The Ghost Kings

H. Rider Haggard

Extract From Letter Headed “The King’s Kraal, Zululand, 12th May, 1855.”

“The Zulus about here have a strange story of a white girl who in Dingaan’s day was supposed to ‘hold the spirit’ of some legendary goddess of theirs who is also white. This girl, they say, was very beautiful and brave, and had great power in the land before the battle of the Blood River, which they fought with the emigrant Boers. Her title was Lady of the Zulus, or more shortly, Zoola, which means Heaven.

“She seems to have been the daughter of a wandering, pioneer missionary, but the king, I mean Dingaan, murdered her parents, of whom he was jealous, after which she went mad and cursed the nation, and it is to this curse that they still attribute the death of Dingaan, and their defeats and other misfortunes of that time.

“Ultimately, it appears, in order to be rid of this girl and her evil eye, they sold her to the doctors of a dwarf people, who lived far away in a forest and worshipped trees, since when nothing more has been heard of her. But according to them the curse stopped behind.

“If I can find out anything more of this curious story I will let you know, but I doubt if I shall be able to do so. Although fifteen years or so have passed since Dingaan’s death in 1840 the Kaffirs are very shy of talking about this poor lady, and, I think, only did so to me because I am neither an official nor a missionary, but one whom they look upon as a friend because I have doctored so many of them. When I asked the Indunas about her at first they pretended total ignorance, but on my pressing the question, one of them said that ‘all that tale was unlucky and “went beyond” with Mopo.’ Now Mopo, as I think I wrote to you, was the man who stabbed King Chaka, Dingaan’s brother. He is supposed to have been mixed up in the death of Dingaan also, and to be dead himself. At any rate he vanished away after Panda came to the throne.”

1. The Girl

The afternoon was intensely, terribly hot. Looked at from the high ground where they were encamped above the river, the sea, a mile or two to her right—for this was the coast of Pondo-land—to little Rachel Dove staring at it with sad eyes, seemed an illimitable sheet of stagnant oil. Yet there was no sun, for a grey haze hung like a veil beneath the arch of the sky, so dense and thick that its rays were cut off from the earth which lay below silent and stifled. Tom, the Kaffir driver, had told her that a storm was coming, a father of storms, which would end the great drought. Therefore he had gone to a kloof in the mountains where the oxen were in charge of the other two native boys—since on this upland there was no pasturage to drive them back to the waggon. For, as he explained to her, in such tempests cattle are apt to take fright and rush away for miles, and without cattle their plight would be even worse than it was at present.

At least this was what Tom said, but Rachel, who had been brought up among natives and understood their mind, knew that his real reason was that he wished to be out of the way when the baby was buried. Kaffirs do not like death, unless it comes by the assegai in war, and Tom, a good creature, had been fond of that baby during its short little life. Well, it was buried now; he had finished digging its resting-place in the hard soil before he went. Rachel, poor child, for she was but fifteen, had borne it to its last bed, and her father had unpacked his surplice from a box, put it on and read the Burial Service over the grave. Afterwards together they had filled in that dry, red earth, and rolled stones on to it, and as there were few flowers at this season of the year, placed a shrivelled branch or two of mimosa upon the stones—the best offering they had to make.

Rachel and her father were the sole mourners at this funeral, if we may omit two rock rabbits that sat upon a shelf of stone in a neighbouring cliff, and an old baboon which peered at these strange proceedings from its crest, and finally pushed down a boulder before it departed, barking indignantly. Her mother could not come because she was ill with grief and fever in a little tent by the

waggon. When it was all over they returned to her, and there had been a painful scene.

Mrs. Dove was lying on a bed made of the cartel, or frame strung with strips of green hide, which had been removed from the waggon, a pretty, pale-faced woman with a profusion of fair hair. Rachel always remembered that scene. The hot tent with its flaps turned up to let in whatever air there might be. Her mother in a blue dressing-gown, dingy with wear and travel, from which one of the ribbon bows hung by a thread, her face turned to the canvas and weeping silently. The gaunt form of her father with his fanatical, saint-like face, pale beneath its tan, his high forehead over which fell one grizzled lock, his thin, set lips and far-away grey eyes, taking off his surplice and folding it up with quick movements of his nervous hands, and herself, a scared, wondering child, watching them both and longing to slip away to indulge her grief in solitude. It seemed an age before that surplice was folded, pushed into a linen bag which in their old home used to hold dirty clothes, and finally stowed away in a deal box with a broken hinge. At length it was done, and her father straightened himself with a sigh, and said in a voice that tried to be cheerful:

“Do not weep, Janey. Remember this is all for the best. The Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Her mother sat up looking at him reproachfully with her blue eyes, and answered in her soft Scotch accent:

“You said that to me before, John, when the other one went, down at Grahamstown, and I am tired of hearing it. Don’t ask me to bless the Lord when He takes my babes, no, nor any mother, He Who could spare them if He chose. Why should the Lord give me fever so that I could not nurse it, and make a snake bite the cow so that it died? If the Lord’s ways are such, then those of the savages are more merciful.”

“Janey, Janey, do not blaspheme,” her father had exclaimed. “You should rejoice that the child is in Heaven.”

“Then do you rejoice and leave me to grieve. From to-day I only make one prayer, that I may never have another. John,” she added with a sudden outburst, “it is your fault. You know well I told you how it would be. I told you that if you would come this mad journey the babe would die, aye,

and I tell you”—here her voice sank to a kind of wailing whisper—“before the tale is ended others will die too, all of us, except Rachel there, who was born to live her life. Well, for my part, the sooner the better, for I wish to go to sleep with my children.”

“This is evil,” broke in her husband, “evil and rebellious—”

“Then evil and rebellious let it be, John. But why am I evil if I have the second sight like my mother before me? Oh! she warned me what must come if I married you, and I would not listen; now I warn you, and you will not listen. Well, so be it, we must dree our own weird, everyone of us, a short one; all save Rachel, who was born to live her life. Man, I tell you, that the Spirit drives you on to convert the heathen just for one thing, that the heathen may make a martyr of you.”

“So let them,” her father answered proudly. “I seek no better end.”

“Aye,” she moaned, sinking back upon the cartel, “so let them, but my babe, my poor babe! Why should my babe die because too much religion has made you mad to win a martyr’s crown? Martyrs should not marry and have children, John.”

Then, unable to bear any more of it, Rachel had fled from the tent, and sat herself down at a distance to watch the oily sea.

It has been said that Rachel was only fifteen, but in Southern Africa girls grow quickly to womanhood; also her experiences had been of a nature to ripen her intelligence. Thus she was quite able to form a judgment of her parents, their virtues and their weaknesses. Rachel was English born, but had no recollection of England since she came to South Africa when she was four years old. It was shortly after her birth that this missionary-fury seized upon her father as a result of some meetings which he had attended in London. He was then a clergyman with a good living in a quiet Hertfordshire parish, and possessed of some private means, but nothing would suit him short of abandoning all his prospects and sailing for South Africa, in obedience to his “call.” Rachel knew all this because her mother had often told her, adding that she and her people, who were of a good Scotch family, had struggled against this South African scheme even to the verge of open quarrel.

At length, indeed, it came to a choice between submission and separation. Mr. Dove had declared that not even for her sake would he be guilty of “sin against the Spirit” which had chosen him to bring light to those who sat in darkness—that is, the Kaffirs, and especially to that section of them who were in bondage to the Boers. For at this time an agitation was in progress in England which led ultimately to the freeing of the slaves of the Cape Dutch, and afterwards to the exodus of the latter into the wilderness and most of those wars with which our generation is familiar. So, as she was devoted to her husband, who, apart from his religious enthusiasm, or rather possession, was in truth a very lovable man, she gave way and came. Before they sailed, however, the general gloom was darkened by Mrs. Dove announcing that something in her heart told her that neither of them would ever see home again, as they were doomed to die at the hands of savages.

Now whatever the reason or explanation, scientifically impossible as the fact might be, it remained a fact that Janey Dove, like her mother and several of her Scottish ancestors, was foresighted, or at least so her kith and kin believed. Therefore, when she communicated to them her conviction as though it were a piece of everyday intelligence, they never doubted its accuracy for a minute, but only redoubled their efforts to prevent her from going to Africa. Even her husband did not doubt it, but remarked irritably that it seemed a pity she could not sometimes be foresighted as to agreeable future events, since for his part he was quite willing to wait for disagreeable ones until they happened. Not that he quailed personally from the prospect of martyrdom; this he could contemplate with complacency and even enthusiasm, but, zealot though he was, he did shrink from the thought that his beautiful and delicate wife might be called upon to share the glory of that crown. Indeed, as his own purpose was unalterable, he now himself suggested that he should go forth to seek it alone.

Then it was that his wife showed an unsuspected strength of character. She said that she had married him for better or for worse against the wishes of her family; that she loved and respected him, and that she would rather be murdered by Kaffirs in due season than endure a separation which might be lifelong. So in the end the pair of them with their

little daughter Rachel departed in a sailing ship, and their friends and relations knew them no more.

Their subsequent history up to the date of the opening of this story may be told in very few words. As a missionary the Reverend John Dove was not a success. The Boers in the eastern part of the Cape Colony where he laboured, did not appreciate his efforts to Christianise their slaves. The slaves did not appreciate them either, inasmuch as, saint though he might be, he quite lacked the sympathetic insight which would enable him to understand that a native with thousands of generations of savagery behind him is a different being from a highly educated Christian, and one who should be judged by another law. Their sins, amongst which he included all their most cherished inherited customs, appalled him, as he continually proclaimed from the housetops. Moreover, when occasionally he did snatch a brand from the burning, and the said brand subsequently proved that it was still alight, or worse still, replaced its original failings by those of the white man, such as drink, theft and lying, whereof before it had been innocent, he would openly condemn it to eternal punishment. Further, he was too insubordinate, or, as he called it, too honest, to submit to the authority of his local superiors in the Church, and therefore would only work for his own hand. Finally he caused his “cup to overflow,” as he described it, or, in plain English, made the country too hot to hold him, by becoming involved in a bitter quarrel with the Boers. Of these, on the whole, worthy folk, he formed the worst; and in the main a very unjust opinion, which he sent to England to be reprinted in Church papers, or to the Home Government to be published in Blue-books. In due course these documents reached South Africa again, where they were translated into Dutch and became incidentally one of the causes of the Great Trek.

The Boers were furious and threatened to shoot him as a slanderer. The English authorities were also furious, and requested him to cease from controversy or to leave the country. At last, stubborn as he might be, circumstances proved too much for him, and as his conscience would not allow him to be silent, Mr. Dove chose the latter alternative. The only question was whither he should go. As he was well off, having inherited a moderate fortune in addition to what he had before he left England, his poor wife pleaded with him to return home, pointing out that

there he would be able to lay his case before the British public. This course had attractions for him, but after a night's reflection and prayer, he rejected it as a specious temptation sent by Satan.

What, he argued, should he return to live in luxury in England not only unmartyred but a palpable failure, his mission quite unfulfilled? His wife might go if she liked, and take their surviving children, Rachel and the new-born baby boy, with her (they had buried two other little girls), but he would stick to his post and his duty. He had seen some Englishmen who had visited the country called Natal where white people were beginning to settle. In that land it seemed there were no slave-driving Boers, and the natives, according to all accounts, much needed the guidance of the Gospel, especially a certain king of the people called Zulus, who was named Chaka or Dingaan, he was not sure which. This ferocious person he particularly desired to encounter, having little doubt that in the absence of the contaminating Boer, he would be able to induce him to see the error of his ways and change the national customs, especially those of fighting and, worse still, of polygamy.

His unhappy wife listened and wept, for now the martyr's crown which she had always foreseen, seemed uncomfortably near, indeed as it were, it glowed blood red within reach of her hand. Moreover, in her heart she did not believe that Kaffirs could be converted, at any rate at present. They were fighting men, as her Highland forefathers had been, and her Scottish blood could understand the weakness, while, as for this polygamy, she had long ago secretly concluded that the practice was one which suited them very well, as it had suited David and Solomon, and even Abraham. But for all this, although she was sure in her uncanny fashion that her baby's death would come of her staying, she refused to leave her husband as she had refused eleven years before.

Doubtless affection was at the bottom of it, for Janey Dove was a very faithful woman; also there were other things—her fatalism, and stronger still, her weariness. She believed that they were doomed. Well, let the doom fall; she had no fear of the Beyond. At the best it might be happy, and at the worst deep, everlasting rest and peace, and she felt as though she needed thousands of years of rest and peace. Moreover, she was sure no harm would come to Rachel, the very apple of her eye; that she was marked to live and to

find happiness even in this wild land. So it came about that she refused her husband's offer to allow her to return home where she had no longer any ties, and for perhaps the twentieth time prepared herself to journey she knew not whither.

Rachel, seated there in the sunless, sweltering heat, reflected on these things. Of course she did not know all the story, but most of it had come under her observation in one way or other, and being shrewd by nature, she could guess the rest, for she who was companionless had much time for reflection and for guessing. She sympathised with her father in his ideas, understanding vaguely that there was something large and noble about them, but in the main, body and mind, she was her mother's child. Already she showed her mother's dreamy beauty, to which were added her father's straight features and clear grey eyes, together with a promise of his height. But of his character she had little, that is outside of a courage and fixity of purpose which marked them both. For the rest she was far, or fore-seeing, like her mother, apprehending the end of things by some strange instinct; also very faithful in character.

Rachel was unhappy. She did not mind the hardship and the heat, for she was accustomed to both, and her health was so perfect that it would have needed much worse things to affect her. But she loved the baby that was gone, and wondered whether she would ever see it again. On the whole she thought so, for here that intuition of hers came in, but at the best she was sure that there would be long to wait. She loved her mother also, and grieved more for her than for herself, especially now when she was so ill. Moreover, she knew and shared her mind. This journey, she felt, was foolishness; her father was a man "led by a star" as the natives say, and would follow it over the edge of the world and be no nearer. He was not fit to have charge of her mother.

Of herself she did not think so much. Still, at Grahamstown, for a year or so there had been other children for companions, Dutch most of them, it is true, and all rough in mind and manner. Yet they were white and human. While she played with them she could forget she knew so much more than they did; that, for instance, she could read the Gospels in Greek—which her father had taught her ever since she was a little child—while they could scarcely spell

them out in the Taal, or Boer dialect, and that they had never heard even of William the Conqueror. She did not care particularly about Greek and William the Conqueror, but she did care for friends, and now they were all gone from her, gone like the baby, as far off as William the Conqueror. And she, she was alone in the wilderness with a father who talked and thought of Heaven all day long, and a mother who lived in memories and walked in the shadow of doom, and oh! she was unhappy.

Her grey eyes filled with tears so that she could no longer see that everlasting ocean, which she did not regret as it wearied her. She wiped them with the back of her hand that was burnt quite brown by the sun, and turning impatiently, fell to watching two of those strange insects known as the Praying Mantis, or often in South Africa as Hottentot gods, which after a series of genuflections, were now fighting desperately among the dead stalks of grass at her feet. Men could not be more savage, she reflected, for really their ferocity was hideous. Then a great tear fell upon the head of one of them, and astonished by this phenomenon, or thinking perhaps that it had begun to rain, it ran away and hid itself, while its adversary sat up and looked about it triumphantly, taking to itself all the credit of conquest.

She heard a step behind her, and having again furtively wiped her eyes with her hand, the only handkerchief available, looked round to see her father stalking towards her.

“Why are you crying, Rachel?” he asked in an irritable voice. “It is wrong to cry because your little brother has been taken to glory.”

“Jesus cried over Lazarus, and He wasn’t even His brother,” she answered in a reflective voice, then by way of defending herself added inconsequently: “I was watching two Hottentot gods fight.”

As Mr. Dove could think of no reply to her very final Scriptural example, he attacked her on the latter point.

“A cruel amusement,” he said, “especially as I have heard that boys, yes, and men, too, pit these poor insects against each other, and make bets upon them.”

“Nature is cruel, not I, father. Nature is always cruel,” and she glanced towards the little grave under the rock. Then,

while for the second time her father hesitated, not knowing what to answer, she added quickly, “Is mother better now?”

“No,” he said, “worse, I think, very hysterical and quite unable to see things in the true light.”

She rose and faced him, for she was a courageous child, then asked:

“Father, why don’t you take her back? She isn’t fit to go on. It is wrong to drag her into this wilderness.”

At this question he grew very angry, and began to scold and to talk of the wickedness of abandoning his “call.”

“But mother has not got a ‘call,’” she broke in.

Then, as for the third time he could find no answer, he declared vehemently that they were both in league against him, instruments used by the Evil One to tempt him from his duty by working on his natural fears and affections, and so forth.

The child watched him with her clear grey eyes, saying nothing further, till at last he grew calm and paused.

“We are all much upset,” he went on, rubbing his high forehead with his thin hand. “I suppose it is the heat and this—this—trial of our faith. What did I come to speak to you about? Oh! I remember; your mother will eat nothing, and keeps asking for fruit. Do you know where there is any fruit?”

“It doesn’t grow here, father.” Then her face brightened, and she added: “Yes, it does, though. The day that we outspanned in this camp mother and I went down to the river and walked to that kind of island beyond the dry donga to get some flowers that grow on the wet ground. I saw lots of Cape gooseberries there, all quite ripe.”

“Then go and get some, dear. You will have plenty of time before dark.”

She started up as though to obey, then checked herself and said:

“Mother told me that I was not to go to the river alone, because we saw the spoor of lions and crocodiles in the mud.”

“God will guard you from the lions and the crocodiles, if there are any,” he answered doggedly, for was not this an

opportunity to show his faith? “You are not afraid, are you?”

“No, father. I am afraid of nothing, perhaps because I don’t care what happens. I will get the basket and go at once.”

In another minute she was walking quickly towards the river, a lonely little figure in that great place. Mr. Dove watched her uneasily till she was hidden in the haze, for his reason told him that this was a foolish journey.

“The Lord will send His angels to protect her,” he muttered to himself. “Oh! if only I could have more faith, all these troubles come upon me from a lack of faith, and through that I am continually tempted. I think I will run after her and go, too. No, there is Janey calling me, I cannot leave her alone. The Lord will protect her, but I need not mention to Janey that she has gone, unless she asks me outright. She will be quite safe, the storm will not break to-night.”

2. The Boy

The river towards which Rachel headed, one of the mouths of the Umtavuna, was much further off than it looked; it was, indeed, not less than a mile and a half away. She had said that she feared nothing, and it was true, for extraordinary courage was one of this child's characteristics. She could scarcely ever remember having felt afraid—for herself, except sometimes of her father when he grew angry—or was it mad that he grew?—and raged at her, threatening her with punishment in another world in reward for her childish sins. Even then the sensation did not last long, because she could not believe in that punishment which he so vividly imagined. So it came about that now she had no fear when there was so much cause.

For this place was lonely; not a living creature could be seen. Moreover, a dreadful hush brooded on the face of earth, and in the sky above; only far away over the mountains the lightning flickered incessantly, as though a monster in the skies were licking their precipices and pinnacles with a thousand tongues of fire. Nothing stirred, not even an insect; every creature that drew breath had hidden itself away until the coming terror was overpast.

The atmosphere was full of electricity struggling to be free. Although she knew not what it was, Rachel felt it in her blood and brain. In some strange way it affected her mind, opening windows there through which the eyes of her soul looked out. She became aware of some new influence drawing near to her life; of a sudden her budding womanhood burst into flower in her breast, shone on by an unseen sun; she was no more a child. Her being quickened and acknowledged the kinship of all things that are. That brooding, flame-threaded sky—she was a part of it, the earth she trod, it was a part of her; the Mind that caused the stars to roll and her to live, dwelt in her bosom, and like a babe she nestled within the arm of its almighty will.

Now, as in a dream, Rachel descended the steep, rock-strewn banks of the dry branch of the river-bed, wending her way between the boulders and noting that rotten weeds and peeled brushwood rested against the stems of the

mimosa thorns which grew there, tokens which told her that here in times of flood the water flowed. Well, there was little enough of it now, only a pool or two to form a mirror for the lightning. In front of her lay the island where grew the Cape gooseberries, or winter cherries as they are sometimes called, which she came to seek. It was a low piece of ground, a quarter of a mile long, perhaps, but in the centre of it were some great rocks and growing among the rocks, trees, one of them higher than the rest. Beyond it ran the true river, even now at the end of the dry season three or four hundred yards in breadth, though so shallow that it could be forded by an ox-drawn waggon.

It was raining on the mountains yonder, raining in torrents poured from those inky clouds, as it had done off and on for the past twenty-four hours, and above their fire-laced bosom floated glorious-coloured masses of misty vapour, enflamed in a thousand hues by the arrows of the sinking sun. Above her, however, there was no sun, nothing but the curtain of cloud which grew gradually from grey to black and minute by minute sank nearer to the earth.

Walking through the dry river-bed, Rachel reached the island which was the last and highest of a line of similar islands that, separated from each other by narrow breadths of water, lay like a chain, between the dry donga and the river. Here she began to gather her gooseberries, picking the silvery, octagonal pods from the green stems on which they grew. At first she opened these pods, removing from each the yellow, sub-acid berry, thinking that thus her basket would hold more, but presently abandoned that plan as it took too much time. Also although the plants were plentiful enough, in that low and curious light it was not easy to see them among the dense growth of reedy vegetation.

While she was thus engaged she became aware of a low moaning noise and a stirring of the air about her which caused the leaves and grasses to quiver without bending. Then followed an ice-cold wind that grew in strength until it blew keen and hard, ruffling the surface of the marshy pools. Still Rachel went on with her task, for her basket was not more than half full, till presently the heavens above her began to mutter and to groan, and drops of rain as large as shillings fell upon her back and hands. Now she understood that it was time for her to be going, and started to walk across the island—for at the moment she was near

its farther side—to reach the deep, rocky river-bed or donga.

Before ever she came there, with awful suddenness and inconceivable fury, the tempest burst. A hurricane of wind tore down the valley to the sea, and for a few minutes the darkness became so dense that she could scarcely stumble forward. Then there was light, a dreadful light; all the heavens seemed to take fire, yes, and the earth, too; it was as though its last dread catastrophe had fallen on the world.

Buffeted, breathless, Rachel at length reached the edge of the deep river-bed that may have been fifty yards in width, and was about to step into it when she became aware of two things. The first was a seething, roaring noise so loud that it seemed to still even the bellowing of the thunder, and the next, now seen, now lost, as the lightning pulsed and darkened, the figure of a youth, a white youth, who had dismounted from a horse that remained near to but above him, and stood, a gun in his hand, upon a rock at the farther side of the donga.

He had seen her also and was shouting to her, of this she was sure, for although the sound of his voice was lost in the tumult, she could perceive his gesticulations when the lightning flared, and even the movement of his lips. Wondering vaguely what a white boy could be doing in such a place and very glad at the prospect of his company, Rachel began to advance towards him in short rushes whenever the lightning showed her where to set her feet. She had made two of these rushes when from the violence and character of his movements at length she understood that he was trying to prevent her from coming further, and paused confused.

Another instant and she knew why. Some hundreds of yards above her the river bed took a turn, and suddenly round this turn, crested with foam, appeared a wall of water in which trees and the carcases of animals were whirled along like straws. The flood had come down from the mountains, and was advancing on her more swiftly than a horse could gallop. Rachel ran forward a little way, then understanding that she had no time to cross, stood bewildered, for the fearful tumult of the elements and the dreadful roaring of that advancing wall of foam overwhelmed her senses. The lightnings went out for a moment, then began to play again

with tenfold frequency and force. They struck upon the nearing torrent, they struck in the dry bed before it, and leapt upwards from the earth as though Titans and gods were hurling spears at one another.

In the lurid sheen of them she saw the lad leap from his rock and rush towards her. A flash fell and split a boulder not thirty paces from him, causing him to stagger, but he recovered himself and ran on. Now he was quite close, but the water was closer still. It was coming in tiers or ledges, a thin sheet of foam in front, then other layers laid upon it, each of them a few yards behind its fellow. On the top ledge, in its very crest, was a bull buffalo, dead, but held head on and down as though it were charging, and Rachel thought vaguely that from the direction in which it came in a few moments its horns would strike her. Another second and an arm was about her waist—she noted how white it was where the sleeve was rolled up, dead white in the lightning—and she was being dragged towards the shore that she had left. The first film of water struck her and nearly washed her from her feet, but she was strong and active, and the touch of that arm seemed to have given her back her wit, so she regained them and splashed forward. Now the next tier took them both above the knees, but for a moment shallowed so that they did not fall. The high bank was scarce five yards away, and the wall of waters perhaps a score.

“Together for life or death!” said an English voice in her ear, and the shout of it only reached her in a whisper.

The boy and the girl leapt forward like bucks. They reached the bank and struggled up it. The hungry waters sprang at them like a living thing, grasping their feet and legs as though with hands; a stick as it whirled by them struck the lad upon the shoulder, and where it struck the clothes were rent away and red blood appeared. Almost he fell, but this time it was Rachel who supported him. Then one more struggle and they rolled exhausted on the ground just clear of the lip of the racing flood.

Thus through tempest, threatened by the waters of death from which he snatched her, and companioned by heaven’s lightnings, did Richard Darrien come into the life of Rachel Dove.

Presently, having recovered their breath, they sat up and looked at each other by lightning light, which was all there

was. He was a handsome lad of about seventeen, though short for his years; sturdy in build, very fair-skinned and curiously enough with a singular resemblance to Rachel, except that his hair was a few shades darker than hers. They had the same clear grey eyes, and the same well-cut features; indeed seen together, most people would have thought them brother and sister, and remarked upon their family likeness. Rachel spoke the first.

“Who are you?” she shouted into his ear in one of the intervals of darkness, “and why did you come here?”

“My name is Richard Darrien,” he answered at the top of his voice, “and I don’t know why I came. I suppose something sent me to save you.”

“Yes,” she replied with conviction, “something sent you. If you had not come I should be dead, shouldn’t I? In glory, as my father says.”

“I don’t know about glory, or what it is,” he remarked, after thinking this saying over, “but you would have been rolling out to sea in the flood water, like that buffalo, with not a whole bone in you, which isn’t my idea of glory.”

“That’s because your father isn’t a missionary,” said Rachel.

“No, he is an officer, naval officer, or at least he was, now he trades and hunts. We are coming down from Natal. But what’s your name?”

“Rachel Dove.”

“Well, Rachel Dove—that’s very pretty, Rachel Dove, as you would be if you were cleaner—it is going to rain presently. Is there any place where we can shelter here?”

“I am as clean as you are,” she answered indignantly. “The river muddied me, that’s all. You can go and shelter, I will stop and let the rain wash me.”

“And die of the cold or be struck by lightning. Of course I knew you weren’t dirty really. Is there any place?”

She nodded, mollified.

“I think I know one. Come,” and she stretched out her hand.

He took it, and thus hand in hand they made their way to the highest point of the island where the trees grew, for here the rocks piled up together made a kind of cave in

which Rachel and her mother had sat for a little while when they visited the place. As they groped their way towards it the lightning blazed out and they saw a great jagged flash strike the tallest tree and shatter it, causing some wild beast that had sheltered there to rush past them snorting.

“That doesn’t look very safe,” said Richard halting, “but come on, it isn’t likely to hit the same spot twice.”

“Hadn’t you better leave your gun?” she suggested, for all this while that weapon had been slung to his back and she knew that lightning has an affinity for iron.

“Certainly not,” he answered, “it is a new one which my father gave me, and I won’t be parted from it.”

Then they went on and reached the little cave just as the rain broke over them in earnest. As it chanced the place was dry, being so situated that all water ran away from it. They crouched in it shivering, trying to cover themselves with dead sticks and brushwood that had lodged here in the wet season when the whole island was under water.

“It would be nice enough if only we had a fire,” said Rachel, her teeth chattering as she spoke.

The lad Richard thought a while. Then he opened a leather case that hung on his rifle sling and took from it a powder flask and flint and steel and some tinder. Pouring a little powder on the damp tinder, he struck the flint until at length a spark caught and fired the powder. The tinder caught also, though reluctantly, and while Rachel blew on it, he felt round for dead leaves and little sticks, some of which were coaxed into flame.

After this things were easy since fuel lay about in abundance, so that soon they had a splendid fire burning in the mouth of the cave whence the smoke escaped. Now they were able to warm and dry themselves, and as the heat entered into their chilled bodies, their spirits rose. Indeed the contrast between this snug hiding place and blazing fire of drift wood and the roaring tempest without, conduced to cheerfulness in young people who had just narrowly escaped from drowning.

“I am so hungry,” said Rachel, presently.

Again Richard began to search, and this time produced from the pocket of his coat a long and thick strip of sun-dried meat.

“Can you eat biltong?” he asked.

“Of course,” she answered eagerly.

“Then you must cut it up,” he said, giving her the meat and his knife. “My arm hurts me, I can’t.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed, “how selfish I am. I forgot about that stick striking you. Let me see the place.”

He took off his coat and knelt down while she stood over him and examined his wound by the light of the fire, to find that the left upper arm was bruised, torn and bleeding. As it will be remembered that Rachel had no handkerchief, she asked Richard for his, which she soaked in a pool of rain water just outside the cave. Then, having washed the hurt thoroughly, she bandaged his arm with the handkerchief and bade him put on his coat again, saying confidently that he would be well in a few days.

“You are clever,” he remarked with admiration. “Who taught you to bandage wounds?”

“My father always doctors the Kaffirs and I help him,” Rachel answered, as, having stretched out her hands for the pouring rain to wash them, she took the biltong and began to cut it in thin slices.

These she made him eat before she touched any herself, for she saw that the loss of blood had weakened him. Indeed her own meal was a light one, since half the strip of meat must, she declared, be put aside in case they should not be able to get off the island. Then he saw why she had made him eat first and was very angry with himself and her, but she only laughed at him and answered that she had learned from the Kaffirs that men must be fed before women as they were more important in the world.

“You mean more selfish,” he answered, contemplating this wise little maid and her tiny portion of biltong, which she swallowed very slowly, perhaps to pretend that her appetite was already satisfied with its superabundance. Then he fell to imploring her to take the rest, saying that he would be able to shoot some game in the morning, but she only shook her little head and set her lips obstinately.

“Are you a hunter?” she asked to change the subject.

“Yes,” he answered with pride, “that is, almost. At any rate I have shot eland, and an elephant, but no lions yet. I was following the spoor of a lion just now, but it got up between

the rocks and bolted away before I could shoot. I think that it must have been after you."

"Perhaps," said Rachel. "There are some about here; I have heard them roaring at night."

"Then," he went on, "while I was staring at you running across this island, I heard the sound of the water and saw it rushing down the donga, and saw too that you must be drowned, and—you know the rest."

"Yes, I know the rest," she said, looking at him with shining eyes. "You risked your life to save mine, and therefore," she added with quiet conviction, "it belongs to you."

He stared at her and remarked simply:

"I wish it did. This morning I wished to kill a lion with my new *roer*," and he pointed to the heavy gun at his side, "above everything else, but to-night I wish that your life belonged to me—above anything else."

Their eyes met, and child though she was, Rachel saw something in those of Richard that caused her to turn her head.

"Where are you going?" she asked quickly.

"Back to my father's farm in Graaf-Reinet, to sell the ivory. There are three others besides my father, two Boers and one Englishman."

"And I am going to Natal where you come from," she answered, "so I suppose that after to-night we shall never see each other again, although my life does belong to you—that is if we escape."

Just then the tempest which had lulled a little, came on again in fury, accompanied by a hurricane of wind and deluge of rain, through which the lightning blazed incessantly. The thunderclaps too were so loud and constant that the sound of them, which shook the earth, made it impossible for Richard and Rachel to hear each other speak. So they were silent perforce. Only Richard rose and looked out of the cave, then turned and beckoned to his companion. She came to him and watched, till suddenly a blinding sheet of flame lit up the whole landscape. Then she saw what he was looking at, for now nearly all the island, except that high part of it on which they stood, was under water, hidden by a brown, seething torrent, that tore past them to the sea.

“If it rises much more, we shall be drowned,” he shouted in her ear.

She nodded, then cried back:

“Let us say our prayers and get ready,” for it seemed to Rachel that the “glory” of which her father spoke so often was nearer to them than ever.

Then she drew him back into the cave and motioned to him to kneel beside her, which he did bashfully enough, and for a while the two children, for they were little more, remained thus with clasped hands and moving lips. Presently the thunder lessened a little so that once more they could hear each other speak.

“What did you pray about?” he asked when they had risen from their knees.

“I prayed that you might escape, and that my mother might not grieve for me too much,” she answered simply. “And you?”

“I? Oh! the same—that you might escape. I did not pray for my mother as she is dead, and I forgot about father.”

“Look, look!” exclaimed Rachel, pointing to the mouth of the cave.

He stared out at the darkness, and there, through the thin flames of the fire, saw two great yellow shapes which appeared to be walking up and down and glaring into the cave.

“Lions,” he gasped, snatching at his gun.

“Don’t shoot,” she cried, “you might make them angry. Perhaps they only want to take refuge like ourselves. The fire will keep them away.”

He nodded, then remembering that the charge and priming of his flint-lock *roer* must be damp, hurriedly set to work by the help of Rachel to draw it with the screw on the end of his ramrod, and this done, to reload with some powder that he had already placed to dry on a flat stone near the fire. This operation took five minutes or more. When at length it was finished, and the lock reprimed with the dry powder, the two of them, Richard holding the *roer*, crept to the mouth of the cave and looked out again.

The great storm was passing now, and the rain grew thinner, but from time to time the lightning, no longer

forked or chain-shaped, flared in wide sheets. By its ghastly illumination they saw a strange sight. There on the island top the two lions marched backwards and forwards as though they were in a cage, making a kind of whimpering noise as they went, and staring round them uneasily. Moreover, these were not alone, for gathered there were various other animals, driven down by the flood from the islands above them, reed and water bucks, and a great eland. Among these the lions walked without making the slightest effort to attack them, nor did the antelopes, which stood sniffing and staring at the torrent, take any notice of the lions, or attempt to escape.

“You are right,” said Richard, “they are all frightened, and will not harm us, unless the water rises more, and they rush into the cave. Come, make up the fire.”

They did so, and sat down on its further side, watching till, as nothing happened, their dread of the lions passed away, and they began to talk again, telling to each other the stories of their lives.

Richard Darrien, it seemed, had been in Africa about five years, his father having emigrated there on the death of his mother, as he had nothing but the half-pay of a retired naval captain, and he hoped to better his fortunes in a new land. He had been granted a farm in the Graaf-Reinet district, but like many other of the early settlers, met with misfortunes. Now, to make money, he had taken to elephant-hunting, and with his partners was just returning from a very successful expedition in the coast lands of Natal, at that time an almost unexplored territory. His father had allowed Richard to accompany the party, but when they got back, added the boy with sorrow, he was to be sent for two or three years to the college at Capetown, since until then his father had not been able to afford him the luxury of an education. Afterwards he wished him to adopt a profession, but on this point he—Richard—had made up his mind, although at present he said little about that. He would be a hunter, and nothing else, until he grew too old to hunt, when he intended to take to farming.

His story done, Rachel told him hers, to which he listened eagerly.

“Is your father mad?” he asked when she had finished.

“No,” she answered. “How dare you suggest it? He is only very good; much better than anybody else.”

“Well, it seems to come to much the same thing, doesn’t it?” said Richard, “for otherwise he would not have sent you to gather gooseberries here with such a storm coming on.”

“Then why did your father send you to hunt lions with such a storm coming on?” she asked.

“He didn’t send me. I came of myself; I said that I wanted to shoot a buck, and finding the spoor of a lion I followed it. The waggons must be a long way ahead now, for when I left them I returned to that kloof where I had seen the buck. I don’t know how I shall overtake them again, and certainly nobody will ever think of looking for me here, as after this rain they can’t spoor the horse.”

“Supposing you don’t find it—I mean your horse—tomorrow, what shall you do?” asked Rachel. “We haven’t got any to lend you.”

“Walk and try to catch them up,” he replied.

“And if you can’t catch them up?”

“Come back to you, as the wild Kaffirs ahead would kill me if I went on alone.”

“Oh! But what would your father think?”

“He would think there was one boy the less, that’s all, and be sorry for a while. People often vanish in Africa where there are so many lions and savages.”

Rachel reflected a while, then finding the subject difficult, suggested that he should find out what their own particular lions were doing. So Richard went to look, and reported that the storm had ceased, and that by the moonlight he could see no lions or any other animals, so he thought that they must have gone away somewhere. The flood waters also appeared to be running down. Comforted by this intelligence Rachel piled on the fire nearly all the wood that remained to them. Then they sat down again side by side, and tried to continue their conversation. By degrees it drooped, however, and the end of it was that presently this pair were fast asleep in each other’s arms.

3. Good-Bye

Rachel was the first to wake, which she did, feeling cold, for the fire had burnt almost out. She rose and walked from the cave. The dawn was breaking quietly, for now no wind stirred, and no rain fell. So dense was the mist which rose from the river and sodden land, however, that she could not see two yards in front of her, and fearing lest she should stumble on the lions or some other animals, she did not dare to wander far from the mouth of the cave. Near to it was a large, hollow-surfaced rock, filled now with water like a bath. From this she drank, then washed and tidied herself as well as she could without the aid of soap, comb or towels, which done, she returned to the cave.

As Richard was still sleeping, very quietly she laid a little more wood on the embers to keep him warm, then sat down by his side and watched him, for now the grey light of the dawning crept into their place of refuge. To her this slumbering lad looked beautiful, and as she studied him her childish heart was filled with a strange, new tenderness, such as she had never felt before. Somehow he had grown dear to her, and Rachel knew that she would never forget him while she lived. Then following this wave of affection came a sharp and sudden pain, for she remembered that presently they must part, and never see each other any more. At least this seemed certain, for how could they when he was travelling to the Cape and she to Natal?

And yet, and yet a strange conviction told her otherwise. The power of prescience which came to her from her mother and her Highland forefathers awoke in her breast, and she knew that her life and this lad’s life were interwoven. Perhaps she dozed off again, sitting there by the fire. At any rate it appeared to her that she dreamed and saw things in her dream. Wild tumultuous scenes opened themselves before her in a vision; scenes of blood and terror, sounds, too, of voices crying war. It appeared to her as if she were mad, and yet ruled a queen, death came near to her a score of times, but always fled away at her command. Now Richard Darrien was with her, and now she had lost him and sought—ah! how she sought through dark places of doom and unnatural night. It was as though he were dead, and she yet living, searched for him among the

habitations of the dead. She found him also, and drew him towards her. How, she did not know.

Then there was a scene, a last scene, which remained fixed in her mind after everything else had faded away. She saw the huge trunks of forest trees, enormous, towering trees, gloomy trees beneath which the darkness could be felt. Down their avenues shot the level arrows of the dawn. They fell on her, Rachel, dressed in robes of white skin, turning her long, outspread hair to gold. They fell upon little people with faces of a dusky pallor, one of them crouched against the bole of a tree, a wizened monkey of a man who in all that vastness looked small. They fell upon another man, white-skinned, half-naked, with a yellow beard, who was lashed by hide ropes to a second tree. It was Richard Darrien grown older, and at his feet lay a broad-bladed spear!

The vision left her, or she was awakened from her sleep, whichever it might be, by the pleasant voice of this same Richard, who stood yawning before her, and said:

“It is time to get up. I say, why do you look so queer? Are you ill?”

“I have been up, long ago,” she answered, struggling to her feet. “What do you mean?”

“Nothing, except that you seemed a ghost a minute ago. Now you are a girl again, it must have been the light.”

“Did I? Well, I dreamed of ghosts, or something of the sort,” and she told him of the vision of the trees, though of the rest she could remember little.

“That’s a queer story,” he said when she had finished. “I wish you had got to the end of it, I should like to know what happened.”

“We shall find out one day,” she answered solemnly.

“Do you mean to say that you believe it is true, Rachel?”

“Yes, Richard, one day I shall see you tied to that tree.”

“Then I hope you will cut me loose, that is all. What a funny girl you are,” he added doubtfully. “I know what it is, you want something to eat. Have the rest of that biltong.”

“No,” she answered. “I could not touch it. There is a pool of water out there, go and bathe your arm, and I will bind it up again.”

He went, still wondering, and a few minutes later returned, his face and head dripping, and whispered:

“Give me the gun. There is a reed buck standing close by. I saw it through the mist; we’ll have a jolly breakfast off him.”

She handed him the *roer*, and crept after him out of the cave. About thirty yards away to the right, looming very large through the dense fog, stood the fat reed buck. Richard wriggled towards it, for he wanted to make sure of his shot, while Rachel crouched behind a stone. The buck becoming alarmed, turned its head, and began to sniff at the air, whereon he lifted the gun and just as it was about to spring away, aimed and fired. Down it went dead, whereon, rejoicing in his triumph like any other young hunter who thinks not of the wonderful and happy life that he has destroyed, Richard sprang upon it exultantly, drawing his knife as he came, while Rachel, who always shrank from such sights, retreated to the cave. Half an hour later, however, being healthy and hungry, she had no objection to eating venison toasted upon sticks in the red embers of their fire.

Their meal finished at length, they reloaded the gun, and although the mist was still very dense, set out upon a journey of exploration, as by now the sun was shining brightly above the curtain of low-lying vapour. Stumbling on through the rocks, they discovered that the water had fallen almost as quickly as it rose on the previous night. The island was strewn, however, with the trunks of trees and other debris that it had brought down, amongst which lay the carcases of bucks and smaller creatures, and with them a number of drowned snakes. The two lions, however, appeared to have escaped by swimming, at least they saw nothing of them. Walking cautiously, they came to the edge of the donga, and sat down upon a stone, since as yet they could not see how wide and deep the water ran.

Whilst they remained thus, suddenly through the mist they heard a voice shouting from the other side of the donga.

“Missie,” cried the voice in Dutch, “are you there missie?”

“That is Tom, our driver,” she said, “come to look for me. Answer for me, Richard.”

So the lad, who had very good lungs, roared in reply:

“Yes, I’m here, safe, waiting for the mist to lift, and the water to run down.”

“God be thanked,” yelled the distant Tom. “We thought that you were surely drowned. But, then, why is your voice changed?”

“Because an English heer is with me,” cried Rachel. “Go and look for his horse and bring a rope, then wait till the mist rises. Also send to tell the pastor and my mother that I am safe.”

“I am here, Rachel,” shouted another voice, her father’s. “I have been looking for you all night, and we have got the Englishman’s horse. Don’t come into the water yet. Wait till we can see.”

“That’s good news, any way,” said Richard, “though I shall have to ride hard to catch up the waggons.”

Rachel’s face fell.

“Yes,” she said; “very good news.”

“Are you glad that I am going, then?” he asked in an offended tone.

“It was you who said the news was good,” she replied gently.

“I meant I was glad that they had caught my horse, not that I had to ride away on it. Are you sorry, then?” and he glanced at her anxiously.

“Yes, I am sorry, for we have made friends, haven’t we? It won’t matter to you who will find plenty of people down there at the Cape, but you see when you are gone I shall have no friend left in this wilderness, shall I?”

Again Richard looked at her, and saw that her sweet grey eyes were full of tears. Then there rose within the breast of this lad who, be it remembered, was verging upon manhood, a sensation strangely similar, had he but known it, to that which had been experienced an hour or two before by the child at his side when she watched him sleeping in the cave. He felt as though these tear-laden grey eyes were drawing his heart as a magnet draws iron. Of love he knew nothing, it was but a name to him, but this feeling was certainly very new and queer.

“What have you done to me?” he asked brusquely. “I don’t want to go away from you at all, which is odd, as I never

liked girls much. I tell you," he went on with gathering vehemence, "that if it wasn't that it would be mean to play such a trick upon my father, I wouldn't go. I'd come with you, or follow after—all my life. Answer me—what have you done?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," said Rachel with a little sob, "except tie up your arm."

"That can't be it," he replied. "Anyone could tie up my arm. Oh! I know it is wrong, but I hope I shan't be able to overtake the waggons, for if I can't I will come back."

"You mustn't come back; you must go away, quite away, as soon as you can. Yes, as soon as you can. Your father will be very anxious," and she began to cry outright.

"Stop it," said Richard. "Do you hear me, stop it. I am not going to be made to snivel too, just because I shan't see a little girl any more whom I never met—till yesterday."

These last words came out with a gulp, and what is more, two tears came with them and trickled down his nose.

For a moment they sat thus looking at each other pitifully, and—the truth must be told—weeping, both of them. Then something got the better of Richard, let us call it primeval instinct, so that he put his arms about Rachel and kissed her, after which they continued to weep, their heads resting upon each other's shoulders. At length he let her go and stood up, saying argumentatively:

"You see now we are really friends."

"Yes," she answered, again rubbing her eyes with the back of her hand for lack of a pocket handkerchief in the fashion that on the previous day had so irritated her father, "but I don't know why you should kiss me like that, just because you are my friend, or" she added with an outburst of truthfulness, "why I should kiss you."

Richard stood over her frowning and reflecting. Then he gave up the problem as beyond his powers of interpretation, and said:

"You remember that rubbish you dreamt just now, about my being tied to a tree and the rest of it? Well, it wasn't nice, and it gives me the creeps to think of it, like the lions outside the cave. But I want to tell you that I hope it is true, for then we shall meet again, if it is only to say good-night."