

THE ALLEY OF TEARS



DEWALD BRINK
AND
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by

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SUMMARY

In the heart of South Africa's untamed Lowveld during the late 19th century, a wilderness teeming with gold-seekers, outlaws, and predators sets the stage for an epic tale of justice and survival. Amid the rugged beauty and lawlessness, *The Alley of Tears* unfolds with relentless tension and high stakes.

Johan Grimbeek, a stoic tracker with unmatched skills and a thirst for vengeance, embarks on a perilous mission. His heart burns with cold resolve as he hunts a murderer in this untamed land. But fate intervenes when Johan encounters Magda du Preez, a fiercely determined woman navigating the treacherous paths of the Lowveld for her own urgent mission. Their worlds collide in a tale of daring escapes, mysterious disappearances, and intense battles, both external and internal. Magda's quest to reach Barberton, fraught with dangers from both man and beast, mirrors Johan's relentless pursuit of justice. Along the way, betrayal, greed, and the haunting weight of the past challenge their endurance and trust. As tensions rise and allegiances shift, they find themselves pitted against enemies who will stop at nothing to protect their secrets.

As Johan navigates through Colt's Creek's murky underworld of gold diggers and violent adventurers, he crosses paths with enigmatic allies and ruthless foes. Meanwhile, Magda's journey reveals her unyielding courage as she faces dangers that threaten not just her survival, but her very cause. Together, they uncover a mystery tied to old grudges, family secrets, and the glittering yet perilous lure of gold.

Set against the sweeping backdrop of the bushveld, *The Alley of Tears* is a gripping adventure that explores themes of redemption, revenge, and the indomitable human spirit. Will Johan's thirst for retribution blind him to what truly matters? Can Magda's determination carry her through when the odds are stacked against her? In this deadly game of survival, only the strongest will prevail.

EXTRACT

When the horse has finished drinking, Grimbeek also goes to drink. He sits on his knees and scoops the water with his hands.

No gun can be seen with Grimbeek. However, he wears a hip bandolier and two revolvers around his waist. He is so used to the revolvers that they are like part of his clothing. The cartridge band and the revolvers are also of the same dark color as his trousers, and that is perhaps the reason why the bearded fellow does not notice it in time.

“Friend, put your hands in the air!” a voice suddenly thinks commandingly behind Grimbeek where he is sitting and drinking water between the reeds and high grass that he has pushed aside.

Grimbeek lets the water that he has scooped up fall back into the stream and looks around.

“Hands up! Didn’t you hear? Hands up or you’ll eat lead!” the fellow repeats his command.

Grimbeek slowly raises his hands to his shoulders.

“Stand up. I won’t tolerate any tricks, hear. I don’t want anything from you, just your horse. Stand up, I say!”

Grimbeek stands up slowly. The fellow behind him, who is holding a gun in his hands, now only sees the two revolvers. He is so startled that he cries out cursing.

2. THE ALLEY OF TEARS

CHAPTER 1

“And are you planning to marry her if you get her in your hands?” The older man with the lean, tanned face looks at his younger companion with a sparkle in his sharp, black eyes as he asks him the question. They are riding side by side on horseback down a slope, between bushveld trees.

The younger man, with an unkempt, bushy, black beard on his face, grins.

“Don’t know,” he says with a shrug. “If she’s as beautiful as the old fellow says, you might think about it, and if she’s going to inherit so much money. But what I think it’s all just crazy stories that the old geezer is proclaiming. If I have to say, I would say he’s getting childish!”

“How can you say that? He himself showed you the map and the piece of gold ore too. And you say the map is very detailed... Look here, Swarts...”

The older man suddenly pulls his horse in, and his small, black eyes remain maliciously on the face of the bearded, younger fellow for a moment. “You mustn’t start proclaiming other stories now. You didn’t say before that you think he’s getting childish...”

“Yes, well, but I’m just joking now,” Swarts explains hastily. “I do believe that it’s a real map that one, that the old man showed me. He must have quite a bit of knowledge of things because he’s been involved in gold seeking for more than fifteen years, since before 1870, in a loose and fast manner. But as for his wonderful granddaughter who supposedly disappeared so completely... I don’t know...” He shrugs his shoulders and grins again.

They ride on, neither of them speaks for a while. They keep to the thickets along the way, not in the open part higher up against the mountainside. In places, the horses struggle to make their way through the thick bushes, and then the two riders are forced to ride one behind the other. When they ride next to each other again a while later, the older man, a lean, bony fellow who sits strong and upright on his horse, with his heavy revolvers on a bandolier around his hips, says:

“And how does the old man say his granddaughter looks now, finally? He’s supposedly never even seen her?”

“Well, he showed me a picture of her mother, and he says she should look like that. He says she will be light-skinned and have blue eyes. He says his daughter that is the girl’s mother was supposedly the most beautiful maiden in the Eastern Transvaal. But he’s heard that she’s already dead. Now the old man is desperately searching for his granddaughter, because he supposedly has bitter remorse because he chased his own daughter away from home back then.”

The older man does not respond to this. His thoughts, grim and sardonic, wander far away.

He wonders if the old man they are talking about and to whom they are on their way, knows that he actually has two granddaughters. Would he ever know that his wonderful daughter she was definitely the “most beautiful maiden in the Eastern Transvaal” ran away from her first husband and married another fellow? Would he ever know that she’s already dead?

Would he ever dream what has become of the two children, the one with the first husband and the other with the second husband? Would he ever dream that his daughter’s first husband is currently riding here on horseback, on his way to him, with the aim of getting that mysterious map in his hands?

The old man has offered great riches to anyone who can trace his missing granddaughter. Sometimes he has added that he will give the riches and his granddaughter to such a man...

There is an almost sardonic chuckle on the tanned face of the rider when he thinks about this. The old man has said to people more than once that if he should ever run into his “cursed son-in-law”, he would shoot him dead like a dog.

We shall see, we shall see, thinks the lean, dark-haired rider with the tanned face.

The two riders advance slowly through the bushes. They now stop in the shade of a thorn tree, and the older man takes a piece of paper out of his pocket on which a rough drawing is made.

“I think it must be along here,” he says. “There’s a black settlement up there. You can inquire. Find out carefully, hear! whether the old man

and the other fellow usually carry weapons. I personally think the camp must be just around the corner. I wouldn't like them to see us, so find out from the blacks how far it is. If it is nearby, we will have to stay here in the ravine until it is dark."

When he has finished speaking, he looks his companion straight in the face for a moment. Swarts seems hesitant.

"If the blacks see me, and something happens at the camp if there's a shooting or something, then they only know me..." he objects.

"Nonsense," it comes sharply. "There will be no shooting if it is not necessary. And if it is necessary, you will not have to participate in it. I don't take cowards with me for important work. Go do what I tell you now."

Swarts impatiently pulls his horse aside and rides up the slope to where the few black huts stand.

He returns half an hour later.

The other man has dismounted and stands in the shade of the tree waiting. He is a tall, lean man of more than middle age. He shifts the heavy revolver bandolier with two revolvers in it, around his middle. Over a shirt he wears a waistcoat made of knitted leather, and the points of his coffee-colored trousers disappear into short black gaiters.

Swarts says.

"It's just around the corner. And the old man is alone at the moment. The other fellow who is digging for gold with him here has gone to Mac-Mac. But the blacks expect him back any time now."

"I see," says the older man. He stands frowning for a moment and thinks. "If he comes from Mac-Mac," he says after a while, "he must come down the mountainside there. He must go through the stream down there anyway." He points with his hand a mile or so to the right. Again, he stands for a moment and thinks, then he says suddenly. "No, look here, the best plan will be for you to ride back. Go stop him. If one waits for him here, things could go wrong. I'm thinking now that he might come from that side too, and then he'll be at the camp before we can get him in our hands. You ride back now, even if it's to the bottom of the mountain flat near Mac-Mac. You must get him in sight somewhere. That will give you plenty of chance to lay an ambush for him. Take his horse from him. That is all that is necessary. And then let

him walk back to Mac-Mac. That will give me enough time...”

“Okay, if you think so...” The younger fellow seems more satisfied with this instruction. Laying an ambush for a man and forcing him to give you his horse is less dangerous than having to rob someone of his possessions by force and perhaps knocking him unconscious in the process or perhaps even shooting him because the old man here in the ravine will probably fight like a tiger before he hands over that map. He might want to shoot, and then... The young man’s eyes wander to the revolvers at the sides of his older companion. This man is very fond of using those revolvers, and he is also as fast and as ruthless as a mamba with them.

When Johan Grimbeek rides away from Mac-Mac, he knows that he cannot be back at Uncle Lodewyk Malan’s camp before long after sunset. He doesn’t feel particularly restless about it, although the world around here is still full of wild animals. The moon will be up early enough, and besides, by that time he will be able to keep to the open world, away from the ravines.

The sun is still shining warm now, although it is already starting to sink low, and Grimbeek quickly becomes absorbed in his thoughts.

Why does Uncle Lodewyk so firmly believe that she has blue eyes and light hair, he wonders... A girl with laughing, blue eyes and rich, gleaming, golden-yellow hair.

Johan Grimbeek sees her in his imagination, as if she is riding alongside him here on horseback, and perhaps it is for that reason that, a while later, he is not as sharply on his guard as he would otherwise have been. He thinks continuously about the girl and about Uncle Lodewyk, and about the tragic mistakes that people can sometimes make in life. What joy could the old man not have had if he had not made the mistake back then of chasing his daughter away from him. Now she is dead, and now the old man lives only in the hope that he will one day be able to trace his granddaughter. He has recently become somewhat troublesome about it because not only he, Grimbeek, but everyone who runs into the old man, is spoken to about the matter and asked to help search.

Grimbeek smiles when he thinks of what his elderly old friend and godfather would say if he were to arrive at their camp with the girl one day!

At an opening between the thick bushes, he guides his horse through and down to the stream in the ravine. He thinks that it was perhaps foolish of him to ride miles away for the umpteenth time to investigate a wild rumor about someone who would know where the girl is, just to satisfy Uncle Lodewyk Malan again.

Vonk struggles down the sloping, steep bank. His nostrils flare wide, and he jerks his head impatiently to get to the water.

A distance from Grimbeek, the bearded, younger man, who has been watching him since he came down from the mountainside, has pulled his horse behind a thick bush and hooked the reins to a branch. Hastily he ties a cloth over part of his face and quickly creeps closer to where Grimbeek has descended the bank.

Vonk and Grimbeek are already at the water. Swarts sees how he takes out the bit to let the animal drink comfortably. Then he creeps quickly, silently, bent over, closer.

When the horse has finished drinking, Grimbeek also goes to drink. He sits on his knees and scoops the water with his hands.

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Grimbeek stands up slowly. The fellow behind him, who is holding a gun in his hands, now only sees the two revolvers. He is so startled that he cries out cursing.

“Such filth... Oh, you’re a revolver shooter, eh!”

“Yes,” says Grimbeek equally friendly. “But look here, old fellow...” The next moment he swings around and throws himself flat on the ground, and in the same fraction of a second fire bursts from both of their revolvers.

He is lying half on his back, with his elbows on the ground and the revolvers in his two hands. In one movement, so fast that the eye could hardly follow it, he simultaneously lifted both revolvers from their sheaths, and simultaneously, like a single bang, the two shots fell.

The gun in the hands of the man behind him, bellows, but the shot is fired almost straight up in the air because the two bullets have already hit the man in the chest and thrown him backward when he thinks of shooting. He now collapses with a gurgling sound.

Grimbeek is pale in the face when he slowly gets into a sitting position and then begins to stand up, with the revolvers still ready in his hands. He now sees that it is not necessary for him to hold a revolver in his hand any longer because the man lying there in the long grass is already dying. One bullet is through his heart, the other through his lungs.

There is no self-reproach with Grimbeek. If he had not been quick enough and had not shot the man dead on the spot, the fellow would most likely have shot him down in cold blood with the gun. Such things have already happened, even when the loot was less than such a lovely animal as Vonk, with saddle and bridle and everything.

Grimbeek is a tall, lithely built young man. He walks with supple, easy movements to the dying man. If the fellow could still see, he would have seen a few strong feet in soft shoes with knitted kudu hide-over leather, right next to him, then a few short gaiters, also of some kind of buckskin, with the hair still on it. From the gaiters come the legs of a dark-colored velvet pair of trousers, and then that black revolver cartridge belt around his waist can be seen. But the fellow’s eyes are already stiffening in the grip of death. The thumbs of Grimbeek’s two strongly built hands are hooked behind the bandolier. He stands looking down at the bearded face with a grim expression in his eyes.

“Now you won’t be able to ride Vonk, old friend,” he says. “I’m afraid you won’t be able to climb on any horse’s back here on earth anymore.” Grimbeek looks around cautiously. Perhaps the fellow has a partner nearby... Then from far between the bushes the snorting of a horse

comes towards him.

He walks to Vonk and leads him carefully, cautiously, in that direction. He sees the dead man's horse tied to the bush. And then Grimbeek stands dead still and ponders for a long time.

The man has a horse then, and a darned beautiful horse at that! For what reason would he have wanted Vonk?

And then, almost without reason, a sharp, stinging unrest suddenly comes into his heart about Uncle Lodewyk. He wonders... and without reasoning further, he makes a decision. He is going to leave the dead man right here and set off to Uncle Lodewyk.

He walks quickly to the other horse, unsaddles it, and gives it a rap so that it runs into the bushes. It will be night soon, and Grimbeek wouldn't like to leave the horse tied up here to be left to the mercy of lions and tigers or hyenas.

"Come Vonk, get moving young one," he urges his horse on. He does not know why he suddenly feels so restless about Uncle Lodewyk.

The moon is shining brightly when Grimbeek later avoids the rugged ravine with a wide turn and rides up the edge of the ridge before descending to the stream where Uncle Lodewyk's camp is.

The horse pushes up the little rise, but when they get to the top, Grimbeek suddenly pulls him to a standstill.

Down in the ravine, from here, one should have seen the campfire in front of Uncle Lodewyk's tent. But there is no fire or light.

Grimbeek wonders why this is.

Why does the absence of the old man's usual evening fire, or any light in the tent, seem so wrong, ominous, to him?

Perhaps he just feels nervous and tense because of the incident earlier. Besides, perhaps the old man just didn't light a fire or light because he's been waiting for him, Johan, all this time.

However, the moon is shining very brightly, and it may just be that the old man is busy in the moonlight at the alluvial gold washing in the stream. But Johan doubts it.

It is also still too early in the evening for the old man to be in bed already unless he feels sick.

Johan rides on, along the rocky side of the ridge. Below is a flat low area. On the other side of the level area, there are a few large, leafy wild

fig trees, and under one of them stands Uncle Lodewyk's tent. Johan sees how patches of moonlight penetrate through the leaves and fall on the white tent.

But it is so quiet at the tent that more and more unrest comes into Grimbeek's heart. An atmosphere of disaster descends around him. He is still quite a distance from the tent when he suddenly stops again and listens attentively.

His heart begins to pound fast. Far away he hears a rhythmic clatter, like that of horses' hooves. He hears it clearly only once and then not again. The sudden howling of a jackal nearby, immediately makes his hand rest on the butt of one of his revolvers.

There are still few other bushveld night sounds, but Grimbeek hears from far away, perhaps miles from here, a deep oomph-oomph sound the roar of a lion. Then it is dead silent.

He listens, but does not hear that clatter of horses' hooves again.

Then he pushes Vonk on, and close to the tent he slides off the horse with his face towards the tent and his eyes and ears strained to pick up any suspicious sound or quick movement.

"Uncle Lodewyk!" he calls loudly, but there is no answer. The only sound he hears is the howling of jackals far and near again, and a shuffling in the high branch corral right here nearby, where Uncle Lodewyk's two pack donkeys are kept at night.

Grimbeek's hands rest on his hips close to the butts of his revolvers as he walks towards Uncle Lodewyk's tent.

The tent flap is closed. He jerks it open and steps back quickly.

"Uncle Lodewyk," he calls again, softer. Still, there is no answer. But when Johan listens, he hears clear breathing inside the tent, and right here at the door he sees Uncle Lodewyk's gun lying. It is completely an unusual, wrong place for the gun...

Johan now quickly walks into the tent, a revolver in his hand. It is quite dark inside, but he immediately sees Uncle Lodewyk lying stretched out.

In a flash, thanks to the moonlight coming in from outside, he also sees that there must have been a fight or something of the kind, judging by the upset state of the stuff inside the tent.

Bedding is lying all over the place. The cabinet of trade goods is

knocked off the stones on which it stood.

But he has no time to look at these things now.

“Uncle Lodewyk!” he exclaims in a hoarse voice as he rushes to the old man and to his knee!

He touches him, and immediately his hand is sticky with blood.

Johan looks around quickly, sees the lamp oil lantern that is also lying on its side, and lights it.

In the light of the lantern, he sees a shiny, dark blood paste on Uncle Lodewyk’s chest. The shirt is pulled halfway away from his chest, but it is soaked with blood.

Uncle Lodewyk breathes with a rattle, and he makes a sound as if he wants to talk.

Johan feels carefully on his chest, at the strange paste that lies on it. Then he sees that green leaves from a tree are stuck in the sticky blood on the chest.

He knows immediately that those leaves were placed there in an attempt to stop the bleeding. It is a well-known first aid method to try to stop bleeding.

Uncle Lodewyk apparently has a bullet wound in the chest, underneath those leaves.

Johan’s throat wants to constrict with emotion and cold fury. There the horse hooves that he heard clattering down in the ravine... Is that perhaps the person responsible for this deed?

Poor Uncle Lodewyk! Dear Uncle Lodewyk...

For a fleeting moment, Johan’s burning vengefulness makes him think of just leaving Uncle Lodewyk lying here and jumping on his horse and chasing the person who rode away down in the ravine.

But he thinks better of it. Perhaps there is still something to be done for Uncle Lodewyk. Perhaps he can still ward off death.

Carefully, Johan feels the exposed, bloodied chest. He lifts the leaves from the wound. The leaves will not help to stop the bleeding inside the chest cavity in any case.

A paralyzing feeling comes into his heart when he sees the wound. It is right above the heart. A rib is broken, and the bullet has penetrated inward. Johan puts his hand under the old man’s back. The bullet is not out there.

It is therefore probably a revolver bullet.

When he pulls his hand out, Uncle Lodewyk gives a groan. He opens his eyes and looks into Johan's face. His eyes are faint, but he stares at Johan. It is at first as if he does not know him. But then he calls his name in a whisper.

"Johan..."

He tries to get something else out, but Grimbeek makes him quiet. In the back of the trade goods case is a bottle of brandy, and Grimbeek immediately brings it out and lets a little of it run between the old man's lips.

Grimbeek pulls a blanket closer and pushes it under his head. He takes other blankets and makes the old man warm. He knows that this is one of the first things one must do when someone is badly injured or has lost a lot of blood.

Grimbeek looks around in the tent more carefully now. He cannot yet figure out exactly what has happened here. Uncle Lodewyk's gun is lying near the door of the tent. There is an empty shell in the magazine. It has therefore been fired.

For a moment Grimbeek stands outside and listens. All he hears, however, is the roar of lions far away. He goes back to Uncle Lodewyk. The fleeting thought that Uncle Lodewyk might have shot himself is completely dispelled when, a little later, as if revived by the brandy, Uncle Lodewyk mentions Johan's name again and then manages to whisper.

"He... he was too fast for me... Sly... wanted to steal goods here in the tent... As fast as... lightning... with his revolver."

"Shush, Uncle Lodewyk," Johan admonishes him. "Just tell me one thing. Was he on horseback?"

"Yes... he... he..."

"Quiet now, Uncle Lodewyk," Johan commands.

The thought of chasing after the villain who is responsible for this inhuman misdeed grabs Johan again. He is already starting to walk towards Vonk. But then he turns around again. Uncle Lodewyk desperately needs help. Perhaps his life can still be saved...

A while later, Grimbeek gets the fire going outside and puts a pot of venison that is standing there on to cook some soup for Uncle Lodewyk.