

UPAZI

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Upazi by W. J. Hairs

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TO
JACOBUS

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CHAPTER 1.

CECIL RHODES, Doctors Jim and Shultz and, later, the beautiful Princess Radzivall, were magic names in the early pioneering days of Rhodesia—that inland empire within an Empire, a lasting and increasingly valuable monument to the greatest of them all, Cecil Rhodes.

What memories of South Africa these names conjure up in the minds of those who, like myself, went through the excitement and dangers of its early days!

Africa south of the Zambesi had lost much of its wildness. Lions no longer hunted the veldt, penetrating into villages, even the one of corrugated iron buildings which is now the City of Bulowayo, where on very rare occasions the hungry beasts have been known to seize a native child and carry it off to their jungle lair.

Big game was growing scarce, with the exception of Koodoo, wilde-beeste and springbok. Is it, then, any wonder that I turned my eyes toward the north where great numbers of elephants, lions, and even giant gorillas still roamed the lawless jungle? Rumours had come to me of strange tribes of cannibals that lived back of the Mountains of the Moon, or, as some called them, the Mysterious Mountains; also stories that, deeper still, in that almost impenetrable country lying westward of these mountains, somewhere midst the fastnesses of the great Itura Forest, was the habitat of the elusive and little-known, in fact almost mythical, animal, "the Okapi".

The temptation became too great to resist; so at last I decided to ascertain first hand if such stories were true. Years before, I had visited the remains of Zimbabwe, reputedly the ruins of Queen Sheba's and King Solomon's mine. I was now hopeful that somewhere in the wilds of the Congo I, myself, might find monuments of an even earlier civilization. The very thought of

this possibility fired my imagination until I was in a fever of excitement to be starting.

Mombasa, the principal port of disembarkation for that vast and little known country of Central East Africa, would be my logical starting point. From there I would trek into the hinterland.

With me went Jacobus. His full name was Jacobus October Cloete. He was a Herero Hottentot, a fearless companion and devoted servant. I had found him some years previously, when he was a mere lad of fourteen, and I had been trekking across the Kalahari Desert towards the German border in the hope of finding new fields of excitement. The journey across had been very severe on my horse and myself. Water had been uncommonly scarce as in some parts of this desert no rain had fallen for seven years.

Jacobus I found on the wind-blown edge of a high ridge where nothing but the fantastically-shaped cacti grew. These particular cacti grew in shapes which appear, from a short distance, to be old scarecrows with their one hand pointing east and the other west—their faces turned to the south. So it was that what appeared to me from a distance to be a short cactus tree near a larger one turned out to be, on drawing nearer, a young Hottentot boy.

At that moment he was the saddest-looking human being I had ever seen. He could not speak Dutch or English and I could not get my tongue around the clicks in the Hottentot dialect; therefore, most of our conversation was carried on by gesticulations and signs, and the guttural noises of two parched tongues. Eventually I learned the cause of this wail's loneliness. His father had aroused the enmity of his tribe and, in attempting to escape their vengeance, had been badly wounded, but with the indomitable courage and hardihood of his race had managed to get away and was making for the fastnesses of the mountains towards the border—the same range which I also had been attempting to reach when I came across Jacobus. The older man had later been joined by this mere lad, who had brought his wounded father fragments of food, and together they had again set out in an effort to reach British territory and succour.

I FIND JACOBUS

Misfortune after misfortune had befallen them. Food was non-existent; water there was none. These privations and his wounds had proven too much for the endurance of even a hardy Herero Hottentot, and less than a couple of hours had passed since Jacobus had scraped with his bare hands a shallow hole near that grotesque-looking cactus tree,* laboriously dragging and pushing the remains of his father into it, covering it up as best he could. His fingers were worn almost raw with his efforts, but never a complaint did he make and, apart from the actual knowledge that his father was no more, Jacobus showed little more outward emotion than he might at losing a locust.

As soon as I understood the situation I asked him how far off his tribe was and, on learning it was two days' march, I made known to Jacobus that I would take him to them. At this he showed signs of abject terror and falling on his knees clawed at my arms and breeches and, no doubt, in his own dialect made a profound and eloquent appeal to me not to take him back. I promised that no harm would befall him, but it was all to no avail. Jacobus continued his wailing and pleading until I lifted him on to his feet and, pushing him in front of me, directed him to proceed in the direction of his tribe's last encampment. Being something of a nomad myself, I did not want the care of an immature Hottentot on my hands.

Towards sundown, utterly worn out from fatigue, hunger and, worse still, lack of water, we reached a *donga* in which were a few clusters of granite rock. One of these clusters was about eight to ten feet in height. Towards this we stumbled, almost in the last extremities of that lethargy which precedes the final collapse of those who go down in the desert.

Long before this happened I had been leading my horse, as he was far too weak to carry me. In fact, he had been stumbling so badly during the last few hours that I had almost given up

*This particular species of cactus is given a wide berth by all desert travellers, and amongst the natives of Namaqualand a legend of sinister import prevails to the effect that if a human being happens to linger within reach of its outstretched arms at high noon he will be clasped in a vice-like grip from which escape is impossible, and later, when his struggles cease, the head of this strangely-shaped cactus tree will droop and through its disc-like suckers drain the blood from its victim. Whether this legend be true or not, the fact remains that neither European nor native will go near, and certainly will not touch, these particular trees.