

Dream Life and Real Life.

A LITTLE AFRICAN STORY.

Little Jannita sat alone beside a milk-bush. Before her and behind her stretched the plain, covered with red sand and thorny "Karoo" bushes; and here and there a milk-bush, looking like a bundle of pale green rods tied together. Not a tree was to be seen anywhere, except on the banks of the river, and that was far away, and the sun beat on her head. Round her fed the Angora goats she was herding; pretty things, especially the little ones, with white silky curls that touched the ground. But Jannita sat crying. If an angel should gather up in his cup all the tears that have been shed, I think the bitterest would be those of children.

By and by she was so tired, and the sun was so hot, she laid her head against the milk-bush, and dropped asleep.

She dreamed a beautiful dream. She thought that when she went back to the farmhouse in the evening, the walls were covered with vines and roses, and the "kraals" (sheepfolds) were not made of red stone, but of lilac trees full of blossom. And the fat old Boer smiled at her, and the stick he held across the door for the goats to jump over, was a lily rod with seven blossoms at the end. When she went to the house her mistress gave her a whole roaster cake for her supper, and the mistress's daughter had stuck a rose in the cake; and her mistress's son-in-law said "Thank you!" when she pulled off his boots, and did not kick her.

It was a beautiful dream.

While she lay thus dreaming, one of the little kids came and licked her on her cheek, because of the salt from her dried-up tears. And in her dream she was not a poor indented child any more, living with boers. It was her father who kissed her. He said he had only been asleep—that day when he lay down under the thorn-bush; he had not really died. He felt her hair, and said it was grown long and silky, and they would go back to Denmark now. He asked her why her feet were bare, and what the marks on her back were. Then he put her head on his shoulder, and picked her up, and carried her away, away! She laughed—she could feel her face against his brown beard. His arms were so strong.

As she lay there dreaming with the ants running over her naked feet, and with her brown curls lying in the sand, a Hottentot came up to her. He was dressed in ragged yellow trousers, and a dirty shirt, and torn jacket. He had a red handkerchief round his head, and a felt hat above that. His nose was flat, his eyes like slits, and the wool on his head gathered into little round balls. He came to the milk-bush, and looked at the girl lying in the hot sun. Then he walked off, and caught one of the fattest little Angora goats, and held its mouth fast, as he stuck it under his arm. He looked back to see that she was still sleeping, and jumped down into one of the "sluits." (The deep fissures, generally dry, in which the superfluous torrents of water are carried from the "Karoo" plains after thunderstorms.) He walked down the bed of the "sluit" a little way and came to an overhanging bank, under which, sitting on the red sand, were two men. One was a tiny, ragged, old bushman, four feet high; the other was an English navy in a dark blue blouse. They cut the kid's throat with the navy's long knife, and covered up the blood with sand, and buried the entrails and skin; then talked, and quarreled a little; and then they talked quietly again.

The Hottentot man put a leg of the kid under his coat and left the rest of the meat for the two in the "sluit," and walked away.

When little Jannita awoke it was almost sunset. She sat up very fright-

oned, but her goats were all about her. She began to drive them home. "I do not think there are any lost," she said.

Dirk, the Hottentot, had brought his flock home already, and stood at the "kraal" door with his ragged yellow trousers. The fat old Boer put his stick across the door, and let Jannita's goats jump over, one by one. When the last jumped over: "Have you been to sleep to-day?" he said; "there is one missing."

Then little Jannita knew what was coming, and she said, in a low voice, "No." And then she felt in her heart that deadly sickness that you feel when you tell a lie; and again she said "Yes."

"Do you think you have any supper this evening?" said the Boer.

"No," said Jannita.

"What do you think you will have?"

"I don't know," said Jannita.

"Give me your whip," said the Boer to Dirk, the Hottentot.

The moon was all but full that night. Oh, but its light was beautiful!

The little girl crept to the door of the outhouse where she slept, and looked at it. When you are hungry, and very, very sore, you do not cry. She leaned her cheek on one hand, and looked, with her great dove's eyes—the other hand was cut open, so she wrapped in it her pinafore. She looked across the plain at the sand and the low karroobush, with the moonlight on them.

Presently, there came slowly, from far away, a wild spring-buck. It came close to the house, and stood looking at it in wonder, while the moonlight glinted on its horns, and in its great eyes. It stood wondering at the red brick walls, and the girl watched it. Then, suddenly, as if it scorned it all, it curved its beautiful back and turned; and away it fled over the bushes and sand, like a sheeny streak of white lightning. She stood up to watch it. So free, so free! Away, away! She watched, till she could see it no more on the wide plain.

Her heart swelled, larger, large, large: she uttered a low cry; and without waiting, pausing thinking, she followed on its track. Away, away, away! "I—I also!" she said, "I—I also!"

When at last her legs began to tremble under her, and she stopped to breathe, the house was a speck behind her. She dropped on the earth, and held her panting sides.

She began to think now.

If she stayed on the plain they would trace her footsteps in the morning and catch her; but if she waded in the water in the bed of the river they would not be able to find her footmarks; and she would hide, there where the rocks and the "kopjes" were.

("Kopjes," in the karroo, are hillocks of stones, that rise up singly or in clusters here and there; presenting sometimes the fantastic appearance of old ruined castles or giant graves, the work of human hands.)

So she stopped up and walked towards the river. The water in the river was low; just a line of silver in the broad bed of sand, here and there broadening into a pool. She stepped into it, and bathed her feet in the delicious cold water. Up and up the stream she walked, where it rattled over the pebbles, and past where the farmhouse lay; and where the rocks were large, she leaped from one to the other. The night wind in her face made her strong—she laughed. She had never felt such night wind before. So the night smells to the wild bucks, because they are free! A free thing feels as a chained thing never can.

At last she came to a place where the willows grew on each side of the river, and trailed their long branches on the sandy bed. She could not tell why, she could not tell the reason, but a feeling of fear came over her.

On the left bank rose a chain of "kopjes" and a precipice of rocks. Between the precipice and the river bank there

was a narrow path covered by the fragments of fallen rock. And upon the summit of the precipice a kippersal tree grew, whose palm-like leaves were clearly cut out against the night sky. The rocks cast a deep shadow, and the willow trees, on either side of the river. She paused, looked up and about her, and then ran on, fearful.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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