

## CHAPTER V

### A LOVE SCENE AND A QUARREL

Presently they were seated side by side upon a stone, Suzanne looking straight before her, for nature warned her that this talk of theirs was not to be as other talks, and Ralph looking at Suzanne.

"Suzanne," he said at length.

"Yes," she answered; "what is it?" But he made no answer, for though many words were bubbling in his brain, they choked in his throat, and would not come out of it.

"Suzanne," he stammered again presently, and again she asked him what it was, and again he made no answer. Now she laughed a little and said:

"Ralph, you remind me of the blue-jay in the cage upon the stoep which knows but one word and repeats it all day long."

"Yes," he replied, "it is true; I am like that jay, for the word I taught it is 'Suzanne,' and the word my heart teaches me is 'Suzanne,' and--Suzanne, I love you!"

Now she turned her head away and looked down and answered:

"I know, Ralph, that you have always loved me since we were children

together, for are we not brother and sister?"

"No," he answered bluntly, "it is not true."

"Then that is bad news for me," she said, "who till to-day have thought otherwise."

"It is not true," he went on, and now his words came fast enough, "that I am your brother, or that I love you as a brother. We are no kin, and if I love you as a brother that is only one little grain of my love for you--yes, only as one little grain is to the whole sea-shore of sand. Suzanne, I love you as--as a man loves a maid--and if you will it, dear, all my hope is that one day you will be my wife," and he ceased suddenly and stood before her trembling, for he had risen from the stone.

For a few moments Suzanne covered her face with her hands, and when she let them fall again he saw that her beautiful eyes shone like the large stars at night, and that, although she was troubled, her trouble made her happy.

"Oh! Ralph," she said at length, speaking in a voice that was different from any he had ever heard her use, a voice very rich and low and full, "Oh! Ralph, this is new to me, and yet to speak the truth, it seems as old as--as that night when first I found you, a desolate, starving child, praying upon this stone. Ralph, I do will it with all my heart and soul and body, and I suppose that I have willed it ever since I was a woman, though until this hour I did not quite know what it was I

willed. Nay, dear, do not touch me, or at the least, not yet. First hear what I have to say, and then if you desire it, you may kiss me--if only in farewell."

"If you will it and I will it, what more can you have to say?" he asked in a quick whisper, and looking at her with frightened eyes.

"This, Ralph; that our wills, who are young and unlearned, are not all the world; that there are other wills to be thought of; the wills of our parents, or of mine rather, and the will of God."

"For the first," he answered, "I do not think that they stand in our path, for they love you and wish you to be happy, although it is true that I, who am but a wanderer picked up upon the veldt, have no fortune to offer you--still fortune can be won," he added doggedly.

"They love you also, Ralph, nor do they care over much for wealth, either of them, and I am sure that they would not wish you to leave us to go in search of it."

"As for the will of God," he continued, "it was the will of God that I should be wrecked here, and that you should save me here, and that the life you saved should be given to you. Will it not, therefore, be the will of God also that we, who can never be happy apart, should be happy together and thank Him for our happiness every day till we die?"

"I trust so, Ralph; yet although I have read and seen little, I know

that very often it has been His will that those who love each other should be separated by death or otherwise."

"Do not speak of it," he said with a groan.

"No, I will not speak of it, but there is one more thing of which I must speak. Strangely enough, only this morning my mother was talking of you; she said that you are English, and that soon or late blood will call to blood and you will leave us. She said that your nest is not here, but there, far away across the sea, among those English; that you are a swallow that has been fledged with sparrows, and that one day you will find the wings of a swallow. What put it in her mind to speak thus, I do not know, but I do know, Ralph, that her words filled me with fear, and now I understand why I was so much afraid."

He laughed aloud very scornfully. "Then, Suzanne," he said, "you may banish your fears, for this I swear to you, before the Almighty, that whoever may be my true kin, were a kingdom to be offered to me among them, unless you could share it, it would be refused. This I swear before the Almighty, and may He reject me if I forget the oath."

"You are very young to make such promises, Ralph," she answered doubtfully, "nor do I hold them binding on you. At nineteen, so I am told, a lad will swear anything to the girl who takes his fancy."

"I am young in years, Suzanne, but I grew old while I was yet a child, for sorrow aged me. You have heard my oath; let it be put to the test,

and you shall learn whether or no I speak the truth. Do I look like one who does not know his mind?"

She glanced up at the steady, grey eyes and the stern, set mouth and answered, "Ralph, you look like one who knows his mind, and I believe you. Pray God I may not be deceived, for though we are but lad and girl, if it prove so I tell you that I shall live my life out with a broken heart."

"Do not fear, Suzanne. And now I have heard what you had to say, and I claim your promise. If it be your will I will kiss you, Suzanne, but not in farewell."

"Nay," she answered, "kiss me rather in greeting of the full and beautiful life that stretches before our feet. Whether the path be short or long, it will be good for us and ever better, but, Ralph, I think that the end will be best of all."

So he took her in his arms, and they kissed each other upon the lips, and, as they told me afterwards, in that embrace they found some joy. Why should they not indeed, for if anywhere upon the earth, if it be given and received in youth before the heart has been seared and tainted with bitterness and disillusion, surely in such a pledge as theirs true joy can be found. Yes, and they did more than this, for, kneeling there upon that rock where once the starving child had knelt in bygone years, they prayed to Him who had brought them together, to Him who had given them hearts to love with and bodies to be loved, and the immortality

of Heaven wherein to garner this seed of love thus sown upon the earth, that He would guide them, bless them, and protect them through all trials, terrors, sorrows, and separations. As shall be seen, this indeed He did.

Then they rose, and having, not without difficulty, lifted the riet-buck ram upon Ralph's horse and made it fast there, as our hunters know how to do, they started homewards, walking the most part of the way, for the load was heavy and they were in no haste, so that they only reached the farm about noon.

Now I, watching them as we sat at our mid-day meal, grew sure that something out of the common had passed between them. Suzanne was very silent, and from time to time glanced at Ralph shyly, whereon, feeling her eyes, he would grow red as the sunset, and seeing his trouble, she would colour also, as though with the knowledge of some secret that made her both happy and ashamed.

"You were long this morning in finding a buck, Ralph," I said.

"Yes, mother," he answered; "there were none on the flats, for the grass is burnt off; and had not Suzanne beaten out a dry pan for me where the reeds were still green, I think that we should have found nothing. As it was I shot badly, hitting the ram in the flank, so that we were obliged to follow it a long way before I came up with it."

"And where did you find it at last?" I asked.

"In a strange place, mother; yes, in that very spot where many years ago Suzanne came upon me starving after the shipwreck. There in the glade and by the flat stone on which I had lain down to die was the buck, quite dead. We knew the dell again, though neither of us had visited it from that hour to this, and rested there awhile before we turned home."

I made no answer but sat thinking, and a silence fell on all of us.

By this time the Kaffir girls had cleared away the meat and brought in coffee, which we drank while the men filled their pipes and lit them. I looked at Jan and saw that he was making up his mind to say something, for his honest face was troubled, and now he took up his pipe, and now he put it down, moving his hands restlessly till at length he upset the coffee over the table.

"Doubtless," I thought to myself, "he means to tell the tale of the Englishmen who have come to seek for Ralph. Well, I think that he may safely tell it now."

Then I looked at Ralph and saw that he also was very ill at ease, struggling with words which he did not know how to utter. I noted, moreover, that Suzanne touched his hand with hers beneath the shelter of the table as though to comfort and encourage him. Now watching these two men, at last I broke out laughing, and said, addressing them:

"You are like two fires of green weeds in a mealie patch, and I am wondering which of you will be the first to break into flame or whether

you will both be choked by the reek of your own thoughts."

My gibe, harmless though it was, stung them into speech, and both at once, for I have noticed, however stupid they may be, that men never like to be laughed at.

"I have something to say," said each of them, as though with a single voice, and they paused, looking at one another angrily.

"Then, son, wait till I have finished. Almighty! for the last twenty minutes you have been sitting as silent as an ant-bear in a hole, and I tell you that it is my turn now; why, then, do you interrupt me?"

"I am very sorry, my father," said Ralph, looking much afraid, for he thought that Jan was going to scold him about Suzanne, and his conscience being guilty caused him to forget that it was not possible that he should know anything of the matter of his love-making.

"That is good," said Jan, still glaring at him; "but I am not your father."

"Then why do you call me son?" asked Ralph.

"Almighty! do you suppose that I sit here to answer riddles?" replied Jan, pulling at his great beard. "Why do I call you son, indeed? Ah!" he added in a different voice, a sorrowful voice, "why do I when I have no right? Listen, my boy, we are in sore trouble, I and your mother, or

if she is not your mother at least she loves you as much as though she were, and I love you too, and you know it; so why do you seek to make a fool of me by asking me riddles?"

Now, Ralph was about to answer, but Suzanne held up her hand, and he was quiet.

"My son," went on Jan with a kind of sob, "they are coming to take you away from us."

"They! Who?" asked Ralph.

"Who? The English, damn them! Yes, I say, damn the English and the English Government."

"Peace, Jan," I broke in, "this is not a political meeting, where such talk is right and proper."

"The English Government is coming to take me away!" exclaimed Ralph bewildered. "What has the Government to do with me?"

"No," said Jan, "not the English Government, but two Scotchmen, which is much the same thing. I tell you that they are travelling to this place to take you away."

Now, Ralph leaned back in his chair and stared at him, for he saw that it was little use to ask him questions, and that he must leave him to

tell the tale in his own fashion. At last it came out.

"Ralph," said my husband, "you know that you are not of our blood; we found you cast up on the beach like a storm-fish and took you in, and you grew dear to us; yes, although you are English or Scotch, which is worse, for if the English bully us the Scotch bully us and cheat us into the bargain. Well, your parents were drowned, and have been in Heaven for a long time, but I am sorry to say that all your relations were not drowned with them. At first, however, they took no trouble to hunt for you when we should have been glad enough to give you up."

"No," broke in Suzanne and I with one voice, and I added, "How do you dare to tell such lies in the face of the Lord, Jan?"

"----When it would not have been so bad to give you up," he went on, correcting himself. "But now it seems that had you lived you would have inherited estates, or titles, or both."

"Is the boy dead then?" I asked.

"Be silent, wife, I mean--had he lived a Scotchman. Therefore, having made inquiries, and learned that a lad of your name and age had been rescued from a shipwreck and was still alive among the Boers in the Transkei, they have set to work to hunt you, and are coming here to take you way, for I tell you that I heard it in the dorp yonder."

"Is it so?" said Ralph, while Suzanne hung upon his words with white

face and trembling lips. "Then I tell you that I will not go. I may be English, but my home is here. My own father and mother are dead, and these strangers are nothing to me, nor are the estates and titles far away anything to me. All that I hold dear on the earth is here in the Transkei," and he glanced at Suzanne, who seemed to bless him with her eyes.

"You talk like a fool," said Jan, but in a voice which was full of joy that he could not hide, "as is to be expected of an ignorant boy. Now I am a man who has seen the world, and I know better, and I tell you that although they are an accursed race, still it is a fine thing to be a lord among the English. Yes, yes, I know the English lords. I saw one once when I went to Capetown; he was the Governor there, and driving through the streets in state, dressed as bravely as a blue-jay in his spring plumage, while everybody took off their hats to him, except I, Jan Botmar, who would not humble myself thus. Yet to have such clothes as that to wear every day, while all the people salute you and make a path for you, is not a thing to be laughed at. See boy, it just comes to this: here you are poor and little, there you may be rich and much, and it is our duty not to stand in your road, though it may break our hearts to lose you. So you had best make up your mind to go away with the damned Scotchmen when they come, though I hope that you will think kindly of us when you get to your own country. Yes, yes, you shall go, and what is more, you may take my best horse to ride away on, the thoroughbred schimmel, and my new black felt hat that I bought in the dorp. There, that is done with, praise be to God, and I am going out, for this place is so thick with smoke that I can't see my own hand," and

he rose to go, adding that if the two Scotchmen did not want a bullet through them, it would be as well if they kept out of his way when they came upon the farm.

Now in saying that the room was thick with smoke Jan lied, for both the men's pipes went out when they began to talk. But as I knew why he lied I did not think so much of it. To tell the truth, at that moment I could see little better than he could, since, although I would have poisoned those two Scotchmen before I suffered them to take Ralph away, the very thought of his going was enough to fill my eyes with tears, and to cause Suzanne to weep aloud shamelessly.

"Wait a bit, father--I beg your pardon, Jan Botmar," said Ralph in a clear and angry voice; "it is my turn now, for you may remember that when we began to talk I had something to say, but you stopped me. Now, with your leave, as you have got off the horse I will get on."

Jan slowly sat down again and said:

"Speak. What is it?"

"This: that if you send me away you are likely to lose more than you bargain for."

Now Jan stared at him perplexedly, but I smiled, for I guessed what was to come.

"What am I likely to lose," he asked, "beyond my best horse and my felt hat? Allemachter! Do you want my span of black oxen also? Well, you shall have them if you like, for I should wish you to trek to your new home in England behind good cattle."

"No," answered Ralph coolly, "but I want your daughter, and if you send me away I think that she will come with me."