

CHAPTER III

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 how 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 carcasses 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."

"Yes, Richard," she answered, placing her slim fingers into his big brown hand, "we shall meet again, I am sure--I am quite sure. And I think that it will be to say, not good-night," and she looked up at him and smiled, "but good-morning."

As Rachel spoke a puff of wind blew down the donga, rolling up the mist before it, and of a sudden shining above them they saw the glorious sun. As though by magic butterflies appeared basking upon the rain-shattered lily blooms; bright birds flitted from tree to tree, ringdoves began to coo. The terror of the tempest and the darkness of night were overpast; the world awoke again to life and love and joy. Instantly this change reflected itself in their young hearts. They whose natures had as it were ripened prematurely in the stress of danger and the shadow of death, became children once again. The very real emotions that they had experienced were forgotten, or at any rate sank into abeyance. Now they thought, not of separation or of the dim, mysterious future that stretched

before them, but only of how they should ford the stream and gain its further side, where Rachel saw her father, Tom, the driver, and the other Kaffirs, and Richard saw his horse which he had feared was lost.

They ran down to the brink of the water and examined it, but here it was still too deep for them to attempt its crossing. Then, directed by the shouts and motions of the Kaffir Tom and Mr. Dove, they proceeded up stream for several hundred yards, till they came to a rapid where the lessening flood ran thinly over a ridge of rock, and after investigation, proceeded to try its passage hand in hand. It proved difficult but not dangerous, for when they came near to the further side where the current was swift and the water rather deep, Tom threw them a waggon rope, clinging on to which they were dragged--wet, but laughing--in safety to the further bank.

"Ow!" exclaimed the Kaffirs, clapping their hands. "She is alive, the lightnings have turned away from her, she rules the waters, and the lightnings!" and then and there, after the native fashion, they gave Rachel a name which was destined to play a great part in her future. That name was "Lady of the Lightnings," or, to translate it more accurately, "of the Heavens."

"I never thought to see you again," said her father, looking at Rachel with a face that was still white and scared. "It was very wrong of me to send you so far with that storm coming on, and I have had a terrible night--yes, a terrible night; and so has your poor mother. However, she

knows that you are safe by now, thank God, thank God!" and he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Well, father, you said that He would look after me, didn't you? And so He did, for He sent Richard here. If it hadn't been for Richard I should have been drowned," she added inconsequently.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Dove. "Providence manifests itself in many ways. But who is your young friend whom you call Richard? I suppose he has some other name."

"Of course," answered that youth himself, "everybody has except Kaffirs. Mine is Darrien."

"Darrien?" said Mr. Dove. "I had a friend called Darrien at school. I never saw him after I left, but I believe that he went into the Navy."

"Then he must be my father, sir, for I have heard him say that there had been no other Darrien in the service for a hundred years."

"I think so," answered Mr. Dove, "for now that I look at you, I can see a likeness. We slept side by side in the same dormitory once five-and-thirty years ago, so I remember. And now you have saved my daughter; it is very strange. But tell me the story."

So between them they told it, although to one scene of it--the

last--neither of them thought it necessary to allude; or perhaps it was forgotten.

"Truly the Almighty has had you both in His keeping," exclaimed Mr. Dove, when their tale was done. "And now, Richard, my boy, what are you going to do? You see, we caught your horse--it was grazing about a mile away with the saddle twisted under its stomach--and wondered what white man could possibly have been riding it in this desolate place. Afterwards, however, one of my voor-loopers reported that he had seen two waggons yesterday afternoon trekking through the poort about five miles to the north there. The white men with them said that they were travelling towards the Cape, and pushing on to get out of the hills before the storm broke. They bade him, if he met you, to bid you follow after them as quickly as you could, and to say that they would wait for you, if you did not arrive before, at the Three Sluit outspan on this side of the Pondo country, at which you stopped some months ago."

"Yes," answered Richard, "I remember, but that outspan is thirty miles away, so I must be getting on, or they will come back to hunt for me."

"First you will stop and eat with us, will you not?" said Mr. Dove.

"No, no, I have eaten. Also I have saved some meat in my pouch. I must go, I must indeed, for otherwise my father will be angry with me. You see," he added, "I went out shooting without his leave."

"Ah! my boy," remarked Mr. Dove, who seldom neglected an opportunity for a word in season, "now you know what comes of disobedience."

"Yes, I know, sir," he answered looking at Rachel. "I was just in time to save your daughter's life here; as you said just now, Providence sent me. Well, good-bye, and don't think me wicked if I am very glad that I was disobedient, as I believe you are, too."

"Yes, I am. Good comes out of evil sometimes, though that is no reason why we should do evil," the missionary added, not knowing what else to say. Richard did not attempt to argue the point, for at the moment he was engaged in bidding farewell to Rachel. It was a very silent farewell; neither of them spoke a word, they only shook each other's hand and looked into each other's eyes. Then muttering something which it was as well that Mr. Dove did not hear, Richard swung himself into the saddle, for his horse stood at hand, and, without even looking back, cantered away towards the mountains.

"Oh!" exclaimed Rachel presently, "call him, father."

"What for?" asked Mr. Dove.

"I want to give him our address, and to get his."

"We have no address, Rachel. Also he is too far off, and why should you want the address of a chance acquaintance?"

"Because he saved my life and I do," replied the child, setting her face. Then, without another word, she turned and began to walk towards their camp--a very heavy journey it was to Rachel.

When Rachel reached the waggon she found that her mother was more or less recovered. At any rate the attack of fever had left her so that she felt able to rise from her bed. Now, although still weak, she was engaged in packing away the garments of her dead baby in a travelling chest, weeping in a silent, piteous manner as she worked. It was a very sad sight. When she saw Rachel she opened her arms without a word, and embraced her.

"You were not frightened about me, mother?" asked the child.

"No, my love," she answered, "because I knew that no harm would come to you. I have always known that. It was a mad thing of your father to send you to such a place at such a time, but no folly of his or of anyone else can hurt you who are destined to live. Never be afraid of anything, Rachel, for remember always you will only die in old age."

"I am not sure that I am glad of that," answered the girl, as she pulled off her wet clothes. "Life isn't a very happy thing, is it, mother, at least for those who live as we do?"

"There is good and bad in it, dear; we can't have one without the other--most of us. At any rate, we must take it as it comes, who have to

walk a path that we did not make, and stop walking when our path comes to an end, not a step before or after. But, Rachel, you are changed since yesterday. I see it in your face. What has happened to you?"

"Lots of things, mother. I will tell you the story, all of it, every word. Would you like to hear it?"

Her mother nodded, and, the baby-clothes being at last packed away, shut the lid of-the box with a sigh, sat down upon it and listened.

Rachel told her of her meeting with Richard Darrien, and of how he saved her from the flood. She told of the strange night that they had spent together in the little cave while the lions marched up and down without. She told of her vigil over the sleeping Richard at the daybreak, and of the dream that she had dreamed when she seemed to see him grown to manhood, and herself grown to womanhood, and clad in white skins, watching him lashed to the trunk of a gigantic tree as the first arrows of sunrise struck down the lanes of some mysterious forest. She told of how her heart had been stirred, and of how afterwards in the mist by the water's brink his heart had been stirred also, and of how they had kissed each other and wept because they must part.

Then she stopped, expecting that her mother would be angry with her and scold her for her thoughts and conduct, as she knew well her father would have done. But she was not angry, and she did not scold. She only stretched out her thin hands and stroked the child's fair hair, saying:

"Don't be frightened, Rachel, and don't be sad. You think that you have lost him, but soon or late he will come back to you, perhaps as you dreamed--perhaps otherwise."

"If I were sure of that, mother, I would not mind anything," said the girl, "though really I don't know why I should care," she added defiantly.

"No, you don't know now, but you will one day, and when you do, remember that, however long it seems to wait, you may be quite sure, because I who have the gift of knowing, told you so. Now tell me again what Richard Darrien was like while you remember, for perhaps I may never live to see his face, and I wish to get it into my mind."

So Rachel told her, and when she had described every detail, asked suddenly:

"Must we really go on, mother, into this awful wilderness? Would not father turn back if you asked him?"

"Perhaps," she answered. "But I shall not ask. He would never forgive me for preventing him from doing what he thinks his duty. It is a madness when we might be happy in the Cape or in England, but that cannot be helped, for it is also his destiny and ours. Don't judge hardly of your father, Rachel, because he is a saint, and this world is a bad place for saints and their families, especially their families. You think that he

does not feel; that he is heartless about me and the poor babe, and sacrifices us all, but I tell you he feels more than either you or I can do. At night when I pretend to go to sleep I watch him groaning over his loss and for me, and praying for strength to bear it, and for help to enable him to do his duty. Last night he was nearly crazed about you, and in all that awful storm, when the Kaffirs would not stir from the waggon, went alone down to the river guided by the lightnings, but of course returned half dead, having found nothing. By dawn he was back there again, for love and fear would not let him rest a minute. Yet he will never tell you anything of that, lest you should think that his faith in Providence was shaken. I know that he is strange--it is no use hiding it, but if I were to thwart him he would go quite mad, and then I should never forgive myself, who took him for better and for worse, just as he is, and not as I should like him to be. So, Rachel, be as happy as you can, and make the best of things, as I try to do, for your life is all before you, whereas mine lies behind me, and yonder," and she pointed towards the place where the infant was buried. "Hush! here he comes. Now, help me with the packing, for we are to trek to the ford this afternoon."