



QUATERMAN'S WIFE.

By RIDER HAGGARD.

Author of "Soldier Quaterch, V. C.," "Mr. Mason's Will," "A Tale of Three Lions," "Allan Quatermain," "She," "Jess," etc.

CHAPTER III.

"MAKE no apology to anybody who may happen to read this narrative, for having set out in the manner of my meeting with Indabazimbi; first, because it was curious, and secondly, because he takes some hand in the subsequent events. That old man was a hunter, he was a very clever one. What amount of truth there was in his pretensions of supernatural powers is not for me to determine; but I may have my own opinion on the subject. But there was no mistaking the extraordinary instance exercised over his fellow-natives."

"When was at length ready to start upon my expedition I went to old Indabazimbi to say good-by to him, and was rather surprised to find him engaged in rolling a medicine, assagai, and other sundries his blankets. "Good-by, Indabazimbi," I said. "I am going to look for you, and you will come back with me. Now the old chief (my father) is gone to where the storms come from, and he nodded to the sky. "I feel very getting into had habits again, but I will just throw up the bones at work out about your journey, and can tell you this, that if you don't see me you will die, and what is more, you will see one who is dearer to you than life."

"Now was no more superstitious than other people, but somehow old Indabazimbi impressed me. And I know his extraordinary influence over every class of natives, and he thought me that he might be useful in that way. "All right," I said. "I appoint you wickiara to the expedition without pay."

"First, then, ask for wages," he answered. "I am glad to see that you have enough imagination to ask for it. I will give you what you want, but you must be satisfied with it. You can't understand my speeches any more than the fool as the kraal could understand that I was his master with the lightning. Well, it is time to start, but I will see you, Macumazahn, I should take one wagon, not two."

"Why? I said. "Because you will lose your wagons, and it is better to lose one than two. "Oh, nonsense!" I said. "All right, Macumazahn, live and learn," and without another word he walked the foremost wagon, put his bundle in it, and climbed into the front seat."

"So, having bid an affectionate adieu to my friends, at length started, and traveled slowly northward. For the first three weeks nothing very particular befell me. Such Kaffirs as we came in contact with were friendly, and game literally abundant."

"The first real adventure that befell me on this particular journey was with elephants, which I will relate because of its importance. Just before we reached the Orange river we came to a stretch of forest had some twenty miles. The night we entered this forest, I camped in a lovely open glade, five yards about tamarisk grass was growing to the height of a man, or rather it had been; now, with the exception of a few stalks here and there, it was crushed quite flat. It was already dark when we camped; but after the moon got up I walked from the fire to see how this had happened. One glance was enough for me; a great herd of elephants had evidently passed over the flat grass not many hours before. The sight of their spoor rejoiced me exceedingly, for though I had seen wild elephants, at that time I had never shot one. Moreover, the sight of elephant spoor to the African hunter is what "color in the pan" is to the prospector of gold. It is by ivory that he lives, and without it or trade it is his chief aim in life. My resolution was soon taken. I would camp the wagons for a while in the forest, and start on horseback after the elephants."

"I communicated my decision to Indabazimbi and the other Kaffirs. The latter were not both, for your Kaffir loves hunting, which means plenty of meat and congenial occupation, but Indabazimbi would express no opinion. I saw him retire to a little fire that he had kindled for himself, and go through some mysterious performances with bones and axes, which were with the greatest interest by the natives. At length he rose, and informed me that he would go to the river with a herd of bleasback."

"I fired at one of them. It galloped about a rest of the herd. "Very well, Macumazahn, then stay and be killed," he answered, taking a pinch of snuff. "Come, let us see about the fallen tree, or indeed anything, until I find myself sitting on the ground drinking some peach brandy from a flask, and old Indabazimbi opposite me nodding his head. The result was instantaneous. Down sank the tree again, giving one of my legs a considerable squeeze, and the next instant I heard a crashing sound. The elephant had fallen."

"By this time, what between fright and struggling, I was pretty well done. I cannot remember how I got under the fallen tree, or indeed anything, until I found myself sitting on the ground drinking some peach brandy from a flask, and old Indabazimbi opposite me nodding his head. The result was instantaneous. Down sank the tree again, giving one of my legs a considerable squeeze, and the next instant I heard a crashing sound. The elephant had fallen."

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hunter who has not felt like this at the sight of his first elephant? I called a halt, and then, the wind being right, we set to work to stalk the bull.

"Very quietly I rode down the hillside of the slope till we came to the bottom, which was densely covered with bush. Here I saw the elephants had been feeding for broken branches and ungrazed grass by all about. I did not make much noise, however, for all my thoughts were fixed upon the bull I was stalking, when suddenly my horse made a violent start that nearly threw me from the saddle, and there came a mighty rush and upheaval of something in front of me. I looked there was the hinder part of a second bull elephant not four yards off. I could just catch sight of its outstretched ears projecting on either side. I had disturbed it sleeping, and it was running away. Obviously the best thing to do would have been to let it run, but I was young in those days and foolish, and in the excitement of the moment I lifted my "rifle" or elephant gun and fired at the great creature over my horse's head. The recoil of the heavy gun nearly knocked me off the horse.

"I recovered myself, however, and as I did so, saw the bull lurch forward, for the impact of a three ounce bullet in the flank will quicken the movements even of an elephant. By this time I had realized the folly of the shot, and devoutly hoped that the bull would take no further notice of it. But he had a different view of the matter. Pulling himself up in a series of plunges, he spun around and came for me with outstretched ears and uplifted trunk, screaming terribly. I was quite defenseless, for my gun was empty, and my first thought was of escape. I dug my heels into the sides of my horse, but he would not move an inch. The poor animal was paralyzed with terror, and he simply stood still, his forelegs outstretched, and quivering all over like a leaf.

"On rushed the elephant, awful to see. I made one more vain effort to stir the horse. Now the trunk of the great bull swung aloft above my head. I thought flying about my brain. Quick as light I rolled from the saddle. By the side of the horse lay a fallen tree, as thick through as a man's body. The tree was lifted a little off the ground by the broken boughs which took its weight, and with a single movement, so active is one in such necessities, I flung myself beneath it. As I did so, I heard the trunk of the elephant descend with a mighty thud on the back of my poor horse, and the next instant he was below me in dust and dirt, for the horse, whose back was broken, fell over across the tree under which I lay ensconced. But he did not stop there. He rolled over and over, and I had got his trunk round my dead nag's neck, and with a mighty effort, hurled him clear of the tree. I wriggled backwards as far as I could towards the trunk of the tree, for I knew what he was after.

"Presently I saw the reptile of the bull's trunk coming to rest upon my head. He could manage to keep it round my part of me I was lost. But in the position I occupied, that was just what he could not do, although he kept down to facilitate his operations. He came to the snapping tip like a great open-mouthed snake; it closed upon my hat, which vanished. Again it was thrust down, and a screen of rage was below me through it within four inches of my head. Now it seemed to enlarge itself. Oh, heavens! now it had me by the hair, which, locked for myself, was very long. Then it was my turn to scream, for next instant half a square inch of hair was dragged from my scalp by the roots. I was screaming piteously, as I have seen cruel Kaffir children boys pluck a fowl. The elephant, however, disappointed with the moderate results, changed his tactics. He would his trunk to the ground, and with a mighty effort, he lifted it so much that, had it occurred to him, he could now have easily fished me out with his trunk.

"Again he looked with all his mighty strength, and I saw that the tree was coming, and roared aloud for help. Some shots were fired close by in answer, but if they hit the bull, their only effect was to stir his energies to more active life. In another few seconds my shelter would be torn away, and I should be done for. A cold perspiration burst over me as I realized that I was lost. Then of a sudden I remembered that I had a pistol in my belt, which I often used for dispatching wounded game. It was loaded and capped. By this time the tree was lifted so much that I could easily get my hand down to my middle and draw the pistol from its case. I drew and cocked it. If they hit the bull, their only effect was to stir his energies to more active life. In another few seconds my shelter would be torn away, and I should be done for. A cold perspiration burst over me as I realized that I was lost. 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