

# A Goddess of Africa

A Story of the Golden Fleeces.

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

Author of "MISS CAPRICE," "DR. JACK'S WIFE," "DR. JACK," ETC., ETC.

Wakulla may have engaged in many a fierce fight in which the deadly assegai of the Zulus was employed at close quarters, but he certainly never met an antagonist who gave him so much concern, and sprung upon him such a variety of surprises as this one.

All the same he proved himself a fighter worthy of the name, and if the tactics to which he was accustomed were met by a superior play of the keen-pointed weapon, he never once faltered nor looked over his shoulder with the air of a man who conceives the idea of retreat.

The assagai whirled and twisted like battling serpents. Rex applied his knowledge of sword tactics toward keeping his antagonist from utilizing any trick he might wish to bring into play, and Wakulla seemed tremendously surprised at being unable to even raise his weapon when he saw a chance to bury its point in the unprotected breast of his enemy.

His surprise turned to amazement as he found himself several times made to give way, giant that he was, under the strategic rushes of the other.

Rex was in no humor for play. He knew this thing had to be settled in a desperate hurry, and since the war chief was bound to accomplish his destruction if he could, Rex made up his mind to return the compliment.

Besides, his danger was very great, since at any instant a swarm of hostile blacks might come dashing out of the kraal, attracted by the clashing of arms or some signal cry to which the war chief might deign to give vent.

Wakulla dared aspire to the hand of this delightful being whom a strange destiny had made a goddess in exile—therefore Wakulla must die—it was decreed, and his the arm to write the sentence of the powers that be.

From mere defensive tactics the change to offensive was but a step. The war chief proved game, for up to this time he had scorned to call assistance, even though one should would have resulted in the undoing of his foe.

When Rex started the new regime of this delightful being whom a strange destiny had made a goddess in exile—therefore Wakulla must die—it was decreed, and his the arm to write the sentence of the powers that be.

Pressed back as he was by the rush of his adversary, it could be seen that while he struggled against the threatening assagai that whirled about his head with dizzying rapidity, it was something else that caused him to fasten his keen black eyes on the arms of Hastings.

Perhaps there may have been some spot which Rex unconsciously neglected when using the ointment in the dark, and it was this patch of white skin that had riveted the native's attention.

At any rate, as he suddenly became aware of the truth, his scruples with regard to sounding the alarm vanished, and from his lips pealed a far reaching shout that echoed from crag to crag overhead.

It was Wakulla's last slogan. Hastings had discovered his chance, and nerved to the deed by the desperate nature of his situation he sent the steel of the assagai cushioning through bone and muscle, until the keen point protruded from the back of the unfortunate war chief.

The Zambodi staggered back and fell to the ground—he endeavored to once more gain his feet, while his painted face looked like that of a devil from Tophet; but now the blow could be swift and sure, and Wakulla could only scowl and shriek for reinforcements.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE RETREAT OF THE FAIR GOD.

To have conquered so valiant an adversary with his own weapons was something of which young Hastings might speak with pardonable pride at some future day, always provided he survived the dangers that seemed to be gathering around his head in such limitless numbers. Just then his one thought was escape.

## White Watery Pimples.

Five years ago my body broke out in white watery pimples, which grew so bad that the suffering was almost unbearable.

I took doctors' medicine and various remedies for two years but they were of little benefit, whenever I got warmed up or sweat the pimples would come out again.

A neighbor advised Burdock Blood Bitters, and I am glad I followed his advice, for four bottles completely cured me.

Three years ago I was again afflicted with the same watery pimples, and I bought a bottle of Burdock Blood Bitters, and it cured me.

No sooner did he see his determined foe man disposed of than he snatched up the assagai that had fallen from the palsied hand of Wakulla at the time the weapon of the adventurer pierced his vitals.

"Come, oh, come!" cried the girl, in an agony of apprehension, lest she should linger just a little too long, and once the blacks came sweeping through the gates to surround them, she could guess the horrible fate that must overtake this bold white man.

Really Rex needed no urging, since it was far from his intention to waste any time, in a case where every second counted.

He saw his guide start swiftly away, and being light of foot himself found little difficulty in reaching her side.

Then again in his heart he found cause to thank heaven for the friendly darkness that received their flying figures in its gentle embrace, and immediately blotted out all indications of their presence.

Back in the direction whence they had come there arose a mighty shout, and Rex, even while risking a stumble in the gloom, could not keep from turning his head to take a flying glance over his shoulder.

The picture that met his startled vision was doubtless an exceedingly strong one; but it might have appeared more heartily to his artistic temperament if he had seen it from a place of safety, instead of filling the position of the hunted fox.

Again that human black stream was pouring through the gates of the kraal, with many extravagant gestures, and brandishing of arms. The signal cry of their war chief had been heard, and to a man they obeyed his call, possibly expecting to discover a host of enemies in battle array, since the shout had been one of extreme urgency.

Leaping and tossing they kept pouring forth by scores, and advancing in the direction of the late council fire.

As they came these warriors formed a very peculiar flying wedge, quite unlike the usual crescent or horn shape adopted by the Matabele in their attacks.

The smouldering fire seemed to leap into new life as the thunder of their approach; as though startled from slumber flames sprang up and in a measure illuminated the scene.

As he looked, Rex saw the form of the stricken war chief stagger to his feet with the deadly assagai still fastened in his body.

If he uttered any sound it was impossible to catch it, such was the awful clamor, but there could be no mistaking the action of Wakulla as he pointed in the direction taken by the fleeing fugitives.

He even attempted to lead his warriors as of yore, the game spirit remaining to the last, but death had too firm a grip on his life, and ere he had taken three steps Wakulla pitched forward on his face to rise no more.

Then Bedlam was let loose. Such fiendish yells as emanated from the throats of those Zambodi warriors as they rushed pell-mell hither and thither in a mad search for their unseen foe, would have won recognition among the adherents of a modern football game. Higher praise is impossible since the supporters of rival latter-day colleges are supposed to have reached the limit of lung capacity with regard to volume of sound and variety of slang.

The impis advanced in the shape of an open fan, extending their lines continually; but with a fair start there was at least a chance of eluding them.

Expecting to run against foes in hiding at any minute the warriors did not move as rapidly as under other conditions they might have done.

Rex discovered that his fair guide knew what her course was to be, and that she had undoubtedly mapped it all out beforehand.

His hopes increased. What if they should throw the Zambodi off their trail, and escape—oh, the rapture of that thought!—in its contemplation he even forgot the treasure contained in the side pockets of his coat, the whereabouts of which he had recently been reminding, since the last time he saw it, Lord Bruno had snatched it from the ground.

At last they held their own, and even that was a satisfaction to the fugitives.

The greatest danger menacing them lay in the many small squads of warriors, returning from the hunt of the little band of argonauts—to run slapdash into the arms of such an ambush would doubtless prove very unpleasant, to say the least.

But the fair guide was wonderfully cautious, and could hear sounds ahead that never reached Hastings' ears. Only in this way could he account for the sudden turns she would make.

They were all the while ascending the mount, and presently he began to suspect that she was taking him to some refuge where she had lived aloof from the tribe since the death of her father, whom they had regarded as a wizard.

This was soon proven to be the truth. To his startled eyes there appeared a little cabin on the side of the hill, partly hidden by encroaching trees—a structure that had been doubtless erected by the hands of the man who called her father, in the days of "Auld Lang Syne" when as a child she came with him into this wilderness, this strange man who

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## Dr. Chase's Syrup of Linseed and Turpentine.

seemed to desire to hide himself from his kind.

Nor did his surprise end there at the threshold, for as they entered he found himself amid many of the comforts of civilization, which had doubtless been brought here into the wilderness to make life more endurable for the girl.

The lodge was not untenanted. A figure sprang up and stood before them, with flashing eyes. Rex saw it was a young girl of the Zambodi tribe, though long association with the white maiden had caused her to resemble many of the strange customs of her race, and adopt those of the whites.

When she saw who entered she fell on her knees, proving that in common with the rest she also worshipped at the shrine of the white beauty.

Then her wondering eyes fell on the disguised Rex, and she seemed almost overcome at the discovery; but her mistress spoke quickly to her, and she dared no longer let her eyes rest on his face, for she believed in him also a god, perhaps even the terrible M'limo.

Obedient the command given her she went outside the door to watch. And now Rex felt confused because of his heathen disguise, but he put a bold face on the matter and even laughed at it as a huge joke at his expense.

"Come," he said, with a lugubrious smile, "what would my aristocratic friends of the Raquet Club in New York say if they saw me in this war dress. Really, it gives me the queerest sensation. But whether I look like a fool or a full fledged Zambodi warrior does not matter. I am bound in your debt, miss, and only await a fitting opportunity to repay the account."

A man may even be polite when his arms and face and chest are smeared with what might be called plumbago, with cat-tails dangling at his waist and a feather lur around his neck that gives him the sensation of wearing a ladies' ostrich bonnet—circumstances do not make the man, for a gentleman is born such and his natural instincts crop out despite contrary environments.

His eyes were fastened upon her face, as though it exceeded his power to withdraw them. Who could blame him, for it was a fair countenance upon which to gaze—such as artists love to paint in connection with hovering angels, with more than a little wisdom and determination also written there.

The girl smiled at his words—perhaps the sound of his voice was like music in her ears, for since the death of the wizard, her protector, she had not heard an English tongue frame speech.

"Do not concern yourself about that, sir. What I have done is small enough. Heavens knows, when you have declared one of the objects that brought you to Zambodi land was my release, my rescue from this distasteful bondage," she said, quickly.

"Then you are not happy here?" he asked.

Her face took on an expression of sadness.

"Happy—no, no. True, I have little to complain of except of late the unwelcome attentions of Wakulla, and the evil plottings of Hassaje, the old witch doctor, who hates me in secret because I cure

those who are beyond his skill. The people worship me as a spirit; but I have not been happy. Time was when as a girl I sang the whole day long—when the carol of the birds and the ceaseless murmur of the waterfall were the sweetest music in all the wide world to me. Alas! it is no longer so. Ever since my husband died I hear strange voices in my sleep and while wandering alone in the forest—voices that seem to come to me from across the sea—voices that speak in my native tongue and urge me to seek the fair country where I first saw the light of day. Oh! sir, I have begun to yearn to see my mother's home, to learn who she was, and whether she be living or dead. It is a terrible thing to be alone in this great world, and never to have known your mother."

She seems overcome for the moment, and tears glistened in her glorious eyes; but Rex knew not how to comfort her, for she was only a stupid man, and quite helpless to assuage a woman's grief.

His face expressed his deep sympathy, but he could only stand there and be mute, much as he might have enjoyed taking the lovely angel into his arms and whispering that she need never again believe there was not at least one honest heart that was most intensely interested in her welfare.

Presently she seemed to recover her composure, and endeavored to smile. "By degrees then, I have determined that when the proper time came I would fly and seek my own people. My heart has grown weary of contacts with these people, my stretched blacks, for although I have endeavored to teach them many things, they are wedded to their idols, and naturally turn to the medicine man with his horrible customs which seem to have a fascination over their souls."

"I have been sorely puzzled how to escape, for Wakulla as if suspecting my designs, has seemed to watch me day and night. So you see, deliverance from this bondage will be very welcome. Heaven takes strange methods to accomplish a result."

Rex felt very glad to be concerned in her escape, although he winced a little when he recollected how very helpless he was, now that his companions had been forced to flee. Still, her words of gratitude were pleasant to hear, and his resolve to take her from the land of the Zambodi if it were within the power of mortal to do so, was strengthened. The determination was there, and a kindly Providence, watching over the affairs of those devoted to a noble purpose, would supply the means in good time.

He had much to tell, and many questions to ask, remembering the face in the locket worn by Lord Bruno.

This fair goddess of the Zambodi was no doubt a long lost sister of the English lord. In no other way could he account for her great resemblance to the picture of Bruno's mother. Such things occur in real life as well as in fiction, and as Rex looked upon her face in the light cast by the lamp which burned some crude oil of the wilderness, he was endeavoring to see his friend there.

It was no time to ask questions, however.

Danger still hovered nigh. To his ears came the clamor of excited multitudes, showing that the kraal was seething with a tumultuous upheaval, doubtless resulting from the death of the war chief Wakulla. He could easily imagine that grim old humbug the witch-doctor, clad in all his hideous paraphernalia, arousing the superstitious blacks to a state of frenzy.

And even while he listened and marveled at the fearful sounds, the little Zambodi girl came plunging into the retreat to declare that the whole populace, led by the witch-doctor himself, was advancing up the side of the mountain.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### HASSAJE AND THE FIRE-DEVIL.

Hastings, as soon as he heard in the Zambodi girl's broken English what new disaster hung over their heads, put his hand under the dangling cat-tails and drew out his revolver.

It was mute testimony as to his intentions, and yet what folly to think he could stand off ten scores of fierce black warriors with a puny weapon like that.

Down in his heart he knew full well that if deliverance came it would have to be through the influence of the fair being to whom he already owed so much.

Therefore, while showing the front of a brave man, whom danger could not daunt, he cast a quick glance not unmixt with apprehension in the direction of his companion. What would she do to meet this crisis—could her influence outweigh that of the vicious old demon of a juggler Hassaje?

To his relief he found that even such alarming news did not seem to overwhelm the young goddess who had dared set her power up in opposition to that of the necromancer claiming to have intimate dealings with the Evil One.

"I have anticipated something of this sort and in a measure prepared for it," was what she hastily said to Rex as she moved toward the exit of the retreat.

He saw her go with considerable apprehension, for while the Zambodi might believe in her as a being not of earth, the high priest was crafty and vindictive, and would exhaust every means in his power to accomplish her downfall.

"If I can assist you in any way, call upon me to the utmost," he said, and she gave him a rare smile that would haunt him for many a day.

The native girl had followed her mistress, carrying several things. Evidently she had been well drilled for this emergency.

Left alone, Hastings examined his revolver which he found in first-rate condition. Then he reached out and picked up the assagai to which he had clung while escaping from the vicinity of the scene where his deadly duel with the war chief had occurred.

It was Wakulla's assagai, and as fine a stick as could be run across from Zululand to Damaraland on the west coast.

His next move was to extinguish the light so that the little cabin should be wrapped in darkness.

This done he too stepped outside, desirous of being a witness to the strange scene about to occur.

The first thing that attracted his attention was the weird light arising from a myriad of blazing torches carried by the crowd of blacks on the steep hillside.

Rex stepped forward to find a place where he could see without exposing himself, for the tumult was enough to arouse his curiosity, even if his life had not been in peril.

What he saw he never forgot. It was a picture to haunt an artist's dreams—a page from the nether world, a mingling of countless black and painted faces, grotesque forms and flashing smoking flambeaux.

Ye gods, what a weird spectacle. He forgot for the moment that it was his life they sought, and only measured the scene as a basis upon which a masterpiece fit for the best hanging at the Paris Salon could be built.

This sensation gave way to one more practical. What was about to happen—would the mad impis forget their veneration for the fair goddess, and overwhelm her in their search for the person who had slain their chief?

Rex noticed with uneasiness that some of those in the advance were bending over as they advanced.

He did not require the training of Bludsoe to understand what this meant—that these men were the expert trailers of the tribe, and that they had followed his tracks from beside the smouldering council fire where the valiant Wakulla fell, to the retreat of the white god.

Did they know the war chief had been slain by a hated paleface—perhaps Wakulla had retained sufficient strength to inform them with his last breath, or possibly the foot-prints revealed this much to their keen eyes.

The main thing of course was the means to be employed in baffling their fury.

All depended on the girl.

Rex drew back and glanced toward her as she stood upon an elevation. A peculiar glow began to surround her form, an unearthly white light very like that produced by electricity.

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## Dr. Chase's Ointment

Her figure stood out like a pale statue. She had discarded the black robe and was now as he had first seen her, an angelic being in purest white.

As the peculiar light increased even Rex was astonished—it seemed to proceed from the figure itself, just as may be seen in the glow-worm or the fire-fly. Of course he knew the cause was some ingenious contrivance which had been arranged by her father, with the purpose in view of controlling the superstitious blacks.

The shouts began to grow less in volume as those below caught sight of the girl at whose shrine they had worshipped these years.

She spoke to them in their own tongue, and an answer came back. What was said Rex could only surmise, but he felt sure it concerned him.

Curiosity again urged him to glance over the edge. A few of the blacks were on their knees, but the main crowd stood erect. Rebellion was in the air—the evil influence of old Hassaje had made itself felt, and only by a supreme effort could the fair god regain her superiority over these wavering superstitious minds, so prone to be led by sophistry and a show of power.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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