

A woman in a blue Victorian-style dress with a high collar and intricate jewelry holds a three-arm candelabra with lit candles. The background is dark and atmospheric, with a faint image of a city street at night visible at the bottom.

SHADOWS OF LIONS

*THE TIP-TOP OF HIGH SOCIETY
IS NO PLACE FOR A LADY*

SCARLETTE PIKE

© 2021 Jamie Jensen

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form whatsoever, whether by graphic, visual, electronic, film, microfilm, tape recording, or any other means, without prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief passages embodied in critical reviews and articles.

This is a work of fiction. The characters, names, incidents, places, and dialogue are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. The opinions and views expressed herein belong solely to the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions or views of Cedar Fort, Inc. Permission for the use of sources, graphics, and photos is also solely the responsibility of the author.

Published by Sweetwater Books, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.

2373 W. 700 S., Springville, UT 84663

Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., www.cedarfort.com

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020950067

Cover design by Shawnda T. Craig

Cover design © 2021 Cedar Fort, Inc.

Edited and typeset by Valene Wood, Hali Bird, and Amy Carpenter

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

Chapter One

Catherine



I subconsciously held my shoulder while my eyes stared at nothing and all my loved ones tore the energy of the room apart with arguing.

“I could barely get her here! She is determined to go home!”

My eyes came into focus a bit and rested on the grandfather clock in this African home. It still baffled my mind that my dear friend Chief Sechele could have somehow retrieved this large, fragile clock from the coast all the way to this interior without a single crack or dent in it. It must have travelled via oxcart, as we had, across this land with no roads and here it remained unscratched. The terrain was unruly and oxen weren't the most careful in the animal kingdom. How had it arrived here unscathed?

“Being ‘home’ nearly killed her. Her mother attacked her daily and kept her down!”

My friend Mary had gathered all of this with no confessions from me. Mary Livingstone had been my companion and mentor in my transition to African life from London. She had been on the boat here with the Captain and I, and had seen in me a greatness I still couldn't see.

I tilted my head. Had she foreseen that the captain and I would become a couple? My mind travelled back and retrieved several encounters with her and Captain Ashmore. I felt my head straighten and nod.

Yes. She had.

“How will it help our situation if she returns to England?”

That phrase caught one of the wandering tendrils of my attention. “Our situation.” How was this “our situation”? I arrived in Africa to escape a horrific home, and my mother, the attacker of my peace, had still found me out. She offered a reward for my return (which I was sure she would never pay), and the grappling over it had triggered a violent battle—one of which we were all the recent survivors.

All the inhabitants of my little African village, Kolobeng, had made valiant attempts to protect me and keep me safe. A group of men, precious to me, had surrounded my home in order to protect me, Mary, and the children. The chief’s own little son, Motsatsi, who had become my dear friend and fierce protector, had stood between me and the Boer men who made it into my home. Though he was just a boy, he had kept them off beautifully.

Until he couldn’t. Until they beat him sore and took him away. My heart ached for Motsatsi and the heartbroken face he had made when he realized there was no escape.

My throat constricted at the memory that had happened mere hours ago. He was only a little boy!

“It’s even worse than that,” I heard the Captain say as I tuned back into the present. “Catherine confided in me that it was her mother who killed her father. Catherine’s father had confronted Lady Kensington about a family of servants she had starved. It is as bad as it can be.”

I instinctively looked up to see the reactions in the room. They hadn’t known.

In this moment, I didn’t react to the reminders of my sweet father like I usually did. So often the mere whiff of a memory would send me spiraling into a grief so severe and drowning that it pained my stomach for hours. But now, after watching Motsatsi being taken, I had fresh worries that crowded my mind.

“Bah!” Chief Sechele scoffed. “How could an English lady fight off a grown man to the point of death?”

“Poison,” the Captain said. “She is supposedly extremely skilled in concocting them. After hearing the story, I suspect that is how she keeps Catherine’s brother at bay. He must be in the house somewhere but kept sick enough that Lady Kensington can use the estate and money as she wishes.”

Allan. My twin brother. He had to be alive. The Captain had to be right; he must be in the house with her. How I missed him. There must surely be some

sort of cosmic connection between twins that would notify the one if the other had died. I was counting on my instincts, feeble as they felt.

“The best thing would surely be to send her away secretly.”

I had survived so many attacks from my mother, and of so many different types. No one understood her malice. As much as I shared, no one could really relate to the deeper levels of her hatred. How could they? Civilized society was not ready to understand. There was no help for families as broken and destructive as mine.

So how did I keep surviving?

I had survived my mother, a sea voyage, and a trip to the interior. Only a few weeks ago I had also survived a horrific lion attack, and now the Boer attack.

Why did I keep living?

My eyes had dropped down to the thick mahogany rug, but at this thought they snapped back up to the grandfather clock.

How do such delicate things like this clock and I keep surviving? How was it even fair?

“We could send her with some of my men to Kuruman.”

The room seemed to have come to an agreement on what to do with me.

“No,” I said tiredly. At the smallest sound from me, I had all their attention, since for the past thirty minutes I had not uttered a sound. “No, your men are needed to go after your kidnapped son and the other children that were taken, Chief Sechele, not to escort me anywhere. Captain Ashmore is more than capable of taking me to the coast on his ship, the *Madras*, and from there taking me home to England.”

“Catherine, you are not in a physical condition to travel to the coast.”

That was David Livingstone, husband to Mary. He was a doctor and that is why he was addressing my physical condition, but I knew his objections ran deeper. He was a protector of the innocent and had a tender heart for the broken. He was a father, a missionary, and was obnoxiously right most of the time.

But not this time.

My physical condition was more than acceptable for travel. It had endured much worse, and I told him so.

“That doesn’t mean it could endure this, especially after a lion bite,” he recounted.

I was tired, so all I did was look to my friend Mebalwe.

He had travelled with me on my first trek to the interior. We didn't speak the same language but we had experienced much together. A true African warrior, he had been protecting Mary since she was a little girl.

"Mebalwe, you were with us on the trek—you saw how I did and you witnessed when the ox stepped on my hand."

The Captain translated for me since he spoke Sechuana from his earlier travelers to Kolobeng. Mebalwe nodded.

"Do you think I can survive this trip?"

After the Captain translated, Mebalwe stared at me.

The trill of Sechuana off his tongue sounded in my favor.

"Mebalwe says your warrior heart will not fail the travel but may fail facing your second lion."

So only partially in my favor.

"But Mebalwe, the odds of being attacked again by a lion are miniscule!"

"He does not mean a lion you touch with your hands," Chief Sechele piped in. "He means a lion you face with your mind. He means your mother."

I halted at that a bit.

"It will be hard," I conceded. The room seemed to relax a little at my confession. "But if I can do it, I can bring back enough money to buy Motsatsi back from the Boers. That was the source of all this trouble—money. If I can confront my mother and win, I can bring my inheritance back to Africa and purchase him if he has not already been rescued by your men."

I paused. "I will only be a secondary plan, for they may bring Motsatsi back tomorrow and all will be well."

"And if they do, Catherine, you would be on a boat heading to the most dangerous place for you. We would not want to do that to you," David said.

"I know," I said. And I wanted to stay and hope for Motsatsi's return. I wanted to stay and see his broad smile, so much like his father's. I wanted to grow old here with this village as my people and the Captain as my soul mate. I stared at all their faces for a moment. "But facing her will surely benefit me instead of running."

I stood. The Captain moved to help me but I didn't need it. My chin raised.

"I have survived a lion attack. When he was coming at me, I knew I could run to the left or to the right, but doing so could have led him to the children or prolonged my agony by being chased."

I looked to Mary and she was tearing up. That wasn't like her.

"There is no question the lion would outrun me. There is no use running. It's incredibly painful, but it taught me that confronting my mother in a likewise manner, running straight at her, will bring freedom to many. And if along the way I can free my brother and gain enough money to buy Motsatsi back, I surely will."

Mebalwe nodded his head.

I locked eyes with my captain.

He straightened his back and his eyes turned harder.

"The hard truth is, as much as you all love me and I love you, it is not right to restrain me here. Keeping me from making the choice I believe to be right would be behaving just as my mother does."

I could see that this comment irked them, but I continued.

"You must allow me my agency. I will find a way to the coast if you are unwilling to escort me, but do not limit me. It is not right."

They all nodded their agreement—all except for the Captain, who now looked to the floor.

Chief Sechele stepped toward me. He looked so sad, so very cast down. He was still in his traditional clothing from the battle, but I knew he would soon be longing for his three-piece British suits. He so loved everything English. He sighed deeply and then looked into my soul with those deep brown eyes.

"If you feel you are right to go, then I will encourage you to go. You have my blessing. But there is one thing you must remember in what you are about to face." He picked up my loose hand and placed it in his own.

"You are us. You are Bakwena. You were born to be in the heart of us. I feel it. And we will be incomplete until you return."

A tear dropped from my eyes at his tenderness and I nodded my head.

"I am Catherine of the Bakwena."

He nodded back and gave me a sad smile.

"One more thing: I feel certain the Captain will assist you, but Mebalwe will accompany you as well. We are capable of handling his responsibilities until he returns."

I started to protest but he shook his head in finality.

The end of our conversation had arrived. I looked around this room that was full of acceptance and loving people. I would need to go without this, at least for a time. My throat knotted and closed off. I couldn't say a word.

You've Just Finished your Free Sample

Enjoyed the preview?

Buy: <http://www.ebooks2go.com>