

A woman with dark hair styled in an updo, wearing a high-collared, long-sleeved, patterned historical dress with a white lace collar and a full skirt, stands in the foreground. In the background, a large, two-story plantation house with a white portico and columns is visible, set against a sunset sky with orange and yellow clouds. A gravel driveway leads from the foreground towards the house.

Zululand

A BWWM
HISTORICAL ROMANCE

OLIVER STRONG

Zululand

By Oliver Strong

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Dedicated to

Queen Princess Karabo Ngcobo

Chapter One: Kreli's Surrender

A rectangular clothes brush darted left to right, shoulder to cuff, its bristles a blur, zig zagging east to west and back on a southerly path, as did the creature from which it originated, boar country was not far from here.

Its handle was constructed of elephant ivory, the spoils of a separate hunt thousands of miles away on the subcontinent of Asia.

A tall Englishman with thick black hair stood before his manservant, the servant's heritage similar in geography to the alabaster tusked beast. The Englishman's mutton chop side burns met above his stiff upper lip, a clean shaven chin below, grey blue eyes rested beneath dark brows.

A pair of gentlemanly legs stood firm and proud, a powerful figure widening at the chest to stretch his British Army officer's tunic, a scarlet beacon of order and civilization. His sub-continental servant, once finished dutifully dusting his master's tunic, began brushing his trousers.

Lord Chelmsford admired himself in the mirror, adjusting medals and straightening collar, he a civilized Englishman sent forth into savage Africa to shine enlightenment upon the primitive elements of this crude continent.

Lord Frederic Augustus Thesiger, 2nd Baron of Chelmsford was in his early forties, forty one to be exact. A Major General of Queen Victoria's Royal Army and a veteran of more than one campaign, Crimea his first, the Indian Rebellion of 1857 to name a second.

The Empire had rewarded Lord Chelmsford for his loyal service in defeating her enemies and laying the savage low. Promoted in line with his achievements Frederic dwelled within the Cape Colony, modern day South Africa or at least part of what modern day South Africa would eventually become.

Yet on this day Chelmsford inhabited neither town nor city, not even so near as to be within sight of a church steeple on a sunny day. On this day a field tent divided him from the elements, out here in Xhosa country on the Eastern Cape of South Africa, soon to be absorbed within the British Empire.

The ninth and final war with the Xhosa was to meet its conclusion in a prompt fashion. Many battles lay behind Lord Chelmsford, a tapestry of horror and carnage, its closing threads depicted Krelis final stand at Kentani against Her Majesty's redcoats.

The African effort failed to impress the British lion; he'd fought savages in the past and when set beside Russians in Crimea they did pale. Today Krelis was to formerly surrender, permitting a smooth transition of his people's tribal estate and full control of the Eastern Cape into the dominion of the British Empire, pushing Her Majesty's borders upwards to meet that of the Zulu.

To the uneducated man or woman it would seem the British Empire had moved in and conquered these people out of a lust for power and wealth.

In truth the British had nothing to do with this war, it was an intertribal conflict brought on by drought and fought between two tribes, the Fengu and the Gcaleka.

Modern day South Africa was yet to be formed, its current map resembled a bag of liquorice allsorts dumped into a frame constructed along lines similar to the nation we recognize today.

A complicated scheme of tribal and ethnic areas rubbing up against one another, the British controlled its southernmost cape area, a modest piece of land compared to the expanse owned by long established African tribes.

Today men in England were to begin work on redrawing that map, for the British long intended on bringing those tribes into a confederation under the banner of Queen Victoria, the Queen of Africa.

A fellow named Henry Bartle Fere had been appointed High Commissioner for South Africa; at his suggestion did these plans of confederation become reality.

So with confederation in mind the British entered the ninth and final Xhosa war on the side of the Fengu. With Lord Chelmsford commanding Her Majesty's Armed Forces the British absorbed more territory into the Empire, crushing the Xhosa at the battle of Kentani and pushing the Queen of Africa's borders against that of Zululand.

Both sides held concern over these fresh living arrangements, but that was an issue for diplomats and men of words.

The order of the day was to accept the Xhosa King's surrender, and ingest his pitiful people as a pride of lions might consume a wildebeest.

The British were always poised to take advantage of any situation in the region, especially drought, for there is an African proverb as old as civilization itself, "Peace is the rain that makes the grass grow ... and war the wind that dries it out".

The commissioner for South Africa and the Cape Colony employed this skilfully to attain his dreams, a confederation of states under a single flag, and why not? For he'd achieved the very same in Canada, bringing a mighty landmass full of wild men and creatures alike under the standard of civilization, the union jack; surely these savages couldn't resist the will of civilized men, when before this time white men who opposed the Empire had buckled under imperial pressure.

Besides, who wouldn't want to be part of the greatest civilizing force in the history of mankind? The British had outlawed slavery, marching proudly into the world in a bid to exterminate its blight from the planet, of course that meant many of the African slave states had to be conquered, not that they weren't given the option of changing their ways first.

It was Henry's Christian duty to release men and women from slavery wherever they may be, if that meant the Empire expanded, well, that was a good thing for all involved, was it not?

An Indian manservant unbuttoned epaulettes on his master's scarlet tunic, running two leather straps over the tunic as a man would braces, a third strap stretched diagonally from left shoulder to a belt on Chelmsford's right hip.

This piece of uniform, worn by officers exclusively, was called a sword strap, of course these days it held not just a British cavalry sabre but also the newly issued Adam's revolver MK III. A weapon every British officer found useful fighting savage Africa.

The pistol's double action ... that is when you pulled its trigger it served more than a single function. It cocked the firing hammer (rather than having to pull it back with one's thumb), while turning its cylinder and loading a fresh chamber, loading and firing the weapon in a single action. This function permitted rapid fire of all six chambers in quick succession.

The Adam's MK III had entered service only this year, 1878, every officer was issued one, much to native chagrin. For this weapon was of considerable assistance in close combat, where natives excelled. It offered

accelerated fire and devastating stopping power, a single shot might drop a 450 pound wildebeest, a charging native had little hope.

The manservant buttoned down his master's epaulettes and fastened a buckle before presenting Lord Chelmsford with his sword, an 1853 pattern cavalry sabre.

Its black leather grip was coursed by a single golden braid wrapped around from end to end, its brass guard a piece of fine intricate work crafted by the most acclaimed sword smith in Birmingham.

A shimmering blade of the finest steel man had ever produced. One of the blade's edges bore faint inscriptions, for this sword had been issued in the Crimea many years ago. It'd seen much use yet he refused to replace it, for sentimental reasons.

Its blade rested inside a beaten old sheathe, also constructed from steel, it was his last line of defence versus the Dark Continent's brutal savagery.

Today Lord Chelmsford awaited his defeated enemy in the province of Natal, a large chunk of land between the now British Cape Colony and KwaZulu or better known to its white neighbours as Zululand.

After checking his master's dress the short Indian fellow nodded his head, "Very good Master."

Chelmsford checked himself in the mirror, noting his manservant's meticulous work, not a speck of dust blemished his fine woollen tunic, a mark of British elite populating the African Cape and the scourge of the Xhosa.

Chelmsford, a tall man at just over six feet marched out of his campaign tent; here at Kentani centuries of Xhosa self-rule was about to come to an end. High Commissioner Bartle was overjoyed; his plans for confederation were going full steam ahead. African savagery found itself wanting when weighed against mankind's most modern military. Often natives were frightened into surrender without a shot being fired, for resisting the British Royal Army's onward march seemed an impossible task.

Inside camp, beneath a tree, Bartle waited on his Major General; as Henry's Alexander exited his tent hot African sun glinted on lacquered boots and the old man arose.

Bartle removed his top hat, grasping it alongside his cane, before dabbing his brow with a handkerchief. The commissioner wasn't dressed for the heat of Africa; he appeared to be straight out of a production of "A

Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens, his forehead reeking with perspiration.

Grey hair and moustache, Bartle was of average height and in his mid-sixties, long face with small beak like nose. Heavy black coat, black top hat, dark cloth trousers and dark leather shoes; an English gentleman pulled out of Dickensian London and plopped on the East Cape of South Africa.

“Is it always so hot here?” stated the Dickensian commissioner whilst dabbing sweat from his brow.

Chelmsford, a typically sombre gentleman, some said he was aloof but that wasn’t true, he was a stoic since his days in Crimea, further detaching himself from society after his wife’s death three years ago, leaving him no children.

Those who accused him of haughtiness were often men who envied his military achievements, from the Crimea to the Indian Rebellion to the Abyssinian expedition of 1868.

Truth be told Chelmsford envied their families as much as they his prestigious career, in his mind military achievements served as poor recompense for a loving wife and strong children.

Chelmsford approached the commissioner, stood beneath a star chestnut tree, and growled in a stern aristocratic tone, “No commissioner but in times of war natives care little for climate, be it mild or blistering they suffer its ordeal.”

Bartle placed a damp handkerchief inside his jacket before returning an uncomfortable top hat to its crown, “A savage people for a savage land, they ought be grateful.”

“Perhaps,” replied Chelmsford, halting beneath one of the thick trunked fern’s low hanging branches, where a cluster of unique fruit in the form of four velvety boat shaped carpels, dangled. Each carpel about five centimetres long with prominent prows arranged in a star pattern. Each boat, when ripe would burst open to reveal black seeds embedded within long hairs.

Chelmsford plucked one from a group hanging at eye level, held its pod between middle finger and thumb while tapping it with his forefinger. Its contents dispensed into the palm of his hand before Chelmsford discarded the empty pod. He offered its dark seeds to Bartle, “Chestnut Commissioner?”

Commissioner Bartle eyed with suspicion a group of seeds in Chelmsford's palm, "Are you sure they're safe to consume?"

Chelmsford picked a seed with his right hand, popped it inside his mouth, chewed and swallowed the fruit, "Commissioner, an entire army with knowledge of this land may move anywhere during any season without the handicap of supplies.

This fern feeds native warriors, fighting men, you can be assured its fruit is harmless yet avoid the long hairs which bind its seeds together, they can be most disagreeable."

Bartle took a single seed popped it inside his mouth and chewed, after swallowing the fruit his brow raised in pleasurable surprise, "Once the crown confederates these savages there'll be no need for war or armies, we'll set them about the proper division of labour, build infrastructure and civilize this brutal place."

Chelmsford looked out at the beautiful Kentani hills, breath taking mountains rising in the distance to meet light cloud huddling around their peaks, "This land is most pleasing to the eye, perhaps it will requite the sensibilities of high society?"

Bartle plucked another seed from Chelmsford's palm, "I don't see why not, peace does often attract aristocracy. Civilized men may no longer experience an aversion to dwelling along these shores."

The grey commissioner chewed on another black berry, its taste and texture pleased his palette, "Tell me Frederic, do you think African life would suit you?"

The usually stoic General produced the tiniest of smiles beneath his thick moustache, "The land is charming yet it shall detain me only as my posting to the Cape Colony requires."

"Detain you?," inquired the commissioner as he returned to his stool, leaning on his walking stick until the seat of his trousers made contact, "I suppose the heat plays its part in your decision?"

"Commissioner, I was stationed in India; the heat of this land is quite mild compared to the blast furnace that is Bombay. No, my father died recently, his estate passed into my hands and awaits my presence."

"Trouble at the manor?"

"Nothing so dramatic, it's expected of the 2nd Baron of Chelmsford. Also ..." his visage became firm and void of expression as he pushed the

following words from his chest, as if they were a flock of rebellious sheep herded by a growling dog, "... I must visit Anna's grave."

Lord Chelmsford wallowed in melancholy brought on by the memory of his wife, "Anna passed three years ago."

"Yes, I remember," stated a sombre commissioner.

"Unfortunately, since laying Anna to rest my mother has pressed me to remarry and raise an heir. She has little else to do but compose badgering correspondence.

I imagine the Chelmsford postal service has witnessed lucrative trade this last year."

The grey commissioner finished off his star chestnut seeds, "Forgive me Lieutenant General but your mother is quite right. You're not a young man, find a good woman of age and put your mind to securing the family line."

Lord Chelmsford popped a black seed into his mouth, while chewing his gaze did attach to the grey commissioner as a Nile crocodile would lock its cold vision upon impala drinking at a river bank, waiting for one of the herd to forget present danger, move in, stretch its neck, providing the crocodile with distance he may cover in a single leap, quick enough to grasp the impala's throat and drag it to the bottom of the river, spinning it around until the creature drowned.

Bartle felt the herpetological gaze of his commanding officer touch his skin, a cold blooded reptilian scrutiny mastered during the Crimean war; the Russian's had taught Lord Chelmsford many dimensions to the art of manhood. Russia had tempered his soul in the furnace of battle, today it was a cold, dark presence, hidden beneath the uniform of a British General, for in war he found the Russian manner to be most productive, added to that, in life, similar outcomes were maintained.

Lord Frederic Augustus Thesiger, 2nd Baron of Chelmsford and Major General of Her Majesty's Royal Army ... hold on ... Lord Chelmsford spoke to the commissioner in a quizzical tone, "Lieutenant General?"

The grey commissioner grinned, "I'm not supposed to inform you until after Kreli surrenders, you've received a promotion from Major to Lieutenant General. From what I've been informed you'll soon have another medal to keep those beauties company," he gestured with his stick toward medallions decorating Lord Chelmsford's tunic.

The Lord had won many honours on the battlefield, from the Order of the Medjidie placed upon his chest by the Ottoman Emperor himself alongside medals for the Sardinian and Crimean conflict as well as being mentioned in dispatches and his Companion of the order of Bath medal, won during the expedition to Abyssinia.

“Thank you Henry, I’m sure I’ll find room.”

Lord Chelmsford and Commissioner Bartle had been friends since the time of the Indian rebellion. Henry Bartle, then Governor of Bombay, had the pleasure of promoting Chelmsford to Colonel after he’d dealt with quarrelsome natives; the two quickly became firm friends, a friendship which served them both in India and here on the Cape of Africa.

Henry had been introduced to Frederic’s former wife, Lady Anna Chelmsford; a charming yet childless woman ... Anna’s death was most unfortunate. Henry witnessed its effect on his friend; he no longer carried a sense of joviality for Chelmsford’s merry attitude only existed in correlation with Anna’s presence.

No longer did Lord Chelmsford appear during social functions since other officers’ and officials’ wives would accompany them, inducing a morbid recollection of Anna’s absence.

Sir Henry Bartle Frere did sense a darkened spirit hang above his friend, casting a Crimean shade onto any trespassers entering his orbit. The majority of society were unable to understand its nature and so believed Lord Chelmsford to be that hard hearted fellow. Henry knew otherwise, Anna’s passing permitted this darkness, acquired in Russia, to reach within Frederic’s soul. For Anna did repel the forces of darkness, chasing shadows from Chelmsford’s psyche upon his return home, yet she no longer walked this earth and so the Devil dispersed her light, causing Frederic to set career before all else.

“I’m certain Wood will press for a celebration of one kind or another, you know how proper he is over military honours and such,” stated Bartle.

A rumble commenced throughout the camp, its wave ascending a sea of tents. Lord Chelmsford and Commissioner Bartle moved in tandem as a band of Xhosa at the front of a British column appeared on the crest of a hill.

Men discernible only by their red tunics marched to the sound of the drum and bagpipe, glory and honour preceding a baggage train, making its

way toward the British camp. Xhosa emanated defeat, dressed in tribal skins their dark sunken faces and tired eyes superfluous against music playing behind them.

Lord Chelmsford called to his manservant, "Field glass Wallah!"

A turbaned fellow, short and dressed in traditional Indian attire walked quickly from Chelmsford's field tent carrying a cylindrical leather case. On reaching Chelmsford he popped its cap and waited on his master.

The tall General drew his field telescope of bright polished brass and brown leather from within. Chelmsford gripped leather with his right hand extending the short end with his left, drawing out the three piece telescope before placing it to his right eye.

Zooming in on the dark tip of this red spear he noted the captured Chief Kreli, directly behind him marched the men of the 91st Argyllshire Highlanders. Originally drafted to fight Napoleon these Scots traditionally wore the kilt with a fur atop their heads; however conditions were very different from the cold and damp winter climate of Northern France.

Today the 91st Argyllshire Highlanders wore not furs but a pith helmet, each tea stained helmet displayed a brass regimental plate facing directly forwards, as the eyes of Mars upon a Spartan shield.

The scarlet tunic of a British soldier covered the torso with a single thick white leather strap across the chest from left shoulder to right hip intersecting a thick white belt and small white bag carrying ammunition and odd and sods.

Rather than standard black trousers these men displayed tartan colours, one of many changes to the uniform. You see, since the Napoleonic era the British soldier's uniform became quite flamboyant until utility superseded glamour.

Tartan trousers disappeared inside a pair of patent leather boots, a frightening sight to any native army, though to be fair Kreli had played a good game.

The British had a single obvious weakness; they were slow, moving in columns with heavy baggage trains, very much reliant on supply lines. The Xhosa were not so hindered, able to travel fast and free without need for logistical supplies. The Xhosa led British redcoats a merry chase, until with the help of the Fengu, a rival tribe with whom Kreli went to war, the British did bring the Xhosa army to battle and claim victory over them.

Kreli attempted to flee but today he was being brought in chains for the ceremonial transfer of the Natal into imperial hands.

Redcoats each carried a MK II Martini-Henry rifle on their right arm. A sturdy and reliable piece of technology, some would argue unmatched by any other military. It was developed from an American rifle, improvements were added such as a superior loading system wherein its cartridge was automatically ejected, permitting fast firing.

Made of dark wood, bright British steel glinted under African sun where its trigger and firing chamber rested, it was a modern marvel, again, much to native chagrin.

To the right of the column two horses travelled at a leisurely pace, one before the other. The foremost carried Colonel Evelyn Wood, at forty years of age his rank was displayed for all to see via a brass officer's badge beaming out from brown pith helmet, noting his regiment, the 91st Argyllshire Highlanders.

During the Indian rebellion men were issued pith helmets. Although being totally ineffective against a rifle bullet it was lightweight and kept sun from a soldier's head.

During the Indian mutiny soldiers stained their bright white helmets with tea so they might camouflage themselves, Officers rarely did so, yet Wood was the type of insufferable fellow more than ready to get stuck in, a serious career soldier whose judgement his Lieutenant General held in high regard.

Lord Chelmsford's helmet remained bright white, a stubborn and fearless man even in the face of death. Kreli had attempted to target him, yet failed, for redcoats cut tribesmen down in waves of a dozen at a time, MK II rifles firing a 0.45 calibre bullet, enough to drop a rhino.

"What do you see?" inquired Bartle as he rested upon a wooden stool.

"Colonel Wood, he's captured Kreli," replied Chelmsford eyeing the column from a distance.

Lord Chelmsford collapsed his telescope with firm satisfaction and turned his head to view Bartle wiping a sodden brow, "Tea Wallah!"

Frederic's manservant appeared from the servant's tent once more, this time bearing a silver tray carrying two glasses filled with ice, a tea pot and small ceramic pot of milk. Another servant appeared with a small table and two more stools.

Red tunics patrolled the camp, tending to supplies and cleaning armaments. Once the 91st Argyllshire was identified the hustle and bustle quietened to a murmur, a stampede of elephants became a leisurely drink at the river bank.

Chelmsford rested upon a wooden stool beneath a quivering ceiling of layered branches. The star chestnut's leaves diffused a bitter sweet scent, its honey, a dark blood-red colour, was known to natives in this part of Africa as an aphrodisiac.

A table separated the General and commissioner, "Thank you," stated Chelmsford permitting his manservant resume his previous duties, both glasses resided within bright steel frames. A wallah raised the pot of lukewarm tea, made eye contact to which Chelmsford returned a nod allowing Wallah to fill his cup with ice cold tea.

The dark skinned fellow from the sub-continent, curled beard and turban, finished pouring Chelmsford's drink before turning to Bartle. Henry nodded, "Please do," the Indian servant smiled as he poured dark tea into the commissioner's glass. He placed the pot down and inquired in a polite Indian accent, "Milk Mr Commissioner?"

"No thank you," said the perspiring official as he waited for his friend to be served.

The man from Punjab turned to Lord Chelmsford, "Milk Master?"

"Lemon, thank you."

"Yes Master," replied the servant, before he softly called a second wallah, a mere youth rescued from the squalor of Bombay to follow an English Lord on his adventures in Africa.

The young man appeared with a knife and fresh lemon. He sliced the fruit asunder and squeezed its contents, doing his best to retain any pips from plopping out and into the drink.

"That will be all Wallah," stated the English lord sending his servants back to their tent until required.

Bartle took a draught of iced tea, for even beneath the chestnut tree's shade this heat was more than he cared to suffer. While Governor of Bombay Henry had the luxury of servants fanning him night and day, even so the heat was horrendous. Despite having withdrawn from India in 1867 and spending the following twenty years in England, studying at Oxford

and journeying to Canada, the memory of that terrible climate failed to escape the mind of Henry Bartle Fere.

He felt iced tea flow through his body, followed by momentary relief from the eye of Helios, until an African climate penetrated his frame once more, "You know old boy, I ask myself every day, why couldn't these natives live in a more agreeable climate?"

Lord Chelmsford, rather than find his statement humorous, for that was his friend's intent, took a sip of lemon tea and fixed his gaze upon the 91st Argyllshire Highlanders, marching down a hill they'd previously been forced to march up, "I pity those poor men Henry, torn from their families, from the cool air of Scotland and forced to march over hills and across dusty plains in drought stricken Africa, all for a miserable ribbon on their chest."

Henry was taken aback, "They should be proud, they fight for the Empire!"

Chelmsford delivered a typically stoic response as he monitored men labour beneath blistering African sun in scarlet tunics, tea stained pith helmets bobbing up and down in synchrony to form a sea of char, "Tell me, what does the Empire do for those poor wretches other than place them in danger?"

"They're paid aren't they?" protested Henry.

"So are you old boy yet that has little influence on your objections to the local climate."

Commissioner Bartle withdrew his protestations; he'd had this discussion more than once with Fredric, it wasn't easy to come off on top when a man of such high honour and lauded achievement in military matters was your opponent, and besides they were friends. Should a man from the lower orders voice a similar opinion Henry would've seen proper correction, as would Lord Chelmsford. In fact both Bartle and General Chelmsford had done so in the past for many of these men were criminals, murderers and rapists, drafted from Her Majesty's Prisons to fight for Queen and country in faraway lands. These convicted criminals often acted up on first arrival, yet after the taste of military reproof they always fell into line, serving as a fine deterrent to fellow scoundrels.

"That may be so, yet it cannot be denied that the flotsam and jetsam are recruited to bolster their ranks, those men are little more than villains!"

Henry referred to the Natal volunteers, young men who existed in the gutters of colonial life, lurking the streets for employment or opportunity in the hope they might coin a few pennies from African tragedy.

When the rumblings of war lifted the African horizon it was music to their ears. They'd take the king's shilling in a mismatch with spears and shields. Imperial food and accommodation, though nothing a man would aspire to, certainly beat what might be scavenged in the gutters of the Cape Colony.

But as far as armies go, the tinned rations apportioned to British troops were nothing to complain about, preserved meat at one end of the tin with a cocoa "supper" at the other.

This meal was intended to sustain a soldier for 36 hours in the field. Then there were biscuit rations which every man kept in that small bag on his right hip. Named "Hardtack biscuits" by the issuer, they were dubbed "Liverpool pantiles" by its beleaguered consumer.

A reference to a specific brand of roof tile for these biscuits resembled them not only in form, down to its dimples, but also in texture.

As the Argyllshire regiment passed the hill's crest Lord Chelmsford expected to see dry grass yet Frederic witnessed a second dark sea. Standing up Frederic snatched his eyepiece from the table, opened it and examined an opaque blob trailing a scarlet snake.

Behind a tiny baggage train, for the 91st had been primarily using supply depots since the British were now firmly entrenched in Natal, followed a white man on a horse with many Africans in chains.

Truly an odd sight, for fifty years ago parliament outlawed slavery in the British Empire, leading to crusades across the planet, fighting the great slave states of Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

These were not prisoners of war for in reality the war ended months previously, this was merely an operation to force the Xhosa chief into an official surrender.

"Soepenbergr," muttered Chelmsford.

"Is something the matter?" inquired Bartle as he stood beside Chelmsford.

"Here, take a look, following the 91st," Fredric handed his field glass to Henry, "do you recognise that fellow on horseback?"

The grey commissioner tipped the brim of his hat upwards, so he might scrutinize the column, "I'm afraid my eyes aren't as sharp as yours old boy, are you familiar with him?" replied Bartle.

"Yes, he's a Boer or he was, a rather distasteful fellow."

"Why would he be in possession of"

"Slaves?" stated Frederic.

Commissioner Bartle collapsed the field glass and handed it back to Chelmsford.

The British lion drew in a deep breath, African chestnut honey soothed his sensibilities before they clashed with the anticipation of a bitter Boer, "He used to live and operate in Griqualand until the Crown took possession. I had surmised he transferred his illicit trade north, out of our jurisdiction. I have absolutely no idea why he's conducting business in the Natal."

The Crown had taken Griqualand from Boer control last year, outlawing slavery, per British law.

This didn't go down well with the Boers; they were farmers with a lot of money invested in slave labour. The British freed slaves by the hundred but some refused to sacrifice their investments, not without recompense.

Bastijn Klein Soepenbergh gave up farming and went into business supplying fellow Boer farmers with fresh labourers. Forced out of Griqualand, Soepenbergh followed droves of Boers in a self-imposed exodus, what he was doing south of KwaZulu, in the Natal, was a complete mystery but Lord Chelmsford was about to find out.

When the British took control of the Cape Colony more than three hundred thousand slaves were released from servitude. Boers moved north, until the British marched in and took control. Eventually the only land remaining where Soepenbergh might ply his wicked trade was the Transvaal Republic, North of Zululand.

From what Chelmsford observed Soepenbergh was presently trading in women, there was always a good supply of the fairer sex bordering Zululand, for King Cetshwayo wasn't popular amongst all the tribes of KwaZulu. Added to that polygamy was a recognised practice and so it was common for women to flee the Zulu King's jurisdiction with lovers in tow; many settling on the now British side of the river separating KwaNatal from KwaZulu.

The column of soldiers reached Chelmsford's camp, a trumpet sounded, announcing the return of victorious warriors. Lieutenant-Colonel Evelyn Wood rode into camp, halted at the star chestnut tree, dismounted and saluted General Chelmsford, "Sir!"

Chelmsford nodded, "As you were Colonel, tell me, how was it?"

"The Chief led us a merry chase but the lads held firm, sir."

"Good work Colonel, now what about this slave trader, what on earth is he doing in your column?"

"We were watering at the Buffalo River and this Afrikaner knave was on the cusp of driving at least fifty men and women over to Zululand."

Chelmsford observed the 91st as they dispersed to their tents, erected by the King's Rifle Corps under Lord Chelmsford's instruction, "Bring Soepenbergh to me."

"You know him sir?"

"We've crossed paths, dismissed."

Lieutenant-Colonel Evelyn Wood was a strict military man, he said "Sir" more often than required and followed military code to the letter. Some found him tiresome; Lord Chelmsford was rather pleased to have a man who followed orders without question or complaint.

Wood handed his horse over to a young redcoat before making off towards the detainees. Kreli was escorted to a guarded tent while Soepenbergh was separated from a band of chained women and escorted by a sergeant to the chestnut tree.

The blonde haired, former Boer, smiled, "Gooden morgen Mr Chelmsford," he stated in a distinctly Afrikaans accent.

Afrikaans being the language also known as "Cape Dutch" was a language of contact; created when Dutch sailors first met the Khoi and the San on the Cape of South Africa. It is 95% Dutch, the rest a mixture of West Germanic, Malay and local languages. Afrikaans eventually formed its own distinct language spoken by millions in Southern Africa today.

At this time in history it was a language of class, mainly spoken by the lower orders of society. Until around 1870 Afrikaans was a "kitchen language" used by servants and slaves, for obvious reasons Soepenbergh was fluent in Afrikaans. After selling his farm he'd slipped down the social order from Boer to Afrikaner.

Commissioner Bartle rose and pointed his stick at the prisoner, "That's LORD Chelmsford."

The slave trader's grin widened, "Ah, so the old man croaked? I guess that makes you a Baron doesn't it? Lucky for some."

Lord Chelmsford's face barely twitched, a stoic lion glared down the wicked Afrikaner, "Despite the climate you'll make no headway Mr Soepenber, a guttersnipe that trades in human misery is far beneath my threshold. Now let me ask you, what exactly is your purpose in crossing the Buffalo River?"

"These ain't slaves, these are wanted outlaws in KwaZulu. Cetshwayo's offering a hefty reward for some of these women."

"Really Mr Soepenber?"

"Yeh, really," replied an impetuous slave trader.

"We shall see, Sergeant, put him in the stockade and release those prisoners."

A redcoat with tea stained pith helmet and three golden stripes running down his left arm saluted stiffly, "Yes sir!"

Soepenber protested, "Aye! You can't put me in the stockade! I ain't done nothing!"

Chelmsford looked down his nose at the vile man, dressed in dusty leather trousers and jacket, dirt stained shirt and leather hat, "Perhaps he might spend his time in the pursuit of the Queen's English, Sergeant?"

"Yes sir!" the sergeant saluted the General.

"Dismissed Sergeant."

A thickly moustached redcoat grasped Soepenber's arm, "This way sir,"

Soepenber resisted, feet rooted to African dust in disbelief, "Sir, it would help if you co-operated, we don't want this to get nasty."

Soepenber looked over in wonder and nodded his head as the sergeant pulled him toward a wooden box on the other side of the camp.

"What should I do with the slaves sir?" inquired Colonel Wood.

"They're no longer slaves, release them forthwith," replied Chelmsford.

Colonel Wood hesitated for a moment.

"Is something amiss Colonel?" inquired Chelmsford.

"You wish me to release them into the country sir?"

"That is correct Colonel; now carry out your orders."

The Colonel saluted, "Yes sir!"

General Chelmsford returned salute and Colonel Wood made his way toward a holding pen usually employed for pack animals on the baggage train. Today it was put aside to hold a largely human population which Soepenbergh had rounded up on the British side of the Buffalo River.

Unfortunately for Soepenbergh, when he'd captured these exiles of the Zulu kingdom, KwaNatal was under Xhosa ownership or so he believed.

The Xhosa King, Kreli, had no qualms with Soepenbergh for he was no ally of the Zulu, quite the opposite in fact. Had the British not intervened in this intertribal conflict Soepenbergh would've taken his slaves and been off to Zululand for he'd travelled hundreds of miles in the hope of capturing not only a band of slaves but in search of the daughter of King Cetshwayo kaMpande.

The Buffalo River demarked the lands of Kreli and Cetshwayo and those who were against the rule of Cetshwayo did often seek refuge on the Natal's banks.

One person in particular had rebelled, rather than be married to the King's General, Dabulamanzu kaMpande, her father's half-brother, a man with three wives under his belt.

Nkosazane, daughter of the Zulu King, was living peacefully on the banks of the Buffalo River until Soepenbergh appeared, for there was a price on her head and rather than spark a war with his neighbours to the south, Cetshwayo sent bounty hunters such as Soepenbergh in search of his daughter; for oddly enough a white man could move around these lands relatively unmolested compared to a native African.

The grey commissioner rose to his feet and eyed a group of penned up Africans, "Bloody shocking!"

"Yes, it's a terrible crime, that someone who purports to be a Christian could bring himself to treat his fellow man with such indignity."

Henry glanced at Chelmsford before returning his gaze to the band of African women, caged alongside pack animals, "Yes of course."

The tall General peered down at his superior, "Oh? What were you thinking old boy?"

"I was taking note of the native dress code, why, some of those women are barely clothed," he pointed his cane at a group of young women in nothing more than grass skirts.

“That cannot be denied,” replied Chelmsford, his eye scanning dark flesh. The General’s head stopped moving as his vision fell on a single female in particular. She stood out above the rest, somewhat taller than the average man at five foot eleven inches, her African brow towered above redcoat saviours, that is, once they’d removed their pith helmets.

She wore colourful beads, red, green, yellow, white and black; her braided black hair was encircled with a band of beads. She wore a necklace, each band a different colour forming a large choker, its beads seamlessly dropping down to touch the top of her chest.

A top covering her breasts was contrived of the same matter forming ever increasing circles of beads. Tassels plunged from throat to dangle beneath an ethnic brassiere.

Her skirt constructed of the same material, bands of beads, each band alternating between red, yellow, green, white and black, its tassels stroked her knees, allowing thick thighs to excite a man’s senses.

Chelmsford was fascinated by her, an odd occurrence, for since landing on this continent all natives appeared as one to his eye, indistinguishable, yet this woman did discern herself from every African creature his gaze had scrutinized, before ... or since.

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