

## CHAPTER XI

### GONE!

I wonder if many married couples are quite as happy as we found ourselves. Cynics, a growing class, declare that few illusions can survive a honeymoon. Well, I do not know about it, for I only married once, and can but speak from my limited experience. But certainly our illusion, or rather the great truth of which it is the shadow, did survive, as to this day it survives in my heart across all the years of utter separation, and across the unanswering gulf of gloom.

But complete happiness is not allowed in this world even for an hour. As our marriage day had been shadowed by the scene which has been described, so our married life was shadowed by its own sorrow.

Three days after our wedding Mr. Carson had a stroke. It had been long impending, now it fell. We came into the centre hut to dinner and found him lying speechless on the couch. At first I thought that he was dying, but this was not so. On the contrary, within four days he recovered his speech and some power of movement. But he never recovered his memory, though he still knew Stella, and sometimes myself. Curiously enough he remembered little Tota best of all three, though occasionally he thought that she was his own daughter in her childhood, and would ask her where her mother was. This state of affairs lasted for some seven months.

The old man gradually grew weaker, but he did not die. Of course his

condition quite precluded the idea of our leaving Babyan Kraals till all was over. This was the more distressing to me because I had a nervous presentiment that Stella was incurring danger by staying there, and also because the state of her health rendered it desirable that we should reach a civilized region as soon as possible. However, it could not be helped.

At length the end came very suddenly. We were sitting one evening by Mr. Carson's bedside in his hut, when to our astonishment he sat up and spoke in a strong, full voice.

"I hear you," he said. "Yes, yes, I forgive you. Poor woman! you too have suffered," and he fell back dead.

I have little doubt that he was addressing his lost wife, some vision of whom had flashed across his dying sense. Stella, of course, was overwhelmed with grief at her loss. Till I came her father had been her sole companion, and therefore, as may be imagined, the tie between them was much closer than is usual even in the case of father and daughter. So deeply did she mourn that I began to fear for the effect upon her health. Nor were we the only ones to grieve; all the natives on the settlement called Mr. Carson "father," and as a father they lamented him. The air resounded with the wailing of women, and the men went about with bowed heads, saying that "the sun had set in the heavens, now only the Star (Stella) remained." Indaba-zimbi alone did not mourn. He said

that it was best that the Inkoos should die, for what was life worth when one lay like a log?--moreover, that it would have been well for all if he had died sooner.

On the following day we buried him in the little graveyard near the waterfall. It was a sad business, and Stella cried very much, in spite of all I could do to comfort her.

That night as I sat outside the hut smoking--for the weather was hot, and Stella was lying down inside--old Indaba-zimbi came up, saluted, and squatted at my feet.

"What is it, Indaba-zimbi?" I said.

"This, Macumazahn. When are you going to trek towards the coast?"

"I don't know," I answered. "The Star is not fit to travel now, we must wait awhile."

"No, Macumazahn, you must not wait, you must go, and the Star must take her chance. She is strong. It is nothing. All will be well."

"Why do you say so? why must we go?"

"For this reason, Macumazahn," and he looked cautiously round and spoke low. "The baboons have come back in thousands. All the mountain is full

of them."

"I did not know that they had gone," I said.

"Yes," he answered, "they went after the marriage, all but one or two; now they are back, all the baboons in the world, I think. I saw a whole cliff back with them."

"Is that all?" I said, for I saw that he had something behind. "I am not afraid of a pack of baboons."

"No, Macumazahn, it is not all. The Babyan-frau, Hendrika, is with them."

Now nothing had been heard or seen of Hendrika since her expulsion, and though at first she and her threats had haunted me somewhat, by degrees she to a great extent had passed out of my mind, which was fully preoccupied with Stella and my father-in-law's illness. I started violently. "How do you know this?" I asked.

"I know it because I saw her, Macumazahn. She is disguised, she is dressed up in baboon skins, and her face is stained dark. But though she was a long way off, I knew her by her size, and I saw the white flesh of her arm when the skins slipped aside. She has come back, Macumazahn, with all the baboons in the world, and she has come back to do evil. Now do you understand why you should trek?"

"Yes," I said, "though I don't see how she and the baboons can harm us, I think that it will be better to go. If necessary we can camp the waggons somewhere for a while on the journey. Hearken, Indaba-zimbi: say nothing of this to the Star; I will not have her frightened. And hearken again. Speak to the headmen, and see that watchers are set all round the huts and gardens, and kept there night and day. To-morrow we will get the waggons ready, and next day we will trek."

He nodded his white lock and went to do my bidding, leaving me not a little disturbed--unreasonably so, indeed. It was a strange story. That this woman had the power of conversing with baboons I knew.[\*] That was not so very wonderful, seeing that the Bushmen claim to be able to do the same thing, and she had been nurtured by them. But that she had been able to muster them, and by the strength of her human will and intelligence muster them in order to forward her ends of revenge, seemed to me so incredible that after reflection my fears grew light. Still I determined to trek. After all, a journey in an ox waggon would not be such a very terrible thing to a strong woman accustomed to roughing it, whatever her state of health. And when all was said and done I did not like this tale of the presence of Hendrika with countless hosts of baboons.

[\*] For an instance of this, see Anderson's "Twenty-five Years in a Waggon," vol. i. p. 262.--Editor.

So I went in to Stella, and without saying a word to her of the baboon story, told her I had been thinking matters over, and had come to the conclusion that it was our duty to follow her father's instructions to the letter, and leave Babyan Kraals at once. Into all our talk I need not enter, but the end of it was that she agreed with me, and declared that she could quite well manage the journey, saying, moreover, that now that her dear father was dead she would be glad to get away.

Nothing happened to disturb us that night, and on the following morning I was up early making preparations. The despair of the people when they learned that we were going to leave them was something quite pitiable. I could only console them by declaring that we were but on a journey, and would return the following year.

"They had lived in the shadow of their father, who was dead," they declared; "ever since they were little they had lived in his shadow. He had received them when they were outcasts and wanderers without a mat to lie on, or a blanket to cover them, and they had grown fat in his shadow. Then he had died, and the Star, their father's daughter, had married me, Macumazahn, and they had believed that I should take their father's place, and let them live in my shadow. What should they do when there was no one to protect them? The tribes were kept from attacking them by fear of the white man. If we went they would be eaten up," and so on. Alas! there was but too much foundation for their fears.

I returned to the huts at mid-day to get some dinner. Stella said

that she was going to pack during the afternoon, so I did not think it necessary to caution her about going out alone, as I did not wish to allude to the subject of Hendrika and the baboons unless I was obliged to. I told her, however, that I would come back to help her as soon as I could get away. Then I went down to the native kraals to sort out such cattle as had belonged to Mr. Carson from those which belonged to the Kaffirs, for I proposed to take them with us. It was a large herd, and the business took an incalculable time. At length, a little before sundown, I gave it up, and leaving Indaba-zimbi to finish the job, got on my horse and rode homewards.

Arriving, I gave the horse to one of the stable boys, and went into the central hut. There was no sign of Stella, though the things she had been packing lay about the floor. I passed first into our sleeping hut, thence one by one into all the others, but still saw no sign of her. Then I went out, and calling to a Kaffir in the garden asked him if he had seen his mistress.

He answered "yes." He had seen her carrying flowers and walking towards the graveyard, holding the little white girl--my daughter--as he called her, by the hand, when the sun stood "there," and he pointed to a spot on the horizon where it would have been about an hour and a half before. "The two dogs were with them," he added. I turned and ran towards the graveyard, which was about a quarter of a mile from the huts. Of course there was no reason to be anxious--evidently she had gone to lay the flowers on her father's grave. And yet I was anxious.

When I got near the graveyard I met one of the natives, who, by my orders, had been set round the kraals to watch the place, and noticed that he was rubbing his eyes and yawning. Clearly he had been asleep. I asked him if he had seen his mistress, and he answered that he had not, which under the circumstances was not wonderful. Without stopping to reproach him, I ordered the man to follow me, and went on to the graveyard. There, on Mr. Carson's grave, lay the drooping flowers which Stella had been carrying, and there in the fresh mould was the spoor of Tota's veldschoon, or hide slipper. But where were they?

I ran from the graveyard and called aloud at the top of my voice, but no answer came. Meanwhile the native was more profitably engaged in tracing their spoor. He followed it for about a hundred yards till he came to a clump of mimosa bush that was situated between the stream and the ancient marble quarries just over the waterfall, and at the mouth of the ravine. Here he stopped, and I heard him give a startled cry. I rushed to the spot, passed through the trees, and saw this. The little open space in the centre of the glade had been the scene of a struggle. There, in the soft earth, were the marks of three pairs of human feet--two shod, one naked--Stella's, Tota's, and Hendrika's. Nor was this all. There, close by, lay the fragments of the two dogs--they were nothing more--and one baboon, not yet quite dead, which had been bitten in the throat by the dogs. All round was the spoor of numberless baboons. The full horror of what had happened flashed into my mind.



My wife and Tota had been carried off by the baboons. As yet they had not been killed, for if so their remains would have been found with those of the dogs. They had been carried off. The brutes, acting under the direction of that woman-monkey, Hendrika, had dragged them away to some secret den, there to keep them till they died--or kill them!

For a moment I literally staggered beneath the terror of the shock. Then I roused myself from my despair. I bade the native run and alarm the people at the kraals, telling them to come armed, and bring me guns and ammunition. He went like the wind, and I turned to follow the spoor. For a few yards it was plain enough--Stella had been dragged along. I could see where her heels had struck the ground; the child had, I presumed, been carried--at least there were no marks of her feet. At the water's edge the spoor vanished. The water was shallow, and they had gone along in it, or at least Hendrika and her victim had, in order to obliterate the trail. I could see where a moss-grown stone had been freshly turned over in the water-bed. I ran along the bank some way up the ravine, in the vain hope of catching a sight of them. Presently I heard a bark in the cliffs above me; it was answered by another, and then I saw that scores of baboons were hidden about among the rocks on either side, and were softly swinging themselves down to bar the path. To go on unarmed as I was would be useless. I should only be torn to pieces as the dogs had been. So I turned and fled back towards the huts. As I drew near I could see that my messenger had roused the settlement, for natives with spears and kerries in their hands were running up towards the kraals. When I reached the hut I met old Indaba-zimbi, who wore a very serious

face.

"So the evil has fallen, Macumazahn," he said.

"It has fallen," I answered.

"Keep a good heart, Macumazahn," he said again. "She is not dead, nor is the little maid, and before they die we shall find them. Remember this, Hendrika loves her. She will not harm her, or allow the babyans to harm her. She will try to hide her away from you, that is all."

"Pray God that we may find her," I groaned. "The light is going fast."

"The moon rises in three hours," he answered; "we will search by moonlight. It is useless to start now; see, the sun sinks. Let us get the men together, eat, and make things ready. Hamba gachla. Hasten slowly, Macumazahn."

As there was no help, I took his advice. I could eat no food, but I packed some up to take with us, and made ready ropes, and a rough kind of litter. If we found them they would scarcely be able to walk. Ah! if we found them! How slowly the time passed! It seemed hours before the moon rose. But at last it did rise.

Then we started. In all we were about a hundred men, but we only mustered five guns between us, my elephant roer and four that had

belonged to Mr. Carson.