

FLAME OF THE LOWVELD



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AND
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SUMMARY

Set in the untamed wilderness of South Africa's Eastern Transvaal during its gold rush, *Flame of the Lowveld* is an electrifying saga of passion, betrayal, and unyielding courage. In a world where cattle rustlers, outlaws, and adventurers carve their paths with revolvers and reckless ambition, the story unfolds amidst rugged ravines and lawless plains.

At its heart is Johan Grimbeek, a relentless tracker and stoic adventurer, haunted by the need to avenge a brutal murder. His path crosses with Juanita Perreira, a fiery and resilient young woman torn between her shadowed family legacy and a yearning for redemption. Together, they navigate a deadly game of deception, loyalty, and survival against forces that threaten to destroy everything they hold dear. Johan's pursuit of justice leads him into a treacherous ravine, where he discovers a group of armed cattle thieves. But this is only the beginning. A near-fatal encounter sets the stage for an uneasy alliance between Johan and Juanita, who hides secrets of her own, bound to a notorious figure whose past is entangled with Johan's mission. As tension simmers and allegiances are tested, sparks of attraction flicker between the two, though their trust is fragile.

From heart-stopping chases across the wilderness to intense moments of raw emotion, *Flame of the Lowveld* masterfully balances sweeping romance with pulse-pounding action. Set against a richly detailed backdrop of 19th-century South Africa, this is a tale of love's endurance, the search for justice, and the scars of choices made in the heat of survival. Will Johan's unyielding quest for revenge cost him everything? And can Juanita escape the sins of her father to find her own path? In a land where danger lurks at every turn, only the brave survive, and only the fearless find redemption.

EXTRACT

Quickly, Johan rolls over and kicks with all his might. He hits the guy in the stomach and sends him flying several paces away. The man's head hits hard against a rock and then he stays lying there.

But the guy from up there, who was half-staggering just now, has also recovered, and while fighting they push Johan closer and closer to the edge of the abyss. If he kicks or punches forward, one grabs him from behind and pulls him to the ground.

Once, Johan tried to explain that he had nothing to do with them, that they were attacking him unnecessarily, but the big guy shouted angrily and red in the face.

"He's lying! Don't listen to him! He must die." The dark-haired girl sees that Johan manages once again to inflict a terrible punch on one of his opponents. The man staggers away from him as if he had received a mule kick, plunges forward onto his face and stays lying there. But the next moment, Johan receives a tremendous blow to the back of the head. It comes from a large round stone that the red-faced man has hurled at him from behind with all his strength. Johan sees stars before his eyes and for a moment he is so dizzy that he gropes around him like a blind man.

1. FLAME OF THE LOWVELD

CHAPTER 1

Atop the high, rocky ridge of a crest that forms one slope of a deep ravine, the scraping of shoes on hard, rough rocks can be heard occasionally. If someone was nearby, they would occasionally have seen the moving head and shoulders of a girl who is making her way between loose rock blocks. In her hand, she holds the reins of a horse, a gracefully built yellow fox.

She has to jump from stone to stone here and there and laboriously leads her horse a distance through the rocks. Then she hooks the reins onto a shrub and walks a little further on her own. Crouched, as if stalking something, she now moves between the rock blocks. Finally, she carefully reaches the very top of the crest. Behind a few wild mopane trees, she creeps closer to a large flat rock, and then she lies down on it and brings a pair of binoculars to her eyes.

She keeps the binoculars focused on the wide, wooded ravine far below her. From this height, the wild trees below look like tiny bushes.

She is a well-built girl, muscular and lithe, with a bush of rich, glossy black hair. She wears a blouse of brown silk, with long sleeves, and men's riding breeches and gaiters. To one side on the flat rock where she is lying, she has carefully placed a rifle.

It is a brand-new Portuguese rifle that her father bought for her in Delagoa Bay. It is so new that the year it was made and which is engraved on the barrel, is still this year's date. 1885.

In this whole region, she does not believe there is anyone else who has such a beautiful new rifle. But it was precisely its beauty and its newness that made her do the wrong thing today. She only has a few cartridges left for the rifle, but when she rode into the veld, she just didn't want to leave the rifle behind. And she knows now that if she hadn't brought the rifle, she would have spared herself the trouble and would have gone to get her revolver and hip bandolier, which at the moment would have made her feel much safer.

She moves the binoculars from place to place. Finally, she finds what she is looking for. It is four moving figures far down in the ravine. When she directs the binoculars at them, she can see them very clearly. They

are horse riders. They ride one after the other, at a slow pace, as if both they and their horses are very tired.

The dark-haired brunette takes the binoculars away from her eyes for a moment and a frown of contemplation appears between her eyebrows. These four men must be the four cattle thieves that Mr. Toerien is looking for. He thinks they have headed towards the bushveld plains, and they have been on the opposite side all this time, here in the mountains.

She found their tracks when she went riding this morning and it gave her the idea that they could be here.

These four men only spent one evening, two weeks ago, at her and her father's house. They talked for a long time with her father and his foreman. If Mr. Toerien were to find out, what would he think of that? The girl shakes her head slowly back and forth as if she has discovered something that surprises her.

There are silver earrings on her ears that softly jingle. Then she brings her binoculars to her eyes again and examines the ravine up and down. Years ago, her father promised her that the things of the past were forever behind her. She still remembers it well. It was on a rainy night in the year 1879. She was then just a fourteen-year-old girl.

Suddenly, she stops the binoculars and her fingers stiffen around them. There is another surprise for her because she now notices that in this lonely, desolate wilderness there is actually a fifth person as well, besides herself.

She is completely surprised to see the other man walking a little higher up in the ravine. She expected the four horse riders because she encountered their tracks and came here with a specific purpose to be able to observe them well with the binoculars.

She also immediately realizes that the fifth person, who is walking on foot and carrying a heavily loaded backpack, must be a stranger in these parts. He is probably blissfully unaware that he is heading straight for the four cattle thieves.

He looks innocent to her. From here, it looks like he doesn't even have a weapon with him. The four horse riders, on the other hand, are all armed. Three of them carry revolvers at their sides, and the one without a revolver has a rifle on his shoulder.

Johan Grimbeek, the lone person, wipes the sweat from his forehead and stands still for a moment to look back. Through the leaves of tall, wild trees, he sees the mountains he crossed early that morning about a mile behind him. It is winter in the Lowveld, but down here in the deep, long ravine where he has been trekking for half an hour, it is hot, very hot indeed. And yet, up there on the mountains, it was bitterly cold early this morning.

“Vonk, my old horse, I hope you’re doing well up there on the mountain,” he says half aloud while looking at the high mountains behind him. He pushes his hat back and stands for a while to catch his breath.

A little uneasy, he wonders if he might have made a mistake by leaving his horse, and especially his weapons, up there on the mountain. He is probably a good fifteen or twenty miles from the place where he made a kind of giant kraal for his horse on an open, flat patch against the mountain, with a cliff on one side, with the help of branches and natural bushes. And there he also left his two revolvers and other belongings. He came here to investigate. If he has obtained the information he is looking for, and it turns out to be necessary, he will go back and get Vonk and his “shooting irons.”

Grimbeek stands and looks around for a moment. He takes a piece of paper out of his shirt pocket and unfolds it. He looks at it and compares the indications given on it with the landscape - which he can see far in front of him, through the bushveld trees.

“By the mountain of seven ravines,” the dying woman had told him. That is the only indication he got from her, and it took him almost months to find out that it is here. According to the map the old man in Barberton had drawn for him, this very ravine is one of the “seven ravines.” The Swazi blacks apparently call this place a name that roughly means “Mountain of Seven Ravines.”

Well, if this is the place, then he must run into the second granddaughter of the late uncle Lodewyk Malan somewhere here.

Grimbeek shakes his head. It doesn’t seem to him that there can be a built-up or inhabited place for miles around.

But it must be somewhere here. And somewhere here he might also run into the man again, or in any case find a trace of him, who murdered

uncle Lodewyk Malan.

If he runs into the girl, she will in any case also only be a lead that will bring him closer to his final goal, closer to the day when he can finally settle scores with the merciless brute he has been looking for for more than a year now.

Grimbeek slings the heavy pack off his back and sits down with a sigh on a thick tree root. He carves at a piece of biltong for a moment while he frowns in contemplation.

Eventually, he resumes his walk. But now he heads diagonally up the slope.

The girl up there now directs her binoculars at the horse riders again. At the moment, they are almost out of sight, because they, too, have left the bed of the ravine to avoid a high cliff against which the water of the mountain stream tumbles down. They have dismounted and lead the animals up the steep slope.

She watches them for quite a while. When they are up, they make their way through the dense vegetation to the water stream again. Exhausted from the steep climb, they now throw themselves down on the side of the water stream in the shade of a tree that grows on a high bank right above them. A little distance from them is the edge of the cliff over which a mountain stream tumbles down into the tree-covered depths below.

Johan Grimbeek struggles up the steep slope. He is now descending again to the water stream, because the biltong he ate a little while ago is making him terribly thirsty.

Suddenly, however, he comes to a standstill. Lower down, right below him, he hears the murmur of people and then a laugh. At first, he imagines it is just the hard murmur of the water stream that he hears, but that laugh is unmistakable.

Johan stands dead still for a while and listens. He can now hear the talking again, quite clearly.

Grimbeek's heart beats faster. His lips press tighter together. Somewhere in this area must be the girl, and also the man, he has been searching for for so many months. He is convinced of it, because the information he gathered in the turbulent mining town, Barberton, on the other side of the mountains, left him with no doubt that he was finally

on the right track.

But he deliberately came without weapons and without a horse because he doesn't want to make the man he's looking for suspicious.

Now, when he hears the voices down below, the thought suddenly shoots through his mind. "Maybe he's one of the men talking there. Maybe fate has finally favored me..." The girl up there has plucked a few dry leaves from the bush next to her and, with almost dreamy interest, watches the scene below. A cool breeze that passes along here softly sweeps against the silk blouse she is wearing. She crumples the leaf in her hand. Then her fist suddenly clenches spasmodically.

Down below her in the ravine, fast, dramatic events have suddenly taken place.

Johan Grimbeek has cautiously crept closer, down the slope, to try and get a look at the men talking down below. He has come close to that tree on the high bank above them.

He was now closer than twenty paces from them. A large, burly guy stood up and stretched.

"You're talking a load of bull, old boy," he says in a lazy voice in English. "The deal ain't done until the cattle are safe in Delagoa Bay. Then and only then is the loot divided."

One of the three sitting men mumbles something and begins to write with a lead pot on an envelope or piece of paper, probably doing a calculation.

Johan's curiosity is now thoroughly aroused. He wants to hear what else is being said here. Just the day before yesterday, a man in Colts Creek, on the other side of the mountains, had told him that one out of every two people you meet in these parts is either a robber or a smuggler or a cattle thief. Grimbeek had thought the guy was exaggerating, but now it seems to him that it could actually be true.

He would give anything to be able to get a look at the men down there. But the next moment, a stone comes loose under his foot and rolls down the bank. Johan immediately realizes that the men will know that he has been eavesdropping on them. He ducks away behind a bush, but it is too late. The men jump up and shout at him.

And the next moment, a revolver flashes and the bullet hits the rock near him.

The big guy bellows at his companions.

“He’s a spy! He mustn’t get away! Shoot on sight and shoot to kill. Mike, you cut around to that side... be careful, hear? He’ll shoot back.” The girl up on the edge hears the crack of revolver shots. She sees how the stranger throws the pack off his back and ducks behind rocks and shrubs.

Grimbeek realizes that these men can easily shoot him dead in cold blood and leave him lying here, and no rooster will ever crow afterward. It will be in their interest to shoot him dead, because they think he has been standing there eavesdropping on them for quite a while and it will not help him to try and prove the contrary.

The girl sees how Grimbeek is fleeing higher up the mountain, diagonally away from his pursuers. But there is a wide strip, bare and treeless, where he will surely be shot.

Out of excitement, she jumps up and involuntarily grabs her rifle next to her.

“Shoot back, you donkey, shoot back!” she cries out. But there is no hope that Johan will hear her. She now also realizes suddenly that he of course has no weapon.

She sees how he reaches a deep trench that runs straight down the slope. He jumps into the trench and then the girl notices that a lightning-fast plan has come into his head. He doesn’t run higher up with the trench, but darts as fast as he can, crouching, down towards the waterfall side. The trench runs out into the ravine just on the other side of that tree under which the four men were sitting.

Grimbeek’s plan is of course to get to the horses.

The girl holds her breath for fear that the others might realize the fugitive’s plan. And it doesn’t take long before they do realize it.

The big guy has reached the trench and run some distance up the bank along the top. Now he realizes that Johan is not up there, but down with the trench, and bellowing, he yells at one of the men to run down and stop Johan.

Johan is now in a rugged area again, and when he hears that they have discovered his plan, he quickly jumps out of the trench and makes his way as quickly and silently as possible through the trees and shrubs.

The girl sees him again when he runs across an open patch near the high

bank where he had been eavesdropping on the men. She sees one of the other men coming running from below, straight towards him.

“Be careful! Be careful,” she shouts involuntarily. She is about to bring her rifle to her shoulder and lend a hand and help the stranger, but she is startled when she realizes that she only has a few cartridges in the magazine and does not dare waste them, because her own life could still be in danger here.

She sees how the fugitive suddenly drops flat behind a mopane bush. And when the guy from below, unaware of his presence, speeds past right under him, he dives down on him like lightning, grabs his firearm. He throws the man back and then hits him with a sledgehammer blow on the jaw, which makes him roll across the ground for several paces.

“Bravo!” the dark-haired girl shouts, relieved. But her joy is short-lived. She sees how the stranger tries to shoot with the revolver, but apparently there are no more cartridges in it, because he quickly throws it away from him, and then, without further ado, he jumps off the high bank onto the level ground below, right above the waterfall. He rushes as fast as he can to the horses, but two of the remaining three men are already there. They now charge straight at the stranger, probably because their revolvers have also been fired empty and because they realize that the stranger has no firearm.

The girl reaches for her rifle again, but now she realizes that it is too late. If she shoots at the people down there, she might just hit the man she wants to protect. She can no longer stand still with excitement. She feels like taking her horse and going down to where she can ride and help the stranger. But she hesitates again, and as if hypnotized, she watches the fight down there with her binoculars. Johan Grimbeek’s right fist has hit the first opponent in the chest and the blow hurls the guy away from him. However, the man immediately gets back on his feet. And the other two are also now close by and grab Johan simultaneously.

He knocks one of them down again, but the other one grabs him by the legs and pulls him to the ground. Then the one he first knocked down approaches. Like a maniac, he charges at Grimbeek.

Quickly, Johan rolls over and kicks with all his might. He hits the guy in the stomach and sends him flying several paces away. The man’s

head hits hard against a rock and then he stays lying there.

But the guy from up there, who was half-staggering just now, has also recovered, and while fighting they push Johan closer and closer to the edge of the abyss. If he kicks or punches forward, one grabs him from behind and pulls him to the ground.

Once, Johan tried to explain that he had nothing to do with them, that they were attacking him unnecessarily, but the big guy shouted angrily and red in the face.

“He’s lying! Don’t listen to him! He must die.” The dark-haired girl sees that Johan manages once again to inflict a terrible punch on one of his opponents. The man staggers away from him as if he had received a mule kick, plunges forward onto his face and stays lying there. But the next moment, Johan receives a tremendous blow to the back of the head. It comes from a large round stone that the red-faced man has hurled at him from behind with all his strength. Johan sees stars before his eyes and for a moment he is so dizzy that he gropes around him like a blind man.

The red-faced guy takes advantage of this opportunity. He charges forward and ducks Johan’s legs out from under him. Johan falls down with a hiccup. Vicious blows now rain down on his face and body.

Only two of the four men are still on their feet. But in his struggle with the two men, Johan has now shifted halfway over the abyss. He struggles against a sharp slope that leads straight to the abyss. His head still feels dizzy, but suddenly he realizes that he will tumble over the abyss if he doesn’t hold on to something.

He grabs onto a protruding rock on one side and tries with all his might to swing his body to one side to a place where he can get a foothold again. But then both the two men charge forward, and while one tries to pull his hands off the rock, the other one coldly kicks him in the face to force him to let go of his hold.

In his desperation, Johan grabs the guy’s foot with one hand as he kicks again.

The next moment, there is a resounding bang from up at the edge above. A bullet hits a rock nearby and sings into the air.

“There’s his mate! Kick the dirtbag off!” shouts the thug who is vainly trying to get Johan’s hands off the rock.

Again, the bang of a gunshot echoes and again the bullet sings away. The red-face lets out a curse. He charges with bitter determination towards Johan. He himself grabs a rock and sinks halfway down the steepness so that he can get to Johan's face properly below.

Johan pulls his face away, but he receives such a tremendous kick to the back of his head that he falls into a swoon for a moment. His hands become limp and the next moment he feels himself falling.

The girl up there on the ridge has fetched her horse and she is now leading him quickly between the stones. In places, the rocks are so steep and smooth that she has to jerk him forcefully before he slips off there. For the third time, she stops, holds her panting breath, and shoots at the men below. She shoots with purpose, because the cold-blooded cruelty she had seen there had made her blood boil.

But she shoots too high each time.

The two men are now running as fast as they can to their companions. One of these men who was just unconscious, is now sitting upright and feeling his jaw in a distracted way.

The stranger has disappeared over the abyss and the four men are now also out of sight from where the girl is.

She finally reaches a kind of level area on the slope, where she can get on the horse. Before she does so, she fires another shot between the trees where she thinks the four men must be. Then she tries to find a way down.

But it soon becomes too steep for the horse again and she has to turn back. After that, she has no other choice than to ride completely around a small round hill and emerge at the bottom of the waterfall. She is convinced that the stranger is lying at the foot of the cliff, either stone dead or extremely seriously injured.

Anxiously, she looks at the foot of the cliff when she rides into the opening with her horse. Then she looks higher up and the next moment she almost screams it out.

CHAPTER 2

Halfway down the abyss, a man hangs with his head down. Above him, the wind sways a mopane bush that grows out of a rock crevice, back and forth. The girl immediately knows what the position is. The man must be unconscious, otherwise he would not be hanging like that.

A cold fear grips her that the unknown man might already be dead.

But she also knows immediately what she has to do to save him if it is possible. When she saddled her horse, she was too hasty to take off the halter. She now studies the cliff carefully, then she jumps off the horse, unfastens the halter, with a long thong attached to it that is tied around the horse's neck, and runs to the side of the cliff.

It is possible to climb up there, along the edge of the slope where the cliff begins, and then with a cross ledge to get to just above the place where the man is hanging.

Without hesitation, she climbs up the steepness. Her rifle swings against her back, with the leather strap around her chest, because she is afraid that the guy's attackers might reappear.

The climb becomes difficult and dangerous as time goes on. In one place she has to hang on to the tip of a protruding rock and swing her feet around the corner to find a foothold in a crevice. Eventually, however, she reaches the rock ledge and then slides along it until she reaches the crevice where the man's foot is caught.

She is grateful to see that the bush growing in the crevice is firmly fixed and has a thick trunk. She grabs onto it and finds a foothold close to the man's face.

A shudder goes through her when she sees how he is covered in blood. He must have lost a lot of blood. Quickly she hooks the halter around his shoulders, pulls his upper body up slightly so that he is not hanging so down with his head, and ties the end of the thong to the trunk of the shrub in the crevice.

Grimbeek is unconscious. Blood is running from his nose and a wound on his head. But his breathing is strong, and she sees no fatal injury to him.

After she has tied him up, she stands for a moment to catch her breath and gasp. Her face is covered in sweat. She wipes it off with her sleeve.