grant me one request. Give me his life.”

He turned his bloodshot eyes on her.

“If the soldiers are defeated, he will be yours. If we are killed—then”—he struck his assegai into the ground and walked away.

“Chief, oh my chief!” the words came with a sob.

Sirayo paused. He looked half around, and Pala flung her arms over his neck, then slipped them over his scarred chest down to his ankles, where she sat with her head against his knees.

He stooped as if he would lift her, and spoke one soft word to her; then, with a sudden proud stiffening of his giant figure, he shook her off, and went to his horse without once turning his head.

The Zulu girl crept up to Mary, and lay sobbing at her feet.

“I shall see him no more, I shall see him no more, my beloved, my great one!”

That night the girls passed in suffering, and were yet awake when the sun rose all blood-red.

Before its rays had pierced the mist, the first red line had passed through the river, and when the two girls could look unhindered by the vapour in the valley, they saw the British army massed in square—artillery and infantry—with the cavalry spread out to break the formation of the Zulus.

And meanwhile the Zulus were rushing down from the hill-sides in dense columns, as though they would sweep the small red square from off the face of the earth.

The shrieking shells from the big guns did not stop their splendid rush. Before the dark cloud of their numbers, the cavalry had to retreat within the square; the red lines opening to let the horsemen in, then closing upon them like a living wall.

Onward swept the young men, led by the fiery Nkobomakosi, from the north. Their leader was not at their head, but his spirit was with them. From the hills to the south, from Ulundi, and the bushes on the river, rushed on the married men. At their head was the white horse with its rider, whose leonine roar almost rose above the thunder of the guns.

On swept the dark mass, and Mary held her breath and closed her eyes, for she felt that the white troops in another minute would be caught on the crest of that living, roaring flood, and dashed to pieces.

Then there broke out such an awful and continuous rattle and thunderous din as shook the ground. She looked. The red square was hidden in a dense cloud, through which belched a stream of fire. The Zulu ranks
trembled under the terrible storm of shot—wavered—stopped—and then turned. Some of them, like the foam of a great wave tossed far in advance of the body of water, went on right up to the ranks and there fell.

During the advance of the Zulus, Pala had shrieked out the name of Sirayo, and then fell with arms outstretched and face downwards. She had seen the white horse stricken to the ground.

Mary, with lips parted and head bent forward, looked down upon the field of battle, and did not see the prostrate form beside her. The colour came into her cheeks, and her eyes flashed to the flaming of her English pride at the triumph of her people. When the square opened and the Lancers thundered out in their wild charge through the wavering Zulus, she thrilled to the fierce exultation of victory, then a frightened look came into her eyes, and her face paled to the whiteness of death.

She remembered Sirayo’s words. Blaine was to die if the Zulus were defeated.

Even now the assegai might have entered his heart. She looked tremblingly to the right, and saw a band of Zulus, with one in their midst, who waved his hand to her, then pointed upward to the sky.

“We shall meet in heaven!” she murmured. “But, oh,” she moaned, “I want him with me here!” Was there no hope of escape or rescue? At this thought she glanced eagerly down to see if she could attract the attention of horsemen. Buller’s men had swept on up to Ulundi; some of them were now searching the King’s house, others were still sweeping along the fringe of the retreating impi.

One man at the head of his troop dashed through a regiment, slashing with his sword, exposing himself recklessly, yet escaping every blow aimed at him. On he rushed, with a great shout, increasing the distance between himself and his troop.

Mary, with a cry of joy, recognized the black charger and its furious rider. She waved her hat, and shouted aloud, “Captain Dalston!”

He heard, and stopped short, throwing his horse on to its haunches, then rushed up the hill to her, taking no note that the Zulus closed behind him.

His face was pale as death when he reached her, and he could scarcely speak for the emotion that shook him.

“Quick, Miss Rath, your hand!”

“No, Captain,” she answered, quickly; “I am safe; but oh, save Captain Blaine—save him!”

“Captain Blaine!” he gasped; “where is he? I thought he was dead.”
Mary steadied her shaking hand, and pointed to the rock where the Zulus were stirring.

“He is there!” she cried. “Oh, my friend, my dear friend, who saved my father, save him!”

“Good God!” cried Dalston, turning his head away. “Miss Mary, I will go, but before I go let me tell you all. It was I who struck down Captain Blaine. It was I who sent men to tear you from your father, whose death might have been laid at my door, too, if it had not been for Blaine. I did it for love of you, and I thank God from my heart that I am able now for love of you to do this last service. Good-bye.”

A great change came over his face, the hard fierce look in his eyes softened, and there was about his stern mouth an expression of joy wonderful to behold. Mary saw his face a moment, but the memory of the stamp of high purpose and great content upon it remained with her.

He spoke to his horse, and the noble animal flew over the ground.

The next instant Mary would have called to him, but she was surrounded by a number of sullen warriors, who glared into her eyes as they passed, and threatened her. One of them, wounded in the leg, in his fury seized her by the hair and would have stabbed her, but that his arm, as it was thrown back to make the blow, was broken.

“Get you gone, lest I slay you!” said a terrible voice, and Mary found herself once more in the presence of Sirayo, who carried in one hand a heavy knobkerrie, with which he had just struck the blow.

His appearance was frightful. Blood flowed from sabre-wounds on his arm and shoulders, and from a lance-thrust which had cut above his ear. His right arm was stained with blood up to the elbow, and his white teeth gleamed between his curling lips.

“White girl,” he said, in hoarse tones, “the battle is against us. You can rejoin your friends, for Sirayo is an outcast. Where is Pala?”

“I heard her cry your name, chief, some time ago, but since then she has kept quiet.”

They looked around, and saw her stretched face downwards on the ground. Sirayo lifted her up. She was quite dead; a small, round hole in the smooth skin of her breast marked the cause of death.

The chief looked upon the still face of the girl who had loved him, and then laid her down. Mary watched him, her hands clasped, expecting a fearful outbreak, but he gave no sign. “I will return to give her burial to-night,” he said, in a low, clear tone.

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A wild cry arose from the right, and Mary—from whose eyes the tears were falling—looking, saw the black horse amid the Zulus.

“What is that?” said Sirayo, turning his bloodshot eyes in the direction. “Ah! I see.”

He picked up an assegai, and bounded away; while Mary, hesitating between her sorrow for the death of Pala, her anxiety regarding Blaine, and her gratitude to Dalston, could do nothing but stand and watch, rooted to the ground.

Dalston rushed upon the band of Zulus who surrounded Blaine, and scattered them before they were aware of his approach. They fled a short distance and then returned.

He leapt from his horse, and told Blaine to mount. The latter, at first dumbfoundered by the sudden appearance of the man whom, above all, he least expected to see, made no answer.

Dalston seized him by the wrist. “Mount, man, and save yourself!”

“Receive my life at your hands? No, Captain Dalston!”

“Blaine,” cried the other, in agony, “do not rob me of my last chance of doing one useful action! See,” he cried, inspired by a sudden thought as Blaine stood motionless, “Mary is in danger! Yours is the duty to save her.” Blaine looked to where Mary stood, with Sirayo near her; and, mistaking the Zulu for an enemy, he mounted the horse, leaving room for Dalston on the pommel of the saddle.

“Mount, sir,” he said.

“No, comrade, my time has come.”

As the other showed a desire to dismount, Dalston struck the horse heavily with the blade of his sword, and it plunged away, passing Sirayo like a flash, and rushing for some distance past Mary before Blaine could control it. He would have returned then to his rescuer, but it was too late.

Dalston had placed his back against the rock, and there, with a smile on his face, he met the rush of the Zulus. Twice he was wounded, but still, undaunted and with that calm strange smile, he fought. Then, at a hoarse cry from behind, the warriors stayed their attack and drew off, seeking safety in flight.

Sirayo walked up to his foe without a pause, dashed the blood from off his forehead, and then began a fierce and silent battle.

“In the name of Pala!” he said, and drove his assegai into the brave heart.

Blaine and Mary saw Captain Dalston stagger, his face turned to them. They saw the flash of his blade, and heard the blow which brought the giant
Zulu to his knees, then they saw him fall, and they turned their eyes upon one another, and Mary, overcome at last, broke into a passion of weeping.

At dusk Sirayo sat by the body of the Zulu girl, looking from her dead face to the flaming circles which marked the site of the great military kraals. He took a lifeless hand in his, and a drop of blood fell upon it, then his great chest heaved, and the warrior’s iron heart was torn within him by the sorrow which he allowed no human eye to see. He dug a hole with his assegai, laid her in it, with his shield over her breast, and piled earth and stone on the top.

“Gi—ya—tanda—ni,” he whispered, and with that unwritten in memoria, Pala was left to her long sleep.

Mary and Blaine went back to Kopje Alleen, their joy in the assurance of each other’s love, which now at last found unchecked expression, mixed with sorrow, for the death of Pala and of Dalston, and by uneasiness about the safety of Rowe and the faithful Basuto.

As they approached the lonely house, old Mr. Rath, hearing the sound of horses, came to the door, and was soon in his daughter’s arms. There was much to tell; but when Mary, with her eyes aglow and tears in her voice, told of the last sacrifice made by Dalston, the old man’s lips moved.

“The son has atoned for his father,” he murmured, but would say no more, and sat puffing at his pipe in silence, thinking over memories of the past, whose secret he kept locked within his breast.

Next day he called the young people to him, and with something of a twinkle in his eye, he addressed Blaine. “Now, sir, are you willing to take this poor girl to your wife, without dowry, burdened with her old father, and at the same time lose your prospects of marrying an heiress?”

Blaine turned his grave eyes upon the sweet face, and at their appeal she laid her fair head upon his shoulder. He looked proudly at the father, with a return of his old, frank, gay smile.

“Ah, yes!” the old man nodded, “love is strong, and will not be denied. Well, my boy, you have not chosen badly. Mary Rath is no other than Kate Dalston!”

Mary thrust Blaine from her, and looked into his face, and then at her father, who smiled, and chuckled, and enjoyed his revelation. “Eh—what?” gasped Blaine, as the truth slowly dawned on him. “This is my little sweetheart, after all! Let me compare you with the photograph.”

He hunted in his pockets and produced the card, but his face turned pale, and Mary sobbed, and ran to her father.
Down through the length of the card was a deep gash, the edges marked with blood. When they had buried Dalston they had found this over his heart, and at the moment Blaine had forgotten it.

“He knew it,” said the young officer, uncovering his head. “He knew you were Kate when he saved my life, and that knowledge made his sacrifice the greater.”

In the evening, as they were sitting in the little room discussing their plans, there was a sound at the door.

“Wal,” said a familiar voice, “I guess you folks are pretty comfortable, but ef you’ll jest consider that we’ve had no food for twelve mortal hours, p’raps you’ll—”

The next instant he was dragged in, Dick after him, looking bashful as they were forced down on the couch; whilst Mary laughed and cried over them, and Blaine, in his excitement, put his pipe into the coffee-pot.

“Yes, you bet,” continued Rowe, in reply to the questions showered upon them, “we’re alive, what’s left of us; but I can tell you, what with elephants, and lions, and a mad buffalo, and the eternal unendingness of those blamed reeds, we’ve been as good as dead several times! Ef it hadn’t been for Dick, bless him, I’d been there now.”

“Skin-jacket mighty good man,” said Dick, staring blankly at the coffee-pot.

Rowe and Dick were present at the wedding, and Mary—for they could not call her Kate—would have the Basuto put his mark on the register. They agreed to go to Texas when the young couple were settled down, but first they meant to hunt for ivory in the reeds, and hoped to get Sirayo to join them.

Only one word about Mr. Mildmay Dalston. He received a Natal paper, forwarded by Rowe, which contained an account, headed “Love and War,” of the rescue made by Captain Dalston at the sacrifice of his life, and of the marriage of the rescued man and the heiress, Miss Dalston.

Mr. Dalston read the report over three times, and at the end of each perusal he muttered, “Well, I’m hanged!” Then he put the paper down, and looked blankly at the ceiling, until the enormity of his son’s blunder came home to him.

“The fool!” he hissed, “the idiot, the wretched, miserable fool! When he had the girl in his power, and the Zulus were about to kill that young Blaine—to have thrown his life away, and a fortune! Ugh!”
Mr. Dalston stormed about for a week, then he sold his business, and took ship for Natal. Securing a horse and a guide, he rode into Zululand, and at last reached the pile of stones which marked the resting-place of Captain Dalston. A headstone had been erected by Blaine and Mary, with a simple inscription, “To Captain Dalston. In memory of a brave and noble heart.”

“A brave and noble heart!” repeated the father. “It was here he flung away that ranche and £35,000! That dull mark on this rock is the stain of his blood, I suppose—oh, the unutterable idiot! Beneath this pile of rocks he is lying—oh, my son! my son! my heart is breaking!”

THE END

Notes

1. Zululand now KwaZulu; adjoining both Natal Colony and the Transvaal, inhabited by the Amazulu; Ama is the plural prefix “people” and “Zulu” signifies High or the Heavens, hence the Amazulu are “people of the sky/heavens”; ruled at this time by Cetshwayo.

2. wide-awake a backwoodsman’s black felt hat with a low crown and a broad stiff brim.

3. thousand Zulus James Rorke, an Irish trader, had sold his stone-built house and trading post (not far from a “drift” or crossing on the Buffalo River) to a Swedish missionary society; the property had been requisitioned by the army as a hospital and storehouse. A few hours after the British defeat at Isandlwana, a small garrison of 139 British and colonial troops were attacked by up to four times the number of Zulu warriors claimed by Glanville. This handful of soldiers, including those hospitalized, medical staff, and commissary troops, held out until the Zulus retreated.

4. Wood’s column Colonel Evelyn Wood (1838–1919) commanded the invading “Flying Column” (the smallest of Lord Chelmsford’s three invading columns); although defeated at Hlobane Mountain, he stood firm the following day against a large onslaught; was promoted to brigadier-general and was a commander at Ulundi, the last battle of the war.

5. Blood River so called because the Ncome River became red with the blood of slain Zulus who fought the Boers (Dutch settlers) in 1838; in 1879 Wood’s Flying Column crossed this river at a point further north than those caught at Isandlwana.

6. kopje or koppie; a Dutch word literally meaning “small head”; a prominent hill often isolated on an otherwise flat veld, usually of granite or now and then of sandstone.


8. Sutu or Usutu; war cry of Cetshwayo’s royal dynasty. “With a tremendous shout, they charged towards the Prince and his companions. ‘Usutu’ was their cry.” “The Late Prince Imperial,” From the Extra to the Natal Witness, Saturday, 7 June 1879, House of Commons Papers, Vol. 54, 131.
9. Isandlana; Kambula or Isandlwana; in January of 1879, a column of British and native troops invading Zululand camped at the foot of this hill and were attacked by about 10,000 Zulus under Sirayo and wiped out; this was the first battle of the Zulu War. After defeating the British at Hlobane as the second invasion began, the Zulus unsuccessfully rushed an entrenched position the next day at Kambula, much to King Cetshwayo’s displeasure, and suffered losses greater than at Isandlwawa.

10. buchu an herbal leaf (*Barosma betulina*) used tribally as a stimulant or for relief of convulsions or as an antibacterial and diuretic agent; an extract of leaves may also be applied to wounds.

11. ‘mission’ Zulu an African educated in a school conducted by missionaries offering Western and Christian training. Nadine Gordimer’s title story in *Not for Publication and Other Stories* (1965) is a compelling visualization of the clash between Western and traditional values in such schools.

12. Kopje Alleen or Koppie Allein; a sandstone hill about twenty miles as the crow flies from Isandlwana. The farmhouse (or was it a cattle station?) at the koppie’s base described in the novel is today found in ruins, its small stone walls partially standing.

13. veldschoens … roer … graf fr. vel hide + schoen shoe; a rawhide high-top moccasin without an inner lining; … roer a heavy long-barreled Dutch-made 2-bore or 4-bore musket carrying a massive charge with a thick slug—they “roared” and kicked; … graf in Afrikaans this phrase (Electra’s in *Orestes*) becomes a pun on the name-as-tomb.

14. umtagati wizard or witchcraft; this worker of evil magic is not to be confused with the witch doctor, who ostensibly counteracts witchery. The Zulu chief Dingaan in 1838 sprang a trap on the Boers with the shout “Bulalani abatagati”—“slaughter the wizards!” (plural: abata-gati).


16. Irregular Horse Redvers Buller commanded a cavalry regiment of these irregulars who were local volunteers who supplied their own horses and equipment.

17. bell tent a circular conical-topped canvas tent having a single central supporting pole; … laager a ring of heavy war wagons lashed end to end housing guns with boxes piled between the wheels and riflemen behind their cover; … waggons obsolete spelling.

18. D’Arcy Captain Henry Cecil Dudgeon D’Arcy (1850–1881), awarded the Victoria Cross for valor at Ulundi; light horse are highly mobile cavalry troops with small arms.

19. canteen a disreputable drinking establishment; this was the only sort of tavern available to Africans in cities.

20. Sirayo a historical Zulu chief with whose biography Glanville takes creative liberties. His wives fled to Natal but, although under protection of British law, were returned by Sirayo’s sons and killed: “The defense made by the sons of Sirayo was:—‘We did it; they were our father’s wives: they forsook him and deserved to be killed. Do not you Englishmen kill your wives, or your father’s wives, if they run away?’” James Grant, *Recent British Battles on Land and Sea* (London: Cassell, 1885), 204.

21. kraal of Inanda “Inanda’s Kraal was a cluster of kyas and rondavels.” See John Buchan, *Prester John* (London: Nelson, 1910), 257. That is, they are sheave-houses and traditional
round thatched houses with conical roofs; located about 15 miles inland from Durban. See “Inandu, kraal, Zululand” by George French Angas (1847), pencil drawing and lithograph.

22. Buller • Colonel Redvers Buller (1839–1908) led mounted infantry under Evelyn Wood at Hlobane, Kambula, and Ulundi.

23. Prince Imperial of France • Napoleon Eugene Louis Jean Joseph, the Prince Imperial of France (1856–1879); killed in action, June 1. The presence of the Prince and many of the details of this “off-saddle … on a spur of Sirayo’s hill, at a Kaffir kraal” were originally reported by Glanville in the Chronicle (17 May; Chronicle, 26 June 1879), 5.

24. Basuto of Cochrane’s Horse • Basutos were scouts; Captain William Francis Dundonald Cochrane volunteered for special cavalry service in Zululand; his mounted detachment later found the body of the Prince. “Whilst we were feeding, it was plain that there was a commotion going on upon the hill above. A man on a white horse was galloping about energetically, and very soon succeeded in collecting a small body of men…. Colonel Buller advanced, and the man on the white horse gave the order to retreat” (17 May; Chronicle, 26 June 1879), 5.

25. Martini rifles • the Martini-Henry (Mark II in service 1877–1881) was a breech loading, metallic cartridge, lever operated firearm, often called “the rifle of Empire” because of its extensive colonial use. “I am inclined to think, that the first experience of the Martini-Henrys will be such a surprise to the Zulus, that they will not be formidable after the first effort.” Lord Chelmsford to Colonel Wood, 23 November 1878, in Lord Chelmsford’s Zulu Campaign 1878–1879, John Laband, ed. (Ballock, Hertfordshire: Army Records Society, 1994), 31.

26. Sir Sydney Smith • Sir William Sidney (or Sydney) Smith (1764–1840) was the British admiral who thwarted Napoleon Bonaparte’s ambitions of Eastern conquest with the victory at Acre. Napoleon reputedly said, “That man made me miss my destiny.” Admiral Nelson, however, received far greater popular acclaim.

27. goat-sucker • a nocturnal bird, like owls also with shadowy color and soft plumage with large head and eyes, they conceal themselves in daytime but appear at sunset to hunt for insects; the name derives from the odd belief that they suck the mammary glands of goats.

28. puff-adder • Bitis arietans; a widespread and very venomous viper, yellowish-grey with brown markings, that puffs and hisses loudly when alarmed.

29. lobala • or lobola; a dowry almost always in cows or oxen, the number set by and paid to the bride’s father.

30. Utrecht • the village served for several weeks both as Lord Chelmsford’s headquarters and as an assembly point for the advance into Zulu territory by Colonel Evelyn Wood’s “Flying Column.”

31. Ulundi • the royal kraal of Cetshwayo, near the White Umfolosi River that forms a wide basin (u(lu)-Ndì, brim, edge of the land), that was the place of residence and burial for the Zulu kings. Lord Chelmsford here defeated the Zulus on 4 July 1879.

32. white-breasted pauws • peacocks.

33. Ityosi … Napoleon • or Ityotyosi River; where the Prince, two troopers, and a black scout were killed.

34. his indunas • noble advisers or military commanders.
35. knobkerrie • ironwood fighting club with a lopsided knob, as cut from a tree’s trunk and fire-hardened, with an abutting tree branch comprising its shaft; used to club or to throw at animals and enemies.

36. Kate Dalston • text has “Mary Dawson,” likely from an earlier draft overlooked by Glanville or the proofreader.

37. comrades • the patrol consisted only of the commanding lieutenant, the Prince, six of Bettington’s troopers and a single African scout; the cavalry charges of Prince Rupert (1619–1682), general of Charles I, became the stuff of legend in English history.

38. pale moonlight • waggon • the Prince’s body in the moonlight is the novel’s romanticized frontispiece by Hume Nisbet (1849–1923), author, travel writer, and artist. Commandant Raaf, the Afrikaner leader of the Transvaal Rangers was the first to find the body of the Prince. The events of the Prince’s death are quoted from the *Times of Natal* (4 June 1879) in “Details of the Death of the Prince Imperial”; see W. Clifford Holden, “Portrait of the Prince Imperial,” *British Rule in South Africa* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1879), 171–79.

39. made sure • not in the sense of “doing something intentionally” but in the obsolete sense of “believing with certainty”; similar idiom “made certain” in the third paragraph following.

40. squirmed • the python is Africa’s largest snake; and although all pythons are constrictors, not all constrictors are pythons. Glanville’s calling it earlier a “boa” is misleading because boa constrictors do not lay eggs; but pythons do and will defend aggressively their soft, leathery clutch of eggs.

41. Lancers • a light cavalry regiment armed with lances.

42. Drury Lowe • as part of the reinforcements ordered by Lord Chelmsford, Colonel Drury Curzon Drury-Lowe (1830–1908) commanded the 17th Lancers, known for his pursuit with two squadrons of the last Zulu fighters at Ulundi.

43. wild tumult • a less comic version of night confusion was reported by Glanville (13 April; *Chronicle*, 16 May 1879). In the wilderness the tenderfoot has identified many a “grazing rock” as a viable target.

44. blesbok • a local brown antelope living on watered grasslands; its name comes from the Afrikaans bles “blaze” descriptive of its white face blaze; it has ringed, lyre-shaped horns.

45. Diana of Kopje Alleen • Acts 19:28; the citizens of Ephesus shouted for two hours “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”

46. damper • bread (made originally in the Australian bush) produced from seasonal grains and nuts baked in campfire coals.

47. Boer tobacco • a strong Transvaal tobacco from Magaliesburg.

48. heliograph • when runners could not get through to Ekhowe garrison, Lord Chelmsford’s engineers were among the first to construct a heliograph for war use. “Signaling,” the *Argus* (Cape Town), reprinted in the *Chronicle*, 7 May 1879, 5. See also W. Clifford Holden, “Portrait of the Prince Imperial,” *British Rule in South Africa*, 175, for a mention of the “heliostat.”

49. “boom by-and-by” • artillery; when the British first brought in heavy ordnance, the Zulus begged the soldiers to shoot it off; their response was “by-and-by.”
50. no fictitious make-believe » reported about a Basuto of Cochrane’s Horse during the chase at Ulundi. See Ian Knight, *Essential Histories: The Zulu War 1879* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 64.

51. Ibabinanga » or Babanango, a now-and-again mist-shrouded mountain not far from the royal kraal.

52. Panda and Nodwenga » or Umpande, Mpande (1798–1872), halfbrother of Shaka and Dingane, king from 1840; Nodwenga (Nodwengu) was his head kraal.

53. *Bayate* » the royal greeting of the Zulus (“Hail, O Majesty”); originally for the paramount chief only, later also for high-ranking colonial officials, such as Sir Theophilus Shepstone, Chief of Native Affairs.

54. Nyaman » after the War when Dinizulu, the son of Cetshwayo nominally ruled, Nyaman and Dabuka, his uncles, were the real powers in Zululand.