

A SOUTH  
AFRICAN  
STORY  
FOR CHILDREN.



ONCE upon a time, when the fairies were still in this land, and the black man had not been driven inland away from the sea-shore, a mighty King called all his chiefs together to witness a contest between the four strongest, bravest, and handsomest of the young men of all his subjects. The prize was the King's youngest daughter—the black-eyed Lala—and the one of these four who should throw the assegai the furthest should win her for his bride.

Many princes and chiefs and their followers assembled at the King's village by the sea, and many days went by in feasting and in choosing four from all that host, who were at the same time the strongest, bravest, and most handsome there.

At last these four were chosen. Three of them were sons of great chieftains, but the fourth was only a poor herdsman. Yet the Princess Lala, who stood at her father's hut, thought him the best of them all. A sandy plain that stretched between the mountains was chosen, and the four champions stood in a row ready to throw. The first threw his assegai so well that it fell upright into an ant-hill far, far away. The second assegai stood

quivering in the bark of a young fir tree many paces beyond the ant-hill.

The spear of the third pierced the breast of a gold and green sugar-bird that was fluttering over a tall aloe blossom still further away. But the herdsman, who was fourth, threw his assegai so vigorously that it flew like a flash of lightning up into the

heavens, and struck a hawk that was soaring there in search of prey.

Loud were the acclamations of the people, and they adjudged the fourth the winner. The Princess wept for joy, but the great King, who did not wish his daughter to wed a humble herdsman, said:—

"Let them throw again with spears that I shall give them. This man's weapon was surely bewitched."

So on the morrow the King sent for fresh spears of gold. And to the princes were given splendid, equally-balanced ones; but the herdsman's was clumsy and untrue. Again they threw, and again the herdsman's assegai out-distanced those of the others. This time it flew into the clouds, and was lost to sight in their whiteness.

But the King was unjust, and said: "Not till you have found the spear, and bring it to my feet, shall you win my daughter, the beautiful Lala. Go!"

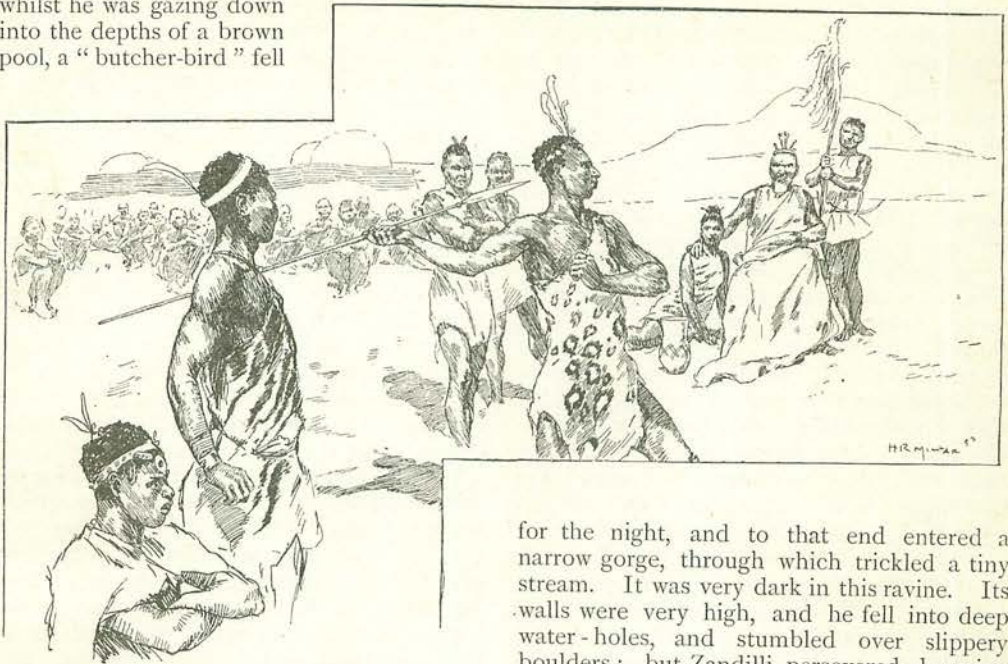
The Princess clung to her father and wept, saying she loved this gallant herdsman; but the King took her arms from round his neck, and bade her go. To disobey the King meant death, and the girl went.

Thus Zandilli, the herdsman, set out in search of the royal assegai. He wandered

some days among the mountains, for it was in the wind-clouds on their brows the spear had disappeared. It was on the fourth day of his wanderings that, whilst he was gazing down into the depths of a brown pool, a "butcher-bird" fell

rose, a great ball of crimson fire, from out the fog in the east.

Zandilli was anxious to find some shelter



THE HERDSMAN THREW HIS ASSEGAI.

at his feet, clutching in its talons a tiny green frog. The frog cried for help, and Zandilli succeeded in frightening the bird away.

The frog expressed its gratitude, and said: "If ever you are in trouble, and think I can help you, close your eyes and call to mind this brown pool, and I shall come to your assistance."

Zandilli thanked the kind frog, who then disappeared in the water.

A little further on he saw a large black and yellow butterfly impaled upon a thorn of prickly-pear. He released it, and the butterfly said:—

"I was thrust upon that thorn by a pair of tiny brown hands belonging to a little maid with large black eyes. She was cruel. You are kind, and I am grateful. If ever you are in difficulty or danger call me, and I shall be at your service."

Then the glorious insect spread its wings, and flew away to play with its mates among the crimson orchids.

Night was approaching on the fifth day, and still the lost spear had not been found. It was a warm summer's night, and the moon

for the night, and to that end entered a narrow gorge, through which trickled a tiny stream. It was very dark in this ravine. Its walls were very high, and he fell into deep water-holes, and stumbled over slippery boulders; but Zandilli persevered, knowing how often small caves are found in these ravines. And such a cave at last he came upon. The moon, now clear of the fog, had floated up into the heavens, and shone into the gorge, lighting up its western wall. Into a large cavity her light fell in a broad pathway of silver.

Zandilli entered boldly; he, who had lived among the mountains all his life, knew no fear. The light of the moon did not enter very far into the cave, and he was too tired to explore the darkness beyond, so he lay down to rest, with his spear close at hand.

He awoke to find the cave in total darkness, and a strange soft music greeted his ears. It was music sweeter than that of the turtle-dove calling to her mate, softer than the murmur of the wind among the grass-bells. Its sound thrilled the listener's heart, and made him long to look upon the being whose voice could discourse such sweet music. Zandilli arose, and crept with steps as noiseless as the leopard's towards the place whence the music came. Nearer and nearer it grew, and as he advanced the cave grew broader and higher, and a pale light seemed to flood the walls.

Louder grew the music at each step, loftier the walls, and more brilliant the light,

until suddenly such a sight burst upon his astonished eyes as never mortal had seen before.

A large lake spread its sapphire waters before him. The roof of the cave shone as the sun, and great pillars, which sparkled with the glitter of countless diamonds, raised themselves from the waters and were lost in the blazing glory of the dome. In the very centre of the lake a magnificent flight of glittering golden steps led to a throne, which sent forth flashes of green fire—being fashioned of a single emerald beautifully carved. The lake seemed boundless, for its shores were lost in darkness.

From out of the shadow from all directions, countless large rose-coloured lilies came floating, each bearing towards the throne a lovely fairy. It was from these lilies the lovely music floated, for each fairy sat singing as she combed her long golden hair. Never had Zandilli seen such beautiful forms. More delicate-looking were they than the soft wind-flowers that crown the precipices; more beautiful than the crimson orchids. Their hair that spread behind them was not less brilliant than the fiery tail of the great star which comes to warn the black man of approaching drought and famine; and it gleamed against their snowy breasts as does the golden tongue of the arum. Their forms were as graceful as that of the slender antelope; their arms were whiter than the spray which tips the waves. Their brows were crowned with white star-blossoms, and their voices excelled anything Zandilli had ever heard. The lily-boats floated from all sides, and seemed to be guided by some unseen power. As they touched the golden steps the fays stepped from the pink petals, and shaking their golden hair around their shoulders as a mantle, they joined the throngs of others as fair as themselves around the throne.

All this Zandilli gazed upon with eyes large with wonder. Only who it was that sat upon the throne he could not see, for a brilliancy of flashing light clothed the occupant as in a veil. The empty boats dotted the lake, as do the blue water-lilies the quiet reaches of the rivers, floating lazily backwards and forwards.

Suddenly the music ceased—his presence seemed to have become known to this strange people. There was much whispering among the throngs upon the steps of the throne. Then a broad pathway was opened among them, and a Being clothed in light stepped from the throne to the water's edge, and a silvery voice spoke :—

“Mortal, you are not unexpected. You are Zandilli, the herdsman. Your quest is not unknown to us. You seek a royal spear, and dare to aspire to win a royal bride. The moon has risen five times since you vanquished the three princes in throwing the spear. When she shall have shone yet twice upon land and sea your bride, unless you save her, will have wed another. Yet, have no fear, brave Zandilli, the royal spear is within your reach.”

The silvery tones ceased, and Zandilli fell upon his face, and said :—

“Oh! great Being! whose light is as the sun's, whose wisdom is greater than that of our witch-doctors, help your servant to find that spear which you say is within his reach!”

A strange-shaped canoe of gold shot from the steps of the throne and rested at Zandilli's feet. He entered it fearlessly, and as quick as light he was carried across to the golden steps. The dazzling Being who stood there reached a hand to him as he stepped from the canoe. He raised his eyes, and saw before him a woman lovely as the morning. Countless rays of light streamed from a girdle and breast-plate of diamonds, and from the flowing robes of silver tissue that clothed her, leaving only the lily-white arms and throat bare. Her golden hair fell to her feet, and was crowned with a wreath of star-flowers.

“Welcome to the land of the Moon-Fairies!” she cried, as she took his hand and led him to a seat beside herself upon the throne. The crowd upon the steps bowed humbly before them as they passed through its midst.

Then Zandilli spoke : “Oh! great Queen! whiter than the wind-clouds, fairer than the dawn, tell your servant how best he can serve you and win the spear!”

She bent her eyes, blue as the lake, upon him, and said : “Would that I could say it is yours now—yours to take away; but there is an ancient law amongst us that forbids even the Queen to take from our treasure-trove *anything*.”

“And this golden spear of Royalty, which fell at the mouth of this cavern, has been given a place among our treasures.”

“It was prophesied in years remote, that a Mortal would come amongst us in quest of a weapon that would give the possessor great joy. When he should appear two tasks were to be set him. If he performed them the object of his search should be given him. You, Zandilli, the herdsman, are that Mortal, for do you not seek a spear that will give you a lovely bride? We will deliberate upon the tasks

to be set you. Meanwhile, you will be shown the beauties of our home by my maidens."

With these words the Queen rose and descended to a lily-boat, which bore her quickly away. Now three of the loveliest of the fairies stepped with Zandilli into the golden canoe—wonder after wonder unfolded itself to his astonished gaze. All was glitter and light. But there was one dark cavern, whose walls were lustreless and black as night. Yet Zandilli was impatient to win the spear, especially as the Queen had spoken of another who was to win the Princess Lala ere two moons had risen.

He therefore begged to be taken back to the Queen, who sat again upon her throne. She greeted him with a smile, and laid her lily-white hand upon his bronze arm. "We have decided," she said, "upon your first task. My councillors have made it no easy one. You have seen the black chamber? It is the one blot upon our home. If you can make it as beautiful as each of the others, half your task will be fulfilled. Before the moon has risen again this must be performed, or death will be your doom."

Zandilli was taken to the black chamber; and there he was left alone in the golden canoe, with despair at his heart, for he had no means of beautifying those hideous walls. He thought of the foam-flecked sea, which he should never see again; of the shy maiden who was to have been his bride.

He thought of the flowers, the birds, the butterflies. At the thought that then came, he laughed. The butterfly he had saved! Could its help be of use to him? It seemed hopeless.

Zandilli sighed, and, overcome by fatigue, laid himself down to sleep.



"HE WAS LEFT ALONE IN THE GOLDEN CANOE."

The butterfly heard its saviour's scarce-formed cry for help. So at break of day it called together its brethren and its cousins, the fireflies. Then they all flew into the dark cavern. The sound of their fluttering wings awoke Zandilli. Great was his surprise to find the dull wall transformed into a fairy palace of gorgeous wings and tender pale-green gems. The butterflies and fireflies had spread themselves over the entire walls.

When the Queen and her followers came to see if the task had been performed, great surprise and joy did they express at the wonderful transformation the Mortal had worked. With one voice they cried:—

"He has won!  
He has won!"

All that day was spent in revelry; but the Queen was absent. She was

with her wise men, discussing the second task.

At the close of the day, the Queen spoke thus to Zandilli: "You have completed your first task, and the spear is partly won. It has therefore been placed here upon the steps before my throne. See! This is to be your second task: My maidens' robes are woven from the wings of flies. Our looms are idle, for our store-rooms are empty. To you is

given the task of filling a hundred of our boats with the wings of flies." Then the Queen disappeared.

Zandilli lay down in the canoe, and gave way to despair. This task seemed far more hopeless than even the first had. Never more should he see the sun; never should he hunt the leopard again. Never should he see the tumbling streams and cool brown pools, nor see the great black eyes of his princess smile upon him. He fell asleep at last with these sad thoughts upon him.

The frog heard his saviour's sigh for a sight of the brown pool, and called his brethren and his friends the lizards. Each came with their burden of flies, and soon filled the many boats.

Their busy croaking awoke Zandilli, who found his task performed; and when the Queen and her followers came again, they cried:—

"He has won! The spear is his!"

Then Zandilli ascended the golden steps to take his well-earned prize. But the Queen was loth to let him go. She would have liked to have held this wonder-worker by her side for ever, and she tried to hold him back.

But Zandilli was impatient, and snatched his arm from her grasp. He seized the golden spear, and jumping into the canoe, propelled it with the spear to the edge of the lake, and bounded ashore. In a few short hours he had claimed his bride.

