

The Girl Who Killed to Save (Nongqause the Liberator)

Characters

Kreli (Sarile)	Paramount chief of the AmaXhosa
Mhlakaza	Great Xhosa Witchdoctor
Nongqause	Prophetess; daughter of Mhlakaza
Charles Brownlee	Gaika Commissioner
Mrs Charles Brownlee	His wife
Hugh Thompson	Mrs Brownlee's brother
Daba	A Xhosa convert
Mrs Daba (MaXaba)	His wife
A Missionary, a Doctor, Councillors, Headmen, Women, Messengers	

Historical Note

During 1856 there befell what is perhaps the most extraordinary episode in all the history of the South African tribes. In that year there arose among the AmaXhosa the most renowned of their seers, Umhlakaza, assisted by his daughter Nongqause, a prophesying medium, who, in all likelihood, exercised the powers of a ventriloquist. Umhlakaza preached a new gospel, which was none other than a resurrection from the dead. Nongqause declared that she had held converse with the spirits of old heroes of the tribe, who intimated that they had witnessed with sorrow the ruin of their race through the oppression of the conquerors from overseas; and as they would no longer be silent spectators of the wrongs and insults, it was their intention to come to the rescue and save their progeny from destruction. They would appear once more in the flesh amongst their people, but they would not do so unless the nation would exterminate all animals, both great and small, with the exception of horses and dogs. All grain was to be thrown away and the fields were to be left untilled. As soon as this was done vast herds would emerge from the ground, the country would smile again with grain, and there would be plenty for everyone. The advent of the resurrection would be preceded by a frightful whirlwind, which would sweep off all members of the tribe who refused to obey the order of the spirits.

Throughout the district occupied by the AmaXhosa, and particularly amongst the Gcaleka tribe, cattle began to be slaughtered. Feasting was the

order of the day, but it was impossible to consume all. Dogs were gorged on fat beef, vultures were surfeited, whole carcasses were left to putrefy, and the air became tainted with corruption. After the delusion had been at work for ten months an order came from the prophetess that within eight days all cattle must be killed. The preparations made during these eight days kept everyone busy. Cattle-kraals and corn-pits were enlarged and cleaned, while huts were re-thatched so as to resist the coming storm. On the eighth day — 27th February, 1857 — heaven and earth, it was said, would come together amid darkness, thunder, lightning, rain and a mighty wind, by which all unbelievers together with the White men would be driven into the sea. The sun would rise blood-red and at noon suddenly descend not to the west but to the east.

At dawn of the great day a people, many of whom had not slept, rose joyfully, decked themselves with paint, beads and rings to welcome their long-lost friends. The sun appeared and made the circuit of the heavens watched by expectant hosts. He set in silent majesty in the west, leaving the usual darkness over the earth and the black darkness of a bitter disappointment in the hearts of thousands.

Those who had destroyed their property sat at their villages with starvation staring them in the face, but still hoping for the fulfilment of the prophecy. Every morning the kraals and corn-pits were eagerly inspected, and hope sickened but was not quenched. The moon was anxiously watched by night and the sun by day by hunger-stricken hosts. The bones they had cast away in the days of feasting were gathered and gnawed. Women and children wandered through the fields digging for roots.

When many deaths had taken place a trek was made to the Colony, where large numbers were fed by Europeans, but by thousands this step was taken too late. Some had no strength even to forsake their villages. Thousands died by the roadside, some only a short distance from succour. It was estimated that 20 000 men, women and children perished, while 150 000 cattle met their death. Among the dead was Umhlakaza, but Nongqause lived for many years. For long the veld was strewn with bones bleaching in the sun.

Scene One

1857. Interior of a hut, native mats, corn and mealie seeds above fire place, calabashes; grass vessels and clay pots; fire (in centre) over which two Xhosa girls roast meat; another girl grinds corn on stone; two other girls, standing, stamp mealies (using the customary stamping sticks); an aged woman plaits Nongqause's hair.

The girls, pretty faces and lovely of form — dressed in tribal style, their bodies largely bare. Nongqause is the loveliest of them all.

Scene opens. They sing a dancing song and work (swinging their bodies)

rhythmically to music. One of the two girls preparing meat stands and dances. This goes on for some moments; suddenly one of the girls breaks into Nongqause's song, the others join in. As the girls begin the second verse Nongqause interrupts them.

Nongqause: Stop! I am tired of that song. I hate it. I have to sing it each time father and Kreli bring people to hear of my vision.

Nozizwe: But I like to sing while I work. Music lightens work and gives strength.

Tandeka: But we must obey Nongqause, Nozizwe, and not sing. She is our leader — and is Queen of Xhosaland today.

Nongqause: I am not against your singing. I like it. Only sing any other song but that.

Nozizwe: Never mind, Nongqause. We shall talk instead. We women love to talk gossip. It keeps us away from trouble and from the madness that would surely result from our dull routine of single life.

Nonsizi: Ha, ha! I know Nozizwe wants to tell us that Mlunguze is mad in love with Nongqause.

Tandeka: But many others — chiefs, headmen and councillors — are in love with her.

Nonsizi: I wish I were in Nongqause's place! To love and live; to sway men!

Nolizwe: Yes! Love weakens men and makes them foolish. Several chiefs and councillors have killed their cattle and destroyed grain merely to please Mhlakaza and capture Nongqause. They do not believe in the prophecy. Woman leads man to great, as well as to beastly things.

Tandeka: What annoys me is that men cannot gauge themselves. Look at things like old councillor Baba. *(She imitates his style of walk, manner of talking and his facial expression — amid great laughter.)* Ugly and old as he is, he wants our Nongqause. Baba loves women so much so that he loves no woman!

Nolizwe: What are you talking about?

Tandeka: Why! don't you see? He loves women, not a woman. He loves any and every woman, not a particular one. A man who sincerely loves one woman cares little for the rest of her kind. The love of one woman makes a man hate other women. The promiscuous love of women makes a man despise devotion to one woman.

Nolizwe: You are right. That is why I do not care for my admirer, Gxowa, although he is handsome and is a brave fighter. He loves too many girls and cares for none. As soon as he has conquered a woman she ceases to attract and interest him — and I simply hate these girls who spoil him by running after him, 'nxi'!

Nonsizi: But what you two say is what father said of bad women the other day. Someone asked father what a bad woman was. He said she is a woman kind, pliable and happy with all men. He added that a good woman hates and despises herself for loving one man, and loves and

praises herself for hating all other men.

(The girls roasting meat beckon the rest to join them. Crying 'Hail! Nongqause', 'Thanks for the meat, Nongqause', they eat meat, sing again, and dance. They suddenly stop short as they hear steps of someone approaching.)

A Voice: You are great, great ones. I pay my respects to the Chief's Prophetess. I humble myself before your presence.

Old Woman: Come in.

(Enter, very old man, trembling — sits on his haunches.)

Old Woman: *(After embarrassing silence.)* Greetings!

Old Man: Yea.

Nongqause: Greetings!

Old Man: Yea.

Girls: Greetings!

Old Man: Yea.

Old Woman: Why, what brings an old bark like you here? Don't you know men are forbidden to visit this hut?

Old Man: That does not apply to me. I no longer am a man. I am harmless. Age has made me a helpless babe. Age, by bringing us near our grave, brings us near our regeneration. Near death shines life. The crumbling dry bones of our autumn herald the spring of our new life. No, woman, I am no man — I am man in the making. My wrinkles show that Life is softening this old human clay in order to remodel it into new forms. Man never dies although men do.

Old Woman: We understand, we understand — speak.

Old Man: I have a complaint. I've brought a complaint to Nongqause, Prophetess. I complain against Selanto.

Girls: M-m-mmm —

Old Man: Some time back, the Selantos asked for my daughter's hand. I asked them to give me a few cattle. They complained that the number I asked for was too much — and remained stubborn.

Girls: *(Excited when they learn it is all about lobola and marriage.)* Say on! We hear!

Old Man: Today Nongqause's prophecy has changed their cunning minds. Times of national distress, upheaval and reform enrich the unscrupulous. Today the Selantos are willing to pay even more than I asked — they dare even to ask for another of my daughters — all because cattle are valueless today. They give me what neither they, nor I, can use. Instead of killing cattle they lobola with them.

One Girl: How clever!

2nd Girl: I never thought about it that way!

3rd Girl: I must advise my lover to lobola me at once!

4th Girl: In its very paralysing blood, trouble carries triumph!

Old Woman: Be quiet girls!

Old Man: How reforms and prophecies have made valuable worthless.

But I refuse to have my daughters given away for nothing.

Old Woman: But what do you want here then? Disputes and lobola cases should be brought before the chief. Why have you come here?

Old Man: During times of revolution and distress the prophet is the chief. I dare not go to the chief about this. He would be furious because he would be helpless.

Old Woman: Well, what do you want here?

Old Man: The advice of the prophetess. I want the prophetess to prophesy. She has not prophesied far enough. The prophet who makes a prophecy should also give a prophecy about the prophecy. The prophet should tell us not only what will happen, but also the aftermath of the event. The trouble with seers and prophets is that they do not see far enough. Where will all this end? Prophetess prophesy! Is lobola to cease? Are our children to be given away for nothing?

Nongqause: Feeble old man! You have answered yourself already. You said near death shines life. Our present plight, as you call it, is a passing one. We are being prepared for new life. There'll be more cattle — better cattle for lobola. Nothing will be destroyed. Life is only being organised on a higher scale. Like you, the country is near a new birth, a greater day, a happier life. Only fools like you and Selanto keep us back. Go!

(Exit old man — the girls shout, laugh, whisper, sing and dance again — but not for long as they are cut short in their revels by footsteps again.)

Messenger: I'm a Messenger from the Great One, the Elephant, the great Chief. Let me in at once. *(Enters.)* The Great Kreli and his renowned doctor Mhlakaza send word to Nongqause to make ready to receive them and their visitors. As I speak, they are near, even on the precincts of the kraal. I have spoken — I, mouth of the Elephant.

(Goes out.)

Old Woman: Quick, my children! Put away the things! Help me get Nongqause ready!

(Some get the place tidy, others help Nongqause with her decorative wearings, and paint her face and body with a reddish dye.)

Hurry! Work! Here, here! That's right!

Nongqause: I am tired of these frequent visits and what they mean. Nonsizi wished to be Nongqause. Ha! ha! The ambitious and great know no happiness. Happiness happens — it is not a result of any known cause. The happy man is he who feels happy, not the one who has cause to be happy. She thinks I am happy. Most of our wishes, aims and desires are born of ignorance. Knowledge would make us wish and ask for little. To be adored and talked of by the whole country is misery. These men love not me, but my fame and position. My heart belongs to Mazwi who loves me truly because he loved me before I had my vision! He is strong, wise, brave, and will not kill cattle even to please us. He says I am wrong. I wonder. I wonder. My Mazwi may be right!

Old Woman: There, my maidens fair! Everything is ready. The Chief

and the doctor Mhlakaza do not want you young people here when they come. You talk too much. You had better go.

(Exit all the girls.)

(To Nongqause.) There now, my child, you are ready — ready to conquer wavering minds and doubting fools — as if Mhlakaza was not a great seer.

(Enter Kreli, Mhlakaza and several men.)

Kreli: Nongqause, I have here Mhala's doubtful men who will kill their cattle only when they have heard you yourself tell the story of your vision. If Kreli, the Mighty, chose he could kill all who doubt, but Kreli, the Father of the race, desires to convince his poor children. Proceed!

(All sit and watch eagerly.)

Mhlakaza: *(Giving her medicine to drink.)* Drink! *(He sprinkles another preparation over her body.)* Speak!

(Nongqause, feigning to be seized with a hysteromania-like trance, laughs, cries, spins round and falls down on her knees and hands — and acts what took place at the river, with additions proposed by Mhlakaza.)

Nongqause: Nice water. Let me drink a little. *(Lifts up vessel and suddenly puts it down.)* What's that? *(She sings her song.)* Who is singing? *(She makes a noise like the lowing of cattle. Jumps up, afraid.)*

Cattle lowing from under the ground! What can it mean?

(She makes a great noise in imitation of horses carrying warriors.)

What is this great cloud of dust? Who are these warriors riding past and vanishing? Oh! I am afraid! What? Who is speaking? Who are these? Ndlambe, Hintsa, Nqeno, Mdushane, Gaika!¹ Marvellous! I should not fear, you say! Why? You want to whisper. *(Pretends to be listening to a whispering voice.)* Wonderful! Amazing! Triumph! Yes, yes, I shall run now and tell it to father and to the Great One, the Lion — the Chief. Yes, I shall return tomorrow. The AmaXhosa will win! Great tidings! Victory! Victory! Victory!

(Faints away. While Mhlakaza revives her with medicine, the visitors shout excitedly.)

Visitors: Wonderful! Great!

It is true! True, true!

We believe, we believe!

Hail Kreli! Long live the Lion!

Victory! Salvation!

Kreli: Now you have seen for yourselves, my people. Go, kill everything. Go, destroy all. Go, tell the country.

(All men go out — except an old fat councillor who, pretending to search for his stick, remains behind.)

Baba: Oh! Nongqause. I love you with all my heart. You shall be my chief wife and everything I have —

Old Woman: Get out, Baba. Kreli wants no man to see or speak to Nongqause.

Baba: I know, I know. That is why I use this chance. Have mercy. I —

Old Woman: They will miss you when they reach the Chief's Great Place, and you will be killed and I may also be killed. Go. Go.

Baba: There is time enough to overtake them. Let me speak to Nongqause. I will —

Old Woman: Go. At once or I'll —

(They stop — fearful — as a dark form darkens the door. But breathe easier when they find it is Mlunguze.)

Mlunguze: So you, old dog, are here —

Baba: What do you say, fool?

Old Woman: Go out both of you or I'll —

Mlunguze: I must talk to Nongqause, ma. You, Baba, I shall see when we leave —

Baba: Dog, who gave you —

(Mlunguze strikes at him and they exchange one or two blows using sticks when Nongqause, seeing this and the old woman crying, steps forward.)

Nongqause: Fools, the Chief, the Lion, wants me to be his chief wife. If you don't stop your fight I shall tell him about it, and you will be slain. Go.

(This speech is delivered disdainfully, mockingly. They go out pushing one another. As soon as they disappear, Nongqause sits down heavily, buries her face in her hands and sobs.)

Old Woman: There now, what is it? Cheer up! Don't cry. You should be the happiest woman in Xhosaland. You rule men. They worship you. The nation itself is blessed through you — a woman. Now —

Nongqause: You do not understand. You cannot understand. My success is my failure. My happiness is my torment. My power, my misery. If only I could know the truth without doubt! The truth! Give me the truth. Take all. Give me the truth, truth! *(Sobs.)*

Old Woman: What can be the matter with the girl? My child, what's wrong? Don't be foolish. The whole nation loves and adores you, and is ready to die in obedience to your sayings; why should —

Nongqause: That's just it. The nation loves and is ready to die for me. The nation's love leaves me lonely. The nation's willingness to perish haunts me. To be loved by a nation — by crowds — means that no one enters your heart, rules, sympathises with, and understands it. I want to be loved by and to love one man. That is love, happiness and life. The love of crowds acts on one's heart as water acts on an over-oiled body — leaving you dry and cold. It is only the love between a man and a woman that soaks into the heart, tears it, changes it. But don't talk to me about love. You remind me of my lover Mazwi whom I die to see, fear to see, may never see, as he is one of those who disbelieve the prophecy.

Old Woman: You are a clever girl, and no wonder the spirits spoke to you. But you are not old and wise enough to appreciate the deeper things

of life, my child. There are things greater — I do not say nobler — than love between man and woman. You are fortunate in —

Nongqause: I am not. Listen. I did hear strange sounds — not voices — near the river. Father and the Elephant assured me, after using the bones and medicine, the sounds were the voices of our ancestors. But are their interpretations correct? Why did not the spirits speak to me in the language I understand instead of in the wonderful but meaningless sounds? Yes, the sounds were strange. But what is the truth? Sounds — mere sounds, great sounds — rule the greater part of humanity. What joy, what sorrow, sounds bring. Out of sounds a great man creates beauty, but the bad man sows evil by sounds. Some sounds give me joy — others torment me.

Old Woman: (*Pointing.*) What is that moving over there? No, don't fear. Sit down.

(*Nongqause had jumped up shouting, 'Sounds?'*) Yes, my child. I am sure the interpretations of your father are correct. Mhlakaza is a gifted seer, you know.

Nongqause: I know. At times I feel pride and self-assurance come up in my breast when I think I shall be the means of saving my people. The feeling brings indescribable content and self-elation, and makes me think I am better, greater and wiser than all women. But at other times, especially when I lie awake at night or when I think of Mazwi, I fear, fear, fear.

(*Stands up only to sink down.*)

Old Woman: Why fear? There's nothing of which to be afraid. I think your fear is caused by the fact that since the day the Lion took up this matter you have been confined to your hut, supervised by an old thing like myself, guarded by the Chief's spies, and not allowed to roam about with your young friends. That is the cause of your trouble. It will soon pass.

Nongqause: Yes, my lonely life is bad. But that is not much. I am thinking of something else.

Old Woman: What?

Nongqause: (*Stands and whispers.*) Say we are wrong? Mazwi, my love, says we are — say we are?

Old Woman: Who?

Nongqause: (*Still in whispers.*) I, father, the Chief, and all who believe in what we say. The cattle are being killed and grain is being destroyed.

(*Suddenly bursting aloud, and holding hands over head.*)

The People! The People! They will perish! They will starve! Tears! Misery! Woe is me!

Old Woman: Don't shout. You'll be heard and killed.

Nongqause: Let them kill me. Death is better than the pangs of uncertainty, than the misery of indecision. I help them because I honestly believe we shall get new cattle and grain, and that the dead shall rise. If somehow my doubts could be proved true, I would run now and tell the people that the whole prophecy is a lie, you hear — a lie. If only I knew

the truth.

Old Woman: (*Infected by Nongqause's doubts at last.*) I never thought about it that way before. But don't shout. Do sit down, my child. Don't try to run away. They would kill me. I'm your guard, remember. What's that? See! the sign, our secret sign — Mazwi your sweetheart is here. My child, this will be the last time I allow your lover to come here. I fear it is dangerous. Our secret plan, clever as it is, will soon be discovered, I fear. The air itself carries messages. There are ceaseless movements and sounds. The world is nothing but motion and sound. (*Whispering.*) Enter, Mazwi, son, and be quick.

(*Enter Mazwi who is an outcast as he does not believe in the prophecy of Nongqause whom he loves.*)

Mazwi: Nongqause!

Nongqause: Mazwi!

(*They embrace one another.*)

Mazwi: Crying! Why? I told you so. Trouble is near.

(*He whispers passionately and his expression is desperate.*) Come, run away with me, now, now. We can easily escape. The guards on the north side are my old pals whom I have bribed. Come, escape from yourself — escape from death.

Nongqause: I cannot. I dare not — will not.

Mazwi: Fool, why not? What holds you back? What ails you?

Nongqause: (*Falling on her knees before him, rapt in pain.*) The People! The Truth! (*From the distance Nongqause's girl companions are heard singing Nongqause's song.*)

The Curtain Falls

Scene Two

In a big cattle-kraal. A group of men talking, smoking pipes, drinking beer. One or two dead oxen seen lying about. Quantities of meat served to the men. A group of girls comes in dancing and is joined by some men. Old women cheer and clap hands.

Messenger: Here comes the Great Lion, the Mighty Chief. Bayete! (*Enter Krel, his bodyguard and his councillors. Krel is wrapped in leopard skin. Mhlakaza carries the usual witchdoctor's stuff. Krel sits on dead ox, not on stool. As Krel and his retinue enter the chief's bard speaks.*)

Bard:

Hawu! The Great Tiger arrives!
Yeha! How strides the Elephant!
Thou great Xhosa Lion
Whose eyes shoot out fire,
Krel, mighty chief of the land,
Krel, great king of the Xhosas,

Thou whose voice is like thunder,
 Thou whose arm crushes the enemy.
 Bayete! Thou chief of the chiefs.
 Bayete! Hater of the white thieves.
 The voice of our ancestors is Kreli.
 The strength of our nation is in Kreli.
 Hail! Hail! Thou handsome One.
 Hail! Mightiest of the Mighty.

(Exit all women.)

Chief Councillor: Bayete, thou Great One.' Listen, all you assembled here. The Chief speaks.

The People: Ee, Ee. We hear. Speak!

Chief Councillor: We are here to find out why the spirits of our great ancestors do not hear our cries, and accept our offerings. There must be something wrong. There is something wrong. Someone is wrong and evilminded. The race suffers through the sins of its highly-placed leaders.

The Assembly: Ee, Ee. Go on. We hear, thou mouth of the Elephant!

Chief Councillor: The spirits live. The spirits live not only in and around our kraals and fields, but in our hearts also. They hear our very thoughts and feelings. They would help us if they could, they could help us if we would. But there are stubborn ones here, who stand against the Will of the Nation — fools who doubt the word of the Lion and the prophecy of his renowned seer. Today we have come to find out the rascals. Come forth thou doctor of the Chief, and tell us who be the offenders.

Mhlakaza: *(Steps out.)* Bayete! Thou Lion — Thou hast spoken, and I shall find out who the rascals are.

(Gets ready his things.)

The Assembly: Tell us! Tell who the evil-doers are!

Kreli: I have summoned you leading men only — chiefs, headmen and councillors — because I know that the spirits of our ancestors would not be so disturbed and so angry if some commoner disobeyed them and obstructed the way. The sinners must be among you leaders. One sin of one great man does more evil to society than the sins of several common people. The sins of lesser folk are their own personal sins, but the sins of great men become the sins of the race they represent. Now, form a circle and let the seer proceed.

(People form a circle. Mhlakaza stands in the centre and dances himself into inspiration. People sing and clap hands while he dances.)

Mhlakaza: I hear the cows lowing in the caves, waiting to come to life. I see, standing out of the caves yonder, the horns of thousands of cattle trying to come above ground. By the side of the rivers and along the sea shore I see a cloud of risen warriors armed heavily trying and crying to come and help us against the white man. What prevents warriors and cattle from coming? Who is keeping these blessings back? Yes, yes! I hear you, spirits of my fathers. Do you say the evil-doers are among the country's leading

men? Bayete! The Elephant was right. But I see an omen. What is it? What is it? Ah! behold! I see a messenger coming to thee, O Lion.
(As some emotional people stand up, excited, the chief councillor orders them to sit down.)

Messenger: Bayete! Thou Mighty One.

Kreli: *(Impatient.)* Speak! Tell the man to speak, Jama.

Chief Councillor: Speak, fool, before you perish.

Messenger: How dare I speak to the mighty Chief, how dare I speak of the Great Spirits, before the doctor purifies me?

Chief Councillor: Thou art right, humble and careful man. You know your place. Mhlakaza, purify him.

(Mhlakaza sprinkles medicine over the man and gives him more to drink.)

Kreli: Now, speak. Quick, and be careful.

Messenger: Long live the Lion! We were at the ocean — myself and three other youths — when we heard a deafening noise as of a great host of Xhosa warriors chanting their battle cries. First, we doubted — then listened. It came again, loud, clear, near. We doubted no longer. It was a host of Xhosa warriors ready to fight for Kreli. Suddenly this was thrown out of the water to us.

(Holding up the object.)

The People: What is it? What is it?

Wonderful signs, great omens!

Let us see! Let us see!

Give it to the doctor, Mhlakaza!

Chief Councillor: Silence! Sit down! What behaviour in the presence of the Elephant! Here, Mhlakaza, tell us about this.

Mhlakaza: *(After treating object — a soldier's golden helmet — with medicine.)* Ah! I see! Our ancestors speak! What do they say? Speak, speak ye bones! *(Using them.)* What? Ah! They say this is a cap of one of the thousands of European soldiers who have been drowned in the ocean. There is war across the sea. The white people are dying and cannot therefore send help to the Europeans here if war were to break out between them and us.

Kreli: Good! Excellent! Do you all hear! By Hintsas, by Gaika, by Ndlambe, these are great tidings! Do you all hear?

The People: Bayete! We have ears — and they are yours.

Kreli: If we fight them the Europeans will get no help from beyond the seas. Are you killing your cattle? Are you ready to fight to destroy the white man? Remember our ancestors will do most of the work!

The People: *(Some standing menacingly, maddened by war fever.)* We are ready, ready even now. Why wait? Let us go!

Chief Councillor: Not yet. Sit down! The path to success is blocked up by your own stupidity and disobedience. You fight against your own selves. Until the orders of the Great One and his renowned seer, Mhlakaza, are carried out, and cattle killed, we can find no help. We are here to find out

the offenders who block up the way to success.

(To seer.) Mhlakaza, proceed!

Mhlakaza: Speak, bones, speak. Tell us the offenders — the dogs which dare despise —

The People: Hai, hai! Wow, wow! where are these boys? Boys, boys!
(This disturbance is caused by two stray calves which run across scene. They are driven out by two men, immediately followed by a nervous herd-boy who is shouted at and scolded.)

Kreli: *(To Chief Councillor.)* In the future put guards to see that our proceedings are not disturbed in this unseemly way.

(To Mhlakaza.) Seer, proceed!

Mhlakaza: The bones say the offenders are the chiefs and the headmen who are not among us here — Sandile, Anta, Go, Soga, Tyala, Nxowana and their confederates. Even as I speak, they are not in Xhosaland. They are in the Kabusie under the Commissioner's protection, and have not killed as they were directed. But see! Messengers!

First Messenger: Hail! Elephant. A party of young men who wanted to find out whether or not our ancestors were on our side made a raid in the Gonubie, plundering and taking cattle. Their easy success and the white man's inability to defend himself prove that the Mighty Chief is being supported by the departed. Hail!

Second Messenger: Hail! Elephant. A party of young men who wanted to find out whether or not our ancestors were on our side made a raid in the Kobongo Church Mission Station. Their easy success and the white man's inability to defend himself prove that the Mighty Chief is being supported by the departed. Hail!

Kreli: *(Shaking with emotion and rage — stands up.)* Do you hear, my children? Do you understand, fools? Go and tell the people all these great things. Which things? Have you not heard from the seer and from the messengers of cattle and warriors ready to rise, of raids that prove that the white man is already weak and fear-struck, of the destruction of Europeans beyond the Seas? Here, Xoxo, call in the regiment of the Lion.

Xoxo: Bayete! Long live the Elephant!

(Retires. Immediately Xoxo goes out a faint sound of warriors singing is heard.)

Chief Councillor: Here, you all get to one side and leave this space for the warriors.

(The people go to one side of the stage. The singing of the warriors is now loud as they draw near. Presently they enter in full war dress, and file up.)

Kreli: *(Convulsed with emotion, stands up. Singing stops.)*

Here, Baba, Mlunguze, and Dondas. Go and tell Sandile, the chiefs, and the headmen who share their treacherous, stupid views that they all must return to Xhosaland before sunset tomorrow. They must kill all cattle and destroy all grain. If not — see my warriors who will fall on them and eat them up with the spear. Those who may escape the warriors will perish

with the European on the day of the fulfilment of the prophecies of Mhlakaza. Our race cannot suffer because of individuals. Individuals must lose themselves in the race. Kreli will kill the defaulters. Kreli will triumph over the European. Kreli will rule over all the country. Go!
(Kreli stands with legs apart, right hand clasping spear and left hand pointing out in front. The soldiers burst into the warrior's song. The seer sprinkles the warriors with medicine. The Chief's bard repeats the praises of Kreli — music, poetical praises and medicinal treatment all done together, giving grandeur and emotion to the scene. Everyone is war mad and wild.)

The Curtain Falls

Scene Three

Interior of room in Gaika Commissioner's house. Commissioner at one table full of documents, writing. His wife at another, reading an official despatch. Nomaliso — a fat Xhosa female servant — is dusting.

Mrs Brownlee: Surely, Charles, you do not believe in these silly rumours still?

Brownlee: What rumours, dear?

Mrs Brownlee: This foolish story about the people killing their cattle and destroying grain. It is all a bluff to deceive the Europeans. Don't you think the authorities — the Governor and the Chief Commissioner — will laugh at our credulity when they read the despatch you sent them on this matter a few weeks back?

Brownlee: *(Stands, and goes to her.)* This is no rumour, my dear. It is a fact — a grim fact. The thing has been going on for quite a time. The despatch of which you speak was written because the trouble had developed too far not to report on it. Only yesterday I saw scores of cattle being killed and —

Mrs Brownlee: Really? Oh dear! How can people be so credulous and foolish?

Brownlee: Something must be done to stop the craze. If we don't, I'm afraid the starved, desperate people will wage war against the European — or will be starved to death before they realise what they have done. Both things must be prevented. All our ways are strewn with suffering, loss, toil, danger, blood. I fear!

Mrs Brownlee: It will mean another delicate task for —
(A knock at the door.)

Mrs Brownlee: Come in.

(Enter Hugh and a missionary.)

Brownlee: Good afternoon, my dear friend. Hullo, Hugh.

(Nomaliso takes the Missionary's coat and hat and goes out.)

Missionary: I hope Mrs Brownlee and you are safe and well in this time of disturbance.

Brownlee: Thanks. We are. Do sit down, gentlemen. Hard times produce sterling qualities.

Missionary: Pleased to hear you say that.

Mrs Brownlee: My husband and I have just been talking about the disturbance. It is awful, really.

(Goes out.)

Missionary: The situation is growing delicate. The matter calls for the finest administrative qualities of even the best Administrator, such as you are. Personally I do not see how we can stop it — although I've my own ideas as to what the results will be.

Brownlee: I am doing all I can to prevent the disaster. The matter calls not only for tact, but for knowledge of the minds and customs of the people one has to deal with. However, as a government official I cannot actively interfere with the chiefs unless their doings put British subjects in danger.

Hugh: Why?

Brownlee: If we interfere with the scheme — plot, we should call it — for no obvious reason, the chiefs would say the Europeans want to fight the AmaXhosa, and soon there would be another bloody rising. This we must avoid if possible. I'm afraid the plot behind the whole movement is to starve the people into fighting the European. The leaders are playing on the people's feelings to cause trouble.

Missionary: What interests me is —

Mrs Brownlee: *(Coming in.)* Pardon me gentlemen.

(To husband.) One of the messengers is outside. I thought it might be urgent.

Brownlee: Thank you, dear. Let him come in here.

(Mrs Brownlee opens door, messenger enters, and she goes out.)

Lizwe: My fathers! *(Saluting.)*

Brownlee: Delivered the message, Lizwe?

Lizwe: Yes, Bawo.

Brownlee: Does Maqoma still refuse to listen?

Lizwe: E-e-e-e. *(Eyes the two other men.)*

Missionary: Mr Brownlee, I think it best we retire till you've interviewed the messenger.

Hugh: So do I. *(They rise to go.)*

Brownlee: Please keep your seats, gentlemen. It is about the matter we are discussing.

(To Lizwe.) These are my confidential friends — of course Hugh you know. Speak.

Lizwe: Father, Maqoma will hear nothing. He says he wants no further messages from you. He said to me, 'Tell your white father that I will obey my chief Kreli and his seer Mhlakaza, and no one else.' Even as he spoke cattle were being killed.

Brownlee: You may go, Li—

Nomaliso: *(Rushing in wild, and shouting.)* Snake! A snake. There is a snake there.

(Pointing from where she comes.)

Mrs Brownlee: *(Coming in on hearing noise.)* What is it, Charles? What is it, Nomaliso?

Brownlee: *(Embracing her.)* Nothing, my dear. A snake only.

(To Lizwe.) Lizwe, go and kill the snake for her.

Nomaliso: Go in first, and kill it.

(Pushing out Lizwe, and following fearfully behind him.)

Mrs Brownlee: How Nomaliso fears snakes! She says she was 'charmed' to fear them.

(Exit. The others laugh.)

Brownlee: Sorry for the disturbance, gentlemen. The position is this. I have been trying to check this trouble by keeping the Gaikas and the Gcalekas from united action. Unfortunately Maqoma will not be prevailed upon. However, I have been successful with Sandile so far, and Anta is wholly on my side and will kill not a beast.

Missionary: What interests me is what the results will be if all our efforts in preventing this calamity fail.

Hugh: Exactly. That is what I've been talking about. It is true, is it not, that both the missionary and the Administrator have long been trying to civilise the black man, turn him into a regular efficient worker, and into a peaceful citizen?

Brownlee: Quite true. But with little success, I'm afraid.

Missionary: Quite true. But success will come, let's wait.

Ngesi: *(Coming in without having knocked.)* Ye lords, I salute you.

Brownlee: Another messenger, gentlemen. *(To Ngesi.)* Tell your story, Ngesi.

Ngesi: Sir, the draft reached the place safely. The men were given over to their various employers. They told me they were happy to find help and work, and they promised to be honest, industrious servants. Here are the papers, Sir.

Brownlee: *(Reading the papers.)* You are right, Ngesi. The letter tells me that the employers also are pleased to find workers who look so eager and intelligent.

Ngesi: Outside, in the yard, there is a group of about forty men ready to enlist as workers.

Brownlee: Send them in quickly, Ngesi.

(Ngesi goes to the door and shouts at the men to come in. They pack together sitting on their legs.)

Brownlee: *(Addressing them.)* I'm glad to hear you prefer to go and work for the European than to remain in Xhosaland and kill yourselves by destroying cattle. You are brave and wise. The white man is just. But remember you must be honest, obedient, loyal servants. I shall find you

good employers. Ngesi will take you to them day after tomorrow. I shall talk to you again tomorrow.

The Men: (*Going out.*) Thank you, White Chief. Thank you, father.

Brownlee: Gentlemen, these are the people who refuse to be deceived by Nongqause, Kreli and Mhlakaza. To escape punishment and death they come to me to find work. This will be the third draft I shall send down south.

Hugh: Ah! That confirms what I have to say. New ideas, opinions and institutions can be built only on the ruins of the old. The human mind and heart are not vacant stands where new edifices can be built at pleasure. The human mind and heart are places overgrown with traditions and customs, beliefs and taboos. If old ideas, customs and sanctions are to be destroyed, and the site prepared for new intellectual and moral structures, there must first be a process, not of construction, but of destruction; not order but confusion. If these poor people carry out their scheme and starve themselves, it will be no national suicide at all. It will be a necessary process of metamorphosis. It will be the agony of birth. It will not be Nirvana but travail. This great cattle-killing drama which we witness today will prepare the Xhosa national soil — soul — for the early propagation of the message of the missionary, the blessings of medical science, the law and order of the administrator, and the light of education. The drafts of which you speak are the first fruits of this drama.

Brownlee: Well, well. I never thought about it that way. But remember that I am an administrator. A civil officer must think of immediate not ultimate results. An administrator is guided, not by theoretical matters of principle, but by pressing practical political problems of the passing moment. But go on. I'm much interested in your original views. Even administrators are human.

Hugh: Nongqause, the source of this drama, may accomplish in a short time, by means of an expensive method, what in the ordinary course of events would have taken generations of Christianity and education and administrative wisdom to do. The only thing to ask is whether or not the price she has asked the people to pay is not too costly. The passing of time will, I believe, show that it wasn't too costly. If we believe in the doctrine of the survival of the fittest then we may excuse her by saying that those who may survive her purging and liberating test will be individuals physically and intellectually superior to the others. You have told us that some of the people already have shown their intellectual independence by being sceptical and refusing to kill their cattle. This reveals strong characters and keen minds not totally trammelled by tradition, or enslaved by superstition.

Mrs Brownlee: (*Coming in.*) Pardon me, gentlemen. Charles, shall I bring in the tea? It is ready.

Brownlee: Thank you dear. Do, please.

(*Exit Mrs Brownlee.*) Proceed. This is altogether a new light on the matter.

Hugh: The transforming, liberating process of evolution is often slow and cumbersome. Not infrequently Fate turns on the more rapid, more consuming, scavenging process of accident, when she wants things speeded up a little. The cattle-killing drama of the AmaXhosa is an example of this rapid scavenging process of accident. It is one of those human mysteries that, defying the laws of determinism, come either to help or hinder a people.

Missionary: (*Rubbing his hands together.*) It is wonderful how people think alike sometimes. All along I've held the opinions expressed by my friend here, with this difference only — I looked at the matter from a religious point of view. But I was afraid to express my views.

Brownlee: Indeed!

Hugh: And now?

Missionary: I'm not. The Xhosa nation is a nation seeking its soul. The missionary has tried to help the nation find and save that soul. So far the people are blind, arrogant and benighted. But if this cattle-killing craze goes on, very soon the Xhosa nation will ask the vital historical question: What shall we do? Ah! what romance, what history, what significance lies behind that simple but burning question: What shall we do?

(*Warming up to his subject, rubbing his hands together more vigorously than ever, and letting himself go.*) Didn't St Paul ask the same question when he was converted? Did not the jailor ask the same question of Silas? Down the corridors of history saints, thinkers and nations have, at turning points in their lives, asked the question. It means a halting and taking stock of the position; it means seeking and finding; it means that enlightened scepticism which doubts the old and the popular, and reaches out to the new and the better; it means asking of and relying on God. What shall we do? If the Xhosas continue to destroy their cattle and grain, they will soon be in trouble, will ask this great question, and God will answer them. Out of the bitter shall come forth sweet. Out of decay will spring the new shoot. Out of —

(*Mrs Brownlee and Nomaliso bring in tea. Nomaliso goes out and Mrs Brownlee serves the tea.*)

Brownlee: My dear, my friends here have brought me new hope, if not as an administrator, certainly as a human being.

Mrs Brownlee: Really! How kind of them. But how?

Brownlee: (*Giving her his armchair, and sitting on one arm of the same chair.*) Listen to the discussion. In short they say my failure to save the Xhosa people actually may save them!

Missionary: Nongqause may reduce at a sweep what legislation and missionary endeavour have so far failed to fight against — the power and influence of the witchdoctor, the tyranny of custom and tradition, the authority of the chief, the isolation of the Xhosa nation. By isolation I mean that the AmaXhosa are a self-sufficient community, hostile to, and not eager to come into contact with Europeans. The Nongqause Drama

will break down this self-sufficiency, this hostility, and force the AmaXhosa to throw themselves — literally and metaphorically — into the arms of their white neighbours. Nongqause will give the AmaXhosa that dependence, by robbing them of their food and national solidarity, which spells progress. For it is one of nature's charming paradoxes that independence is born of dependence.

Hugh: Yes, I know that historians and writers will condemn Nongqause as a fool, a traitor, a devil-possessed witch. But is that everything that can be said about this? I hope to God not. No, I will not believe, I cannot believe that the tragedy which is now upon us can be explained in that way only. There must be something deeper. I believe that in the distant future someone will catch the proper spirit and get the real meaning of this incident and write about it. Who knows?

Brownlee: Really, gentlemen, I must thank —
(*A knock at the door.*)

Mrs Brownlee: I will attend to this, Charles.

(*Goes to the door — returns with a letter.*) A letter for you.

Brownlee: (*Reading.*) It is from Colonel Maclean, the Chief Commissioner. He refuses to sanction my plan of settling in the Kabusie those Xhosas who will not kill their cattle. He thinks the people are deceiving me. But I know them far better than he does. His refusal complicates my administrative work.

Mrs Brownlee: Oh! these high authorities! They glory in giving orders about things and situations of which they know little. They put obstacles in the paths of lower officials, and then expect them to accomplish miracles. When the lower officials who are in the actual field of activity achieve some great success in their difficult work, the credit goes to the higher authorities who perhaps have never moved a yard out of their comfortable homes to do anything in the matter, and have relied both for information and action entirely on the men in the field. It makes me —

A Messenger: (*Rushing in unceremoniously, panting.*) There is trouble in the Gonubie, father! You are required immediately!

Another Messenger: (*Enters excited and speaks before anyone replies to the first.*) There are grave disturbances in the Kobongo Church Mission! People have been killed and the uninjured European settlers are in danger. I was sent to call you at once, White Chief!

Third Messenger: (*Perspiring.*) Anta sends word that his followers who refuse to kill cattle have been threatened and are in danger! They need your immediate help! Anta says come with a strong personal guard! There's grave danger!

(*Everyone has involuntarily stood up.*)

Brownlee: Duty calls, friends. I go alone.

Missionary: May God bless and protect you!

Mrs Brownlee: (*Aside.*) When duty calls love is sacrificed. When duty calls life is endangered.

Missionary: (*To Brownlee.*) You are brave. It must be taxing. You risk your very life in this work. May you go through it all triumphantly, and may He bring you back safe. (*Stretching out right arm involuntarily as if blessing him.*)

Brownlee: Thank God I have the noble wife I have.

Mrs Brownlee: (*Tears in her eyes, and running into his open arms.*) Oh! Charles!

Brownlee: (*Emotional.*) Darling! (*They embrace. Silence long and profound.*)

The Curtain Falls

Scene Four

Near Brownlee's house. Immediately before the curtain rises Bell Call Song is heard, followed by sounds of wagon brakes and of 'whoa! whoa!'. As the curtain rises a wagon has just come to a standstill on an open space covered with grass, and two or three trees growing by. The driver and the touleier⁴ outspan the oxen, and those in the wagon come down. This group is made up of the Commissioner, his wife, the white missionary, Hugh, Nomaliso (the black servant), and three male (Xhosa) assistants. The party takes down the things it has brought in the wagon — first aid equipment, foodstuffs, utensils.

Brownlee: A moment, please. (*They all come round and listen to him.*) We must be systematic. Planning is required to save the people. Now, listen. Mrs Brownlee, Nomaliso, Buku and I will form the provisions department and give out the food to the victims. Hugh and Faku will give first aid to those who may need it. And you, my friend (*to the missionary*) and Qawu will minister to the spiritual needs of the victims. No time for delay. They have heard of salvation, and see! They already come!

(*The party divides itself into the three groups already suggested.*)

Mrs Brownlee: That soup tin there, Buku! Quick, Nomaliso, the knife — and cut the bread!

Nomaliso: (*Running excitedly to the wagon to get the knife and colliding with the quiet Buku.*) Get out of my way, fool! Haven't you got eyes? (*Pushes him away, gets knife and works furiously — dropping things, missing things, gesticulating.*) O, O, we, e-mm.

(*Lifts up her hands and then puts them on back of her head — she does this because the victims have come.*)

A Woman Victim: (*Appearing on scene with her child.*) Help! help, fo-o-d, fo-r th-e chi-i-ld.

(*Drops down. Buku and the others rush to her assistance. Meanwhile other victims — men, women and children — appear.*)

Brownlee: As soon as you have given each one help, let them pass on lest we be mobbed and rendered helpless.

(*A haggard man staggers in carrying a baby boy.*)

The Man: Help. I am injured here. *(Pointing.)* And my boy, my heir, has been badly assaulted.

(The medical department attends to them.) We met two men desperately hungry. They saw I had a parcel which they rightly guessed contained food. They assaulted us and a fight took place. My boy and I were overpowered.

(By now there is a stream of victims coming in, finding food and medical treatment, passing out, and leaving room for others coming in. Every member of the rescue party is now quite busy.)

A Woman Victim: *(Brought in carried. She is quite emaciated and has a wild look.)* O, O, mm, mm, O!

(Her groaning is heard above the general noise of eating, talk and other groans. They give her food. Suddenly she jumps up.) Ha, ha, ha, ha! Cattle, cattle, corn, corn! The great day has come. We eat. We conquer. New life! Happiness!

(Suddenly changes her expression.) No! No! They lied! They lied! The Chiefs and their witchdoctors lied! Lied! We have been deceived. The missionaries and the Commissioner were right.

(Getting quite wild.) No food my child — no food! Oh! look, she dies. Don't, don't die, don't die my child, my darling. Ha, ha, he, he.

(Drops down and dies.)

(A moment later.)

A Man Victim: *(Has received food, and now talks with the missionary.)* The great God can pardon and save even great sinners? Yes? No, you are wrong, wrong! He cannot save and accept animals like me. My sins are too great to be moved.

Missionary: God is Love. God is in the very sins we commit ready to change evil into good. He knows and understands. If you confess and are sorry he will forgive. God is forgiveness.

The Victim: Forgive me, father?

(Wild and claspng his own throat.) Look! there it is — I fear — f-e-a-r. I see it — the face of the man I killed over the meat we found in a deserted hut. He had food. Here is the face of another man who tried to snatch away an edible root I had dug up — I killed him too. But, above all, hear her voice! Oh! father! She herself asked me to kill her. She was lying weak and helpless on the roadside and with her last breath cried to me to kill her and end her sufferings. I did. No, father, how can God be merciful when he has deliberately made a hell for sinners? Help me. Don't let me die.

(Missionary whispers something into his ear. As he listens his face brightens up.)

The Man: You are right. I see. Do, please!

(Missionary baptises him, kneels down and prays into his ear.)

The Man: *(Joyfully.)* Lord, there is no hell-fire in all God's Universe. There is no revenge about God. Wonderful? Glorious! God of Love, forgive. God of Love, I come.

(Dies. The procession continues undisturbed.)

Cries: Don't, don't. Move on!

Food. Give, food, food!

Water, water, I thirst!

I came before you. Yes, I did!

I die. Let me come first.

Oh! my child!

Someone: *(To someone else.)* Let the child drink first. There's plenty. Don't you see that good mother giving her child preference? Good. There comes your soup.

Brownlee: *(Seeing his wife dropping into a stool rather heavily and burying her face in her hands.)* Darling. What's wrong?

Nomaliso: Oh! my missus yo!

(Sobbing, hands on head.)

Brownlee: Quiet, Nomaliso. Yes, dear, sick?

(Giving her a glass of tonic which the watchful Hugh has dispatched.)

Mrs Brownlee: *(Gently brushing away the glass.)* No, Charles, I'm not. But — the hand of God, how mighty and overwhelming! Today we see God's hand squeezing sin and folly out of poor man. It is terrifying! It is crushing!

Brownlee: Come, take a rest on the wagon. You are tired. It is cruel of me to —

Mrs Brownlee: No, Charles, no. I am neither sick nor tired. I grieve for the helpless, the deceived. How can one look on this scene of human misery and not be touched and moved? How can I not serve when there's so much service to render. My sickness is the misery of the people. My agony is our helplessness to triumph. Come, Charles, let us work on. I am come to serve. We are come to serve.

Brownlee: Sure you are well?

Mrs Brownlee: Quite. My body is well, my soul is sick.

Brownlee: *(Leaves her to work and speaks to himself.)* True, true. What a spectacle of want amid service, of selfishness amid nobleness, of death within salvation. What a picture of humanity devoid of hope. Trouble, misery. There is no better reflection into human character than real distress or real power. Distress, like power, brings out the best, or the worst, in man. Distress, like power, makes man forget about inhibitions, and free from social codes of behaviour — free to shine in his true colours. Distress, like power, makes the good man thoroughly good, and the bad man flatly bad. And the end of —

(He is stopped short in this soliloquy by the shouts of a victim whose wounds are being treated. Through all this the missionary is praying for one dying victim and for another who has just accepted Christ. At the same time a baby girl is being given food. Like a few other victims, she is not at all weak, and like the child she is, is happy amid her gloomy surroundings. This unholy mixture of contrasting situations produces the

following results. The day is gradually fading away.)

Injured Man: Ai! O, Yo, Yo, Yo!

Child: Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Ma! look, that man is dancing.

(Mother is too weak to hear and milk is being forced down her throat.)

Missionary: Thou merciful God, save their souls if not their bodies. Out of this chaos of misery let there come forth fuller and higher Life. Let, we beseech —

Injured Man: Phew! Yo. Yo. Hey, it hurts. Let me go!

Child: Te, he, he!

Hugh: Steady my man — it will soon be over.

Missionary: — of thy Son, Jesus. Ignorance and superstition hurt and hurt deeply. What keeps man away from God is not deliberate sinfulness but the delusions of ignorance. Sin is the product of man's spiritual imperfection. Trouble, the result of man's mental immaturity. Therefore, O Lord, have mercy on these poor simple —

Child: Ma, look! Why does that man speak with his eyes shut?

Nomaliso: Sh! sh! Quiet, child. Come to me.

Injured Man: Yo, Yo, finish up, quickly. You-u-yo!

Child: He is crying. Yo, Yo, Yo.

Nomaliso: Naughty girl. Keep quiet or I'll thrash you and send you away.

Child: *(Really crying now.)* Yo, Yo. Ma, ma — yo.

Mrs Brownlee: Oh, Nomaliso, let the child be. This is time for great, not small things. People who are faithful in small things, hardly rise to great ones. Think big, woman. Let the child be.

Missionary: Receive the souls of the dying. Purge the souls of the living. Have mercy on thy people, Lord. Let the doom brought by their own stupidity lead them to the paths of righteousness. Let the work of their hands build their soul. Christ died for all — even these. Therefore, forgive them and save them for his sake. Amen.

(The victims are few now. It is late in the afternoon.)

A Man Victim: *(To missionary.)* Thank you, father. Your God is great. He has made our enemies our helpers. I believe in Him and —

A Latecomer: Food, water. I thirst!

Missionary: All thirst. We thirst. Man thirsts for knowledge and salvation.

Nomaliso: No, they thirst for water — food. People can only think about salvation when their stomachs are not empty. First give the people food and then talk of salvation. Misery makes men deaf to all but the call of the stomach. An empty stomach means an empty unreasoning mind. No, father, food first.

Mrs Brownlee: *(Smiling to missionary.)* Oh, Nomaliso, you don't understand. Work on.

Nomaliso: I understand because I work! I work because I understand!

A Male Victim: *(Hardly any new victims appear now. One of the few who are still fairly strong: to missionary, pointing to others.)* We four want to help and show thanks to you and your — yes our — God. As we came

along here, many were lying on the road, unable to go further — victims caught by their own weakness. If they get no help, they will die. We want to go out and carry them back here, father.

Missionary: Very good. I'm overjoyed. Go, my sons, go.

(To Brownlee and Hugh.) God be praised! The Lord has raised to himself disciples from these poor souls! God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.

(Rubbing his hands vigorously from beginning to end of speech.)

Hugh: *(Suddenly forgetting himself and oblivious to scene of misery.)* See! What a glorious, beautiful sunset. What warm colours. Trailing clouds. The beauty of God's creation. Shine on, O Sun, God's Lamp! Great!

Brownlee: *(Always composed and practical.)* Well, rather strange and perhaps great of you to see and think about that amid these gloomy scenes.

Hugh: *(Dead to immediate things.)* God's Lamp! When God dims His lamp the darkness that follows is folded and hidden between the glorious sunset and the brighter morn. And so will all human misery vanish when celestial morn is reborn.

Missionary: Our friend is a genius. A great mind can live, feel and think beyond its immediate experience. But, of course, he is right. What contrasts — this glory of sunset and the misery of the Xhosa. But life is made pleasant by contrasts such as these.

Hugh: It is not. Life is made horrible and hollow by contrasts. Some men say variety is the spice of life. It is not. Variety is a sign of human immaturity. Variety is a mark of infancy. The very fact that our growing minds and souls require change, variety and contrasts, proves we are weak. Give man nothing but Beauty, Peace, Trust and Goodness — and he gets tired of it all and wants change, contrasts! In other words man tires even of the best and noblest — and plunges headlong to their opposite. The day man learns to enjoy the higher and more serious and permanent things of life, and not tire of them, this world will be transformed into a heaven. Our trouble is that we want change — even from good things. Heaven itself would be too dull for some of us — if a kind fate did not first make us ready by the great transformation which is death.

Missionary: I disagree, my friend. Thank God we tire of one thing. Therein lies man's hope. Man tires even of sin, and is forced to do right — even as a matter of fashion. Progress is nothing but man's desire for variety and change.

Brownlee: Gentlemen, pardon me. I am fascinated by your duel of wits. But it is late. I believe there will be no more people coming here today. The hungry are even now coming out to hunt and kill. Buku, you and others help the driver to inspan. The day's work is over. It is getting dark. *(Buku and the other members of the party, who during the discus-*

sion between Hugh and the missionary had been collecting things and loading them on the wagon, make ready to inspan the oxen.)

Hugh: (Still entranced by nature — hearing the music of birds, insects, etc.) Listen! What melodious sounds. What birds and animals be those? (Without waiting for an answer.) Wherever it comes from, it is celestial music — a chorus from Nature. Listen! Nature's symphony performed beneath God's beautiful blue roof! Nature's symphony sung by the living instruments of the Almighty! Nature's symphony composed and conducted by the Creator — Himself.

(Stands rapt listening to the music.)

Missionary: (Affected — and rubbing his hands more vigorously than ever.) Let us also sing and give thanks to God for all He has done for us. (They all kneel down and sing. Some of the stronger victims who now feel better, and have been resting — off stage — come on to the scene, kneel down and, with the African's gift for music catch up the tune, sing, brightening it up with all kinds of musical decorations for which the black man is noted. The music rises and falls.)

The Curtain Falls

Scene Five

Many months after. Interior of a Christian, but 'raw' Xhosa home, showing a room and a sick man lying in bed. Three women attending to the patient talk in whispers and walk stealthily.

Lumka: Sh! He has fallen asleep. Be careful not to wake him up. Sleep soothes. In sleep the sick and healthy, poor and rich, are all alike, you know. Poor Daba! Wakefulness brings pain.

(Covers him up with care.)

Mrs Daba: O, O, Yo-o-o. I'm afraid. No hope, my sisters, no hope for him. He may die. Oh! he will die. Yo! Yo!

Nomsa: Don't, MaXaba, don't. You'll wake him up. He needs rest. Be calm and trust in God. Today, you know, things are different. Before that great Nongqause Famine, death was a fearful black thing. But today we know about our Lord and Saviour of whom the good missionaries preach. Today death means birth. We need not fear for Daba who is a baptised believer. We should pray, believe, work and wait. MaXaba, God loves you.

(Gently touching the covered up, bundled Daba.)

Lumka: (To Nomsa.) Before he slept, did you give him the medicine the missionary brought?

Nomsa: Yes. I did. But the old man, his father, insisted upon him taking also the herbal mixture brought in by Mdhlamkomo, the herbalist. We gave him both preparations alternately.

(A knock at the door.)

Both Girls: Who is it?

A Voice: We.

Lumka: (Recognising voice.) Come in.

(Four women and one man enter.)

Nomsa: (After prolonged embarrassing silence.) Greetings.

Visitors: E, e, e, e.

Lumka: Greetings.

Visitors: E, e, e, e.

Mrs Daba: (With sobs.) Greetings.

Visitors: E, e, e, e.

Old Woman of Party: How is it my children — this cloud over the home? Are you all well?

Lumka: We are well under God's mercy. Yet we are not well at all despite our good health. This is — this terrible sickness of Daba.

The Old Woman: How is he today?

Nomsa: We see no improvement, Ma.

Mrs Daba: Yo! Yo! my dear husband. O, God of salvation!

(Others groan and murmur sympathetically.)

The Man of the Party: Let us make prayers.

(He immediately sings a hymn, and as others join him one by one, he switches over to bass voice. The song ends.) Let us pray. God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of David, hear us.

(Voices: Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Amen.) Thou art our Father. We pray for this Thy son, Daba, to recover.

(Voices: So be it! So be it! Amen.) Here is his wife, and there are his children — what will happen to them if he dies?

(Loud groans and murmurs.) We ask Thee to spare his soul. But not our will, but Thine be done.

(Groans, shouts of Hallelujah! Amen! Thy will be done.) Oh! Jehovah, God, Creator, King.

(Warming up to the long prayer he proposes to make and gesticulating wildly, beating the ground.) Thou who spoke on Mount Sinai, and thunder and lightning came, and the Israelites trembled —

(Stops short as one of the women, excited and gesticulating has touched the small table and something has fallen with a bang and a clang.)

Man: (After short but nasty pause.) Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rest: (Most with eyes already open.) Amen!

(A groan from the sleeping sick man as he twists round.)

The Man of the Party: (To Lumka.) Here, this will help him.

(Gives over some medicine.)

Lumka: Thank you. He'll take it when he wakes up.

(Another knock at the door.)

Nomsa: Who is it?

A Voice: We.

Nomsa: Come in.

(Enter two men and four women.)

One Man of 2nd Party: *(Seeing members of other party.)* So you are already here, kinsmen.

(And at once turning to Nomsa.) How is the patient, my child?

Nomsa: He is still held down, father.

Same Man: We are sorry to hear that. I have brought you medicine. But first, let us make prayers.

Man of 1st Party: We have already prayed, friend. But, then, I only state a fact. I do not say we shouldn't pray again. More praying will hurt no one. *(They are just ready to start when Daba, the patient, disturbs them by groaning and pointing.)*

Nomsa: *(Rising.)* He wants water, I think.

(Daba is given water, drinks and falls back heavily on pillow. A knock at the door.)

Lumka: Who is it?

Voice: It is I.

(A general shuffling as the people recognise missionary's voice. Enter missionary accompanied by an unknown white man, an intelligent-looking black minister, and two native servants carrying the missionary's portable organ which they set up while the following takes place.)

The People: Greetings, Bawo.

Good day, ye great ones.

Good afternoon, servants of God.

Missionary: Greetings to all.

(Aside.) Do you notice the quantity of medicine on the table. Christianity has not eradicated belief in their own medicines and ceremonies.

White Friend: *(Aside.)* The room is small. The crowd will do the sufferer no good.

Missionary: How is Daba today? Better, I hope.

(Aside.) I know, but we must be tactful.

(He goes to Daba and puts a thermometer in his mouth.)

Lumka: No father, he is quite bad.

Mrs Daba: Yo, Yo, my God. Yo. Yo — sorrow to me!

Missionary: Peace daughter.

(To crowd.) My white friend here is a doctor and would like to examine the patient. Would you all wait outside for a little. The members of the family of course should remain behind with us. Before you go out I want to introduce to you my other friend here — Tiyo Soga, the new African missionary from Scotland.⁵ Your own man — you have heard of him — learned and godfearing. He has come to work among you, his kinsmen. I shall tell you more about him, later.

(The people go out murmuring greetings of joy — Lumka, Nomsa and Mrs Daba remain behind.)

White Friend: *(To missionary and Tiyo Soga — after feeling pulse and looking at the thermometer.)* Hopeless!

Lumka and Nomsa: *(Ignorant of the word 'hopeless' but their strong womanly intuitive senses telling them something awful is near, speaking together.)* What is it, father?

Daba: *(Suddenly sitting right up — unearthly expression on his face.)* MaXaba, come to me.

(Wife goes to him.) Look, MaXaba, look! Listen! See the beautiful crowd singing? Ah! This is the host of those who perished in the Great Famine. Do you see these people, surrounding, thanking and laughing with Nongqause. They tell her that hunger and destitution drove them into the paths of life, led them to the missionary and his divine message; put them into the hands of God. So there is triumph in death; there is finding in death; there is beauty in death. Nongqause laughs as she tells them that she was really in earnest but was ignorant. They laugh and sing. They call her their Liberator from Superstition and from the rule of Ignorance. These people are dressed, not in karosses and blankets as we are, but in Light — Light that makes it impossible to see their bodies or to distinguish their sex.

(Bright light bathes his face, and he stretches out his trembling arms, and smiles.) There she comes to us. I greet you Nongqause. Yes, I come. Yes, thank you, do lead me to the Master. O Nongqause, the Liberator!

(Falls back dead. Wife falls into the arms of Nomsa. Lumka closes Daba's eyes and puts the blankets over his chest, the three women sobbing softly. Missionary sits at organ and plays. Others stand rigid with heads hung down. Soft music fills the place.)

The Curtain Falls

The End

Notes to The Girl Who Killed to Save

Characters: Nongqause was actually Mhlakaza's niece.

1. 'Nxi' is used to express disgust and irritation.
2. The names are those of earlier chiefs.
3. 'Hail . . .'
4. A 'touleier' (from Afrikaans) leads the team of oxen, holding the reins.
5. Tiyo Soga (b. 1829) attended Glasgow University where he was ordained in 1856. His influential translation of the first part of *Pilgrim's Progress (Uhambo loMhambi)* was published by Lovedale in 1867.