

LEGEND of the OUTENIQUA

Essay by **Susanna Scheepers** * - Std 9 pupil of Outeniqua High School, 1931

Long, long ago, when the mountains we now know as the Outeniquas were as yet unnamed, a little Hottentot kraal nestled in the dreaming valley at their feet. These Hottentots lived, like all the others, chiefly by their hunting; and when they were not busy chasing after deer with their bows and arrow, they lay in the sun smoking dagga in their long-stemmed pipes while their wives did what work there was to do.

In this kraal there dwelt a man who was very different from the others. They lived as beasts, beating their many wives daily, and killing more for sport than for food. But this man did not hunt, because he thought it cruel and he never hurt those who were weaker than himself. He lived by taking out the wild honey on the tree-clad hillside. Thus in time he came to be called "Outeniqua" meaning "Bearer of Honey".

Now the headman of the kraal had a daughter, who was called "The Watcher of the Little Calves" because she had herded the calves since childhood. This maiden was comely as the valley when blessed by the Moon Spirit and more gentle of heart than the doe. And although she was sought in marriage by all the men of the kraal, she loved but one – Bearer of Honey.

One day the Bad Spirit, who dwelt always in the unknown places, peeped across the shoulder of the mountain after the sun had set (for this Bad Spirit never ventured out in the daylight). And it chanced that his wicked eye fell upon the Watcher of the Little Calves hastening homewards with her charges. And seeing her he greatly desired her.

On the morrow, as the maiden sat minding her charges on the hillside, he resolved to carry her off. Leaning far out of the cave on top of the tallest peak of the mountain, in which he lay hidden, the Bad Spirit blew dense clouds of dagga smoke into the afternoon air. The smoke descended upon the mountain like a pall; it rolled down into the valley in grey waves' it sent the people cowering into their huts for very fear. Under cover of this, the Bad Spirit swooped down upon the terrified maiden and carried her off to his cave against the sky.

Soon the mist cleared away and the day hurried on before the pursuing night. Golden sunset faded to grey dusk, merged into velvety darkness, but the Watcher of the Little Calves came not. Bearer of Honey wept and prayed to the Moon Spirit for help. But alas! She had fled from the Heavens, for at night the Evil Spirit is strong. Only her daughters, the stars, gleamed coldly down upon him. But love is stronger than fear and Bearer of Honey set out to find his loved one.

Day dawned. A murky day, boding the hot mountain wind, with wisps of cloud clinging about the sun and a diaphanous mist hugging mountain and valley. But the lovers did not return. They would never return again. And the valley folk will tell you that the Watcher of the Little Calves, imprisoned in her cave, weeps still and her tears run down the mountain side in little rivers; and that Bearer of Honey still wanders up and down the hillside calling her dear name which comes echoing back like lost music from afar.

And that is why they call the mountains "Outeniqua".

* Research by K Schultz:

"Susanna's essay appeared in the school magazine and published in the George & Knysna Herald dated 7 October 1931. Susanna went to Pretoria and worked for the Post Office and died aged 21. Her father was a teacher at the Rondevlei school for coloured children and it is surmised he may have heard the legend from a pupil and related it to his daughter. He had also helped establish the apprenticeship school in George. He died when Susanna was in her teens."