

The Induna's Wife

By
Bertram Mitford

*Free*editorial 

THE INDUNA'S WIFE

Chapter One

The Tale of the Red Death.

There was that about the look of your oxen just now, Nkose—shadowed like black ghosts against the mist—that brought back to my old mind a strange and wonderful time. And the night is yet young. Nor will that tale take very long in telling, unless—ah, that tale is but the door opening into a still greater one; but of that we shall see—yes, we shall see.

I have already unfolded to you, Nkose, all that befell at the Place of the Three Rifts, and how at that place we met in fierce battle and rolled back the might of Dingane and thus saved the Amandebeli as a nation. Also have I told the tale of how I gained the White Shield by saving the life of a king, and how it in turn saved the life of a nation. Further have I told how I took for principal wife Lalusini, the sorceress, in whose veins ran the full blood of the House of Senzangakona, the royal House of Zululand, and whom I had first found making strange and powerful *múti* among the Bakoni, that disobedient people whom we stamped flat.

For long after these events there was peace in our land. The arm of Dingane was stretched out against us no more, and Umzilikazi, our king, who had meditated moving farther northward, had decided to sit still in the great kraal, Kwa'zingwenya, yet a little longer. But though we had peace from our more powerful enemies, the King would not suffer the might of our nation to grow soft and weak for lack of practice in the arts of war—oh, no. The enrolling of warriors was kept up with unabated vigour, and the young men thus armed were despatched at once to try their strength upon tribes within striking distance, and even far beyond the limits of the same. Many of these were mountain tribes, small in numbers, but brave and fierce, and gave our fiery youths just as much fighting as they could manage ere wetting their victorious spears in blood.

Now, although we had peace from our more formidable foes, yet the mind of the King seemed not much easier on that account, for all fears as to disturbance from without being removed, it seemed that Umzilikazi was not wholly free from dread of conspiracy within. And, indeed, I have observed that it is ever so, Nkose. When the greater troubles which beset a man, and which he did not create, beset him no longer, does he not at once look around to see what troubles he can create for himself? Whau! I am old. I have seen.

So it was with Umzilikazi. The fear of Dingane removed, the recollection of the conspiracy of Tyuyumane and the others returned—that conspiracy to hand over our

new nation to the invading Amabuna—that conspiracy which so nearly succeeded, and, indeed, would have completely, but for the watchfulness and craft of the old Mosutu witch doctor. Wherefore, with this suspicion ever in the King's mind we, izinduna, seemed to have fallen upon uneasy times. Yet the principal object of dislike and distrust to the Great Great One was not, in the first place, one of ourselves. No councillor or fighting man was it, but a woman—and that woman Lalusini, my principal wife.

"Ha, Untúswa!" would the King say, talking dark, but his tone full of gloomy meaning. "Ha, Untúswa, but thine amahlose (Tutelary spirits) watch over thee well. Tell me, now, where is there a man the might of whose spear and the terror of whose name sweeps the world—whose slumbers are lulled by the magic of the mighty, and who is greater even than kings? Tell me, Untúswa, where is such a man?"

"I think such is to be found not far hence, Great Great One. Even in this house," I answered easily, yet with a sinking fear of evil at heart, for his words were plain in their meaning; my successes in war surpassed by none; my beautiful wife, the great sorceress of the Bakoni, the wandering daughter of Tshaka the Terrible. And his tone—ah, that, too, spoke.

"Even in this house! Yeh bo! Untúswa—thou sayest well," went on the King softly, his head on one side, and peering at me with an expression that boded no good. "Even in this house! Ha! Name him, Untúswa. Name him."

"Who am I that I should sport with the majesty of the King's name?" I answered. "Is not the son of Matyobane—the Founder of Mighty Nations—the Elephant of the Amandebeli—such a man? Doth not his spear rule the world, and the terror of his name—au!—who would hear it and laugh? And is not the bearer of that name greater than other kings—greater even than the mighty one of the root of Senzangakona—whose might has fled before the brightness of the great king's head-ring? And again, who sleeps within the shadow of powerful and propitious magic but the Father and Founder of this great nation?"

"Very good, Untúswa. Very good. Yet it may be that the man of whom I was speaking is no king at all—great, but no king."

"No king at all! Hau! I know not such a man, Father of the World," I answered readily. "There is but one who is great, and that is the King. All others are small—small indeed."

I know not how much further this talk would have gone, Nkose; and indeed of it I, for my part, was beginning to have more than enough. For, ever now, when Umzilikazi summoned me to talk over matters of state, would he soon lead the conversation into

such channels; and, indeed, I saw traps and pitfalls beneath every word. But now the voice of an inceku—or household attendant—was heard without singing the words of sibonga, and by the way in which he praised we knew he desired to announce news of importance. At a sign from the King I admitted the man.

“There are men without, O Divider of the Sun,” he began—when he had made prostration—“men from the kraals of Maqandi-ka-Mahlu, who beg the protection of the King’s wise ones. The Red Magic has been among them again.”

“Ha! The Red Magic!” said Umzilikazi, with a frown. “It seems I have heard enough of such childish tales. Yet, let the dogs enter and whine out their own story.”

Through the door of the royal dwelling, creeping on hands and knees, came two men. They were not of our blood, but of a number whom the King had spared, with their wives and children, and had located in a region some three days to the northward as far as a swift walker could travel. It was a wild and mountainous land—a land of black cliffs and thunderous waterfalls—cold, and sunless, and frowning—a meet abode of ghosts and all evil things. Here they had been located, and, being skilled in ironwork, were employed in forging spear-heads and axes for our nation. They were in charge of Maqandi-ka-Mahlu—a man of our race, and a chief—and who, having been “smelt out” by our witch doctors, the King had spared—yet had banished in disgrace to rule over these iron-workers in the region of ghosts and of gloom.

Their tale now was this: The stuff which they dug from the bowels of the earth to make the metal for our spears and axes was mostly procured in a long, deep, gloomy valley, running right up into the heart of the mountains. Here they bored holes and caves for digging the stuff. But, for some time past, they had not been able to go there—for the place had become a haunt of tagati. A terrible ghost had taken up its abode in the caves, and did a man wander but the shortest space of time from his fellows, that man was never again seen.

He was seen, though, but not alive. His body was found weltering in blood, and ripped, not as with a spear, but as though by the horn of a fierce and furious bull. This had befallen several times, and had duly been reported to the King—who would know everything—but Umzilikazi only laughed, saying that he cared nothing that the spirits of evil chose to devour, from time to time, such miserable prey as these slaves. There were plenty more of them, and if the wizard animals, who dwelt in the mountains, wanted to slay such, why, let them.

But now, the tale which these men told was serious. They could no more go to that place for the terror which haunted it. They had tried keeping together, so that none might fall

a prey to the evil monster—and, for some while, none had. But there came a day when travelling thus, in a body close together, through the gloom of the forest, a sudden and frightful roaring, as of the advance of a herd of savage bulls, burst upon them. Some fell, half dead with fear; others, crying out that they could see fearful shapes, with gigantic horns and flaming eyes, moving among the trees, rushed blindly in all directions. Of thirty men who had entered that dreadful valley, ten only came forth, nor of these could any be persuaded to return and see what had happened to the remaining score. But the seer, Gasitye, who knew no terror of things of the other world, had ventured in. Twenty bodies had he seen—lying scattered—no two together—no, not anywhere two together—and all had died the Red Death.

“And was this by day or by night?” said the King, who had been listening with great attention to this tale.

“By day, O Ruler of the World. While yet the sun was straight overhead,” replied the men.

“Well, I care not,” said Umzilikazi, with a sneer. “Go back now and cause your seer, Gasitye, to charm away that tagati, and that soon, lest I visit him and you with the fate of those who make witchcraft. Shall we keep a dog who cannot guard our house? For to what other use can we turn such a dog? Begone.”

There was despair upon the faces of the two messengers as the meaning of these words became plain to them—and in truth were they between two perils, even as one who travels, and, being beset by a great fire, fleeth before it, only to find himself stopped by a mighty and raging river, whose flood he cannot hope to cross. Yet the man who had spoken, instead of immediate obedience, ventured further to urge his prayer with the intrepidity and hopeless courage of such despair.

“Who are we that we should weary the ears of the Father of the Great?” he went on. “Yet, even a dog cannot entirely guard a house if he is but a small dog, and they who would enter are many and strong. He can but give warning of their approach—and this is what we have done. But the King’s magicians are many and powerful, and ours are weak. Besides, O Black Elephant, how shall metal be procured for the spears of the Great Great One’s warriors, when the place where it is procured is guarded by the horns of the ghost-bulls, who slay all who go in?”

Now, I thought those slaves must indeed have touched the lowest depth of despair and terror, that they dared to use such speech to the King. And upon the countenance of Umzilikazi came that look which was wont to mean that somebody would never behold another sun to rise.

“Enough!” he said, pointing at the two messengers with his short-handled spear. “Return ye hence. For the rest of you—hearken now, Untúswa. Send one half of thy regiment of ‘Scorpions’ under an experienced captain, that they may drive the whole of the people of Maqandi within this Ghost-Valley. Then let them draw a line across the month thereof, and slay every one who shall attempt to escape. So shall the people of Maqandi either slay this ghost or be slain by it. I care not which. Go?”

I rose to carry out the King’s orders, and upon the faces of the grovelling messengers was an awful expression of set, hopeless despair. But, before I could creep through the low doorway, a sign from Umzilikazi caused me to halt. At the same time, a frightful hubbub arose from without—the hubbub of a volume of deep, excited voices—mingled with a wild bellowing, which was enough to make a man deaf.

“I think these ghost-bulls are upon us, too,” said the King, with an angry sneer. “Look forth, Untúswa, and see whether all the world has gone mad.”

Quickly I gained the gate in the woven fence which surrounded the isigodhlo. From far and near people were flocking, while the great open space within the kraal was becoming more and more densely packed; and, making their way through the blackness of the crowd, which parted eagerly to give them passage, came a weird and hideous throng, decked with horrid devices of teeth and claws and the skulls of beasts, their bodies hung with clusters of bleeding entrails and all the fooleries which our izanusi hang about themselves to strike terror into the fearful. These, leaping and bounding in the air, rushed forward till it seemed they were about to bear me down and pour into the isigodhlo itself. But they halted—halted almost in the very gate—and redoubled their bellowings, howling about the Valley of the Red Death and the woe which should come upon our nation. And all the people, their faces turned earthward, howled in response. Looking upon this, I bethought me that there seemed truth in the King’s words, and that all the world had indeed gone mad. Making a sign to the izanusi to desist their howlings—a sign, however, which they did not obey—I returned to the royal presence to report what I had seen.

“Send my guard, Untúswa, to beat back this mob,” said the King. “This must be looked into. As for these”—pointing to the messengers—“custody them forth, for it may be I have further use for them.”

Quickly I went out to issue my orders, and hardly had I done so, than the King himself came forward, and making a sign to myself and two or three other izinduna to attend him, sat himself down at the head of the open space. The while the roars of bonga which greeted his appearance mingled with the howling of the gang of witch doctors and the

shouting and blows of the royal guard, beating back the excited crowd with their sticks and shields. In very truth, Nkose, it seemed as though the whole nation were gathered there.

Suddenly a silence fell upon the multitude, and even the bellowing of the izanusi was stayed, as there came through the throng, creeping upon their hands and knees, nearly a score of men. Their leader was a fine and well-built warrior of middle age, whom I knew as a fierce and fearless fighter, and they had returned from “eating up” the kraal of one of the subject tribes in accordance with the King’s mandate. Now the leader reported having carried out his orders fully. The evil-doers were destroyed, their houses burnt, and their cattle swept off as forfeit to the King.

“It is well,” said Umzilikazi. “Yet not for that ye have obeyed your orders has the whole nation gone mad.”

“There is more to tell, Great Great One,” answered the warrior, upon whose countenance, and upon the countenances of his band, I could descry signs of dread. “In returning we had to pass through the land of Maqandi. Two of us fell to the Red Death.”

“To the Red Death?” repeated the King, speaking softly and pleasantly. “Ha! How and where was that, Hlatusa?”

Then the leader explained how he had allowed two of his followers to wander into the Ghost Valley in pursuit of a buck they had wounded. They had not returned, and when sought for had been found lying some little distance apart, each terribly ripped and covered with blood, as though they had been rolled in it.

“So?” said the King, who had been listening attentively with his head on one side. “So, Hlatusa? And what did you do next, Hlatusa?”

“This, Black Elephant,” answered the man. “Every corner of that tagati place did we search, but found in it no living thing that could have done this—ghost or other. In every cave and hole we penetrated, but nothing could we find, Father of the Wise.”

“In this instance, Father of the Fools,” sneered Umzilikazi, a black and terrible look taking the place of the pleasant and smiling expression his face had hitherto worn. “Yet, stay. What else did you find there? No sign, perchance?”

“There was a sign, Divider of the Sun,” replied Hlatusa, who now considered himself, and they that were with him, already dead. “There was a sign. The hoof-mark as of a huge bull was imprinted in the ground beside the bodies.”

“And wherefore did ye not rout out that bull and return hither with his head, O useless ones?” said the King.

“No bull was it, but a ghost, Great Great One,” replied the leader. And they who had been with him murmured strongly in support of his words.

“Now have I heard enough,” said Umzilikazi. “You, Hlatusa, you I send forth at the head of twenty men, and you return, having lost two—not on the spears of a fighting enemy, but in strange fashion. And no one do ye hold accountable for this, but return with a child-tale about ghosts and the hoof-mark of a ghost-bull. Hamba gahle, Hlatusa. The alligators are hungry. Take him hence!”

With these fatal words the throng of slayers sprang forward to seize him. But Hlatusa waited not to be seized. Rising, he saluted the King; then turning, he stalked solemnly and with dignity to his doom—down through the serried ranks of the people, down through the further gate of the kraal, away over the plain, keeping but two paces in front of his guards. A dead silence fell upon all, and every face was turned his way. We saw him stand for a moment on the brow of the cliff which overhung the Pool of the Alligators, wherein evil-doers were cast. Then we saw him leap; and in the dead silence it seemed we could hear the splash—the snapping of jaws and the rush through the water of those horrible monsters, now ever ravening for the flesh of men.

Chapter Two.

“Behold the Sign!”

The silence was broken by a long, muttering roll of thunder. Masses of dark cloud were lying low down on the further sky, but overhead the sun darted his beams upon us in all the brightness of his mid-day fierceness, causing the great white shield held above the King to shine like polished metal. To many of us it seemed that the thunder-voice, coming as it did, was an omen. The wizard spell of the Red Death seemed to lie heavy upon us; and now that two of ourselves had fallen to its unseen terror, men feared, wondering lest it should stalk through the land, laying low the very pick and flower of the nation. Murmurs—deep, threatening, ominous—rose among the dense masses of the crowd. The King had decreed one victim, the people demanded another; for such was the shape which now those murmurs took.

Umzilikazi sat in gloomy silence. He liked not the sacrifice of good and brave fighting men, and the thing that had happened had thrown him into a dark mood indeed. Not until the murmurs became loud and deafening did he seem to notice them. Then the izanusi, deeming that their moment had come, took up the tale. Shaking their hideous ornaments and trappings, they came howling before the King; calling out that such dark witchcraft was within the nation as could not fail to destroy it. But upon these the Great Great One gazed with moody eyes, giving no sign of having heard them; and I, watching, wondered, for I knew not what was going to follow. Suddenly the King looked up.

“Enough of your bellowings, ye snakes, ye wizard cheats!” he thundered. “I have a mind to send ye all into this Ghost Valley, to slay the thing or be slain by it. Say; why are ye not ridding me of this evil thing which has crept into the nation?”

“That is to be done, Ruler of the World!” cried the chief of the izanusi. “That is to be done; but the evil-doer is great—great!”

“The evil-doer is great—great!” howled the others, in response.

“Find him, then, jackals, impostors!” roared the King. “Whau! Since old Masuka passed into the spirit-land never an izanusi have we known. Only a crowd of bellowing jackal-faced impostors.”

For, Nkose, old Masuka was dead. He had died at a great age, and had been buried with sacrifices of cattle as though one of our greatest chiefs. In him, too, I had lost a friend, but of that have I more to tell.

Now some of the izanusi dived in among the crowd and returned dragging along several men. These crawled up until near the King, and lay trembling, their eyes starting from their heads with fear. And now, for the first time, a strange and boding feeling came over me, as I recognised in these some of the Bakoni, who had been at a distance when we stamped flat that disobedient race, and had since been spared and allowed to live among us as servants.

“Well, dogs! What have ye to say?” quoth the King. “Speak, and that quickly, for my patience today is short.”

Whau! Nkose! They did speak, indeed, those dogs. They told how the Red Death was no new thing—at least to them—for periodically it was wont to make its appearance among the Bakoni. When it did so, it presaged the succession of a new chief; indeed, just such a manifestation had preluded the accession to the supreme chieftainship of Tauane, whom we had burned amid the ashes of his own town. The Red Death was among the darker mysteries of the Bakoni múti.

Not all at once did this tale come out, Nkose, but bit by bit, and then only when the Great Great One had threatened them with the alligators—even the stake of impalement—if they kept back aught. And I—I listening—Hau! My blood seemed first to freeze, then to boil within me, as I saw through the ending of that tale. The darker mysteries of the Bakoni múti!—preluding the accession of a new king? The countenance of the Great Great One grew black as night.

“It is enough,” he said. “Here among us, at any rate, is one to whom such mysteries are not unknown. The Queen of the Bakoni múti—who shall explain them better than she?”

The words, taken up by the izanusi and bellowed aloud, soon went rolling in chorus among the densely-packed multitude, and from every mouth went up shouts for Lalusini—the Queen of the Bakoni múti. Then, Nkose, the whole plot burst in upon my mind. Our witch doctors had always hated my inkosikazi, because she was greater than they; even as they had always hated me, because I had old Masuka on my side, and was high in the King’s favour, and therefore cared nothing about them, never making them gifts. Now their chance had come, since old Masuka was dead and could befriend me no more, and my favour in the King’s sight was waning. Moreover, they had long suspected that of Lalusini the Great Great One would fain be rid; yet not against her had they dared to venture upon the “smelling out” in the usual way, lest she proved too clever for them; for the chief of the izanusi had a lively recollection of the fate of Notalwa and Islwana, his predecessors. Wherefore they had carefully and craftily laid their plot, using for the purpose the meanest of the conquered peoples whose very existence we had by that time forgotten.

Now the shouts for Lalusini were deafening, and should have reached my kraal, which, from where I sat, I could just see away against the hillside. But the shouters had not long to shout, for again a way was opened up, and through it there advanced she whom they sought.

No dread or misgiving was on the face of my beautiful wife, as she advanced with a step majestic and stately as became her royal blood. She drew near to the King, then halted, and, with hand upraised, uttered the “Bayéte” for no prostration or humbler mode of address was Umzilikazi wont to exact from her, the daughter of Tshaka the Terrible, by reason of her mighty birth. Thus she stood before the King, her head slightly thrown back, a smile of entire fearlessness shining from her large and lustrous eyes.

“Greeting, Daughter of the Great,” said Umzilikazi, speaking softly. “Hear you what these say?”

“I have heard them, son of Matyobane,” she answered.

“Ha! Yet they spoke low, and thou wert yet afar off,” went on the King craftily.

“What is that to me, Founder of a New Nation? Did I not hear the quiver of the spear-hafts of Mhlangana’s host long before it reached the Place of the Three Rifts?”

“The Place of the Three Rifts,” growled the King. “Hau! It seems to me we have heard overmuch of that tale. Here, however, is a new tale, not an old one. What of the Red Death? Do these dogs lie?” pointing to the grovelling Bakoni.

Lalusini glanced at them for a moment—the deepest scorn and disgust upon her royal features—the disgust felt by a real magician for those who would betray the mysteries of their nation’s magic, and I, gazing, felt I would rather encounter the most deadly frown that ever rested on the face of the King himself than meet such a look upon that of my inkosikazi, if directed against myself.

“They lie, Great Great One,” she answered shortly.

Then the King turned such a deadly look upon the crouching slaves that these cried aloud in their fear. They vociferated that they were telling the truth, and more—that they themselves had witnessed the operations of the Red Death among their own people; that Lalusini herself and her mother, Laliwa, had actually brought about the destruction of Tauane’s predecessor by its means, and that that of Tauane himself had been decreed—that it always meant the accession of a new ruler.

Now I, sitting near Umzilikazi, knew well what was passing in his mind. As he grew older he had become more and more sour and suspicious. Now he was thinking that he himself was destined to die in blood, even as that Great One, Tshaka, had died, that I, his second fighting induna, his favourite war-councillor, should succeed him, and so win back not only the seat of Matyobane, but the throne of Senzangakona for this sorceress—this splendid daughter of Tshaka the Terrible. So, too, would the death of Tshaka be avenged. And in Umzilikazi's look I could read my own doom, and yet, Nkose, even at that moment not of myself did I think. I had only eyes for the tall, shapely form of my beautiful wife thus put upon her trial before the King and the whole nation. Then Umzilikazi spoke.

"It seems we have spared too many slaves of this race of Abatagati. Take these hence," pointing to the grovelling Bakoni. "The alligators are hungry."

There was a roar of delight from all who heard. The slayers flung themselves upon the shrieking slaves, dragging them away by the heels as they rolled upon the ground imploring mercy, for they were too sick with terror to stand upon their legs. Shouts of hate and wrath followed them as they were hurried away to the pool of death. Indeed, such a rain of blows and kicks fell upon them from those through whose midst they were dragged that it seemed doubtful whether most of them would ever reach the alligators alive. For, Nkose, although in dead silence and pitied by all, Hlatusa had gone through these same people to his doom, he was one of ourselves, and a brave fighter; but these were of an inferior and conquered race, and withal miserable cowards, wherefore our people could not restrain their hatred and contempt.

"Hold!" roared the King, before the slayers had quite dragged these dogs outside the kraal, and at his voice again silence fell upon the throng. "Hold! After feeding upon the flesh of a brave man I will not that my alligators be poisoned with such carrion as this. There may yet be more royal meat for them," he put in, in a lower tone, and with a savage and deadly sneer. Then, raising his voice, "Let these dogs be taken up to yonder hill and burnt."

A roar of delight broke from all, mingled with shouts of bonga as to the King's justice and wisdom. And none were more pleased, I thought, than the slayers, men of fierce and savage mind, who, from constantly meting out torture and death, loved their occupation the more the farther they pursued it.

For awhile there was silence. Away upon a round-topped hillock, within sight of all, the slayers were collecting great piles of dry wood, and upon these the condemned slaves were flung, bound. Then amid the fierce roar and crackle of the flames wild tortured

shrieks burst from those who writhed there and burned, and to the people the shrieks were the pleasantest of sounds, for the terror of the Red Death had strangely fastened upon all minds, and they could not but hold that these who thus died had in some way brought the curse of it upon them.

Again upon the stillness arose a long roll of thunder—this time loud and near, for the great cloud which had been lying low down upon the further sky was now towering huge and black, almost above the very spot where burned those wretches, and the pointed flash which followed seemed to dart in and out of the smoke which rose from the crackling wood pile. The multitude, watching, began to murmur about an omen.

“Talk we now of this thing of evil,” said Umzilikazi, at last. “Thou, Lalusini, art a pestilent witch. For long hast thou been among us. For long has thy greatness been honoured, thou false prophetess, whose promise is as far from fulfilment as ever. Now thou shalt travel the way of those whose predictions are false.”

Black and bitter wrath was in the King’s mind. Hardly could he contain himself, hardly could he speak for rage. He must stop perforce, half choking for breath. And I, Nkose, I sitting there, how did I contain myself, as I was obliged to behold my beautiful wife—whom I loved with a love far surpassing that which I felt for King and nation, or my own life a hundred times over—standing thus awaiting the word which should adjudge her to a shameful and agonising death! Hau! I am an old man now—a very old man—still can I see it before me; the huge kraal like a full moon, the yellow domes of the huts within the ring fences, the great open space in the middle black with listening people, bright with distended eyeballs, and gleaming teeth showing white between parted lips, and away beyond this the heavy smoke-wreath mounting from the glowing wood-pile, the cries and groans of the expiring slaves, the blackness of the thunder cloud, the fierce pale glare of the sun upon the assegais of the armed guard, and upon the blaze of white of the great shield held above the King. Yeh-bo—I see it all—the angry infuriated countenance of Umzilikazi, the dread anxiety on the faces of the other izinduna, which was as the shrinking before a great and terrible storm about to burst. Haul and I see more. I see, as I saw it then, the face of my beautiful wife, Lalusini, Daughter of the Mighty—as she stood there before the Great One, in whose hand was death—proud, fearless, and queenly. And she was awaiting her doom.

Now she threw back her head, and in her eyes shone the light which must oft-times have shone in the eyes of that Mighty One from whom she had sprung. Then she spoke:

“In the hand of the King is death, and even the greatest of those who practise sorcery cannot withstand such—at least not always. But know this, son of Matyo-bane, with my death shall utterly perish all hope of the seat of Senzangakona to thee and thine.

Further, know that, without my help, the very House of Matyobane shall in two generations be rooted up and utterly destroyed, scattered to the winds, and the people of the Amandebeli shall become even as Amaholi to those who are stronger."

Those who heard these words murmured in awe, for over Lalusini's face had come that inspired look which it wore when the spirit of divination was on her. But the King was beside himself with fury, and his features were working as those of a man who has gone mad.

"So!" he hissed. "So! And I sit in my seat only by permission of a witch—by permission of one who is greater than I! So I am no longer a King!" he mocked. "Yet two bulls cannot rule in one kraal. So, sister, thou shalt have a high throne to rule this nation from—as high a throne as had the traitor Tyuyumane before thee." Then raising his voice—for they had hitherto talked in a tone low enough to be heard only by the King and the few who sat in attendance round him—"Make ready the stake—the stake of impalement—for the inkosikazi of Untúswa. Make ready a high throne for the Queen of the Bakoni múti."

Whau, Nkose! I had fought at the side of Umzilikazi ever since I could fight. I had stood beside him when, single-handed, we hunted fierce and dangerous game. I had stood beside him in every peril, open or secret, that could beset the path of the founder of a great and warrior nation, who must ever rule that nation with a strong and iron hand. In short, there was no peril to which the King had been exposed that I had not shared, and yet, Nkose, I who sat there among the izinduna, unarmed and listening, knew that never, since the day of his birth, had he gone in such peril of instant death as at that moment when he sat there, his own broad spear in his right hand, and guarded by the shields and gleaming assegais of his body-guard—pronouncing the words which should consign my inkosikazi to a death of shame and of frightful agony. For the spell of Lalusini's witchcraft lay potent and sweet upon my soul—and I was mad—yet not so mad but that as I sat there unarmed, I could measure the few paces that intervened between myself and the Great Great One—could mark how carelessly he held the broad-bladed spear within his grasp.

Even the slayers—for not all had gone forth to the burning of the Bakoni—even the slayers stared as though half stupefied, hesitating to lay hands upon that queenly form, standing there erect and unutterably majestic. Upon us the spell of the moment was complete. We leaned forward as we sat, we izinduna, and for the rest of us it was as though stone figures sat there watching, not living men of flesh and bones. For myself, I know not how I looked. But how I felt—ah! it was well my thoughts were buried. The armed guards, too, seemed bewildered with awe and amazement. The moment had come. The Red Death had indeed presaged the accession of a new King—but for the

daughter of Tshaka the Mighty, the swift and merciful stroke of a royal spear should end her life, instead of the stake of agony and shame. For myself I cared not. I was mad. The whole world was whizzing round.

Through it all I heard the voice of Lalusini.

“Pause a moment, Ruler of the Great,” she was saying, and her voice was firm and sweet and musical as ever, and utterly without fear. “Pause a moment for a sign.”

She had half turned, and with one hand was pointing towards the ascending smoke-cloud towering above the hill of death. A sharp, crashing peal of thunder shook the world, and the lightning-gleam seemed to flash down right upon the smouldering pile. A silence was upon all as, with upturned faces, King, izinduna, guards, slayers, the whole multitude sat motionless, waiting for what should next befall. Not long had we to wait.

Lalusini stood, her eyes turned skyward, her hand outstretched, her lips moving. To many minds there came the recollection of her as she had thus stood, long ago, singing the Song of the Shield—that glorious war-song which had inspired each of our warriors with the daring of ten, which had saved the day to us at the Place of the Three Rifts. Then there came such a deafening crash that the very earth rocked and reeled; and from the rent thunder cloud a jagged stream of fire poured itself down upon the remainder of the burning wood, scattering logs, sparks, cinders, and the bones of the tortured slaves, whirling them in a mighty shower far and wide over the plain. Those of the slayers who still lingered around the spot lay as dead men.

“Behold the sign, O son of Matyobane!” cried Lalusini, in clear, ringing tones, turning again to the King. “Yonder are the dogs who lied against me. The heavens above would not suffer their very bones to rest, but have scattered them far and wide over the face of the world. No others have met with harm.”

Now all began to cry aloud that indeed it was so; and from the multitude a great murmur of wonderment went up. For then those of our men who had been struck down were seen to rise and walk slowly down towards the kraal—stupified, but alive and unharmed. Then I, who could no longer sit still, came before the King.

“A boon, Great Great One,” I cried. “Suffer me to go and root out this mystery of the Red Death, and slay for ever this evil thing that causeth it; I alone. So shall it trouble the land no more.”

A hum of applause rose from among my fellow izinduna, who joined with me in praying that my undertaking be allowed.

“Ever fearless, Untúswa,” said the King, half sneering; yet I could see that the wrathful mood was fast leaving him. “Yet thou art half a magician thyself, and this thing seems a thing of fearful and evil witchcraft. But hear me. Thou shalt proceed to the Valley of the Red Death, but with no armed force; and before this moon is full thou shalt slay this horror, that its evil deeds may be wrought no more. If success is thine, it shall be well with thee and thine; if failure, thou and thy house shall become food for the alligators; and as for thine inkosikazi, the stake which she has for the time being escaped shall still await her. I have said it, and my word stands. Now let the people go home.”

With these words Umzilikazi rose and retired within the isigodhlo, and, as the rain began to fall in cold torrents, in a very short time the open space was clear, all men creeping within the huts to take shelter and to talk over the marvel that had befallen. But while only the izanusi retired growling with discontent, all men rejoiced that Lalusini had so narrowly escaped what had seemed a certain doom.

Such doom, too, Nkose, had the King himself narrowly escaped; but that all men did not know, it being, indeed, only known to me.

Chapter Three.

An Ominous Parting.

You will see, Nkose, that my times now were stormy and troublesome, and indeed I have ever observed that as it is with nations and people so it is with individuals. There comes a time when all is fair—all is power and strength and richness—then comes a decline, and neither nation nor individual is as before.

Such a time had come upon myself. After the battle of the Three Rifts, when we had rolled back the might of Dingane—a matter, indeed, wherein I had fully borne my part—there had followed a time of great honour and of rest. I was, next to the King, the greatest man in the nation, for Kalipe, the chief fighting induna, was getting on in age, and would fain have seen me in his place, having no jealousy of me. I had taken to wife the beautiful sorceress whose love I had longed to possess; moreover, the King had rid me of Nangeza, whose tongue and temper had become too pestilent for any man to bear aught of. My cattle had increased, and spread over the land, and they who owned me as chief were many, and comprised some of the best born and of the finest fighting men in the nation. Yet this was not to last, and as age and security increased for Umzilikazi, his distrust of me gained too, and now I knew he would almost gladly be rid of me, and quite gladly of Lalusini, my principal wife. Yes. To this had things come. I, Untúswa, the second in command of the King's troops, who had largely borne part in the saving of our nation, who had even been hailed as king by the flower of the Zulu fighting indunas, had now to set out upon a ghost hunt, and, in the event of failure, the penalty hanging over me was such as might have fallen upon a miserable cheat of an izanusi.

Thus pondering I took my way back to my principal kraal, followed by Lalusini and others of my wives and followers who had separated from the throng and joined themselves on to me when the order was given to disperse. Arrived there, I entered my hut, accompanied by Lalusini alone. Then I sat down and took snuff gloomily and in silence. This was broken by Lalusini.

“Wherefore this heaviness, holder of the White Shield?” she said. “Do you forget that you have a sorceress for inkosikazi?”

For a while I made no reply, but stood gazing at her with a glance full of admiration and love. For, standing there, tall and beautiful and shapely, it seemed to me that Lalusini looked just as when I first beheld her in the rock cave high up on the Mountain of Death. Time had gone by since I had taken her to wife, yet she seemed not to grow old as other women do. My two former wives, Fumana and Nxope, were no longer young and pleasing, but Lalusini seemed ever the same. Was it her magic that so kept her? She had

borne me no children, but of this I was rather glad than otherwise, for we loved each other greatly, and I desired that none should come between to turn her love away from me, as children would surely do. For my other wives it mattered nothing, but with Lalusini it was different. I loved her, Nkose, as some of you white people love your women. Whau! Do you not allow your women to walk side by side with you instead of behind? This I have seen in my old age. And those among us who have been at Tegwini (Durban) tell strange tales of white men who go out with their women, that they might load themselves with all the little things their women had bought from the traders. Few of us could believe that, Nkose—the tale is too strange; and yet it was somewhat after this manner that I loved Lalusini—I, the second induna of the King's warriors, I, who since I was but a boy had slain with my own hand more of the King's enemies than I could count. I, moreover, who had known what the ingratitude and malice of women could do, in the person of my first wife, Nangeza, for whom I had sacrificed my fidelity to the King and the nation—even my life itself. But with Lalusini, ah! it was very different. No evil or sullen mood was ever upon her; nor did she ever by look or word give me to understand that a daughter of the House of Senzangakona, the royal house of Zululand, might perchance be greater than even the second induna of a revolted and fugitive tribe, now grown into a nation. Even her counsels, which were weighty and wise, she would put forward as though she had not caused me to win the White Shield—had not saved our nation at the Place of the Three Rifts.

“It seems to me, Lalusini,” I said at last, “it seems to me that in this nation there is no longer any room for us two. I have served Umzilikazi faithfully and well. I have more than once snatched back the life of the King, when it was tottering on the very brink of the Dark Unknown, but kings are ever ungrateful; and now I and my house are promised the death of the traitor. The destruction of the Red Terror, which is my ordeal, is no real trial at all—it is but a trick. The King would be rid of us, and, whether I succeed or whether I fail, the Dark Unknown is to be our portion.”

Lalusini bent her head with a murmur of assent, but made no remark.

“And now I am weary of this ingratitude,” I went on, sinking my voice to a whisper, but speaking in a tone of fierce and gloomy determination. “What has been done before can be done again. I have struck down more of the enemies of our nation than the King himself. One royal spear—one white shield is as good to sit under as another; and—it is time our new nation sat down under its second king.”

“Great dreams, Untúswa,” said Lalusini, with a smile that had something of sadness in it.

“Great acts shouldst thou say rather, for I am no dreamer of dreams,” I answered bitterly. “Ha! do I not lead the whole nation in war? for, of late, Kalipe is old, and stiff in the limbs. One swift stroke of this broad spear, and the nation will be crying ‘Bayéte’ to him who is its leader in war. Ah! ah! What has happened before can happen again.”

But here I stopped, for I was referring darkly to the death of that Great Great One, the mighty Tshaka, from whose loins my inkosikazi had sprung. Yet no anger did she show.

“So shall we be great together at last, Lalusini, and my might in war, and thy múti combined, shall indeed rule the world,” I went on. “Ha! I will make believe to go on this tagati business, but to-night I will return in the darkness, and to-morrow—whau!—it may indeed be that the appearance of the Red Death has presaged the accession of a new King—even as those dogs, who were burnt to-day, did declare. How now for that, Lalusini?”

“The throne of Dingiswayo is older than that of Senzangakona, and both are older than that of Matyobane,” she answered. “Yet I know not—my múti tells me that the time is not yet. Still, it will come—it will come.”

“It will come—yes, it will come—when we two have long since been food for the alligators,” I answered impatiently. “The King’s word is that I slay this horror—this tagati thing—by the foil of the moon. What if I fail, Lalusini?”

“Fail? Fail? Does he who rolled back the might of the Twin Stars of Zulu talk about failure? Now, nay, Untúswa—now, nay,” she answered, with that strange and wonderful smile of hers.

“I know not. Now cast me ‘the bones,’ Lalusini, that I may know what success, if any, lieth before me against the Red Terror.”

“The bones? Ha! Such methods are too childish for such as I, Untúswa,” she answered lightly. “Yet—wait—”

She ceased to speak and her face clouded, even as I had seen it when she was about to fall into one of her divining trances. Anxiously I watched her. Her lips moved, but in silence. Her eyes seemed to look through me, into nowhere. Then I saw she was holding out something in her hand. Bending over I gazed. She had held nothing when we sat down nor was there any place of concealment whence she could have produced anything. But that which lay in her hand was a flat bag, made of the dressed skin of an impala. Then she spoke—and her voice was as the voice of one who talks in a dream.

“See thou part not from this, Untúswa. Yet seek not to look within—until such time as thy wit and the wit of others fail thee—or the múti will be of no avail—nay more, will be harmful. But in extremity make use of what is herein—in extremity only—when at thy wit’s end.”

Still held by her eyes, I reached forth my hand and took the múti bag, securing it round my neck by a stout leather thong which formed part of the hide from whence the bag had been cut. As I did so, Lalusini murmured of strange things—of ghost caves, and of whole impis devoured in alligator-haunted swamps—and of a wilder, weirder mystery still, which was beyond my poor powers of understanding—I being but a fighter and no izanusi at all. Then her eyes grew calm, and with a sigh as of relief she was herself again.

Now I tried to go behind what she had been saying, but it was useless. She had returned from the spirit world, and being once more in this, knew not what she had seen or said while in the other. Even the múti pouch, now fastened to my neck, she glanced upon as though she had never seen it before.

“Go now, Untúswa,” she said.

We embraced each other with great affection, and Lalusini with her own hands armed me with my weapons—the white shield, and the great dark-handled assegai which was the former gift of the King, also my heavy knobkerrie of rhinoceros horn, and three or four light casting spears—but no feather crest or other war adornments did I put on. Then I stepped forth.

No armed escort was to accompany me, for I must do this thing alone. But I had chosen one slave to bear such few things as I should require. Him I found awaiting me at the gate of the kraal.

It was evening when I stepped forth—evening, the busiest and cheeriest time of the day—yet my kraal was silent and mournful as though expecting every moment the messengers of death. The cattle within their enclosure stood around, lowing impatiently, for the milking was neglected; and men, young and old, sat in gloomy groups, and no women were to be seen. These murmured a subdued farewell, for not only was I, their chief and father, about to sally forth upon an errand of horror and of gloom, but in the event of failure on my part, who should stand between them and the King’s word of doom?

Through these I strode with head erect as though proceeding to certain success—to a sure triumph. When without the gate I turned for a moment to look back. The rim of the sinking sun had just kissed the tips of the forest trees on the far sky-line, and his rays,

like darts of fire, struck full upon my largest hut, which was right opposite the great gate of the kraal. And there against the reed palisade in front of the door stood Lalusini, who had come to see the last of me, ere I disappeared into gloom and distance. Au! I can see her now, my beautiful wife, as she stood there, her tall and splendid form robed as it were in waving flames of fire, where the last glory of the dying sun fell full upon her. And through the dazzle of this darting light, her gaze was fixed upon me, firm and unflinching. Yes, I can see her now as I saw her then, and at times in my dreams, Nkose, old man as I am, my heart feels sore and heavy and broken as it did then. For as I returned her parting gesture of farewell, and plunged into the forest shades, at that moment a voice seemed to cry in my ears that I should behold her no more. In truth was I bewitched.

“Will you not rest a while, lord, and suffer me to prepare food, for we have travelled fast and far?”

The voice was that of my attendant slave, and it struck upon my ears as a voice from the spirit world, so wrapped up was I in the gloom of my own thoughts. Now I glanced at the sky and judged the night to be more than half through. And we had marched since the setting of the sun. But the light of the half moon was sufficient for us, for the forest trees were of low stature and we were seldom in complete darkness.

“Rest a while? Not so, Jambúla,” I answered. “Are we not on the King’s errand? and from hence to the full of the moon is not far.”

“The forest is loud with the roarings of strange ghost-beasts, my father; and the time of night when such have most power must already be here. And we are but two,” he urged, though with great deference.

“And what are such to me—to me!” I answered, “I who am under the protection of great and powerful múti? Go to, Jambúla. Art thou turning fearful as time creeps upon thee?”

“I fear nothing within touch of thy múti, father,” he answered, liking not the question.

And then, indeed, I became alive to the meaning of the man’s words, for strange and fearful noises were abroad among the shadows on either hand, low sad wailings as of the ghosts of them that wander in darkness and pain, mingling with the savage howls of ramping beasts into whose grim bodies the spirits of many fighters had passed, to continue their fierce warring upon such as still trod this earth in the flesh. And over and above these came the mighty, muffled, thunderous roar of a lion.

But those sounds, many and terrifying as they were, held no fears for me—indeed, they had hitherto fallen upon deaf ears—so filled was my soul with forebodings of another kind. Now, however, a quick, startled murmur on the part of my follower caused me to halt.

Right in front I saw a huge shape—massive and shaggy—and I saw the green flash of eyes, and the baring of mighty jaws in the moonlight. Then up went the vast head, and a quivering thunderous roar shook the night.

Then the beast crouched. It was of enormous size in the half light. Was it only a lion—or a ghost-beast, which would spread and spread till its hugeness overshadowed the world? If the latter, mere weapons were powerless against it.

Jambúla stepped to my side, every muscle of his frame tense with the excitement of the moment. His shield was thrust, forward, and his right hand gripped the haft of a broad-bladed stabbing spear. But I—no movement did I make towards using a weapon. I advanced straight upon the beast, and as I did so, some force I knew not caused my hand to rest upon the múti bag which hung upon my breast.

With a snarling roar the beast moved forward a little, preparing for its rush. We were but ten paces apart. Then the fierce lashing of the tail ceased, the awful eyes seemed to glare with fear where rage had fired them before—the thunder of the threatening roar became as the shrill whine of a crowd of terrified women—and, backing before me as I advanced, the huge beast slunk away in the cover, and we could hear its frightened winnings growing fainter and fainter in the distance.

By this, Nkose, two things were clear—that the shape, though that of a huge and savage lion, was but a shape to give cover to something which was not of this world—and that Lalusini's múti was capable of accomplishing strange and wonderful results.

Chapter Four.

The Abode of the Terror.

Through the whole of the following day, and the night after, we travelled; and on the next morning, before the sun had arisen, we came upon a large kraal. The land lay enshrouded in heavy mist, and the hoarse barking of many dogs sounded thick and muffled. Armed men sprang to the gate to inquire our errand, but one word from my slave, Jambúla, caused them to give us immediate admission. This was the kraal of Maqandi-ka-Mahlu, the chief over the workers in iron, in whose midst the horror named the Red Death had broken forth.

As I strode across the centre space—the domes of the encircling huts looming shadowy through the mist—Maqandi himself came forth to meet me. Yet although showing me this mark of deference, I liked not his manner, which was sullen, and somewhat lacking in the respect due from an inferior and disgraced chief towards one who dwelt at the right hand of the King, and who was, moreover, the second in command of the King's army. But it seemed to me that fear was in his mind, for he could not think that an induna of my rank would arrive alone, attended by one slave, and I think he expected every moment the signal which should bring my followers swarming into the kraal to put him and his to the assegai and his possessions to the flames.

“What is the will of the Great Great One, son of Ntelani?” he said, as we sat together within his hut alone. “Hau! I am an old man now, and troubles grow thick on every side. I have no people, and am but taskmaster over a set of miserable slaves—I, who fought with the assegai and led warriors to victory at the Place of the Three Rifts, even as you did yourself, Untúswa. Yes, troubles are upon me on every side, and I would fain sit down at rest within the Dark Unknown.”

I looked at Maqandi, and I pitied him. He had, indeed, grown old since we had fought together in that great battle. His face was lined and his beard had grown grey; and his hair—which, being in some measure in disgrace, he had neglected to shave—seemed quite white against the blackness of his head-ring. Yet with all his desire to sleep the sleep of death, there was in his eyes a look of fear; such a look as may be descried in the faces of those to whom the witch-finder's rod draws very near. Yes, I pitied him.

“The will of the Great Great One is not with thee for the present, Maqandi,” I said, desiring to reassure him. “Now, hearken, and give me such aid as I need, and it may be that the head-ring of the son of Mahlu may yet shine once more in its place among the nation.”

“Ha! Sayest thou so, holder of the White Shield?” he answered quickly, a look of joy lighting up his face. “Is not all I have at the disposal of the second induna of the King?”

“That is rightly said, Maqandi,” I replied. “For never yet did I fail those who did well by me. And now we will talk.”

I unfolded my plan to the chief over the ironworkers, and as I did so his face grew sad and heavy again—for I could see he doubted my success in ridding the land of this terror—and then would not he, too, be sacrificed to the anger of the King? But I enjoined upon him silence and secrecy—telling him that his part lay in strictly obeying my orders and supplying my need. This, so far, lay in requiring two of the slave ironworkers to be in attendance upon me at sundown, for I intended proceeding to the Valley of the Red Death that very night.

Food was brought in, and tywala, and we ate and drank. Then I lay down and slept—slept hard and soundly throughout the heat and length of the day.

When I awoke the sun was declining from his highest point in the heavens. My slave Jambúla was already waiting and armed before the door of my hat. Beside him, too, were those I required to be in attendance. Both went before me, uttering words of bonga.

“Why are these armed?” I said, noting that the two ironworkers carried spears and axes. “I need no armed force. Let them leave their weapons here.”

A look of fear spread over the faces of both slaves at these words, and they reckoned themselves already dead men. For although weapons could be of no avail against a thing of tagati and of terror, such as had already laid low so many of their number, and indeed two of our own tried warriors, in a death of blood, yet it is in the nature of man to feel more confident when his hand holds a spear. But at my word they dropped their weapons and stood helpless.

Now, Nkose, not without reason did I so act. The King’s word had been that I should slay this horror accompanied by no armed force, and although two such miserable fighters as this race of slaves could supply were of no more use with arms in their hands than without, yet I would not give Umzilikazi any chance of saying I had not fulfilled his conditions. Besides, I had a purpose to which I intended putting these two, wherein weapons would avail them nothing at all.

I took leave of Maqandi-ka-Mahlu and set forth—I and Jambúla and the two workers in iron. Such men of our people as I encountered saluted me in gloomy silence, and as I

passed the kraals of the iron-workers the people came forth and prostrated themselves on the ground, for my importance was twofold; I represented the majesty of the King, and further, some inkling had got abroad that my errand lay to investigate, and, if possible, bring to an end the terror of the Red Magic.

From the kraal of Maqandi we could already see the great mountain range in whose heart lay the locality of this terror, and shortly, ere the last rays of the sun faded from the world, we stood before a dark and narrow defile. We had left behind the dwellings of men, though plentiful traces of their occupation would meet our eyes, being left by the iron-working parties. Through this defile a thin trickle of water ran, though in times of rain and storm the place showed signs of pouring down a mighty and formidable flood. High overhead the slopes were covered with thick bush and forest trees, and above this, again, walls of red-faced rock seemed to cleave the sky. As we entered this gloomy place the terror on the faces of the slaves deepened, and even I, Nkose, felt not so easy in my mind as I would have it appear.

Soon we came out into more open ground; open immediately around us, for on raising my eyes I saw that we were in a large valley, or hollow. A ring of immense cliffs shut in the place as with a wall, nor, save the way by which we had come in, could my glance, keen and searching as it was, descry any means by which a man might find a way out.

The bottom of this strange valley was nearly level, and well grown with tall forest trees and undergrowth; not so thick, however, but that there were grassy open spaces, bestrewn with large rocks and boulders. But from the level floor of the hollow rose little or no slope. The great iron faces of the cliffs rose immediately, either in terraces or soaring up to a great height. Such was the aspect of the Valley of the Red Death.

That it was indeed the dreaded valley, the looks on the faces of the two iron-workers were sufficient to show. But I, gazing earnestly around and noting that there was but one way in or out, reckoned that the first part of my errand would not be hard—to find the accursed thing. Then a further examination of the cliffs, and I felt not so sure, for irregularly along their faces were black spots of all shapes and sizes. These were the mouths of caves.

Now, as we stood there, the light of day had all but faded from the world, and already one or two stars were peeping over the rim of the vast cliff-wall rearing up misty and dim to the height of the heavens. Little sound of life was there, from bird, or beast, or insect; and this of itself added to the grey and ghostly chill which seemed to brood over the place; for in that country night was wont to utter with more voices than day. But the golden bow of a young moon, bright and clear, gave a sufficient light to make out anything moving, save under the black darkness of the trees.

“What is thy name?” I said suddenly, turning to one of the slaves.

“Suru, father,” he replied.

“Well then, Suru, attend,” I said. “Remain here, in this open space beside this small rock, and stir not hence until I send for or call thee. To fail in thy orders in the smallest particular is death.”

But the man sank on the ground at my feet.

“Slay me now, father,” he entreated, “for death by one blow of the spear of the mighty do I prefer to the awfulness and horror of the death which shall come upon me here alone.”

“But death by one blow of the spear shall not be thy portion, oh fool,” I answered, mocking him. “Ah, ah! No such easy way is thine, oh dog, oh slave. The stake of impalement shall be thy lot, oh Suru. Think of it, thou hast never seen it. Ask Jambúla here how long a man may live when seated upon that sharp throne. For days and days may he beg for death, with blackened face and bursting eyeballs and lolling tongue, and every nerve and muscle cracking and writhing with the fiery torture. Why surely the death which this ghost could bring upon thee here would be mercy compared with such a death as that. But I think I will leave thee no choice. Bind him, Jambúla. Even a bound sentinel is better than none, though more helpless. If Suru will not keep his watch a free man he shall keep it bound. Ah, ah!”

That settled all his doubts. As Jambúla made a step towards him, Suru cried out to me to pardon his first hesitation, and to allow him to obey my orders at any rate unbound. I agreed to this, for he was frightened enough, and indeed, Nkose, as he moved away to take up the position I had assigned to him, his look was that of one who stands on the brink of the Pool of the Alligators with the slayers beside him.

Leaving Suru to his solitary post, I moved back with Jambúla and the other slave to near the neck of the narrow passage by which we had entered the hollow, for I wanted to see whether the thing of dread came in when night fell, or whether it abode within the place itself. This we could do, for I chose a position a little way up the hillside, whence, by the light of the moon, I could command a clear space over which anything approaching from without could not but pass. So we sat beneath a cluster of rocks, and watched, and watched.

Night had fallen, mysterious and ghostly. The stars burned bright in the heavens, yet it seemed as though some black cloud of fear hung above, blurring their light. From the

open country far beyond came the cry of hyaenas, and the sharp barking yelp of the wild hunting dog calling to its mates; but in the drear gloom of this haunted valley, no sound of bird or beast was there to break the silence. So the night watches rolled on.

I know not whether I slept, Nkose; it may be that I partly did; but there came a feeling over me as of the weight of some great terror, and indeed it seemed to hold me as though I could not move. Was it an evil dream? Scarcely, for, as with a mighty effort, I partly threw off the spell, my glance fell upon the face of Jambúla.

He was gazing upward—gazing behind him—gazing behind him and me. His jaw had fallen as that of a man not long dead, and his eyeballs seemed bursting from their sockets, and upon his face was the same awful look of fear as that worn by the slave, Suru, when left to his solitary watch. I followed his glance, and then I too felt the blood run chill within me.

Rising above the rocks, at the foot of which we sat, a pair of great branching horns stood forth black against the sky. Slowly, slowly, the head followed, till a pair of flaming eyes shone beneath, seeming to burn us as we crouched there. But the size of it! Whau! No animal that ever lived—even the largest bull in the King's herd—ever attained to half the size. Thoughts of the tagati terror rushed through my mind. Should I creep round the rocks and slay the monster, while its attention was taken up watching my slaves? Would it indeed fall to mortal weapon? And at that moment, I, the fearless, the foremost in the fiercest battle, the second commander of the King's armies, felt my heart as water within me. But before I could decide on any plan the thing vanished—vanished as I gazed.

It was coming round the rocks, of course. In a moment we should receive its onslaught, and three more would be added to the number of the victims of the Red Death.

But—after? I thought of my beautiful wife, writhing her life out upon the stake of agony. I thought of my kinsmen and followers given over to the death of the alligators, and in a moment my heart grew strong again. I felt nerved with the strength of ten men. Let the thing come; and gripping my broad assegai, the royal spear, and my great white shield, the royal gift, I stood above the two scared and cowering slaves, ready to give battle to this terror from the unseen world. And in the short space of silence, of waiting, it seemed that I lived the space of my whole life.

But as I thus waited there rang forth upon the night a shrill, wild echoing yell—such a cry as might issue from the throat of one suffering such unheard of torments as the mind of man could ever invent. It pealed forth again louder, more quavering, rending the night with its indescribable notes of terror and agony—and it rose from where we had left the slave, Suru, to keep his grisly watch alone in the blackness of the forest.

There was silence, but immediately that was rent by another sound—a terrible sound, too—the savage growling roars as of an infuriated bull—receding further and further from the place whence the death cry had arisen, together with a crashing sound as though a great wind were rushing away further and further up the haunted valley.

For long did that fearful death-yell ring in my ears, as I stood throughout the night watches, grasping my spear, every moment expecting the onslaught of the thing—for, of course, it would return, where more victims awaited. Then the thought came to me that it only dared attack and slay the unarmed; that at the sight of a warrior like myself, armed and ready for battle, it had retired to vent its rage upon an easier prey; and this thought brought strength and encouragement, for I would find no great difficulty in slaying such. But with the thought came another. The two men of Hlatusa's band had been slain as easily and mysteriously as the iron-working slaves—slain in broad daylight—and they were well-armed warriors, and men of tried valour. In truth, the undertaking seemed as formidable as ever.

Even that night came to an end, and the cheerfulness and warmth of the newly-arisen sunbeams put heart even into the two badly-frightened slaves; and, feeling strong in my presence, their fears yielded to curiosity to learn the exact fate of Suru—not that any of us really doubted what that fate had been.

With spear held ready, and none the less alert because it was day, and the valley was now flooded with the broad light of the sun, I quickly made my way down, followed by Jambúla and the other, to where I had left the slave the night before. It was as I thought. There he lay—dead; crushed and crumpled into a heap of body and limbs. He had tried to run. I could see that by the tracks, but before he had run ten steps the terrible ghost-bull had overtaken him and flung him forward. The great hole made by the entering horn gaped wide between his ribs, and, tearing forward, had half ripped him in two. The grass around was all red and wet with half-congealed blood, and in the midst, imprinted deep and clear as in the muddy earth after rain, two great hoof marks, and those of such a size as to be imprinted by no living animal.

So now I had seen with my own eyes a victim of the terror of the Red Death, and now I myself must slay this horror. But how to slay a great and terrible ghost—a fearful thing not of this world?

Chapter Five.

Gasitye the Wizard.

For long I stood there thinking. I looked at the ground, all red and splashed with blood. I looked at the distorted body of the dead slave and the great gaping wound which had let out the life—the sure and certain mark of the dreaded Red Death—always dealt as it was, in the same part of the body—and for all my thought I could think out no method of finding and slaying this evil thing. Then I thought of the múti—the amulet which Lalusini had hung around my neck. Should I look within it? Her words came back to me. “Seek not to look within until such time as thy wit and the wit of others fail thee.” Yet, had not that time come? I could think of no plan. The monster was not of this world. No weapon ever forged could slay it; still there must be a way. Ha! “the wit of others!” Old Masuka had departed to the land of spirits himself. He might have helped me. Who could those “others” be, of whom my sorceress-wife had spoken while her spirit was away among the spirits of those unseen?

“Remain here,” I said suddenly, to Jambúla and the other slave. “Remain here, and watch, and stir not from this spot until I return.”

They made no murmur against this—yet I could see they liked not the order. But I gave no thought to them as I moved forward with my eyes fixed upon the tracks of the retreating monster.

The bloody imprint of the huge hoofs was plain enough, and to follow these was a work of no difficulty. Soon, however, as the hoofs had become dry, it was not so easy. Remembering the crashing noise I had heard as the thing rushed on its course, I examined the bushes and trees. No leaves or twigs were broken off such as could not but have happened with such a heavy body plunging through them. Then the hoof-marks themselves suddenly ceased, and with that, Nkose, the blood once more seemed to tingle within me, for if the thing had come no further was it not lying close at hand—those fiery eyes perhaps at that very moment watching me—those awful horns even now advancing silent and stealthy to rip and tear through my being? Ha! It seemed to me that this hunting of a terrible ghost was a thing to turn the bravest man into a coward.

Then as I stood, my hearing strained to its uttermost, my hand gripping my broad spear ready at any rate to fight valiantly for life, and all that life involved, something happened which well-nigh completed the transformation into a coward of a man who had never known fear.

For now a voice fell upon my ears—a voice low and quavering, yet clear—a voice with a strange and distant sound as though spoken afar off.

“Ho! fearless one who art now afraid! Ho! valiant leader of armies! Ho! mighty induna of the Great King! Thou art as frightened as a little child. Ha, ha, ha!”

This last was very nearly true, Nkose—but hearing it said, and the hideous mocking laugh that followed, very nearly turned it into a lie.

“I know not who speaks,” I growled, “save that by the voice it is a very old man. Were it not so he should learn what it means to name me a coward.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” screamed the voice again. “Brave words, O holder of the King’s assegai. Why, thy voice shakes almost as much as mine. Come hither—if thou art not afraid.”

From where the bush grew darkest and thickest the voice seemed to come. I moved cautiously forward, prepared at every step to fall into some trap—to meet with some manifestation of abominable witchcraft. For long did I force my way through the thick growth, but cautiously ever, and at last stood once more in the open. Then astonishment was my lot. Right before me rose a great rock wall. I had reached the base of one of the heights which shut in the hollow.

“Welcome, Untúswa,” cackled the voice again. “Art thou still afraid?”

Now, Nkose, I could see nobody; but remembering the Song of the Shield, and how Lalusini had caused it to sound forth from the cliff to hearten us during the battle—she herself being some way off—I was not so much amazed as I might have been, for the voice came right out of the cliff.

“If thou art not afraid, Untúswa,” it went on, “advance straight, and touch the rock with thy right hand.”

I liked not this order, but, Nkose, I had ever had to do with magicians, and had dipped somewhat into their art, as I have already shown. Here, I thought, was more sorcery to be looked into, and how should I root out the sorcery of the Red Magic save by the aid of other sorcery? So I advanced boldly, yet warily. And then, indeed, amazement was my lot.

For, as my right hand touched it, the hard rock moved, shivered. Then a portion of this smooth, unbroken wall seemed to fall inward, leaving a black gaping hole like a doorway, through which a man might enter upright.

“Ho, ho! Untúswa!” cackled the voice again, now from within the hole. “Welcome, valiant fighter. Enter. Yet, wilt thou not leave thy weapons outside?”

“Not until I stand once more in the presence of him who sent me do I disarm, O Unknown One. And now, where art thou? for I like better to talk to a man with a voice than to a voice without the man.”

“And how knowest thou that I am a man, O Fearless One? Yet, enter, weapons and all. Ha! Knowest thou not this voice?”

Whau! It seemed to me then that my flesh crept indeed, for I did know that voice. Ah, yes, well indeed; and it was the voice of one who had long since sat down in the sleep of death—the voice of old Masuka, the mightiest magician our nation had ever seen.

Then, indeed, did I enter, for, even though dead, the voice was that of one who had done naught but well by me during life, and I feared not a change the other way now. I entered, and, as I did so, I stood in darkness once more. The rock wall had closed up behind me.

Now my misgivings returned, for, Nkose, no living man, be he never so brave, can find himself suddenly entombed within the heart of the earth alone, the voice of one who has long been dead talking with him in the black, moist darkness, and not feel some alarm. Again the voice spoke, and this time it was not that of Masuka, but the mocking cackle which had at first startled me.

“Ho, ho! Untúswa, the valiant, the fearless. Dost thou not tremble—thou who art even now within the portal of the Great Unknown? Did ever peril of spear, or of the wrath of kings, make thy face cold as it now is? Ha, ha!”

True indeed were the words, for the position was fearful; but then so was that which had been the means of driving me into it. But I answered:

“I have seen strange and mysterious and terrifying things before, my father, else would I fear greatly now. Yet let us talk face to face.”

For a moment there was no reply, then with startling suddenness a light flashed forth. On the floor just in front of me burned a small fire—throwing a ball of green misty light upon the tomb-like blackness. Within this I could make out the figure of a man—a very old man.

A man, did I say? Whau! It was more like that of a monkey, or a great crouching spider. The limbs were thin as the shaft of a spear—too withered and dried even to show the wrinkles of age; the face, too, was like a dry piece of skin spread over the skull; and on the head a wisp or two of white hair. If it was a man, in truth he must have lived nearly as long as the world itself. His hands, which were like the claws of a bird, were spread over the fire, which burned not upon the floor, but in a large clay bowl. Into this he seemed to be sprinkling some kind of powder which caused the green flame to leap and hiss.

But now another sound stopped my ears; an awesome and terrible sound—a sound full of fear and agony indescribable—for it was again the death-yell, such as I had heard in the darkness of the night when the slave, Suru, looked upon the Red Terror and parted with life. And now it was not night, but broad, clear, golden day—outside the cavern at least—and the other slave had parted with life by the same dread means; and I—while this thing of horror was abroad—this monster I had come to slay—here was I imprisoned within the heart of the earth—held there at the will of a being who seemed less a man than the ghost of one who had died while the world was yet young. I leaped to my feet.

“Ha, ha, ha! Sit again, induna of the King, who knows not fear,” cackled the shrivelled old monkey before me. “Ha, ha, ha! But now I think thou art afraid.”

“Afraid or not, thou evil scorpion—thou creeping wizard—if I stand not in the light of day before I strike the ground with my foot three times, this spear shall see if there be any blood to run from thy dried-up old heart.” And, raising the blade aloft, I struck the ground once with my foot.

“Ha, ha, ha!” cackled the wizard again, still scattering his magic powder into the fire. “Look again, Untúswa; look again.”

I did look again, I could not do otherwise, and then I stood as one turned into stone—with the spear still uplifted—unable to move hand or foot, as I glared in front of me. For the whole vault was filled with a vivid green flash, and in it the wizard seemed to dissolve.

His shrivelled limbs seemed to turn into black, horrible snakes, which glided away hissing into the darkness beyond; then the light sank somewhat, and before me there started up faces dim and shadowy, and their aspect turned my heart into water indeed, for I was gazing upon the faces of those I knew had long been dead.

Dim and shadowy as they were, I knew them all, knew them at first sight. There was Hlatusa, who had been sent to “feed the alligators” by reason of this very magic I was here to destroy. There was Tyuyumane, who had conspired with the Amabuna to overthrow our nation; and Notalwa, the chief of our izanusi, who had aided him, both faces wreathed with hate and torture as I had last beheld them, writhing on the stake of impalement. There were many others who had died for the conspiracy of Newelo’s Pool. There was the face of my brother, Sekweni—he who had been slain for sleeping at his post—and that of Gungana, the induna whom I myself slew, and to whose command I had succeeded. All these were glowering upon me with a very whirlwind of hate and vengeance, and I—whau!—I was as a man who had died ten deaths. Then I saw the face of Tauane, the chief of the People of the Blue Cattle, and—Ha! what was that? The face of Lalusini, beautiful, but sad and agonised? Yet no. But as a flash I had seen it, and lo! it became that of Nangeza, my erstwhile inkosikazi, even as when she had failed in her attempt upon the life of the song. And then indeed did I know what hate and vengeance could look like. For long it seemed I stood there face to face with that terrible countenance—with it alone—and my lungs now seemed to fill with choking fiery air. I beheld a vast array defiling before me—of warriors I had met in battle, of all races, but chiefly those of our parent nation. On, ever, they passed, silent grim spectres, with broad spear and tufted shield, even as in life. Others followed densely in rank, company upon company. Hau! Once more the battle! I heard the clash of shields, the shiver of assegai hafts, the flash and flame as of fire weapons. I saw the red blood spout and flow; I heard the roaring of an army of warriors in the full career of their victorious charge; my ears were dulled by the screams of the vanquished, for mercy, for pity; the wild hiss and whistle of the conquerors as they stabbed and stabbed; and lo! blood swirled around my feet in rivers, and still the screaming and wailing of those beneath the spear went on. Then I could no longer breathe. The earth itself seemed to be heaping on high to fall on me and crush me to dust. I sank down, as it seemed, in death.

Chapter Six.

The Ghost-Bull.

I was not dead, Nkose; or, indeed, how should I be here telling you my story? Or, if I were—well, at any rate, the magic which had been powerful enough to draw me through the abode of those who had become ghosts was powerful enough to bring me back to life and to the world again—and yet I know not. It is a terrible thing to look upon the faces of those who have long been dead; and how shall a man—being a man—do this unless he join their number? Such faces, however, had I looked upon, for, as I opened my eyes once more to the light of the sun, no dim recollection of one who has slept and dreamed was mine. No; the mysterious cave, the magic fire, the fearsome sights I had beheld—all was real—as real as the trees and rocks upon which I now looked—as real as the sky above and the sun shining from it.

Yes; I was in the outer air once more. I rose and stood up. My limbs were firm and strong as before, my hand still grasped the broad spear—the white shield lay at my feet. Before me was the smooth rock wall, there the exact spot where it had opened to receive me. But there it might remain, closed for ever, for all I cared. I had no wish to look further into its dark and evil mysteries. But now, again, the voice came back to my ears, faint and far away this time, but without the mocking mirth which had lured me before to what might have been my doom.

“Ho, Untúswa!” it cried; “wouldst thou see more of the unseen? Wouldst thou look further into the future?”

“I think not, my father,” I answered. “To those who deal in magic be the ways of magic, to warriors the ways of war—and I am a warrior.”

“And thine inkosikazi, Untúswa, what of her?”

“Help me to slay the ghost-bull who deals forth the Red Death, my father!” I pleaded eagerly.

There was no answer to this for long. Then, weary of waiting, I was about to turn away, when once more the voice spake from within the rock—faint, as before.

“Great is the House of Matyobane; great is the House of Senzangakona; Umzilikazi is ruler of the world to-day—but Dingane is greater. Yet to-morrow, where now are the many nations they have stamped flat there shall they be. Dust—all dust! Gasitye sees it.”

“Ha! And shall I see it too, my father?”

“Thou shalt see it, Untúswa. Thou, too, shalt see it.”

Now, when I heard the name of Gasitye, I knew it as the name of a great seer and prophet who dwelt alone among the mountains, and who was held in wide repute among all tribes and peoples, near and far. His own tribe nobody knew exactly, but it was supposed that his age was three times that of the oldest man known. Even Umzilikazi himself had more than once sent secretly to consult him, with gifts; for the rest, nobody cared to interfere with him, for even the most powerful of kings does not desire the enmity of a great and dreaded sorcerer, whose magic, moreover, is real, and not as that of the tribal izanusi—a cheat to encompass the death of men. And now I had encountered this world-famed wizard; had beheld him alone in the heart of the rock, whose face he had the power to open and shut at will.

“Help me to slay the ghost-bull, my father,” I entreated again.

“And when thou hast slain it—what then?”

“Then it shall be well with me and mine.”

“Well with thee and thine? Will it then—with thee and thine! Ha, ha!” repeated the voice within the cliff, in the same tone of mockery as before. “Go now and slay it, Untúswa, thou valiant one. Go!”

I waited some little time, but no further answer could I obtain, though I spoke both loud and softly. Then I turned away.

As I did so a strange feeling came over me, a feeling as of the faintness caused by starvation. The fumes of the wizard fire had worn off in the clear open air, and I felt as though I could spend the rest of my life eating, so hungry was I. So, losing no time, I started back to where I had left Jambúla.

Then upon my mind came the recollection of the death-yell I had heard when within the vault. Ha! I must proceed with care. I glanced upward. The sun was well up when I entered the rock; now it was at its highest overhead. I had not been as long in that vault of fear as it seemed.

Now there struck upon my nostrils a most horrible stench as of death and putrefaction. What did it mean? I had passed this spot this very morning and the air was pure and clear. Death might have taken place—but putrefaction?—au, there was not time for that.

Yet this was a place of witchcraft, where everything was possible. And, thus thinking, I came right upon a human body.

It was in a horrible state, Nkose, in the state of one who has been dead eight or ten days. Yet here such could not have been the case, for in the swollen, half-decayed features, as well as by articles of clothing, I recognised the second of the two slaves, whom I had left alive and well that same morning, but a very few hours before. Yet, there it lay, beneath a tree, with upturned face, and across the decaying ribs the rending gash left by the horn of the ghost-bull.

Now I heard a voice in salute, behind me—a voice I knew. Looking up, I beheld my slave, Jambúla.

He was looking strangely at me. Then he broke forth into extravagant words of welcome, and it seemed to me he had been badly frightened, and was glad enough to behold me once more. That was it, of course; so giving no further thought to the matter at all, I bade him find food. He had a number of speckled pigeons, which he had knocked over with his kerries; and having kindled a fire on the flat top of a high rock for safety's sake—whau, Nkose!—there was soon nothing left of those birds. The while Jambúla eyed me strangely.

Now this Jambúla—although my slave—was a man I held in great favour. He was not of any of the races we had conquered, but came of a tribe further to the southward than even the Zulu arms had ever reached. Him I had captured while storming the fortress of a mountain tribe, and the King had allotted him to me: He was a tall, strong man, and knew not fear, and was faithful and devoted to me as any dog. Now he said:

“I think this night must this thing of tagati be slain, my father.”

“We think the same, Jambúla,” I answered. “But what I cannot quite think out is how. But that will come.”

“Nevertheless, let it be this night, father. I have a plan.”

This plan he then unfolded to me, and by the time we had talked it out and around it was nearly dark—nearly time to set it working.

Never had any spot struck upon my mind as more ghostly and even terrifying than that haunted valley when night drew fairly down; and, Nkose, what I had seen and gone through in the wizard cave that morning seemed to have sapped my former fearlessness.

A low-lying mist wreathed around the tree-stems and bushes, thick to near the height of a man, then thinning out dimly just enough to show out the twinkle of a star or two. But there was light enough for our purpose.

Hard by the place where Suru, the first slave, had been killed was an open space, thickly studded with rocks embedded in the earth, and one side of this open was overhung with mimosas of a good height and strength. Clambering up one of these, I lay out upon the spreading branches. Jambúla remained below.

The night watch wore on—even the night side of life seemed hushed in this abode of wizardry and fear. Suddenly all the blood within me tingled and burned. Something was moving. And then above the ghostly wreathings of the white mist I could see the gigantic head—the huge horns curving upwards—of the ghost-beast.

Only the head was visible as, tilted upwards, nose in air, it moved above the sea of vapour, to and fro, as though seeking for something or somebody—for a fresh victim, perhaps—and I thought it might indeed soon find one. And as I looked the mist suddenly rolled away, revealing the dark form of Jambúla, standing upright against a small rock.

For the moment the beast did not see him. It continued to run hither and thither in the moonlight, and as I marked its gigantic proportions, my heart sank, for I knew that to kill such a thing as this single-handed was very nearly the hardest task ever entrusted to me.

It was huge in the dim light—black as night, and as large as an elephant almost. There was that in the very size of the thing no less than in the glaring ferocity of its eyes—which was enough to turn a man's heart to water—for it could not be a thing of this earth. How, then, could it be slain?

Now it began to mutter, like the growlings of a heavy thunderstorm, as it ran to and fro, shaking its horrible head, and its dark, shaggy frontlet of hair. Whau! That was a fearful sight as the thing drew nearer. What of Jambúla! He had not moved, beyond half turning his head to get a better view of the horror. Would his heart fail him? I almost expected it would.

Ha! It had seen him. It dropped into a sort of stealthy crouch, more like that of a leopard or a lion than the movement of any horned animal; and thus it came up swiftly behind him.

But Jambúla was not asleep—oh no! There was no lack of wakefulness in him. In a moment he whirled behind a rock, as the ghost-bull, uttering a roar that shook the world, came at him with the swiftness of a lightning flash.

Then began a scene indeed. Jambúla, watching his opportunity, flitted from rock to rock, but not less swiftly did the monster come after him—seeming to fly through the air as it leaped over some of the lower rocks which were in its way. Hau! Could this last? Would not Jambúla, out of breath, falter for one instant? Would not his foot stumble in the tortuous rapidity of his flight? Au! Did that happen he were lost—we both were lost.

Hither and thither he sped, the horrible beast ever behind him, roaring in a fashion to turn a man's heart to water—the foam flying from its mouth, the points of its huge horns tossing wildly, its savage eyes seeming indeed to flash flame. Would they never come beneath the tree where I—the great assegai gripped and ready—lay out along the bough waiting my chance?

This came. Jambúla, who had been drawing the thing nearer and nearer to my side of the ground, now broke from his shelter, and ran with all the swiftness of which he was capable beneath my place of ambush. After him came the ghost-beast, right under me.

This was my chance, Nkose, and my only one. Swift as the movements of the horror itself, I dropped down upon the thing's back, and clinging fast with the one hand, with the other I drove the point of my great assegai into the joint of the spinal bone behind the skull.

Whau, Nkose! That was a moment. I know not quite what I expected to happen. I felt the point of the great horn, thrown backward, narrowly graze my side; then I was hurled through the air, as the huge body, arrested in mid course, turned right over, falling with its head twisted under its own enormous weight.

I was on my feet in a moment—not daring to think I had slain the monster—although I had felt the blade of my noble spear bite deep into the marrow. But there it lay, a huge black mass in the moonlight. While I stood contemplating it, still panting after my exertions and the fall, I heard the voice of Jambúla:

“That was well done, my father. Those horns will deal out the Red Death no more.”

“I know not whether a headless ghost may come to life again, Jambúla,” I said, “but anyhow we will cut off the head of this one. But, first of all, this”—and I buried the blade of my great spear in the thing's heart.

We were both strong men, Jambúla and I, yet it was with a vast deal of labour we at last succeeded in cutting off the head, which was twisted under the huge body.

“Whau!” exclaimed Jambúla, gazing upon the great deluge of blood which poured forth upon the ground. “It is as though the blood of all those slain by the Red Death were flowing there. But now, father, suffer me to ran to Maqandi’s kraal and fetch slaves to carry this, and indeed, the skin and hoofs, to lay before the King, for we have no time to lose.”

“No time to lose!” I repeated. “What mean you?”

He pointed upward with his blood-smeared assegai.

“The moon,” he said.

Then, indeed, Nkose, amazement was my lot—amazement and dismay. And well it might be. For last night the moon had not quite passed its first quarter. To-night it was nearly full.

Like one in a dream I gazed. Anything might be possible in this abode of tagati, but that the moon should change in one day from half to nearly full—au! that was too much.

“What does it mean, Jambúla?” I said at length. “Last night the moon was less than half, and now—?”

“Au!” muttered Jambúla, bringing his hand to his mouth with a strange sort of laugh. “Who am I that I should contradict you, my father? But last night the moon was nearly as it is now. But the night you left us it was but at half.”

“And was not that last night, O fool? In truth the wizardry of this place has eaten into thy brain. And yet—!”

There was the moon, Nkose, within a day or two of full. It could not lie, even though Jambúla could. Stupidly I gazed at it, then at him.

“And how long ago is it that I left you, Jambúla?”

“Six days, father.”

Ha! Now I saw. Now everything was clear. The wizard, and the múti fire—the green, choking vapour that had filled my lungs and brain, causing me to see strange and fearful

things—had kept me in a state of slumber. For six days I had lain within the heart of the rock, and I had thought it but the short part of one day. My hunger on my recovery—the state of putrefaction of the body of the slave whom I had supposed to have been slain only that morning—the change of the moon—all, indeed, stood clear enough now.

But whatever Jambúla may have imagined, it was not in my mind to tell him, or anybody, what had really happened, for it is not good among us for a man to have a name for dealings with abatagati. So I sent him off there and then to Maqandi's kraal, with orders to bring back a number of men immediately to flay the great ghost-bull and carry the hide, with the head and hoofs, before the King, without loss of time.

After he had gone, and while I sat alone in the haunted place, I watched by the great black mass lying so still and quiet; and, Nkose, I believe I should have felt little surprise had the thing come to life again, head and all, so great was the awe it had set up among us. I am not even sure that I did not once or twice hear the voice of old Gasitye, and behold his spidery old form shambling among the trees. The dawn came at last, however, but before it came Jambúla, with a number of the iron-working slaves. These were in great delight over the slain monster who had destroyed so many of them, yet no time did I allow them to give way to their joy over dancing and such. It behoved us to return to the Great Great One with all speed, for on the next night the moon would be at full.

Chapter Seven.

The Faith of a King.

The news of what had been done had already spread fast and far, and before I reached Maqandi's kraal a great crowd of the iron-workers had assembled. These increased more and more, and presently a vast number of these people had joined in my train, dancing in their joy, and singing songs of triumph and of praise of myself, who had rid them of a twofold terror—of destruction by this thing of tagati, and of peril of wholesale death by the assegai when the patience of the King should become exhausted. But little attention did I pay to all this, for my allotted time had nearly expired, and it would be all I could do to reach Kwa'zingwenya ere it had quite. So I levied upon Maqandi for a large body of slaves, and pushed on, travelling night and day, and taking little or no rest.

No time even had I to visit my own kraal, which was somewhat off the line of my nearest road. However, I sent messengers there, and swift runners to Kwa'zingwenya, that news of my success might reach the King as early as possible.

But as I travelled on swiftly through the night, whose dawn should see me laying my trophies at the feet of the Great Great One, my mind was torn by many misgivings, and many an anxious glance did I send upward to the heavens. The moon was at the full.

Fair and splendid rose the dawn of that day, and as I came in sight of our Great Place, and of the people flocking thither—for here, too, the news had spread, and all were eager to hear about what had been done, and, if possible, to behold the actual skin and horns of the great tagati beast—I forgot my fears, and felt proud and light-hearted as ever when I had accomplished something great. And thus I stalked into the great circle, looking neither to right nor left, and seemingly not hearing the murmurs and exclamations of wonder which broke from all who beheld the immense horned head borne behind me by the slaves.

“The Great Great One is sleeping, Untúswa,” said the commander of the armed body-guard before the gate of the isigodhlo. “His orders are that none should awaken him.”

“Yet what will he say if such news as I bring be allowed to grow old? How will that be, Ngoza?”

“Whau! I know not, son of Ntelani,” was the answer. “But I may not go behind my orders. There is no safety that way.”

Now I liked not this reply. I noticed, moreover, that the guard before the isigodhlo was much larger than usual, and in those days, Nkose, anything unusual was likely to foreshadow trouble for somebody. Further, there was a shortness in the tone of the captain of the guard which sounded strange as addressed to one of my rank and influence. There was nothing for it, however, but patience, so I sat down to await the pleasure of the Great Great One.

As I sat there, taking snuff, I ran my eyes over those present, both near and far, seemingly with unconcern, but in reality with something of anxiety. Many of my own followers could I discern among the throng, and their women; but among these last was no sign of Lalusini. Yet this did not disconcert me, for of late my inkosikazi had rather avoided coming overmuch within the notice of the Great Great One.

Presently an inceku came out and spoke to the captain of the guard. Immediately it was proclaimed that the Great Great One was about to appear; and, preceded by the izimbonga, or praisers, bellowing the royal titles, Umzilikazi came forth and took his seat at the head of the great circle, where he was wont to sit each morning and discuss matters of state, or pronounce judgment on offenders.

As soon as the prostrate multitude had made an end of shouting the royal praises I advanced to the King and made my report, leaving out, however, my experience of the witchcraft of Gasitye.

“Thou hast done well, Untúswa,” he said when I had concluded. “Now bid them bring hither that head.”

This was done—and as Umzilikazi stood up the better to examine it, even he murmured in surprise at its gigantic size. And I, gazing upon the thing, black and huge, with its glazed eyes and swollen tongue and shaggy frontlet of hair, remembered the horrible and terrifying aspect of those vast, pointed horns, tossing and tearing in the glade of the moonlit forest.

“Whau! It stinks. Let them take it away,” said Umzilikazi at length, spitting in disgust, as a swarm of flies came buzzing about his face. “And now, Untúswa, this thing will trouble the land no more?”

“No more, Great Great One.”

“Ha! That is well. And now by virtue of what múti didst thou triumph over this evil thing of witchcraft?”

“By the virtue of no múti save that of the spear of the King, O Elephant,” I answered, with a glance backward at where I had deposited the great assegai, the erewhile royal gift.

I thought the answer seemed to please him, then not; for his expression changed as though reading into my words a hidden meaning.

“But it has taken long to rid the land of this thing, Untúswa,” he said, looking at me with his head bent sideways, and speaking in a soft tone.

“That is so, Great Great One. But the thing was both crafty and fierce.”

“Yet not alone didst thou slay it, as my conditions were,” he went on, pointing at me with his short-handled spear.

“Alone indeed did I slay it, Serpent of Wisdom,” I answered.

“Now thou liest, son of Ntelani. What of the slaves who were with thee?”

“They were but bait for the ghost-bull, Divider of the Sun; and both were duly slain by it,” I replied. But now I knew my feet were standing on slippery ground indeed—for never for a long time past had Umzilikazi spoken to me in that tone, and for a longer time still, in the sight and hearing of all men.

“And what of thy slave, Jambúla?” went on the King. “Was he not armed?”

“No part did he take in slaying the thing, Father of the Wise. His part lay in running away.”

“Yet he was armed, and my condition laid down that no armed force should accompany thee.”

“Au! Now I would ask the Great Great One, the leader of the nations in war, whether one man, and he a slave, constitutes an armed force?” I replied, fully aware that whatever was in the King’s mind towards me, lack of courage never yet found favour in that mind.

“Let be, then,” he said. “For that question we will let it rest. But say then, son of Ntelani—what of the moon? That this thing should be slain before the full of the moon—was not that one of my conditions? Yet the moon has been full these two nights.”

“But the thing was so slain, Black Elephant. Before the moon was full, was it slain.”

“But it should have been brought here by the full of the moon—the head, even as now. Well, well, Untúswa! It is not always possible to carry out conditions in their entirety, is it? Ah, ah! not always possible. Now go home, thou slayer of ghost-bulls, for it may be that I have even harder conditions awaiting thee than slaying tagati beasts. Go!”

I saluted and withdrew, and as I did so, the chief of the izanusi came up and begged to be allowed to have the trophies of the ghost-bull for múti purposes. But Umzilikazi refused shortly, and gave orders that they should be prepared and preserved until he had chosen how to dispose them. And I, leaving the presence as commanded, felt sore and heavy at heart, for the King’s tone of mockery seemed cold and hostile, and to bear some hidden meaning—one that boded ill to me and mine.

So concerned was I, trying to think out this matter, that I hardly noticed how few of my own rank joined me to give me news or talk over what had been done, and of my own followers none at all. These last would give me greeting from afar, and hurry onward; yet, by what I had done, I had saved them all from the death of the assegai. But it behoved me not, as a chief of great rank and influence, to show curiosity, and so, asking questions of no man, I eventually reached my kraal.

Then as I entered the gate, looking up towards my principal hut, it came back to me how I had last beheld Lalusini standing there in the setting sun to see the last of me, on that evening when I set forth on my errand of dread. Why was she not there now, waiting to welcome me? Hau! It seemed to send a chill through my being—a foreboding of all that was direful and deathly. Man of mature age and ripe experience as I was, even I could hardly restrain a quickening of the step as I paced across the open circle, returning the greetings of those who hailed my return.

Stooping through the doorway, I entered the hut. It was empty.

Everything was in its place as I had left it. But—no Lalusini.

“She has gone about some ordinary business,” I thought; “or has come to welcome me in the path, and we have missed.” But my sinking heart cried aloud that such thoughts told idle tales.

Stepping forth, I beckoned a young man standing near.

“Where is Mgwali?” I inquired.

He replied that he thought my brother must have tarried at the Great Place, for he had seen him there that morning.

“Where is Ncala-cala?” I then asked.

He replied that the old man, who was the responsible head of the kraal under me, had been sent for by the King the day before, and had not yet returned. I asked him no more questions, but entered the hut of one of my other wives.

I found Nxope and Fumana squatted together on the ground. They greeted me in a manner that struck me as showing great if subdued fear.

“Where is Lalusini?” I said.

Then indeed was fear upon their countenances. They looked at each other as though each expected the other to reply.

“Where is Lalusini?” I repeated.

“We know not,” said Fumana sullenly.

Then my patience gave way.

“Ha! Ye know not! Hear me now, ye witches. I am tired of such as you. Look at this,” holding forth the great assegai, from which I never parted, save when forced to disarm in the presence of the King. “Look well at it and bear in mind I do not speak twice. This spear has drunk much blood, but never yet the blood of women. Fail to answer my next question and it will begin. Now. Where is Lalusini?”

“In truth we know not,” screamed Nxope.

I know not how it was, Nkose, that in my awful grief and rage that blade did not shear swiftly through the speaker’s heart, even as I had promised. I know not how it was, I say, unless it were that something about the woman—some movement, perhaps—reminded me of Lalusini, but my hand seemed arrested in the very act of striking.

“Ha! One more chance,” I said. “Now, quick. Tell me.”

“We will tell you all, lord,” yelled Fumana, more quick-witted than the other. “The third night after you left she disappeared. No one saw her go; nor has she ever returned.”

“Seven nights ago that would be; and she has never returned?”

“Never, lord.”

“And that is all we know about it,” whimpered Nxope, still in fear for her life.

But she need not have been. My anger against them was past now, for I could see they had told me all they knew, and that was—nothing. Besides, of them I had no further thought. I sat down on the floor of the hut and thought. The third night after I left. Ha! The vision in Gasitye’s cavern! Had I not seen Lalusini’s face among the others—among the faces of the dead—for such were all the others? She, too, had passed into the Great Unknown.

Now my thoughts at once flew off to the King. I saw his hand in this matter. Umzilikazi had broken faith with me. He had seized the opportunity of my absence to put my sorceress-wife to death, and that secretly and in the dead of night. Ha! I saw it all now. All that had been said that morning connected him with this. Had he not repeatedly taxed me with not carrying out the conditions of my challenge, so as to justify his own act of treachery? And then his words, uttered in soft, mocking tones: “Well, well, Untúswa. It is not always possible to carry out conditions in their entirety, is it? Ah, ah! not always possible,” That pointed to some breach on his part of his own conditions. And again: “I have even harder conditions awaiting thee than the slaying of tagati beasts.” It was all as clear now as the noonday sun. Yet why should he thus have tried to excuse what he had done? At a nod from him—one word—I had gone to join the others whose faces I had seen, dim and horrible, in the wizard cave. And then I knew that if the son of Matyobane, founder and first King of the Amandebeli nation, had never made a mistake in his life, he had made one when he failed to give that nod, to utter that word; for, so sure as he had ordered the death of Lalusini, so sure would a new king reign over the Amandebeli, and that speedily.

I have already told you, Nkose, that the love which I felt for Lalusini was after the manner of the love which white people bear for their women; and, indeed, I think but few, even, of them. Now, as I sat there, realising that never again should I behold my stately and beautiful wife, never again hear the tones of her voice—always soft with love for me—the thoughts that hunted each other through my mind were many and passing strange. In truth, I was bewitched. All that had constituted the joy of living was as nothing now—my rank and influence, my ambitions, the fierce joy of battle, the thunder of the war-march, of rank upon rank of the splendid warriors I commanded—all this was as nothing. And at this moment there crossed my mind the thought of that priest-magician, the white man whom we found offering sacrifice in the forest—of whom I told you in a former story—and who dwelt with us long. I thought of his teaching and his

mysteries, and of the God of Peace of whom he taught, and how that, if he were here now, I would gladly put myself through his strange water-rite, and participate in his mysterious sacrifices, so that I might once more be reunited to Lalusini in another world; for such seemed to me to have been his teaching—at least, so as I remembered it. But he, too, was dead; and, though I might sacrifice oxen at his grave, I doubted whether his voice even then would tell me what to do, for I remembered he liked not such sacrifices. Besides, he had always taught that it was not lawful to kill any man, save in defence of our lives or nation; and if there was one thing as firmly rooted in my mind then, Nkose, as the Intaba Zungweni yonder is rooted to the plain, it was that the son of Matyobane should himself travel the road of death. I cared not what fate should be mine therefor; nor, indeed, that my whole kraal—wives, children, relatives, followers—should die the death of the spear or the stake; I myself would slay the King with my own hand. And then it seemed that waves of blood were rolling red around my brain. I saw myself King—I saw all those of Umzilikazi's House led forth to die—I saw the surface of the Pool of Death scarlet with the blood of all who, in the farthest degree, boasted a single drop of the blood of Matyobane, till even the alligators, surfeited, refused to devour any more. Haul I would slay. Haul I would invent new tortures for every man, woman, and child of the now reigning House; I would execute such a vengeance that the tale of it should be handed down as long as the tongue of the Zulu was spoken in the world.

I know not, Nkose, what change this cloud of blood and flame rolling around my brain must have produced in my countenance, but I awoke from my thoughts to find Nxope and Fumana staring at me as though at a thing of horror. Their eyes were starting from their heads, their mouths were open, they seemed turned to stone, as though they were staring into the very jaws of the most terrible form of death. Then I remembered. If I would render my vengeance complete, I must be wary; silent and crafty as the leopard when marking down his prey. The strength of the warrior, the craft of the councillor, the coolness and self-control of both—such must be the rôle of every moment, waking or sleeping, of life.

"I think I have travelled too fast and too far, and am tired," I said in an ordinary and even tone; yet, even as it was, so frightened were those two women that they half leapt at the sound of it. "You two," pointing at them with my spear, "attend now. It is not good to talk too much. The tongue that wags too much must be cut out with this"—fingering the edge of the blade—"or the throat is less trouble to cut. Bear that in mind, for I know not how ye escaped with your lives but a short while ago."

They were quick in their declarations of silence and careful utterance, and I knew I had sufficiently frightened them. And thus I left them.

Chapter Eight.

Gegesa's Tale.

For several days I went about as usual, to the eyes of men showing no difference in my converse and behaviour. At first all would watch me furtively, as though to observe what effect my loss would have on me, if any; but this soon ceased as they saw no difference, and indeed this was not strange, for it is not our custom to allow ourselves to be affected by the loss of a woman, more or less. There were plenty more women in the nation, and I, Untúswa, the second commander of the King's hosts, could take as many wives as I chose. The King had given me this particular wife, and if he chose to take her from me, openly or secretly, who might run his will against the will of the Great Great One, at whose word we held our lives?

So men looked at it, but I—well, I looked at it from another point of view. That the King's hand moved behind the matter I could see by the uniform silence with which it was treated, nor could I even overhear so much as the “darkest” of talking among any of the people. But I was awaiting my time, and to allay suspicion I took a new wife. She was young and good-tempered, and was a daughter of Xulawayo, an induna of rank, and a commander of high standing in the army, by reason of which he demanded much cattle in lobola for her, all of which I paid him without objection. This astonished him greatly, nor could he sleep for three nights for wishing he had demanded more. But I had an object in view, which was to bind so influential a leader as Xulawayo more closely to me against the time for striking my blow.

Now of this I never lost sight for a moment. Carefully I sounded my own followers, and lost no opportunity of rendering myself popular among the army at large. Yet the game was a terribly risky one, and I felt as a man might who attempts to walk on a ridge of rock no wider than an assegai blade, with the depth of a whole mountain on either side. But the game was worth the risk, for I was playing for a throne and for revenge.

Now and again the King would rally me.

“Taking new wives at last, Untúswa?” he would say. “Whau! but you have been long content with old ones. How often have I told you that women are like a bowl of tywala: delightful and stimulating when fresh; but, when stale, sour and injurious, and the sooner thrown away the better.”

And I would laugh pleasantly at the royal wit, and send lobola for yet another girl, this one, as before, the daughter of an influential fighting induna; but, for all that, the loss of

Lalusini was none the less present in my mind, and the desire for my projected vengeance grew, the longer that vengeance was delayed.

Two things, however, I observed, and these did not look well for my plot. One was that never now would Umzilikazi commune with me alone as in the old friendly manner of former days; the other that he never appeared without a strong body-guard in attendance, fully armed, and composed of young warriors chosen from houses whose fidelity to the House of Matyobane was beyond suspicion, they being themselves of that House. But my time was coming, and that I knew, for the very desperation and assurance of a man who values not his own life.

There were times when, looking upon the múti bag—Lalusini's last gift to me, which I ever wore—I felt moved to open it. But her words were explicit. It was only to be opened in the very last extremity, and such extremity I felt had not yet been reached. So I forebore.

And now, Nkose, there befell one of those occurrences which will befall even the wisest and coolest and most experienced of any of us when least we look for it, which are destined to alter all our most carefully laid plans, for there is ever some moment in life when the wisest and most carefully thinking man is no better than a fool. And this is how it came about.

One evening I was walking back, along the river bank, to my kraal, alone—thinking, as ever, upon my now fast ripening scheme—when I heard my name called out in a quavering croak. Turning, I beheld the shrivelled figure of an old crone, perched upon a point of rock overhanging a long deep reach. Beside her was a bundle of sticks she had been gathering.

“Give me snuff, Untúswa, O Great Fighter,” she cried, stretching out a bony claw. “Give me snuff from that pretty box stuck in your ear, for I have none.”

I stepped aside, and, taking the horn tube from the lobe of my ear, poured half its contents into her skinny old hand, and as I did so I recognised in the old witch one who had an evil repute among us for Umtagati; indeed, it was reported that she had been “smelt out” and killed in the time of Tshaka, but had somehow managed to come to life again, and had not been interfered with since because of our custom under which no one can be killed twice.

She was very, very old—so old that beyond a wisp or two of white wool her scalp was entirely bald. Her limbs were mere bits of stick, to which even her few rags of clothing would hardly cling. Looking at her squatting there, I thought she would make an exact

mate for old Gasitye, as I had seen him in the tagati cave, squatting in like fashion; and I must have laughed at the thought, for she said, with some show of fire:

“Laugh, Untúswa, laugh, I am old and shrivelled, am I not? But that is a complaint you will never suffer from. Oh, no! Oh, no!”

“What mean you, mother?” I said, pausing as I was about to continue on my way, for there was that in her words which fitted not well in with my thoughts just then. “I am a fighting man, and such may reasonably not live to grow old.”

“Ah, ah! A fighting man. Thou art more. He who would sit in the seat of the mighty is hardly likely to die of old age,” she answered slowly, poking her head forward with a meaning chuckle.

“Now,” I thought, “this old witch knows too much. I will just drop her over into the river and make her safe.”

But before I could do so, she again croaked out:

“What will you give to know something, Untúswa? What will you give me if I tell you that which you would most like to learn?”

The blood seemed to stand still within me at the words. “That which I would most like to learn”—the secret of Lalusini’s disappearance, of course. I strove to restrain all semblance of anxiety, but the dim eyes of the old hag seemed to pierce my thoughts through and through.

“If it is indeed something I would like to learn, mother, then will I give anything—not too great—you may choose to ask. But, beware of fooling me with old women’s tales.”

“Ha, ha! And the fate of the Daughter of the Great—is that an old woman’s tale?”

“Tell me of that, if you know it, mother,” I said.

“Ah, ah! If I know it. See now, Untúswa, I am old—so old that I am as they of another world. And the other world moves about at night—and I—often I steal out at night and talk with those of another world.”

I murmured assent, and she went on.

“See yon pool, Untúswa?” pointing up the river where the alligators dwelt, to whom were cast those whom the King had doomed to die. “Often, at night, I go out and sit over that pool that I may talk with the ghosts of them who have died there; and they come creeping up, those ghosts of dead men, all dripping and bloody, as though fresh from the alligators’ jaws. Ha! and we have such talks, I, old Gegesa, and those ghosts of dead men—yes, and of women, too, Untúswa—of women, too;” and she paused with a shrill cackle, and leered at me. “There was thy former inkosikazi, Nangeza, she who died there, and she came up and talked with me, saying she should soon have fitting company in the land of ghosts, for it was not healthy to be the inkosikazi of Untúswa. And just then I heard steps—the footsteps of men—although it was night, and the neighbourhood of the pool was one of fear and of death. So I hid myself, Untúswa—crept away behind a stone which the moon threw into a black shadow, and this is what I saw. Four great, fierce looking men came down to the brink of the rock which overhangs the pool, and in their midst was a woman—”

“A woman!” I echoed, staring at her.

“Eh-é! a woman—tall and shapely and beautiful, as a daughter of the Great.”

“What then?”

I hissed the words rather than uttered them. Again that blood-wave surged around my brain. I knew what was coming—knew the worst.

“What then? This,” went on the hag. “They led her to the brink of the pool, and were about to throw her in. But she spoke, and her voice was firm and sweet, as the wind’s whisper. ‘Lay not hands on me,’ she said, ‘for I come of the greatest the world ever saw.’ Then they refrained, and the foremost said, ‘Go in thyself, then, Daughter of the Great, for it is the word of the King. It is our lives or thine.’ Then she looked for one moment in front of her, the moon full on her face, and dropped quietly over. And I heard the splash and the rush through the water, as the alligators seized their meat, even as I have often heard it. But while the moon was on her face, I knew her.”

“Who was she?” I whispered.

“Lalusini, the daughter of that Great One, the founder of all nations. Thine inkosikazi, Untúswa.”

“And the men, who were they?”

“They were chief among the King’s slayers.”

“Their names? Did you not know them, Gegesa?”

“Did I not know them? Ah, ah! who is there I do not know?” And she told me the names of all four, and I laid them up in my memory; for I thought how I would have those slayers let down by thongs over the edge of the rock so that the alligators might eat them piece by piece—might crunch off first a foot, then a leg, and so on, as they dangled there. Oh, what vengeance should be mine!

“But how do I know this is true, thou witch?” I said. “How can I tell it is not all a made-up story?”

“What have I to gain by making it up? Have I not rather to gain by not telling it? Go home, Untúswa, and be happy with your new wives; they are young and bright-eyed, and round, as I was once. Yau! Rest content now you know Lalusini can never return. A returning inkosikazi is not always welcome; ha, ha!”

I stood gazing at her in silence, and the old hag went on.

“Yet it is better to lose an inkosikazi, if by that loss you sit in the seat of a King! Ah, ah! Untúswa; there will be food for the alligators then.”

“Meanwhile they shall have some now. You have lived too long, Gegesa, and you know too much. I trust not that croaking old tongue. This is the price I pay for thy news—the price it is worth.”

So saying, I picked her up by her ragged old blanket where it was knotted round her, and before she had time to utter a cry, tossed her clean over the brink of the rock. I heard the splash in the water beneath, and without troubling to look over, I turned away.

With the blood-wave surging around my brain, I strode quickly onward. Now the mystery of Lalusini’s disappearance was a mystery no more. Any last hope I might have clung to that she might one day reappear was shattered. She had died as my first inkosikazi had died, a death of horror and of blood. Whau! but other blood should flow—should flow in rivers—before many days had gone by. When the King had rid me of Nangeza I had been well pleased, for her pestilent tongue and evil temper had gone far towards rendering life a weariness; but I had lived even longer with Lalusini than with Nangeza, but so far from doing aught that should cause my love for her to decrease, Lalusini had taken care that it should grow instead.

By the time I reached my kraal, night had fallen. Entering my large hut, I called for Jambúla the slave who had been with me in the slaying of the ghost-bull. By birth Jambúla was of the Amaxosa, a numerous and warlike people whose land is to the southward, as you know, Nkose. When a young man his family had been “eaten up” by order of its chief; and he, narrowly escaping with his life, had at last found refuge with a tribe of Basuti, among whom we had captured him. And now I knew that if there was one man upon whose fidelity I could entirely reckon, that man was Jambúla.

Having made sure that none could overhear us, to him now I opened the plot. His face lighted up with joy as he listened.

“To-morrow, by this time, we shall both be ghosts in the shadow world, or I sit in the seat of Umzilikazi, and you among the izinduna of this nation. How like you that, Jambúla?”

“If you are dead, my father, I too am dead,” he answered. “Not too soon, either, is it to strike, for my eyes and ears have not been closed in these days, nor have those of the Great Great One. It is his life or ours. The time when this place shall awaken hemmed in by the spear-points of the slayers is but a question of a few nights more or less.”

I believed this to be true, but even if it were not so it would have made but little difference. The tale told me by old Gegesa had so inflamed my blood that I could wait no longer. Vengeance, now at once—now, before it escaped me. I could wait no more.

A little while longer did Jambúla and I whisper together. Then softly and silently we stole forth into the night.

Chapter Nine.

“To Slay Thee, Son of Matyobane.”

The great kraal, Kwa’zingwenya, slept. All was dark and still as we drew near it, Jambúla and I. We could make out dimly in the starlight the immense circle of domed huts within their ringed fences, but not so much as the spark of a distant fire showed that any within were awake. Treading cautiously, we took our way round to the upper end of the great circle.

At every gate bodies of armed guards were posted, yet in the darkness two men, stealthy, silent as serpents, glided by unnoticed—no dog even was roused to give warning of their approach. Two men, alone. Success, and on the morrow the nation would hail a new king. Failure, and the lives of these two, and of all their kith and kindred, would be taken mercilessly.

Having reached our point we set to work. Twig by twig, thorn by thorn, we began to breach the thick prickly fence; long and silently we worked until the hole was large enough for the body of a man to creep through. But it was done at last, and I stood within the isigodhlo.

Jambúla was to remain outside. If all went well, that is, if he saw or heard nothing the night through, he was to enter himself shortly before dawn, and having stopped up the hole from the inside, was to await my orders. If I failed—and that he would not be long in learning—he was to return at full speed to my kraal, and warn the people there to flee at once for their very lives—to flee both fast and far—for it would not be long before the slayers were on their track.

Were my movements actuated by ambition alone, Nkose, then indeed my heart might have begun to fail me. Here was I, in the dead of night, all unbidden, within the sacred precincts of the isigodhlo. To be found there was death—were I the highest in the nation—death by impalement, or some other form of lingering torment. But now the thoughts engendered by such knowledge availed not to daunt me. The spirit of Lalusini, agonised and bloody, rose ever before my eyes, beckoning me onward, and my one thought was how soon I might bury my spear in the heart of her slayer.

But for my spear, here before me, was work already. From round one of the huts a man appeared, so suddenly as to collide with me in the darkness, had I not quickly stepped aside. Immediately I struck—and struck home. The broad blade had cleft his heart, and breathing only a soft sigh he sank motionless—being stone dead. I bent over his face,

and recognised one of the izinceku, or body-servants of the King. Of these I knew there were two on watch at night. I had yet to reckon with the other.

Now I stood motionless, and held my breath, listening. I was among the huts of the royal women, and there, but twenty paces distant, was that of the King. For arms, I had but a single broad-bladed assegai, the gift of Umzilikazi himself, as I have told you, Nkose, in a former tale; not even a shield, for such would but encumber me if it came to a close hand-to-hand struggle. My own craft and quickness were to be as a shield.

Two steps at a time, treading softer than any cat, I gained the outside of the large hut. Peering round I saw what I expected. Right across the door lay the body of a man. It was the other inceku.

He was sleeping. I could hear his soft regular breathing. But before I could enter that door he must exchange his sleep for the sleep of death.

He was lying on his back, his face turned upward to the stars, his body filling almost the whole width between the outside screen and the door itself. To reach him I could hardly hope without some slight sound of a scuffle. I flattened myself on the ground, and so crept noiselessly along his side.

Whau! but again the blade went home. Right under the fifth rib it glided, and the red blood flowed forth warm upon my hand. This one, too, died without a struggle.

Pausing again, I listened. All was still inside the hut. I began to cut the thong fastenings of the wicker door. What if Umzilikazi, experienced warrior as he was, awakened by the small amount of noise I had caused, were standing ready for me, waiting in the darkness with assegai uplifted to plunge the broad blade in between my shoulders as I crept in through the low doorway. Then the thought came to me that by reason of his very security, hemmed around with guards, the sleep of the King would be sound and unsuspicious. The fastenings were now cut, and grasping the wicker door firmly, I let it down noiselessly upon the floor of the hut.

There was another screen inside which I had forgotten. Peering around this I saw that the interior was not in darkness. The smouldering embers of a fire glowed in the hollow in the centre of the floor, and by its indistinct light I could make out the King, asleep among a pile of blankets against the thatch wall.

But in a moment he started from his sleep and sat upright.

“Ha! Who is that?” he said. Then, recognising me, he cried furiously, “Ha, Untúswa! Thou dog, daring to invade my privacy. Are we threatened from without, or why art thou here?”

“Thou art threatened from within,” I answered jeeringly. “I have come to slay thee, son of Matyobane.” And I sprang upon him.

But not so easily was my purpose of vengeance to be fulfilled. Umzilikazi, the warrior and leader of warriors while I was yet a boy, the founder and strong ruler of a new nation, was not so easily to be overcome, although surprised in the midst of sleep. Avoiding the stroke I aimed at him with my assegai, he seized my right wrist and held it in a grasp of iron, and for a moment thus in the half darkness we grappled. Indeed, I know not why he refrained from shouting aloud for assistance, knowing my bodily strength and prowess as a fighter, unless it were that his old warrior instincts moved him to add to the terror of his name by overthrowing so formidable a foe in single strife. And then it was too late, for with my left hand I seized his throat and gripped it until his very eyes protruded, choking back any sound he might then fain have uttered.

“Thy life shall pay for thy breach of faith with me,” I snarled. “Ha, ha! Where is Lalusini?” And my grasp on his throat tightened.

But then I saw another form rise from the heap of blankets and disappear swiftly through the door of the hut. I had not reckoned on the presence of any of the King’s wives; and I knew that I was lost, even before I heard the loud, shrill cry for help that rang out upon the night.

At that moment the sides of the doorway were nearly rent asunder, as the armed guard swarmed in. But, as this happened, Umzilikazi’s grasp upon my wrists relaxed, and he fell heavily to the ground. At the same time a strange, sweet odour filled the air, half stupefying me.

“Slay him, the traitorous dog!” I cried, imitating, as well as I knew how, the voice of the King. “Slay him where he lies.”

In another moment half a dozen spears would have transfixed the prostrate form, but just then, either by chance or design, one of the armed guard kicked the red embers into a momentary glow. The light fell full upon the face of Umzilikazi.

“Whau!” cried the guards, leaping in alarm, their assegais arrested in mid air. “It is the King!”

Then I saw that my plot had failed. Swift—swift as the lightning flash—I stabbed the warrior nearest the door, and, gliding through the latter, but a very few steps brought me to the thorn fence. No time had I to seek the hole by which I had entered. Gathering my legs under me I leaped. Right over the high stockade I flew like a buck, and once on the further side, I ran—ran as I had never ran in my younger days when I was the King's messenger.

And as I ran, keeping on fast and far throughout the night, I noticed that there was no hubbub in the great kraal behind. This meant that I had certainly failed to kill the King. But what had made him drop thus suddenly? Whatever it was it had been the saving of my own life, for only to the momentary diversion caused by my imitating Umzilikazi's tone did I owe it that half a dozen blades had not transfix me then and there. And now I noticed that the same strange, sweet, stupefying odour, though much fainter, was with me as I ran. Instinctively I clutched the múti bag hanging to my neck. Whau! It was open. Half of it had been torn away, but from what was left proceeded the odour. Now I saw. Now all stood clear. The bag had contained some stupefying scent. In our struggle it had been torn open, and Umzilikazi's face coming against it he had fallen senseless. He was in my hands. Lalusini's death would have been avenged, and I on the morrow would have proclaimed myself King, and supported my position by force of arms if need be; whereas now I was a fugitive, without home or nation. Umzilikazi still lived, and would pursue me with untiring and relentless purpose; and, worse than all, Lalusini was unavenged.

Still unavenged, should I not have said? for as I fled a new thought came into my mind. One plan of vengeance had failed, another might not; and, Nkose, if you are thinking, as I see you are, what kind of vengeance a nationless fugitive, fleeing for his very life, could hope to compass against a mighty king sitting at the head of a warrior nation, I can only answer that it was as a nationless fugitive I could best hope to compass that vengeance, as you will see. Anyhow, though my scheme had failed, Lalusini's múti had availed to save my life—that, too in the direst extremity. For what purpose, then, had my life been saved, but to carry out that scheme of vengeance by some other means?

When the dawn broke, I had already placed a great distance between myself and Kwa'zingwenya, and now the most perilous part of my flight began. The kraals of our own people were scattered about the land, and did any inhabiting these catch so much as a glimpse of me, the pursuers already on my track would not be long in finding me. I dared not lie hidden during the day, for, long as it really was, the distance between myself and Kwa'zingwenya was far too short. Well I knew Umzilikazi would cover the land with searching parties, and that many leaders of these would pay with their lives for failure to discover me. No more deadly crime had been committed since our nation was a nation. I had offered violence to the King's person; had attempted the life of the Great

Great One, and only by the merest accident had foiled to take it. The offence of the conspiracy of Ncwelo's Pool was an easily pardonable one compared with mine.

Carefully I travelled throughout the day. I could see the kraals of our people both near and far, and now and then parties of people themselves, but of the pursuers nothing as yet. Fortunately the ground was broken and bushy, and I was able to avoid observation. For arms I had but one assegai, no blanket to cover me from the night chills, and no food.

You will be wondering, Nkose, how it was that so experienced a campaigner as myself should have made no sort of preparation for this flight by storing provisions and necessaries in some place of concealment where I could readily take them up. But the reason lies in the fact that flight had not come into my plan at all. When I had started in upon it my desperate enterprise offered two alternatives—success or death—in the attempt. That a third alternative—flight—might be open to me I had never for a moment contemplated; wherefore, here I was in very evil case.

I managed to pluck some ears of green corn from a garden unperceived, and this sustained me as I devoured it; for in those days we could live for a long time on very little food, and but little rest. By the following evening I had gained the foot of the mountain range called Inkume, somewhat to the eastward of the Place of the Three Rifts, where our great battle was fought and won—won for us chiefly by the magic of Lalusini.

“Ah, ah!” I growled to myself, shaking my assegai in the direction whence I had come. “This nation has doomed itself in taking the life of her through whom its own life has been preserved.”

Now just as the sun touched the rim of the western world, his last gleam caused something to flash and shine. Ha! The glint of spears! I ought to know it. And in the clear light that succeeded I could make out a considerable body of armed men.

They were yet a great way off, but were coming towards me, not as though straight from Kwa'zingwenya, but by a roundabout way. A search party, of course. And now I thought gladly how I had been seen by none—though of this I could not make altogether certain. But I would not linger here. Darkness fell and the night was starry and still. Up and up, higher and higher I climbed, intending to place the whole mountain range between me and the Amandebeli nation by sunrise; but I was somewhat weary, and the ascent was rough and very steep. As I drew near the summit the night wind blew chill, singing through the long grass like the wailings of countless ghosts, and strange cries and

howlings would float up from the mountain sides. But nothing cared I for ghosts now; my chief thought was to avoid falling over cliffs and into chasms.

But when I had reached the summit of the range, as I thought, the stars grew dim, and, in a moment more, were hidden altogether. A white mist was creeping up from the further side, veiling everything. This was bad, for the most experienced traveller is as a little child in a thick mountain mist; and it was quite as likely as not that by continuing to travel I might turn round unknowingly and thus walk straight back upon the spears of those who came after. No! I must halt until it became clear again; and, at any rate, if I were delayed, the same would hold good of my pursuers, unless, indeed, the northern side of the mountains remained clear. This would give them such a long start that they would soon come up with me, in which case—goodnight!

It was time I decided to halt, Nkose. A puff of cold air coming upward warned me to pause in the act of making a step. The swirl and movement of the air lightened the thickness a little. And lo! I was standing on the very brink of a black chasm.

Its depth I could not estimate, but it looked bad. I was not unacquainted with these mountains, and I knew there were clefts which seemed to go down into the very heart of the world. But I saw something else. Away on the one hand rose a great rock, and around it, along the lip of the chasm, a narrow path seemed to run.

Now a new thought struck me. This might lead to one of the cave dwellings of those old tribes who long ages ago had inhabited those mountains. If so, no better hiding-place could I find, and immediately I started to make my way along the ledge path.

Whau, Nkose, I like not to recall that dread journey. That way, at first only broad enough for one man to travel, soon narrowed until a monkey could hardly have found foothold on it. Before me a great tongue of slippery rock face against which, and with arms extended, I had to flatten myself; behind, the unknown depths of that awful chasm. It seemed as though ghosts and witches sung in my ears in the dank breaths of the white mist, as though in the fitful puffs of the night wind hands were stretched forth to claw me down. Then, fortunately, the projecting rock tongue ended, and lo! I had gained a flat surface about twice the length of a man. This sloped inward, a narrowing tunnel, with a strange sudden twist just before it ended; and now my heart leaped within me, for no better hiding-place could I have lighted upon. Chilled, and wet, and weary, I crept into the narrowest end of the hole, and hardly had I lain me down than I fell into a deep, sound slumber.

When I awoke, it seemed that dawn had already begun to lighten the world, for I could make out the rock-walls of my sleeping place. Well, I would see, at any rate, what sort of

hiding this place promised to afford. I crept to where the cave widened sufficiently to allow me to stand upright, and then, as I turned the corner, amazement was my portion, and a growl escaped me, which boded ill for him who had caused it, for I had run right against the body of a man.

He grappled with me in a moment, seizing my wrist before I could bury my assegai in his body, and speaking quickly and eagerly. We were perilously near the edge of the chasm, for in my advance I had borne him backward. Then, as suddenly, my grasp of him relaxed, and his of me; for, in the fast lightening dimness of dawn, I recognised the face of my faithful slave, Jambúla, the Xosa.

Chapter Ten.

The Faith of a Slave.

“Greeting, my father,” he exclaimed, when we had stared at each other for a moment in silence. “Au! but it is well that none of those who come on behind me were in my place now.”

“Who come on behind thee? What meanest thou, fool, leading those who pursue thee to my hiding-place?”

“Nay, father; I came to warn thee, for this place is known to them, and from one point yonder”—and he pointed upward and across the chasm—“it can be seen into. Then they will surround it by day and by night, for none will venture in by so narrow a way as this, and the choice before us will be a leap into yon depth, or death by hunger and thirst, or on the stake of impalement, which is even now reared outside the King’s Great Place.”

I looked at Jambúla somewhat suspiciously, for a thought had come into my mind: What if he were meaning to betray me? What if he had been offered life, and even honour, to decoy me forth, so that my pursuers might pounce upon me, with the alternative of death in torments should he fail? Who could be trusted? On whose faith could one set entire belief?

“Let us go hence, my father, and that immediately,” he said, “for we must find a safer refuge than this. The mist is still upon the mountains, but at any moment it may roll back. Here is food that will last us some little time.”

He picked up a bundle which lay on the ground. It contained a quantity of grain, stamped and prepared as for amasi. For arms he had a broad assegai and three or four casting ones, and a great short-handled knob-stick, which he had brought especially for me, when he should find me.

Whatever my suspicions, it was clear I could not remain in that place for ever. Jambúla leading the way, we retraced the perilous cliff path, and stood outside upon the mountain once more. At first I kept a sharp look-out, but soon my suspicions were entirely lulled, and I was able to appreciate the fidelity of my slave, who had sought me out with the resolve to share my peril in the day of my downfall and flight.

We kept on along the summit of the mountain range in complete silence, for a man’s voice travels far in those quiet solitudes. Then, as the sun rose, the mist rolled higher and higher up the slope, and there on the further side lay the open country.

It was flat, or gently rolling, and now the dew lay upon it like the sunlight on the points of the waves of the sea. Here and there, like moving dots, we could see herds of game browsing, and the tall necks of giraffes stalking among the flat tops of the mimosas. It was a fair and gladsome sight, Nkose, and for us who had to traverse it, promised, at any rate, no scarcity of food.

But just then our eyes lighted upon that which was by no means a gladsome sight—and this was a moving body of armed men. They had evidently come through the mountains by the Place of the Three Rifts, and were now moving along the base in such wise that did we descend from where we were now we should walk right into the midst of them. We could make out nearly a hundred of them. Well for us was it that the mist lifted when it did.

This was not the impi I had seen the night before. Jambúla said that numbered half the strength of this. Our chances began to look small. We were between two search parties; and, for all we knew, a third might be sweeping along the summit of the range.

As we lay carefully concealed, watching the movements of this impi, we took counsel, Jambúla and I. There would be look-outs posted at some point on the mountains, and anyone moving over the flat, open country beyond could not escape observation. We must wait until night—that was certain.

We watched the impi in front of us, and presently saw it halt. It was signalling to someone above and behind it. Ha! Just as we thought. Another search party was coming along the summit.

We could see it now, but it was still a long way off. We were on higher ground, amid rocks and broken boulders. We made out about three score of men.

Our eminence was a small peak rising but a trifling height from the summit of the range. Should they pass without searching this we were safe, for, crouching behind the rocks, none could see us from but a short way off. Should they search, why, then, we must die fighting, for neither of us had any mind to writhe upon the stake of impalement.

We lay behind the rocks and gripped our weapons, for it was now too late to fly. On they came, till nearly abreast of our position. Then they halted, looking upward. Would they come?

Now we could just catch what the leader was saying—

“There is no hiding-place there, and we have travelled fast and far. And see. Yonder buck, with her fawn, would not be feeding there so peacefully were any man near. No! We had better hurry on.”

Then we saw a new sight, and one for which we were entirely unprepared. Quite close to us, peacefully and unconcernedly, was grazing a buck, of the kind you white people call “pheebok,” and beside her a little fawn, skipping and whisking its white tail as it gazed open-eyed at the impi. The other men seemed to agree with what their leader had said. They looked towards our hiding-place, then at the bucks, then they passed on their way.

For long we lay, not daring to move, scarcely to breathe. But we saw no more of the searchers, and at last the sun went down, and the grey of evening blotted out the world.

“A vow, Jambúla,” I whispered, as we travelled down the mountain side in the darkness. “Never again—no, not even if starving, will I slay a buck of that species—male or female, young or old—for it seems that our snakes have taken that form to watch over us,” And Jambúla assented.

Now as we travelled onward Jambúla told me of much that had happened since my flight. Knowing by the uproar within the isigodhlo that my plan had failed, he was about to start and warn my kraal according to my orders, when he saw me leap the fence and disappear into the darkness. He, like myself, had not reckoned on the chance of my escape, and his first impulse had been to follow me. But he remembered my orders, and, running at full speed, he warned my people and saw them all take flight before following on my track. Not too soon, either, had they done so, for, looking back as he fled, he had seen from far the smoke from my blazing kraals mounting to the heavens, which proved that the slayers had been there. He thought, and indeed so did I, that there was little probability of my people eventually escaping; but at any rate, they had a warning and a start, which was something.

That night we got down the mountain side without any trouble, and by dawn were far out over the open country. Yet not for a moment did we relax our caution. But the land was covered with patches and clumps of forest, some large, some small, and by keeping within these we could travel in concealment. We were able, moreover, to kill game, and this we did but sparingly, immediately burying what we did not need lest the cloud of vultures that would gather overhead should mark our locality to those who came after.

Now Jambúla, as we began to hunt, made mock of our Zulu casting-spears. The broad-headed umkonto—ah, that, he said, was good for its own purpose; but the umgculta, or casting-spear, with its stiff, awkward handle terminating in a knob, was a poor sort of weapon for killing game at any distance, or with any accuracy of aim. So he cut staves

and fashioned long slender hafts running to a point, as the Amaxosa have their spear-hafts, and to these he bound the lighter blades he had with him, and—Whau! with these he could slay a buck half as far again as I could with our own.

Thus we journeyed on from day to day, seeing no man, for that belt of country to the south had been well cleared by our people and was kept as a hunting-ground. Not yet, either, had I unfolded to Jambúla the aim of our wanderings.

We had come to a large wide river, and having crossed it, we lay by for a day or two on the further side, intending, if we could, to slay a buffalo and make shields of its hide, for we had come away without our shields. This river-bank was high and broken up into great rifts with earthen sides all filled and covered with trees and creepers. It was a place where a man might lie concealed for ever, and escape discovery even though a thousand were in quest of him, and it suited our purpose well.

It happened that on the second morning after our arrival here, Jambúla had gone forth early to spy out where buffalo might be found; but I, feeling weary, elected to rest throughout the heat of the day. When I awoke the sun was already high, and again I slept. On awaking the second time the sun was on the decline. Rising, I went forth, but of Jambúla there was no sign.

We had chosen for our hiding-place a crack in the ground that branched sideways from one of the great rifts of which I have made mention, and this was roofed in with trees as the roof of a hut. Then I heard that which brought me to an attitude of intense listening. It was the deep murmur of voices, and it seemed to come from the river-bed.

Here the trees and bush grew thick to a cliff of earth about six times the height of a man, over which they hung in a thick tangle. Quickly I gained this point, and peering through, this is what I saw:

Right underneath was a stony space, between the base of the cliff and the flowing of the broad swift current, and this space was full of armed men.

They were our own people. I knew most of them by sight. But one among them was not armed, and at that moment several of them were engaged in binding the wrists of this one, far apart, to the ends of a pole. Then the man was stretched upon his back, two or three of them grasping the centre of the pole, and thus drawing his arms high above his head. His feet had already been treated in like fashion. And in this man, thus made ready for I knew too well what, I recognised my slave and faithful follower, Jambúla.

Over him now was bending the leader of the impi, speaking in a stern, decisive tone.

“Say now, thou dog, where lies hidden thy master, or I rip thee as thou liest.” And the broad assegai quivered in the speaker’s hand.

“Does ever a dog betray his master?” was the sullen reply. “A man may, but a dog, never.”

“How does that feel, and that, and that?” snarled the leader, bringing his blade down to the broad breast of the Xosa, and inflicting two or three deep gashes. “Ha! It will be through thee directly.”

I knew this man well. He was a brave enough fighter, but a sub-chief of small account, and not one of my own following. Could he capture me his fame would be assured. But he had that yet to do.

“Oh, good for thee, Sivuma,” I growled to myself. “Thou shalt feed the alligators for this when my day comes.”

Seeing that Jambúla was not to be frightened thus, Sivuma signed to the others. Well I knew what should follow. From a small fire which had been kindled among the stones they brought an assegai, whose blade had been heated red-hot. This was placed against the inner part of Jambúla’s thigh. I could hear the hiss of the burning flesh, but the brave Xosa never winced.

For long was the hot iron thus held, and when it began to cool another was brought from the fire. The perspiration poured from Jambúla’s face, and his teeth were set with agony; but beyond a quiver of the limbs, which he could not control, he quailed not, nor did he speak.

“Well, dog?” at last cried Sivuma furiously. “Where is thy master?”

“Not from me will that news come, leader of Umzilikazi’s hunting dogs,” replied this brave man, speaking in a quick hard voice in his agony.

“Ho! then shall the game continue; and there is much daylight before us yet,” said Sivuma; and again he beckoned the torturers.

This time the red-hot blades were inserted between Jambúla’s toes. Still, beyond some slight writhing, he showed nothing of the horrible torment he suffered.

All of this, Nkose, I was obliged to witness—being helpless. Had there been but few men I had quickly been in their midst; but what can one man do against a hundred? I could have yielded, but this would not have saved Jambúla; for, in any case, death by torment was the doom of the man—slave or free—who had linked his lot with that of the attempted slayer of the King. But I promised myself a rich revenge on all concerned in this matter when my day should come; nor would my yielding up of myself now do aught to hasten this, that I could see. Besides, all this would I have endured myself rather than betray Umzilikazi, in the days before he had broken faith with me; for it is the duty of a man to suffer anything rather than betray his chief.

Now the torture had gone on a little longer, when I saw Jambúla raise his head.

“Cease now, I pray thee, my father!” he gasped. “I can bear no more. I will lead you to the hiding-place of Untúswa.”

At that I started, Nkose. After all, this man was of an alien race—not one of us. He could not bear torture as the children of Zulu.

“Thou wilt, dog?” cried Sivuma, in delight. “And thou shalt. Fail, though, and for days shalt thou lie beneath the red-hot pang of the heated steel; ay, until thou diest.”

“I will not fail, my father,” groaned Jambúla, as though weak and exhausted with the pain. “He is somewhat far from here; but you shall take him. Then will the King, the Great Great One, give me my life?”

“Thy life? That I know not, but it may be,” replied Sivuma, ready to promise anything in his eagerness.

I have said that Jambúla’s hands and feet were stretched far apart, being bound to poles. His feet were now cut loose, but his feet only.

“The forest growth is thick where we have to go,” he said, “and how shall I pass through it bound thus?”

Sivuma looked at him a moment as though pondering. Then he gave orders, and they cut his hands loose.

But hardly had they done so when I saw through his plan. With the hand that was last loosened he grasped the end of the pole, and, whirling it around, swept two men to the earth, finishing off by swinging it with a hollow thud hard against the side of Sivuma’s head, bringing the leader to his knees.

So rapid had been Jambúla's movements, so unexpected withal, that before the warriors had quite understood what had happened, he had hewn his way through them; and, still holding the pole, had plunged to the water's edge and sprang far out into the stream. But swift as he had been, he had not been swift enough, for even as he leaped, quite half a dozen assegais out of the shower hurled at him transfixed his body; and as he struck the water, and was immediately whirled away by the current, I knew that the frame which the waters swept down was that of a dead man.

This, then, Nkose, was the end of Jambúla, my slave and faithful follower, and his end was a noble one, and worthy of the bravest warrior who ever lived, for he endured much horrible torture, and of himself plunged into the embrace of death rather than betray his chief; and further, striking down in that death two or more of those who guarded him armed; and if there exists a braver or more valiant form of death for a warrior than this, why, Nkose, I, who am now very old, have never heard of it.

Chapter Eleven.

The Rumble of the Elephant.

I was now left alone, and having lain hidden a few days—for that impi, though it made good search all around my hiding-place, failed to find me—I began to travel southward again. And as I travelled I thought how once before I had fled from our people nationless and an outcast, all for the sake of a woman, as I told you in that former tale when I won the King's Assegai; and now a second time I thus fled—a second time a woman had been the cause of my undoing; and yet it might be otherwise, for I was not an old man then, and who may tell what time holds in store?

And now, Nkose, I must leap over a great deal that happened during my flight, for if I were to dwell upon everything, and all I went through, and the peoples I fell in among—how some entertained me friendly and well, and how from others—being but one man and alone—I had to fly as fast and as far as from Umzilikazi's hunting dogs; how too, from others again, who, seeming friendly, yet plotted against me the direst treachery, from which I escaped as by a flash of time—all this, I say, were I to dwell upon, I should never get to my story, which being bound up with the fate of mighty nations and peoples, is the tale, Nkose, which you would desire to hear rather than the escapes and wanderings of one man.

Two moons had reached their full, and had died again, and by then it seemed to me that once more I was coming among my own people, for I heard our tongue spoken in all its fulness; and the kraals were even as our kraals, with the ringed fence and domed huts, and the women at work in the corn lands wore their hair gathered up in the impiti, or reddened cone, even as our women wear it. Now I judged it time to enter in among them; and one day, feeling hungry, I stopped at a small kraal—one of several—and gave greeting. None but women were there at the time, but presently from the other kraals men came hurrying, all armed. These were young and unringed, and seeing before them a kehla, and a man of my warrior aspect, their bearing, which had seemed somewhat hostile, became respectful, and they gave me greeting deferentially; and presently the women brought me tywala and ears of green corn roasted, for they might not open the milk-sacks, the heads of the houses being absent.

Now, desiring information, I found a way of asking as to the head of this group of kraals, whereat I saw surprise and some suspicion in their faces as they exchanged glances, for taking me for an induna of high import, they could little understand my ignorance on that point. They answered that it was the country of Nomapela, who was absent on an expedition into the territory of the Amaswazi, wherein he was acting as the chastising right arm of the King; but that, from day to day, they had been expecting his return.

“Then I will await the return of Nomapela, my children,” I answered.

“We hear you, father,” they said. And then I was shown to a hut and provided with entertainment, yet I knew that these young men were all suspicious of me, for I myself had come from the direction of the Swazi country, and might well be one of that people.

But not long had I to wait, for presently runners came in, and soon afterwards, great dust clouds, arising from the valley in the hills through which I myself had come, announced the arrival of the impi. But before it, streaming out through the defile, like a torrent when the rain is falling among the hills, came a great herd of cattle. Whau! it was a goodly sight to see the beasts as they poured onwards, the crashing of horns, as great bulls would now and then turn to fight each other as they ran; the lowing of cows, with calves racing at their sides, the gleam of the sun on the black and red and white and spotted hides, the forest of horns and the rolling eyes, and the trampling, and the dust-clouds, and the dark, leaping figures of the young men who, with shouts, and flourishing their shields, kept the herd from straying too far on either side. And then the impi, a full regiment strong, marching behind, the glitter of spear-points and the flash of shields as they advanced in column, singing a song of war—Whau! that was a goodly sight, and my eyes kindled as, with head thrown back, I watched it, feeling as though I were indeed among my own people once more, instead of among the children of Dingane, that mighty Elephant whose tread shaketh the earth at his great kraal Nkunkundhlovu. (“Nkunkundhlovu” means “the rumble of the Elephant.”) And from that great place I knew I could not now be many days distant.

As I watched, the impi halted, squatting on the plain a little distance off. Several men detached themselves from it and came to the kraal, foremost among them being Nomapela, the chief. He gave me greeting, and bade me sit with them, while bowls of tywala were handed round, and food. But these men also were gazing at me curiously, knowing not what to make of me, for they seemed to divine I was not one of themselves, and also that I was a man of standing and authority. This they could readily see, for the habit of commanding men will soon stamp upon the very countenance of him who exercises it a look of command; and the face of the man who practically commanded the whole of Umzilikazi’s army was likely to bear that stamp. So they knew not what to think, and could not ask direct.

“Do you fare our way, brother?” said Nomapela presently, while we ate together.

“I seek speech with the King,” I answered, “and would fain travel in your company, ye who return conquerors.”

These half-dozen men were all ringed and chiefs. Nomapela I knew by name as an induna of Dingane, and now I thought more than one of the others were known to me by sight. One indeed seemed to think the same as regards myself, for him had I seen eyeing me from time to time, as though he were trying to recollect me. Then, as he turned, displaying a certain scar upon his shoulder, I remembered him well—remembered the scar, too. It was a broad scar, as though the point of his shoulder had been sliced nearly off, and that then the weapon, turning, had buried itself in a deep straight cut. Indeed, I ought to remember it, for it was I who had inflicted it, and that with the very spear I held in my hand.

Often during our march did I find this chief looking thus at me. At last he said quietly:

“The way from the North is far, brother, is it not?”

I assented, and he went on:

“Is the Black Bull of the North growing old and weak that he sends to konza to the Elephant who trumpets at Nkunkundhlovu?”

“No older and no weaker than the day his horns gored back the Elephant, yonder at Inkume,” I answered, betrayed for the moment into speaking up for my nation. “And I think on that day thou, too, didst feel the goring of those horns, Mfulwana,” I added with a half-laugh as I glanced meaningfully at the scar upon his shoulder.

“Whau! That was a great fight, induna of the Black Bull,” he answered; and then, we being somewhat apart from the rest, we fought the battle of the Three Rifts over again—in words this time—I and this warrior, whom I had wounded there, and I found that my name and deeds at that place were well known in Zulu-land. Yes, and even how I had met and striven with Mhlangana the brother of Dingane, shield to shield and face to face; but I already knew how that Great One had travelled into the Dark Unknown, for two bulls cannot rule in one kraal.

In due time we came to the White Umfolosi, which was but a short march from Nkunkundhlovu, and were met on the river-bank by many who had come to gaze on the returning impi, and to amuse themselves watching the cattle and the women captives as they crossed the stream. Much whispering, too, did I perceive as regarded myself, for I was the only one of that impi not in war-gear, and the plainness of my attire and my head-ring unadorned with plumes drew every eye to me, all at first deeming me a captive, until they saw that I carried arms, and then they knew not what to make of it.

And now, Nkose, as we came in sight of Nkunkundhlovu, I gazed upon this great place with more than curious eyes. I had seen, when a boy, Tshaka's great kraal, Dukuza, but this one was even more magnificent. As we looked upon it from the opposite heights, I noticed that the isigodhlo alone occupied fully a quarter of the space within the ring fences, and before this was the King's cattle kraal. Then the immense number of huts, many rows deep, between the ring fences, hau! it seemed to me that at least twenty thousand warriors might easily have been housed there. And the great space in the centre, hau! so great was it that I thought our own great kraal, Kwa'zingwenya, would find room to stand within that huge circle alone, could it be placed there. But one thing was curious, and that was a stockade of upright logs, which encircled the outside fence, leaving a broad space between, through which an impi might march in columns.

We arrived at about mid-day, and as we filed in through the lower gate our impi began to sing a triumph-song in honour of the King:

“Ruler of the World, thy people turn to thee!
Father of nations, thy children creep beneath thy shadow!
Pursuer of the disobedient, thy scourges return to thee red;
Red with the blood of those who have fallen beneath thy glance.
Thy glance withers, O Stabber of the Sun; O Divider of the Stars.
Before it nations are consumed and creep away to die!”

Thus sang they in praise of Dingane, and two regiments within the centre space, drawn up under arms, took up the song, strophe by strophe! clashing together their war shields as they sang.

Now, as we entered, the King himself came forth from the isigodhlo, preceded by the izimbonga, running and roaring, and trumpeting and hissing, as they shouted aloud the royal titles—and so long, indeed, were these, and so many, that I thought they would last until sundown. But at length they desisted, and the thunder of the “Bayéte!” went up with a roar as from the voice of one, as every warrior tossed aloft his unarmed right hand, hailing the King.

I had seen this all my life when Umzilikazi appeared in state; but, somehow, here it seemed to impress me as it had never before done. The vastness of this great place, Nkunkundhlovu, “The Rumble of the Elephant,” the perfect order and splendid array of the regiments under arms, and, above all, the knowledge that here was the fountain-head of the pure-blooded race of Zulu—the parent stock, the ruler and eater-up of all nations, feared even by the white people, of whom just then we were more than beginning to hear—all this told upon me, and great as our new nation was, it was only great by reason of distance and strategy when compared with this. And now, Nkose, you will understand with what curiosity I gazed upon him to whom all nations did konza—

the mighty Dingane, slayer of Tshaka the Terrible, and who now sat in that Great One's seat.

He was a very tall man, in the full strength of middle age, but that largeness of limb which peculiarly distinguishes the House of Senzangakona imparted to him a stoutness of aspect which made his height appear less than it really was. And his look was right kingly. Straight he walked, with his head thrown back—lord, indeed, of the “People of the Heavens” (The literal meaning of “Amazulu.”)—and his eyes burned like stars, as, without bending his head, his glance swept down over the array of warriors there assembled.

He took his seat upon a wooden chair covered with a leopard-skin robe, which was set at the upper end of the great space, the chief indunas squatting on the ground on either side. The shield-bearer stood behind the royal chair, holding aloft the great white shield of state, an office I had many a time fulfilled in times past for Umzilikazi. Then he beckoned Nomapela and the other leaders of the returning impi, to draw near and make their report. They crept up, uttering the phrases of sibonga, and set forth what had been done. They had gone through that section of the Swazi people who had defied the King and made raids upon tribes who did konza to the Great Great One, and had carried the torch and the assegai upon their path. None had escaped, save, perhaps, a few who had fled to the mountains, having got warning of the approach of the slayers.

“That they should not have been allowed to do,” said Dingane. “Yet in pouring tywala from one bowl to another, a few drops will now and then perforce be spilled. And what spoil have ye brought?”

“Much cattle and good, Ruler of the World,” answered Nomapela. “Some we left, for it looked weak and sickly, and we knew it was not the will of the King that the remnant of that people should starve.”

“Ye have done well on the whole, my children,” said Dingane, who looked pleased. “And how—what of the women? Were any good enough to bring hither?”

“Au! Are any good enough for the Father of Nations?” quickly replied Nomapela. “Yet some we thought too well favoured to feed the blade of the spear, and these we brought.”

“Ha! I will see them, then,” said Dingane, somewhat eagerly. “Bring them hither. The cattle I will inspect some other time. But—hold. Whom have ye there?” he broke off, as his glance now fell upon me, where I sat among the warriors, conspicuous by the lack of plumes and war adornments. “Is it the chief dog of this tribe of dogs ye have exterminated? Yet no, for he is armed.”

“He is a stranger, O Elephant, who seeks audience of the Ruler of the World,” answered Nomapela.

“He is from the North, Serpent of Wisdom. Au! and a great tale should he have to tell,” struck in Mfulwana.

“Ha! From the North? He has the look of one who could wield yon broad spear he holds,” said Dingane, with that piercing glance of his full upon me. Then louder, “Come hither, stranger.”

I understood the ways of kings, Nkose, none better; and so, disarming, I crept forward, the words of bonga rolling out thick and fast the while. Arriving before the Great Great One, I prostrated myself, and then, seating myself upon the ground, waited for him to speak. Still he kept silence, and seemed to be looking me through and through; and, Nkose, I, who knew little of fear, felt it was no light thing to be there thus, awaiting the word of this mighty one, at whose frown tribes and peoples fell dead.

“Whau! but I think thou dost understand somewhat of the ways of war?” he said, at last.

“That do I, indeed, Father of the Nations,” I answered.

“Who art thou, and what is thy name?”

“I am Untúswa, the son of Ntelani, of the tribe of Umtetwa, Black Elephant,” I answered.

As I said these words, a great exclamation volleyed forth from the warriors; from all within hearing, that is, for the place was large, and my words could not reach everybody. The izinduna seated around the King bent eagerly forward to look at me, and even Dingane himself could not avoid something of a start. Nomapela too, and Mfulwana, started and stared, for not even to the latter had I revealed my identity. He knew that I was a war chief of high rank, and had wounded him in battle, but even he had not guessed who I really was.

Now Dingane looked at me all the more eagerly, and I, who knew not what was in his mind, thought that it was all even whether death now had travelled my way at last, or not. For I had wounded Mhlangana in the side at the battle of the Three Rifts. I myself had seen the blood flow. I had shed the blood of the royal House of Senzangakona, and were this known to Dingane, au! the place of slaughter would soon know another victim.

“Well, Untúswa, son of Ntelani, thy name is not unknown here, it would seem,” said the King, with a wave of the hand which took in those around. “And now, what is the message wherewith thou art charged?”

“With no message am I charged, Father of the World,” I answered. “I desire to konza to the lion of Zulu. That is why I am come hither.”

“Ah—ah, Untúswa,” said the King softly, putting his head on one side. “And what hast thou done, away in the North where a new lion roars alone—that so mighty a warrior, so brave a leader of men, should seek another king?”

“I have a reason, Serpent of Wisdom, but it is not for the ears of all,” I said. “One thing, however. It is to the advantage of the House of Senzangakona that I thus desire to konza to the Elephant whose tread shaketh the world.”

“Thou art a brave man, Untúswa,” said the King, “but I think thou surpassest thyself in coming hither with that tale. However, I will hear it, and that shortly. And now, Nomapela, bring hither thy captives, for I would see them.”

The women, to the number of a score and a half, were marched up before the King, and lay prone on their faces in fear; howbeit some, who were young and pretty, and well rounded, did not fear to look slyly through their fingers, calculating their chances of obtaining more or less ascendancy within the isigodhlo, for Dingane loved women much, though he would never take onto himself wives, lest there should be strife as to the succession.

“Whau! they are an ugly lot,” I heard him mutter. “Nevertheless, she will do—and she—and she—and she,” pointing at four of them with his short-handled assegai. “For the rest, I want them not. You, Nomapela and Mfulwana, and all who have led the impi, can choose two or three apiece, and if any remain let Untúswa here take them; for it is not meet that a warrior of his standing should come among us and have no wives.”

We all shouted aloud in praise of the King’s generosity, and just then two of the women whom Dingane had chosen faltered forth that they had small children with them.

“Children, have ye?” said Dingane softly. “Then they and ye must part, for my peace cannot be disturbed with screaming. Fear not, my sisters, they shall be well cared for—ah, yes—well cared for.” And the women said no more, for although they knew what sort of “care” would be meted out to their offspring, they themselves had no desire to travel into the Dark Unknown—wherefore they uttered no further word.

Then the King retired, amid shouts of praise from all there, and I—Whau! in but a short space I found myself occupying a fine hut within the great kraal of Nkunkundhlovu, the owner of three captive Swazi girls who had been given me as wives by Dingane, the Great King, and this, at any rate, was better than the stake of impalement at Kwa'zingwenya.

Chapter Twelve.

A Devouring Swarm.

I had no reason, so far, to complain of my treatment at the hands of the King, for I was supplied abundantly with all I required, either by the orders of Dingane, or by the generosity of the izinduna and warriors of note within Nkunkundhlovu, many of whom would drop into my hut at all times to have a talk with me; or we would sit in the shade in or about the Great Place, watching the reviewing of young regiments put through their practice by their chiefs, or talking and taking snuff. But although many thus came to hear a tale from me, and no tale pleased them so much as that of our flight from the great Tshaka, unless it were that of the Battle of the Three Rifts, yet I would ever tell such tale cautiously, suppressing or varying any event I deemed it not advisable to dwell too much upon, and among such was that very battle, wherein my strategy and that of Lalusini had saved our nation, for it might be that by the same strategy I should destroy Umzilikazi, and that I did not desire to reveal just yet.

Among those who would fain have got much out of me was Umhlela, one of Dingane's principal indunas—a little soft-voiced man, who would sit among the others and put in a word here and a word there, but always such a word as required careful pondering before I could give an answer to it. However, I had not myself sat at the right hand of a king all my life for nothing.

Not until I had been three days at Nkunkundhlovu did the King send for me. As I took my way to the great hut, through the isigodhlo, I noticed that the latter was formed in such wise that, once inside, a man might have difficulty in finding his way out of it, or indeed further into it, which spoke much for the suspiciousness of Dingane's character, of all of which I took careful note; for, Nkose, it is by reading such small things that a man may look into the minds of other men, be they kings or not, even as you white people draw knowledge from books.

Dingane was seated in the great hut, and with him three izinduna—Umhlela, the one who had already sought to draw out of me a great deal more than I had intended he should know; Nomapela, him with whom I had come hither; and Tambusa, a large fierce-looking man, who hitherto had shown me no active friendship. I did homage to the King; and then, in obedience to his command, sat and prepared to tell my tale. But as I did so I could see that Dingane was in a sullen and angry mood. Perhaps his sleep had been bad, or he had heard ill tidings; and, Nkose, whereas we must laugh when we would rather weep, most look pleased when our hearts are bursting with anger and hate, a king is different, in that he need conceal what he feels to please no man.

Now my tale pleased not Dingane much, yet I told it not in its entirety, nor did I say aught as to my attempt on the life of Umzilikazi.

“So, Untúswa,” he said, “when the doings of one king do not please thee thou wouldst konza to another?”

“That is not quite it, Great Great One,” I ventured. “I am a fighting man, a man of deeds rather than of words. I was but a boy when I fled with Umzilikazi, and ever since then has my spear been raised to strike down his enemies, and now he has sorely broken faith with me. I would sooner die than serve such.”

“Hau! This is of the sort who would make their kings at their own will,” growled Tambusa to himself; but I heard him.

“I know not which way to take with thee, Untúswa,” said Dingane, doubtfully. “I know not, indeed, whether to trust thee.”

“There are but two ways, Elephant. One is to make thyself master of this new nation, easily and with but little loss. The other way is not to do so, O Father of the Wise!”

“There is yet another way, Untúswa, Father of the Fools,” said the King, softly sneering, “and that is the Hill of Slaughter for thee, rebel and traitor to two kings.”

“My life is in the hand of the Lion of Zulu, for I myself have placed it there,” I said. “Now, father, should I have placed it there had I not known it was of more value to this nation than to me?”

“Bold words,” said Dingane, still frowning.

“Bold deeds are more to my taste, Great Great One,” I said. “The fate of the new nation in the North is in my hand. But if I die, it will never lie beneath the paw of the Lion of Zulu.”

The izinduna were staring in amazement at the boldness of my words; but the frown had left the brows of Dingane. Looking straight at me, he said softly:

“And what is to be thy reward for delivering this nation into my hand, Untúswa?”

“Only this, Black Elephant, that the whole House of Matyobane be delivered into my hand,” I answered.

“Then it is only revenge thou seekest?”

“Only revenge, Ruler of the World.”

Gazing keenly at him, I could see now that I had won over Dingane. I knew that the existence of our new nation had ever been to the parent race as a sharp stone in the side of a man who sleepeth. I knew that the fear of the Zulu power was ever present to the mind of Umzilikazi, and that one day that power would, sooner or later, reach him. I knew, moreover, all the weak points of our nation and army; and, knowing this, doubted not my ability to surprise and crush it, given sufficient force, and that with ease. Now my revenge looked very near indeed.

But if I had won over Dingane, there was one power I had yet to deal with, and that was the induna Tambusa. In this man I foresaw a formidable opponent, and his word carried weight in the ears of Dingane, even as did mine in times past in the ears of Umzilikazi. Now Tambusa spoke:

“Revenge is a great motive for a man to give up all his cattle and wives in order to obtain it.”

“Some men act from great motives and some from very small ones,” I answered shortly; for I, who but yesterday was, next to the King, the greatest in my own nation, could ill brook the tone of this man, who was but an induna like myself. But Dingane again took up the talk.

“Well, Untúswa, I must think out this matter. If thou canst deliver this nation into my hand, why then it may be that I will deliver those who remain of the House of Matyobane into thine. But if thou failest, what then?”

“My life is in the hand of the Great Great One,” I answered.

“Ha! Thou hast well said,” replied the King. And then he dismissed me.

For many days then I dwelt at Nkunkundhlovu; I, who had now become a wanderer; I, who had been a man of large possessions, the chief of many kraals, and the owner of vast herds of cattle, was now as poor as the poorest, living only on the King’s bounty. But from time to time Dingane would send for me, and we would talk long and earnestly over our plans for conquering Umzilikazi. At last I saw my revenge within my grasp. All was in preparation. No more impis were sent out on errands of plunder or punishment, and the regiments which dwelt at the great military kraal of Imbele-bele were ordered

up to Nkunkundhlovu. They came, making a splendid show as they paraded before the King, in full war-array.

When this was at an end and I was walking back to my hut, I heard myself hailed by a deep voice. Turning, I beheld a fighting chief arrayed in the war dress of the Imbele-bele regiment.

“It seems to me that this is not our first meeting. Wanderer from the North,” said this man.

“Ha! I should know thee,” I replied, “for we have exchanged hard blows in a great battle, Silwane. More than that, thou didst once cry me the ‘Bayéte’ and didst take orders from me as to the disposal of the invading host of Zulu.”

At those words Silwane stared as though he were face to face with a madman. But I brought him to my hut, and there alone, over a bowl of good tywala, I told him of those things which had happened during the blackening of the moon which preceded that great battle which was the saving of a nation’s life, and of which I have told you, Nkose, in another tale. When I had done, Silwane stared harder than ever, thinking perhaps I was the most wonderful strategist he had ever heard tell of, or the most wonderful liar.

“And now, having saved thy nation, thou art to be the means of destroying it, Untúswa?” he said. “Well, if thou art as good at fighting for us as thou wert against us it will go hard for Umzilikazi’s army. Well do I remember that great white shield of thine in the thick of the battle. Whau! but we thought it was Umzilikazi himself.”

Thus we talked, we two leaders of men—and often afterwards—and we two who had exchanged hard blows face to face now became friends, who were to deal hard blows side by side.

Almost were we ready to march northward, I say, and now the spirit of Lalusini would appear to me in my dreams, but glad and smiling, and by this I knew the omen of our success was good. But on one night I row her thus more plainly than ever, and it seemed I could touch her, and then her face changed, and grew quick and watchful, as though in warning, and it seemed as though the weight of some great peril lay upon me.

Now as I woke, in something very like fear, I found that one of my Swazi wives, who slept at my side, had sprung up and was shaking with fear. She declared that the form of a woman had passed through the hut; that it was a spirit, for assuredly no living woman possessed such beauty of form or face.

I knew not what to make of this; yet, while affecting to scorn her tale, I questioned the girl closely. If she, like myself, had but dreamed, why then it was passing strange that our dream should have shown us both the same vision. In truth, I knew not what to think. Powerful beyond all others I knew Lalusini's magic to be; was it then sufficiently powerful to bring her back from the dead? I thought much of this during the days that followed.

But the days that followed brought that which turned all our thoughts in an entirely new direction, for tidings came which were weighty indeed. The Amabuna (Boers) were advancing into the land of Zulu.

They were swarming in, men said. The slopes of Kwahlamba were covered with flocks and herds—their wagon teams were winding through the mountain passes, seen like vast serpents in the distance, far as the eye could see. In the face of this new enemy Umzilikazi was forgotten. No expedition to the North could be undertaken now. Day by day men brought tidings. The numbers of the Amabuna were countless, they said, and with them, besides their flocks and herds, they had their women and children in their waggons. They had come to remain in this land.

Well was it, now, that the army had been called up, and was disposed in or around the Great Place; well indeed for us now, for we would need all our strength to beat back or stamp out this locust swarm. Bitter and stubborn fighters were they, and knew how to use their long guns. The war-song was sung, and war-dances were held among our regiments, and the talk of all men was of war.

But Dingane was uneasy in his mind, and in his rage at not being sooner informed of the advance of the Amabuna, he sent for the head men of the outlying kraals and had them killed. Two of them he ordered to be impaled upon stakes, within sight of all in Nkunkundhlovu.

Now hard by there dwelt a white man—an Umfundisi (Teacher or missionary), one of your countrymen, Nkose. Him the King had allowed to live there because he was the friend of another white man who had visited the country alone and in a friendly manner a short while before, but Dingane had no love for him or his teaching, nor had any of us in those days. This man, seeing from his house the death of those evil-doers, came quickly down to Nkunkundhlovu, hoping he might save the lives of others, for he was a man with a kind heart and hated to behold suffering.

Now as he came before the King he was very pale, for he had passed close to the place of slaughter where lay those just slain, with broken skulls; and the sight of the agony of the two upon the stakes turned him very sick.

“You are somewhat late, my father,” said Dingane, when the Umfundisi would have pleaded for their lives. “The mouths of those who kept them closed too long are now closed for ever. Yonder they lie.”

“But those under torture, King?” urged the white man, hardly able to look in the direction of the stakes, so filled was he with loathing and disgust. “At least give the word that they be put out of their pain.”

“Au! Here is a marvel!” said Dingane laughing; “the white Umfundisi actually pleading for the death of men!”

“Yes, but it is to save them hours of cruel torment,” answered the white man quickly.

“Ah, ah!” laughed the King. “And yet, my father, you teach that nothing but torment awaits bad men after death—torment for ever and ever. Is it not so?”

Now we who listened awaited the Umfundisi’s reply with some curiosity.

“That is so, King, for it is in the word of God,” he said.

“Why, then, if that is so, Umfundisi, it will make no difference whether I order these to be slain at once or not, since, they being bad men, torment awaits them after death,” answered Dingane.

“But were they bad men, King? What was their crime?”

“Their crime was that of those who sleep when they should have been awake, Umfundisi; and I seem to remember that in the stories you teach to my people out of your sacred book such are thrown by the God whom you serve into a place of darkness and of never-ending torment. So the punishment I mete out to my people is less than the punishment your God metes out to his.”

“But His ways are not as our ways,” replied the Umfundisi, becoming angry. “He alone created life, and He alone has the right to take it. Who art thou, sinful man?” he went on, his eyes blazing with wrath, and pointing his finger at the King. “Who art thou, thou man of blood, to wreck and mangle God’s Image thus?” pointing to those upon the stakes. “Tremble and know that a judgment awaits thee—yea, a burning fiery looking-for of judgment to come. Then the torment that these undergo now shall be a bed of flowers beside such as thine, for thy part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire for ever and ever and ever.”

The eyes of the Umfundisi seemed to blaze, his hair to bristle, as he thundered out his words, shaking his finger at the King; and we—au!—we looked to see a third stake erected to receive the body of this white man, who dared to revile the majesty of the Lion of Zulu—or, at least, that he be led forth to die beneath the knobsticks of the slayers—and we gazed at the King, awaiting the word. But Dingane only laughed.

“Thou mad Umfundisi,” he said. “Had I but spoken of thy God as thy speech is to me I should have gone into torment for ever and ever according to thee and thy teachings. But I am more merciful than thy God, and thou canst go home. Yet hearken! I am god over the people of Zulu, and if a man disobeys me I order his death—whau!—a swift and easy and painless death, or at worst a few hours of torment. But thy God? Whau! for ever and ever and ever does He torment men after death, in a burning flame of fire! So, Umfundisi, I am the more merciful of the two; and I think the people of Zulu prefer the god they know to the one whom thou and such as thee would teach them to worship. Now, go home. Hamba gahle, Umfundisi! Hamba gahle!”

“Hamba gahle, Umfundisi!” we all cried, deriding the white man as he went away. But some of us wondered that the King should allow him to live, or, at any rate, to remain in the country; and, indeed, had he been a man of any other nation I think he would have died that day; but, being a man of your country, Nkose, he was allowed to live unmolested, for Dingane had no wish to quarrel with the English. But most of us—especially Tambusa—would gladly have seen this interfering Umfundisi despatched to—well, to that place of torment whither he had predicted the King should come.

Chapter Thirteen.

The Tongue of the Snake.

The cloud which had rolled down upon the land of Zulu from the slopes of Kwahlamba was destined to be no mere summer cloud, Nkose, but was charged with thunders, black and threatening. The army, which had been doctored and made ready for war, wearied the King with its clamour to be sent forth against the invaders, and long and oft would Dingane hold council with the izinduna as to what was best to be done to repel this peril. Now I reckoned it a sign of the honour in which I was held that at such conferences I was ever commanded to be present.

But counsels were various. Some were for falling upon the Amabuna in the passes of Kwahlamba; others for allowing them all to cross in peace, and when encamped on our side to throw the whole strength of our army upon them, and, having cut off their retreat, to put every one of them—man, woman and child—to the assegai—even the suckling babe.

“I have a mind to send to the white people at Tegwini,” (Durban. Literally “The Bay”) said the King. “They are my friends, but not of this new race. It may be that they will aid me to get rid of these Amabuna.”

But Tambusa, who hated all whites, opposed this idea of the King’s. The people at Tegwini, he urged, would stand by these other whites and support them. White was white, and black was black, and all white people stood together against black, although they professed very great friendship when but a mere handful, and had anything to gain by it. He had always objected to this handful of English being allowed to remain at Tegwini from the very first. If it was inexpedient to kill them they should have been sent away right out of the country.

In this counsel Tambusa was right, as subsequent events proved; but, Nkose, few men would have dared to speak their minds thus boldly. But Tambusa although he hated me, I could not but regard with respect as a brave man, and as such he lived and died, as will be shown.

“And thou, Untúswa,” said Dingane, “thou hast fought these Amabuna. What is thy mind in this matter?”

“It is that of Tambusa, Great Great One,” I answered. “These Amabuna fight hard and die hard, nor is their word to be trusted. He whom I served knew how to handle them—and there is but one way.” Then I told that tale of how they would have enslaved our

nation, and how they plotted with certain of Umzilikazi's izinduna to procure the death of that king; and all who heard me murmured aloud that there was but one way for these people, and that was the way of the spear.

"A swarm of locusts beaten off returns again," I ended, "and again and again, until the land is eaten up; but a swarm of locusts stamped flat—au! there is no more of that swarm. That is my counsel, Lion of Zulu."

And again all murmured aloud in approval of my words, for it was intolerable to us that these strangers should swarm down upon the land, not even so much as asking leave of the King; and this, Nkose, I felt, as though I had done konza to the House of Senzangakona all my life, instead of growing great in the service of another king; for, after all, this was the land of my birth—this people the parent race from which we were all proud to have sprung. Moreover, for the present, I thought no more of my revenge. Here was more than one great and glorious battle awaiting; it was long since I had taken part in such a one, and the blood rushed and danced in my veins at the thought.

From day to day our spies brought in word to the King. The Amabuna continued to advance, and they were in great force. Their leaders and picked men were stern, determined-looking fighters, fierce of aspect, with their long guns and leather breeches and shaggy beards; and our warriors, listening, lay under arms, their eyes glaring like those of lions, as they awaited the word that should let them loose.

Then came tidings that the Amabuna had formed a great camp some ten days distant from Nkunkundhlovu, and that several of their leaders were advancing to talk with the King.

Soon they arrived. They were but a few men, with their servants. Dingane received them in but quiet state, seated at the head of the great open space of the kraal. Save the King's body-guard, but few warriors were visible, yet so little did we trust the Amabuna that every hut in Nkunkundhlovu held two or three armed men ready to spring forth on a given signal, the while relays of spies watched their distant camp, so as to pass the word should any sudden and hostile movement be made thence.

The leaders of the Amabuna rode into the kraal. They were required to leave their guns with their horses in the centre of the kraal. This they did not at all like, even when told that it was death for any man—black or white—to come armed into the presence of the King. But they had to do it, or return as they came.

"Ah, ah! This is not the head of the snake, only its tongue," growled Tambusa aside to some of us as we watched the approach of the white men. "Soon shall we have its head."

Dingane was seated in his chair of state, and received the Amabuna pleasantly. Bowls of tywala were handed round, and then, sitting in a half circle in front of him, the indaba commenced.

They had travelled far, they said, even as the People of God in old times, seeking a land where they might dwell in peace. Such a land they had found, a land over which the Zulu King claimed ownership, but which was little used, if at all, by him or his people. Now this land, which lay between the Tugela and the Umzimvubu, they desired to treat for. For it they would give part payment in cattle and horses, and part payment in acting as friends to the Zulu people, supporting them by force of arms in all their lawful quarrels. So should two peoples flourish and grow great, dwelling in peace side by side, the waters of the Tugela alone dividing them.

“I know not,” answered Dingane, speaking pleasantly. “When two great bulls stand looking at each other over one fence, are they friends for long?” And we all murmured aloud in praise of the wisdom of the King.

But the Amabuna replied that the land on each side of the proposed boundary was large enough for both.

“The kraal in which stands each of those bulls is large enough for him,” said Dingane, still speaking pleasantly; “yet it is not long before one of them is through the fence to drive out the other. Then he rules over both kraals.”

What the King said was very true; yet it would not be so in this case, urged the Amabuna, for there could be no reason why either should seek a quarrel with the other. The people of their race sought a quarrel with no man. They only desired to be let alone.

“Why, then, did ye leave your own land?” asked Dingane. “Why did ye not stay the other side of Kwahlamba?”

We, who sat around the King, narrowly watching the countenances of the Amabuna, could see that these men did not like that question at all. They did not answer for a moment; then they said, through him who spoke as their tongue, for they knew not ours:

“We crossed the mountains in obedience to the will of God. It was His will that we should seek out a new land for our wives and our children, and His finger it was that guided us hither. We are even as the People of God in old times, who went to dwell in the land which He had promised them; and, even as they, we are ruled and led by the Great Book.”

Now we who listened could have laughed aloud, for we had heard something of that people of old to which the Amabuna referred. Many a tale had the Umfundisi, who dwelt hard by, told us of that people; how it swept onward, a fierce and unsparing scourge, destroying and enslaving tribes and nations, and seizing their flocks and their herds and their women; and we liked to listen to such tales, for they were those of a right valiant warrior race—indeed, me they reminded of our fierce and destroying flight under Umzilikazi. But now we thought those Amabuna must be fools, indeed; for if they were the children of that people, still less did we desire them as neighbours.

“So ye are the people of God, brothers?” said the King softly, his head on one side.

“That is so, King,” they answered, looking upward solemnly.

“Why then, indeed, should we be as brothers, for we are the People of the Heavens,” (Such is the literal meaning of “Amazulu”) said Dingane. “Talk we now of the land. As ye say, I have not much use, nor my people, for this land—yet it is a large country. I know not. I must consider it further. Yet stay, there is somewhat ye can do for us as a pledge and an earnest of our future friendship.”

“And that?”

“Yonder in the mountains dwells a dog, the head of a tribe of dogs—not large, but difficult to come at, because of the ruggedness of the country they inhabit. This dog has stolen much cattle and many horses from my people and hidden them away in his mountain retreats. Now I am without warriors, for the army is away on two expeditions to the northward.”

We who listened thought we saw the countenances of the Amabuna change at this, and inwardly we laughed. If they only knew—ah, if they only knew!

“Wherefore,” went on the King, “if as an earnest of your friendship ye will go and retake this our property, and restore it to us, then it may be we may grant you the use of the land ye need.”

“And what is the name of the chief of these robbers, King?” asked the Amabuna.

“U’ Sikonyela.”

“The cattle shall be restored, King. Do you require Sikonyela to be delivered up to you?”

“No. I am merciful, and will spare him this time. Only warn him that now the Amazulu and the Amabuna are brothers. Now, fare-ye-well. When ye have obtained the restoration of our property, then return hither, and we will talk further about the land.”

Then the Amabuna rose and shook the King by the hand, and we, as they took leave of us, all called out “Hambani-gahle!” (“Go ye in peace”) with right good-will. So they took their horses and guns and rode away from Nkunkundhlovu, very pleased with themselves and with the King. But the multitude of armed warriors concealed within the huts were not pleased, in that there was no work for their spears that day; but that was to come. Ah, yea! plenty of work would there be for their spears before many moons were dead.

And we izinduna, how we laughed among ourselves, for we knew the mind of Dingane. These people must in truth be mad, and worse than mad, to think that the King would give them a vast tract of country in exchange for their friendship and a few cattle—would welcome this swarm of buzzing devouring locusts beating down upon our lands. Hau! Mad, indeed, were they. They opened their mouth wide—very wide—and we thought we knew how we would fill it, but not with the country that lay between the Tugela and the Umzimvubu. Oh, no!

There were some among us who would have persuaded Dingane to order the death of the Umfundisi, for we feared lest he should warn the Amabuna; but this the King refused to do. The white teacher was not of their race, and he had no quarrel with the English; besides, the very feet of a white man being slain would implant suspicion in the minds of the new arrivals. But the Umfundisi, unknown to himself, was closely watched, and meanwhile our plans were fully matured.

Chapter Fourteen.

The Head of the Snake.

No great time went by before those Amabuna returned, having sent word that they were bringing the cattle and horses taken from Sikonyela. There were about three-score and ten, and with them, their slaves—yellow men—to attend them and their horses.

Dingane had received them in but little state before. Now, however, he received them in a great deal. He was attended by all his izinduna and war captains, with the shield-bearer, and the praisers shouting aloud his names with all the power of their mighty voices; and as the Amabuna rode into Nkunkundhlovu by the lower gate and paced, two by two, up to the centre of the great space, two regiments, in full war array, began a grand dance on either side of them, singing a new song in honour of our guests:

“The mouth of the white man is open;
It shall be filled - it shall be filled.
Wide, wide, is it open;
Full, full, very full shall it be filled.

“Lo! they come, the friends of the Amanita;
Full, full, shall their mouths be filled.
The lion of Zulu is as the sun in the heavens;
In his warmth - in his warmth shall his new brothers grow great.”

This and much more did the warriors sing, Nkose, all referring to the hunger for land of these invading whites. They little knew in what manner their mouths were destined to be filled.

“Now we have the head of the snake at last,” growled Tambusa to us in an undertone, during the thunder and din of the singing. “Soon shall his tail, too, cease its writhings.”

Signing the dance and song to cease, the King ordered the cattle taken from Sikonyela to be brought up. The herd was driven past, outside the fence of the kraal. It was not much of a herd, but Dingane was as full of delight over its recovery as though it represented the wealth of a whole nation. Now, he said, he felt sure of the friendship and good faith of these his new brothers; but we, watching, thought: “Can these people be such fools as to think we shall give them half our country in exchange for a few miserable beasts like this?”

Then, while talking about the cattle, Dingane asked the Amabuna to show him how they took cattle from other people in war. This they were very ready to do, and the King

having sent the herd some little distance away over the plain, the Amabuna sprang upon their horses and galloped to the place. They dismounted and fired their guns—loaded with powder only—leaping into the saddle again and reloading as they rode; then returning and firing again upon our people, who had been told off to take part in this mimic war. Finally, while some kept on firing, others got between the cattle and our men, and, with shouts and yells, swept the beasts forward. On they came at full gallop, then letting the herd rush wildly by, these three-score and ten Amabuna, as they came before the King, drew up their horses suddenly and in line, and fired their guns in the air in royal salute.

It was well and cleverly done, Nkose, and Dingane was delighted with it, and so, indeed, were we—looking at it as a spectacle. But more than ever were we agreed that men who could make war in that fashion were not the people to welcome as neighbours in a country as large as our own, and with nothing but a river between us and them. Oh, no!

For two whole days the Amabuna remained in their camp outside, and most of the time was spent in talking over the question of the large piece of our country they expected to swallow up. They were well entertained—for many oxen were slaughtered—and the King ordered abundance of beef and beer to be supplied to them—and, indeed, everything they should want. But during this time our spies and runners had reported that their main camp, where the bulk of their people, with their cattle and women, were left, was peaceful and unsuspicious, and that the men were spread out over the country far and wide, hunting and looking at the land—our land—which they hoped should soon be theirs.

On the third night, when all men slept, the King took secret counsel of his principal izinduna, and among them was I; for by reason of having met these people in battle, whereas as yet the Amazulu had not, my opinions carried weight.

“Now I think the time has come to stamp out this locust swarm,” said Dingane.

“We have here the head of the snake,” said Tambusa.

“That shall be crushed to-morrow,” said the King.

“But the writhings of its tail will shake the earth, bringing another snake from over the mountains,” put in Umhlela, thinking of the wagon camp and all the Amabuna left there.

“What sayest thou, Untúswa?” said the King, turning to me.

“This, Great Great One. To destroy a locust swarm and to spare the eggs is of no great use. And the ‘eggs’ of this locust swarm are yonder.”

“Ha! Thou art no fool, Untúswa,” said the King, knowing that I meant the women and children of the invaders.

“This is my counsel, Great Great One. When the forerunners of this locust swarm sleep for ever tomorrow, let those be sent who shall stamp flat the remainder, sparing none.”

All murmured in deep assent, and I continued:

“Let the camp of these plunderers be destroyed as quickly and as silently as possible. Then let strong bodies of warriors waylay the return of those outside. Such, suspecting nothing, will walk into the snare, so shall we be rid of the whole swarm. Thus, on like occasion, acted he whom I formerly served, and our success was thorough.”

“Thou hast the mind of a leader of men Untúswa,” said the King, greatly pleased. “Thou thyself shalt go to-morrow, and see thine own plans carried out.”

I thanked the King, and when we had talked a little longer over our plans we left the presence and went to our huts to sleep, our hearts beating with fierce anticipation over the thought of what the morrow was to bring.

Soon after daybreak Dingane sent word to the Amabuna, who were our visitors, that the time had come to speak decisively about the land, that he had talked the matter over in council with the izinduna of the nation, and now he wanted them all to come into Nkunkundhlovu that all might hear his word and carry it back to their people, who awaited it and them.

Accordingly it was not long before the whole company of the Amabuna, with their slaves and attendants rode up to the gate. But there they were met by some who told them they must leave their horses and guns without the gate. This they liked not at all, objecting that on every other occasion of their visit they had been allowed to enter armed and mounted.

That was true, but on those occasions there were war dances, and the white men themselves had delighted their Amazulu brethren with a mounted display. But this was entirely a peace indaba. No warriors were in Nkunkundhlovu, and it was dead against Zulu custom for strangers to come before the King armed on such an occasion. In fact the King would be highly offended, and would almost certainly refuse to receive them at all.

Less and less did the Amabuna like this proposal. They muttered hurriedly among themselves; then it was just as we knew it would be. They dismounted, stacked their guns outside, and giving their horses to their attendants to hold, entered the kraal.

“Whau! The head of the snake is now under the shadow of the stone that shall crush it,” quoth fierce Tambusa, as we watched the approach of the unarmed Amabuna.

They saluted the King gravely, and sat down; but many of them looked displeased and troubled, and well they might, for what is more helpless than an unarmed man! This time the King, with the izinduna, was seated near the centre of the open space, not at the upper end, as usual.

They spoke about the land. They were glad the King was to give them his word that morning, for the hearts of their countrymen would be glad too, when they should carry back that word.

Now great bowls of tywala were brought, and as the white men drank, the King talked to them. He rejoiced that that great stretch of country should be used by his friends and brothers, the Amabuna. There were a few useless cowardly tribes still in that country, people whom he had spared, but who were thieves; and these he hoped his new friends would prevent from annoying him.

While Dingane was thus talking, people had been coming into the open space by twos and threes, and now there was quite a number of men within the circle. These bearing no arms, but a stick only, roused no suspicion in the minds of the Amabuna, not even when they formed into two lines, or half circles, and began to dance; singing the while the song they had sung to welcome these people on their first arrival.

“The mouth of the white man is open;
It shall be filled - it shall be filled.
Lo! they come, the friends of the Amazulu;
Full, very full, shall their mouths be filled.”

Swaying backward and forward, the two half circles danced, now joining at the lower end, so as to form a wall of bodies between those in the centre and the outer gate, now parting again, and leaving the ends open. And, the while, more and more by degrees swelled the number, and the song rose and fell, not loud, but in long-drawn measured note. The while the King was speaking:

“Fare-ye-well, my brothers,” he said. “Perchance I shall visit ye in this new land, when ye come to dwell in it. Depart now in peace to your countrymen, and tell them how good

are the hearts of the Amazulu towards you, how good the heart of their King. Fare-ye-well! Hambani-gahle." ("Go ye in peace.")

Dingane had risen while he was speaking, and now, with these words, he turned to depart. The Amabuna, too, had risen.

"The white man's mouth opens very wide;
It shall be filled - it shall be filled."

So howled the singers; and lo! a mass of warriors swept in between the King and these strangers; we, the izinduna, being outside the circle. With alarm now in their faces, the Amabuna turned quickly towards the gate whereby they had entered. But on that side, too, the circle was complete. Then they knew that their time had come. They were walled in by a dense array of stalwart warriors.

Now began such a struggle as never could have been seen. Our people had sticks, but were otherwise unarmed, for they might not kill within the precincts of the King's kraal. The Amabuna, too, were unarmed, for it was to this end they had been obliged to leave their guns outside the gate. But many of them were large and powerful men, and all fought with the courage of desperate men. They struck out with their fists, and with their feet; they tore out eyes; some were able to draw knives, and with these they slashed and thrust, making the blood fly in spouts. Whau! That was a struggle—that was a sight. Whau! Hither and thither it swayed—that heaving, striving mass—the shouts and curses of the desperate Amabuna rising hoarse amid the din and scuffle of feet, the gasping and the yells, as those of our warriors who were on the outside of the struggle encouraged those within it by yell and whistle. Whau! How they howled and leapt, how they swung to and fro, how they even rolled on the ground—great heaps of men piled high upon each other, but all kicking, all struggling. But it could not last, for what could three-score and ten men, all unarmed, however valorous, do against a thousand, or, indeed, several thousand? They were borne down and overpowered at last—some were bound with thongs—but all were dragged out from Nkunkundhlovu to the place where those were killed whom the King adjudged to die, and there beaten to death with sticks, as the usual manner was.

"Hau! The head of the snake is now crushed!" cried Tambusa. "Hambani-gahle, abatagati!" ("Go in peace, doer of dark deeds.")

Then the hissing and the roars of the savage slayers ceased, and the whole mass of our people trooped back from the place of slaughter, howling, in derision, the song they had made for the Amabuna.

"The mouth of the white man is open very wide;

It has been filled - it has been filled."

Thus they died, those Amabuna—nor did one of them escape; for even their servants, whom they had left outside to hold their horses, were all seized at the same time, and taken to the place of doom. As Tambusa had declared, the head of the snake was crushed at last.

It is said by you white people, Nkose, that Dingane acted a cruel and treacherous part in thus causing the leaders of the Amabuna to be slain. That may be, when seen with a white man's eyes. But seen with ours the thing is different. These Amabuna had come to take a large portion of the Zulu country from the Zulu people, and, had they done so, how long would it have been before they had taken the whole? They made a show of asking the land from the King, but had Dingane refused to listen to them, would they have gone back the way they came? Is that the manner of the Amabuna, I would ask you, Nkose? Again, if their hearts were good, and free from deceit, why did they not send messengers to Nkunkundhlovu before they entered the land as they did, to obtain the answer of the King and the Zulu people? But instead of doing this, they came over Kwahlamba in great numbers, with their horses and their guns, their waggons and their oxen, their cattle and their women, falling upon the land like a vast swarm of devouring locusts. Whether they obtained leave or not, they had come to stay, and that we did not wish; and further, by thus entering the Zulu country in armed force without the King's permission! they had deserved death.

It is true that these people who had been slain were the King's guests, but then we have a custom under which one great chief must not go to the kraal of another great chief of equal rank. The great chief of the Amabuna claimed to be the equal of the House of Senzangakona. He did not approach the King as a subject, but as an equal; and by our custom Dingane was justified in causing him and his followers to be slain, for he had placed himself within the power of the King, and that as an equal. Whau, Nkose! You white people and ourselves see things differently, and I suppose it will always be so. Dingane and the Zulu people did not choose these invaders to seize their land, so they used what they thought was the quickest and easiest way of preventing them from doing so.

Chapter Fifteen.

The Crushing of the Snake.

As we sat there, we izinduna, watching the place of slaughter where those evil-doers had found death, we heard the volume of a mighty war-song approaching. Those within Nkunkundhlovu hushed their own singing and gazed outward. A great impi drew near, marching in columns like unto broad black snakes gliding over the ground. Yet, not all black, but spotted; for the white and red of shields, the streaming of cowhair tufts, the rustling of feather capes, showed forth above the blackness of marching bodies. The wavy glint of spear-points in the sun was as a sea of light—the tramp of feet as the dark and terrible array swung onward—the thunder of the war song! Hau! I could feel all the blood tingling within me, and my eyes were aglow as I gazed. Here was a force, indeed. That which had been led against us by Mhlangana might equal it, but could hardly surpass it.

On they came—and as this vast mass of warriors poured in by the lower gate of Nkunkundhlovu they raised the war song of Dingane:

“Us’eziténi,
Asiyikuza sababona.”

Soon the great open space within was crowded. Rank upon rank the warriors squatted there, crouching behind their shields, their eyes glaring like those of lions as they awaited the word which should let them loose upon their prey. When the roar of the “Bayéte,” which greeted the King’s appearance, had sunk into silence, Dingane addressed them:

“Lion cubs of Zulu, you are here in your might, for yonder lies prey worthy of your fangs. Yonder is an enemy who has swarmed down upon our land like the deadly locust pest—an enemy who comes with soft words, but never fails to devour that people who is fool enough to believe those words.

“There is not room for two nations in the land of Zulu. Two bulls cannot rule in one kraal. Yonder is another bull who would bellow loudest in the Zulu fold. The horns of that bull are cut off, but there is enough of him left to attract by his roarings other bulls like unto himself. Go now, therefore, and slay that bull. Make an end of him utterly.”

As the King paused, with a wave of the hand in the direction of the distant camp of the Amabuna, the warriors made, as though they would have sprung to their feet; but the King’s hand restrained them, and they sank back. Dingane went on:

“When we destroy a locust swarm which is devouring our lands, we do not destroy the flying insects only. The young which appear after them, too, we stamp flat. So shall it be with this locust swarm. Stamp it flat. Make an end of it utterly. Let none escape. Go, my children!”

As one man that dense mass of warriors rose to its feet. As from one man the “Bayété” thundered forth from every throat; and the winnowing of shields and quivering rattle of spear-hafts was as a great gale sweeping through a forest. They poured forth from the gates, those terrible ones, broadening out upon the plain beyond, in a great stream of rushing men—of lions, of leopards, hungry for blood; and we izinduna, who followed more leisurely, could see in the distance the white Umfundisi standing at the door of his house, looking upon our movements.

“Whau!” growled Tambusa, scowling towards the white man. “Such as that should long since have travelled the way of the spear. It is such evil crows whose croak brings our enemies upon us.”

“Yet that is not ill-doing,” I said, “for without enemies how should these lion-cubs find meat for their teeth?”

“There is that without these swarms of white carrion,” replied Tambusa, and his voice was as the snarling of a beast. “Whau! It is all alike. It licks the feet of the King when it thinks to get land from him. When it has got it, the Great Great One should be its dog, even as yonder crow dared to croak not many days since. My heart has been heavy ever since that he was not sent to take the place of those upon the stakes.”

On they sped, those messengers of death, on through the burning glare of mid-day; on through the black gloom of night; on ever, over rugged height, through tangled valley and rushing river, pausing but little to take rest.

After many days we saw signs that we were near the camp of the Amabuna. We rested then, and pushed on cautiously during the night, until within striking distance. Then we paused. Little sleep was ours that night. In silence they lay, that black army of terrible ones, with eyes strained upon the first streak of dawn that should reveal to them their prey.

It came at last, that dawn. No sound from the camp of those whites told that any were awake and watching. They slept as though safe in their own land, as though they had not of their own accord come to place their necks beneath the paw of the Lion of Zulu. Only the crunch of the jaws of cattle, only the occasional sneeze of a goat, broke the silence.

In such silence—in such stillness—did the dawn lighten. Then two or three men began to stir, moving sleepily inside the encampment. We could wait no longer. The word was given to fall on.

I could not sit still with the izinduna when blows were falling, and at the head of the right horn of the impi I found myself flying over the defences, spear in hand. Within, the awakening for those whites was terrible. Wild shrieks arose with the roar of our appalling war-shout, as women, with the stamp of death upon their pale countenances, rolled from the waggons, and with arms tossed on high, screamed for that mercy we were not there to show. Men were there, too; but these were few, yet they fought. Shaggy faces confronted me, jets of flame shone redly in my eyes. My great assegai was shearing around, cleaving the hearts and bodies of these. Whau! that was a moment! And through it all, I could see lines upon lines of flying bodies, of tufted shields and gleaming spears come surging over the waggons on the other side. We had taken the camp.

Not yet, however, was our work complete. Grouping together, those Amabuna stood and fought. Au! they fought! It was worth living, Nkose, to see the fight those men made. With hatchets and knives they defended themselves; with clubbed guns, too, for they could no longer reload. Man to man, hand to hand, eye to eye, they fought. But the breadth of our broad shields met blow or stab, and the overwhelming weight of those behind threw upon them such masses of men that they could no longer lift hand, and were borne to earth. Blood streamed forth everywhere, and amid the grim death-yells of the Amabuna and the screams of their women beneath the assegais rose the shrill “I-ji!” the fierce triumph hiss of each victorious warrior as he drove his spear home.

And now the whole inside of that great waggon camp was as a den of raging lions let loose. The dead lay in heaps, but any movement seen among such heaps would draw a rush to the place, to stab and stab again. Children of all ages—boys, girls, infants—were dragged from their hiding-places and speared. Even the cattle within the enclosure were ripped and slain. Nothing was spared, young or old, male or female—all were slain; for it was not our custom to spare; and in this matter the King’s word had been explicit: “Make an end of them utterly.” And this we had done.

Now that all were slain we began to see what plunder the camp contained, that it might be collected for the King. And there was much of it—for besides all manner of provisions and stores, there were things of iron and of glass, knives and axes, and all manner of useful things; but, best of all, there were the long guns of the Amabuna, and powder and ball. So much of all this was there that it took time to remove it all, and arrange it in such wise that it could be borne back to Nkunkundhlovu, and even then we had to leave some of it.

“Make an end of them utterly.” Such had been the word of Dingane, and looking at that waggon camp when we left it, I think, Nkose, you would have said we had obeyed the word of the Great Great One to the full. By hundreds the slain lay there, heaps and heaps of dead bodies whom the assegai had kissed again and again. In darker heaps, too, lay our own dead; but of this we thought not much, for even these whites, dreaded alike by all nations who had met them, had not been able to stand before the power of Zulu. They had been swept away, as all black nations had been before them; swallowed up, and the wave of our might had rolled over them. And as we moved from the place a fierce new song of triumph thundered forth from the ranks of our host.

There were some who would have burned the waggons and such stuff as could not be taken away, but this we izinduna would not permit, lest the smoke, seen from afar, should convey warning to other camps of the Amabuna. For our work was not yet done.

Word was now passed that the impi should form up, and indeed not much telling was needed, for their appetite for blood, only whetted with what had already been shed, the warriors could hardly be kept in hand, so eager were they to reach those other camps. But it would have served no good purpose that they should tire themselves by marching at a run. Yet, short of this, our advance was a rapid one.

Even then, however, rapid as it was, we were not to fall upon those other camps, as we had expected, all unprepared. Whether it was that some had escaped from the first camp, or that the noise of the shouting and the firing had reached their ears, we found these Amabuna with their waggons drawn up so as to form a wall, the spaces between the wheels even being filled in with bags and boxes, and as we drew near they were still busy driving in their cattle and horses, for some of their herds had sighted us from afar. Yet even then they were obliged to leave much of their cattle outside.

But to this we gave no heed, for we counted all these as ours already, and such as were scattered about the land we could collect at our leisure. With a roar and a rush our impi went at the waggon forts, spreading out in “horns” so as to enwrap the whole in a wall of living leaping men.

But the long guns from within began to spit forth destruction and death. Pouring into the dense masses of the charging warriors the storm of lead wrought terrible havoc. Those behind, eager to get in among the enemy, bore onward the front ranks, and for these there was no turning back. The air trembled with roars of anguish and of fury, as the lead ploughed through body and limb; and in the death-throes the warriors in the foremost ranks would make one more effort to hurl themselves upon the grim foe who lined the waggons, so resolute, so cool, and yet so prompt to strike hard when opportunity offered.

Sudden as our onslaught had been, huge our force, so grimly determined was the resistance of those Amabuna, fighting for their lives and for their cattle and women, that they actually beat back one side of the attack. Now we, izinduna, as the Zulu custom had then become, were taking no active part in the battle, but from our station on a neighbouring rise were directing the movement of our people, by signal or by runner. But seeing one side of the impi falling into confusion we could sit still no longer. Tambusa's eyes were like those of a hungry lion, and for long my broad assegai—Umzilikazi's gift—had seemed to burn within my grasp. We sprang to our feet.

“Now, Untúswa!” cried Silwane, “you and I will fight side by side, even as once we fought against each other.”

Down we rushed. We were here—there—everywhere. Under the influence of our presence, the encouragement of our voices, the wavering side of the impi rallied, and hurled itself—a solid black wave—upon the waggon barricade once more. Hau! I seemed to see nothing clearly then. All was red about me. Our warriors, baring their teeth, howled like beasts, making furious leaps in their attempts to reach these determined and terrible enemies; but ever to be met by those fierce, shaggy countenances, smoke-blackened, whence gleamed forth eyes fell with hate and purpose; and the flashes of the guns would singe and blind, so near were they, as they were thrust forward and discharged where the crowd was thickest and most threatening. Even their women fought. We could see them behind, loading the guns as fast as the Amabuna could fire almost. Great broad-faced hags would reach over the waggons and hack at our warriors with axes and choppers, or hurl pans of boiling water over their naked bodies when they approached too near.

More hot, more fierce, their fire hissed through our ranks. The Amabuna had loaded their guns with many bullets at a time, and these, tearing through our serried ranks at close quarters, cut down our men like corn.

Again and again they fell back, only to rush forward once more. But every such onward rush was made with less and less of heart. They could not face those terrific storms of lead, and we, izinduna, seeing that the day was lost, made haste to draw off our warriors before these, panic-stricken, should break and flee. And what a loss had been ours! The waggon forts seemed ringed in with the heaps of our dead. And those who lived! Bleeding, panting, begrimed; shields hacked and slit, broken spears, wounds gaping redly—such was our aspect. Many with shattered limbs, where the bullets of the Amabuna had met them, dragged themselves forward and begged of their brethren the death of the spear, which was granted them. Our repulse was complete.

Yet there remained the cattle, and all outside the waggon forts we speedily collected; for the Amabuna, valiant as they were when under that shelter, were too wise to leave it and come forth to meet us in the open. But although it was a very large and fine herd of beasts which we swept before us on our return to Nkunkundhlovu, our minds were uneasy. Those Amabuna had held their own against us, and were left alive. Presently they would bring others. For every one we could kill, five would grow in his place, as, indeed, we were soon to see.

Chapter Sixteen.

Of a New Witch-Finding.

Dingane was very angry when we returned to Nkunkundhlovu, and, indeed at first, it looked as though some would pay for our repulse with their lives. But that was no time for sacrificing skilled leaders of men, and winning the resentment of their relatives and following; and this the King knew. So, with gloomy and bitter reproaches, he dismissed us.

The first step taken by the two principal izinduna, Tambusa and Umhlela, was to send out and muster every available man throughout the land. All were enrolled, even those whose youth would have precluded them from bearing arms yet awhile, and several new regiments were formed; and while this was going on, a careful watch was kept upon the movements of the Amabuna, for we knew not what they might attempt next. It was intended to attack them again before more could join them, but the idea was abandoned, for careful observation showed that we should stand but small chance of success, so warily did they move; scouting the land far and wide, and camping in such strength. So our people watched and waited, biding their time.

Now all this, Nkose, in no wise helped forward my plans. I had hoped that we should have made an end of these invaders, and that then Dingane would have sent forth a strong impi to crush Umzilikazi. So should I have obtained my revenge. But with such a formidable foe upon our borders as these Amabuna, the King would not have a single regiment out of call; wherein, of course, he was wise.

All of which did not help me, for now there was no more fighting my heart grew heavy once more as I thought of Lalusini and how she was lost to me; of my high position among my former nation forfeited for ever. And, indeed, my position among the parent stock was becoming daily far from secure, and I was looked coldly on by many who had been most friendly before, and even by the King himself. This I attributed to the influence of Tambusa, who had always hated me, and would be glad if by any means he could compass my death. Afterwards I learned that I was right, for, in his jealousy of me, Tambusa never lost a chance of poisoning the mind of Dingane against me, more than hinting that the repulse of the impi was due to my presence in the battle in a position of command. More and more then did I feel that I was stumbling upon the edge of a very high cliff. More and more did I awaken each morning to wonder if I should see the setting of another sun.

Then something occurred which still farther deepened my forebodings. On returning from an expedition which had lasted but a few days, I found that one of my Swazi wives

had disappeared. None knew what had happened to her, but I could see by their looks that it were better not to inquire too closely. Well, it mattered not. One girl was as good as another since the loss of Lalusini, and I still had two remaining. But she who had disappeared was that same girl who had been by my side what time I had dreamed; and she, too, had awakened in fear, declaring that a vision had passed through the hut, and I thought that the disappearance of this one, rather than that of the other two, augured ill—how, I knew not.

As the days went by, the gloom that lay upon the mind of the King deepened, and herein the izanusi—ever eager for blood, or for gain—saw their opportunity. The wizardry which had wrought ill for our arms must be removed. So there was “smelling out,” and many were killed; but still the invaders did not melt away in fear, as the witch doctors had promised. On the contrary, they grew stronger; for others crossed Kwahlamba to join them.

Then the izanusi declared they had seen other visions—had received a new and important revelation, to the effect that the workers of tagati had not yet been discovered, but should be by an entirely new method. But Dingane was becoming weary of them and their trickeries. He sent for Tola, the chief of the izanusi, and roundly told him to use what methods he liked, but if his prophecies fell short of fulfilment this time death should be his reward.

The land seemed shaken by a shudder of ill-ease. The warriors were growing impatient once more to be sent against the Amabuna, but the counsels of Umhlela, that we should wait for our enemies to make the first move—as they surely would—prevailed. So when the word went forth that all were to assemble at Nkunkundhlovu for a great witch-finding, an eagerness of relief went through all; for now we would see what the new method, as announced by the izanusi, would bring forth.

Many a “smelling out” had I witnessed, Nkose, as you know, and the truth was, I hated them. I had been too much among the heads of the nation not to know what their real object was, however much the common people might be deceived, and believe—or pretend to—in the power of the izanusi. I had known but two real magicians in my life—Masuka, the old Mosutu, and Lalusini, my sorceress wife—and these used not their powers to destroy any, save real evil-doers; never to take the lives of brave men for the sake of gain or malice. All others I knew to be jugglers and impostors, and that Tola and his following were of this order I had long since determined. So there was no eagerness in my mind as on the day appointed I sat near the King, in the midst of the other izinduna, while the witch doctors began in their usual way.

The open space within the great kraal was densely packed, save that room was left for the wild dancing and other ceremonies employed by the izanusi. These ran up and down, mouthing and bellowing, and shaking the ornaments of their calling—bladders filled with blood, festoons of entrails of sacrificed beasts, bunches of feathers and bird's claws, and snakes and lizards. Now and again they would halt, and pointing with their wands, tipped with giraffe tail, at some one in the crowd, would name him, calling, out a string of instances of witch dealing. This one held converse with a black baboon, that one slept all day and only moved out at night, another was reputed to eat snakes, and so forth. All so named were immediately led forth to the place of slaughter; but I noticed that among them was no person of any consequence. The witch doctors, to all appearance, were destroying them out of sheer wanton craving for blood.

Dingane was growing impatient. His brows were wrinkled into a heavy frown. Not for such a well-worn exhibition as this, surely, had the bulk of the nation been convened. If so, then indeed it would go ill with Tola and his following. This was running in the mind of the King; and I, who sat near him, could see into his thoughts.

Now the witch doctors ceased in their mouthing, and suddenly, from behind them, appeared a band of girls. There might have been three score of them, and they seemed to have been chosen from the handsomest and finest of the nation. They were arrayed in the richest beadwork, and wore wreaths of green leaves upon their heads and twined around their shapely limbs. A strange band, indeed, to spring up suddenly from the midst of those wizard-hounds of blood and of death.

They advanced, swaying to a measured dancing step, and softly singing. A deep murmur of amazement and delight arose from all; for this was a fair and goodly sight, and all welcomed it as a relief from the grim hideousness of the witch doctors. A weight of fear seemed lifted from the minds of many. These, surely, were not here to doom to death.

But as their singing rose louder and louder, as I caught the burden of their song, I, for one, felt by no means so sure. They sang of a nation cursed by an evil blight, of the counsels of strangers, of the first repulse the great Zulu power had ever known, of the presence of strangers in the ranks of the lion-cubs, of the presence of a stranger. And every time they repeated the words they would sway round so as to face me, as I sat among the izinduna at the right hand of the King.

Then, Nkose, the nerves within me seemed to tingle. Well knew I the meaning of this. I was the object of their denunciations. Any moment now I might step into the Dark Unknown. Doom had found me at last. I was being "smelt out."

Well, indeed, could I see through it all now. This had been arranged between Tambusa, my enemy, and Tola, the head izanusi. The singing band of girls, designed to add novelty to the witch finding, as well as to please Dingane, had for its object my death. The red cloud began to surge around my brain as I sat there. Not in me was it to die tamely; and softly I reached forth for the stick which was the only approach to a weapon which custom allowed upon such an occasion, and calculated how great a spring would enable me to crush in Tambusa's skull ere they could lay hands on me. The death of the stake would be my lot; no matter—I must slay somebody.

The band of singing-girls swayed nearer and nearer; then with a rush of their light feet they came straight for me. Now for the doom. But—not yet. Some unseen force seemed to turn them back again. They held on around the circle, not having pointed at or named me.

This happened several times, and each time I looked to hear the word of doom, each time I tightened up my muscles for my spring upon Tambusa. Each time, too, the song denunciatory of "the stranger" grew fiercer, each time only to sink and die away in their throats. Then the izanusi, as in encouragement, lifted up their deep hoarse voices, as the voices of beasts growling for blood.

Whau, Nkose! I can see it all still—for at such moments a man may seem to live a thousand lifetimes—the immense kraal, with its ringed fences and vast circles of yellow huts—the assembled multitude blackening the earth in its awed hush—the sea of expectant faces—the countenance of the King sternly set, those of the izinduna expressionless as stones—the band of singing-girls—the savage eyes of the witch doctors—and, as a background to the whole, a brooding sky, blue-black with the threatenings of its pent-up storm.

Once more, encouraged by the wild howling of the izanusi, this strange band of doom came whirling towards me. This time I was gone. But, no! They halted more suddenly than before, and their song seemed to die on their very lips. Then I looked up from calculating the distance between my stick and the skull of Tambusa, and beheld—a woman!

She was standing alone in the open, midway between the cloud of scowling witch doctors and the band of girls, and there was that in her wondrous eyes which constrained and controlled the latter. She, too, was arrayed in rich beadwork, but wore no wreaths or garlands of leaves, and as I gazed upon her standing there—a splendid and majestic form—why then, Nkose, anybody who chose might have stepped up and slain me, unresisting in my amazement. For she who stood there was none other than my lost sorceress-wife, Lalusini.

Had the shades sent forth their spirits? Had the grim alligators in Umzilikazi's pool of death shrank back in fear from so royal a prey? Was I dreaming, or had I gone mad with the prolonged suspense of my impending doom? No! In the very life there she stood—she to avenge whom I would have slain a king—would have destroyed a whole mighty nation. And she stood there to avert from me the sure and dreadful death—the death of the man at whom the witch-wand has been pointed.

One glance she flashed upon me from her wonderful eyes—quick, full, penetrating—one glance and no more; but in that glance I knew I was safe, for who should harm one whom the most marvellous magic ever known now protected?

For some time thus she stood, speaking no word, only gazing around with calm commanding eyes. Then the King grew impatient.

“Have done,” he exclaimed, with a frown. “Let us see whether the magic of Mahlula is greater than that of Tola.”

“The magic of Mahlula,” had said Dingane. Then Lalusini was not known. Yet it seemed to me the majesty of the House of Senzangakona was so stamped upon every feature that her very look must betray her.

“Judge now for thyself, Father of the Wise,” she replied. “This is the word of Mahlula. The ‘stranger’ of whom Tola speaks, of whom his company did but now sing, is not here, else these”—showing with a sweep of the hand the band of girls, who had ceased their movements and were now sitting in a ring around her—“these whom I have trained and taught would have found him—for my will works through theirs—my eyes see through theirs. Therefore, he cannot be here.”

“Why, then, are we?” said Dingane, with a meaning in his tone that boded ill for Tola and his following.

“Was it to learn the fate of a nation, Great Great One?” answered Lalusini, or Mahlula, as she was known here. “Learn it then so far. The end is not yet. But—I see the shook of war. I see men and horses advancing. The lion-cubs of Zulu flee before them. But lying behind the hills on either side is a dark cloud of terrible ones. Still they advance, those whites. Then that cloud whirls down upon them, breaks over them. Ha! There are death-screams as the flash of the spears rises and falls, and horses straggling, hoofs in air, and the song of those black ones is a battle-song of triumph.”

Now I saw that the speaker had fallen into one of those divining trances I knew so well, and in which all she foretold had come to pass. Dingane, too, began to see this, and asked eagerly, yet not without awe in his tone:

“And when shall this be, sister?”

“Hearken to no idle counsels. Heed no false magic,” she answered, with meaning. “I, and I alone, can see into the future. Be led by me if this nation would live.”

With these words, I, who looked, saw the vision pass away from Lalusini’s countenance, and her eyes were as those of one who awakens out of a deep sleep. The King, too, must have seen it, for he forebore to question her further. Then he spoke, low at first, but raising his voice in a black and terrible burst of wrath.

“Now of yon impostors I will make an end. Take them away, ye black ones.” And he pointed with his spear at Tola and his following.

At the word of the King, the slayers sprang forward. But the witch doctors fled howling, and keeping in a compact body, broke through all who stood in their path, and the lower end of the kraal became full of the kicking, tumbling bodies of men. But the slayers were among them; and the people barring their way to the lower gate, they were seized and dragged, howling and shrieking, without the kraal. And as the knobkerries fell with a heavy thud upon their cunning and bloodthirsty brains, a murmur of fierce delight escaped all who heard, for the people hated these wolves of izanusi, and rejoiced that they themselves should taste the death they loved to deal out to others.

There was one, however, who did not so rejoice, and that was Tambusa; indeed at first he had made a movement to stay the word, which was that of doom to the izanusi; but the look on the face of Dingane was so fell and deadly, that even the boldness of Tambusa quailed before it.

And I—Whau!—I rejoiced that I still lived, and that Tola was dead. But Tambusa did not.

Chapter Seventeen.

The Dwelling of the Wise One.

With the slaughter of the witch doctors Dingane had retired, and the vast assemblage of the people, breaking up, was streaming away in different directions. Mahlula had disappeared.

Then, having gained my huts, I gave orders that I was to be left alone, and sat down to take snuff and to think. For here was a wonderful thing. She whom I had thought dead was alive again—had reappeared at the very moment when death would otherwise have overtaken me. There was something of fear in my mind as I thought of it all. Was it really Lalusini whom I had seen, or was it another sorceress who bore to her a most marvellous likeness—a sister, perhaps? But even the House of Senzangakona could not produce two such, I reflected; and then the very method she had adopted of averting from me the doom was the method of Lalusini. And now I longed for her again, for, as I told you, Nkose, I loved her as you white men love your women; but if, for some reason, she had been forced to hide herself under another name, how could I, the wanderer, the stranger, the man who had come hither to deliver his own nation to destruction, reveal the real relationship between us by laying claim to her?

How was it I had never heard men speak of her? No talk, no word of a marvellous witch doctress, of a sorceress like no other ever seen, had reached my ear. Tola I knew, and those who worked magic with him, but of this one never a word. Was it because I was a stranger and not yet fully trusted? But old Gegesa's tale was untrue anyhow, for here was Lalusini alive and well, and beautiful as ever. Then I thought how to get speech with her.

To this end I went out. First I sought the hut of Silwane. But when after bringing round the talk to the events of the morning I would have drawn out of him what he knew as to the sorceress Mahlula, I found that he knew but little, as did those who sat in his hut. Her appearance in their midst was mystery, her movements were mystery, her very dwelling was mystery; and hearing this I thought how greatly I could have amazed Silwane by revealing how it was through the magic of this sorceress that our arms had won success over the great impi he had helped to command at the Place of the Three Rifts. But from them I could obtain no tidings, nor from any with whom I talked on the subject; and as day after day went by, I began to wish I had not beheld Lalusini again, for now it seemed as though I were losing her once more.

Then my mind went back—back over my life since I had first beheld Lalusini and at great peril had managed to keep her for myself; back over our first meetings in the rock

chamber of the Mountain of Death, what time we had eaten up the Bakoni, the nation who owned the Blue Cattle, and I remembered her words: "There is a people into whose midst I will one day return, and there I shall be great indeed, and you through me." Ha! Was this part of a scheme—of a carefully-matured plan? It seemed like it. So I resolved to wait and let things shape their course.

Now the very day on which I had formed this resolve I chanced to be outside of Nkunkundhlovu alone. Two girls strode by me with bundles on their heads, and as they did so, one whispered, "This night—induna of the Great One who site in the north. This night, by the two large reed-beds at the turn of the river. Mahlula waits."

The speaker passed on, but I, Nkose—my blood leaped at the words. At last I would have speech with Lalusini. At last we would meet face to face. Yet, even in the midst of my joy came a misgiving. Was it a snare—was it a trap Tambusa had set for my undoing? for the man who wanders at night on mysterious business—au! he is soon an object of suspicion, and to be an object of suspicion at that time meant death.

This, however, I was ready to risk, but for all that I resolved to proceed warily, and he who should attempt treachery upon me might well wish he never had. So with my great assegai, together with a heavy knob-stick and a small shield, I wandered up the river shortly before sundown, and did not return to Nkunkundhlovu for the night.

It had fallen quite dark, though the stars glittered forth in countless eyes from the blackness above. There was just the faintest murmur of the wind in the reed-beds, like the sigh of one who waits, and expecting, is disappointed for the time. The water flowed, evenly and smooth, lapping a low rock slab on the opposite bank, and now and again a soft splash and ripple as some crocodile rose or sank. In the air was a feeling of wizardry and awe; but I had passed through too many strange things to hold such in fear. Yet it seemed over long that I sat by that dark water and whispering reeds, waiting, while I listened to the many voices of the night, near and far.

"Greeting, Untúswa!"

The words seemed to come out of nowhere. Quickly I looked up, but the voice was not that of Lalusini! Then I made out a dark shape—a very shadow.

"Follow now, holder of the White Shield," it said, and immediately began to move away.

The voice was that of a woman—soft and pleasing. Keeping the shadow in view, yet warily, I moved forward. Beneath the heavy gloom of trees overhanging the river bank we moved, and I had quite lost to view my guide, but at such times her voice would lead

me; and at last I found she had halted at the entrance to a great rift like unto that wherein I had hid what time Jambúla was surprised by the impi in search of me.

My guide signed me to follow, and lo! we were threading our way in darkness between two great walls of earth. Then a light shone dully forth, and there, in a cave formed by the closing of the earth walls overhead, I beheld a fire.

“Advance now, induna of another King,” said the voice of my guide, “for my errand is done.”

Even as I looked round for her she had disappeared. But raising my eyes to the lighted space in front I beheld that which made me forget all else, for before me stood Lalusini.

In the circle of firelight there she stood, a smile of welcome wreathing her lips, her splendid form erect and tall as when I last saw it standing to watch me out of sight what time I had started for the Valley of the Red Death. There she stood, her hands extended towards me.

“Welcome, Untúswa,” she said. “Thus do we meet once more.”

No words did I utter, Nkose. I sprang to her side and we embraced long and warmly. Then we sat down to talk, for we had much to say.

“Welcome, Untúswa,” she repeated, still holding my hands. “Welcome, thou great brave one who would have slain a King who knew not how to keep faith.”

“Ha! But how didst thou know?” I cried in amazement.

“What do I not know? Tell me that,” she said, smiling at me. “Listen; I saw the midnight struggle in the ‘great hut’ of the isigodhlo. I saw the dark way along the cliffs of the Inkume. Was not my múti in the buck with its fawn that saved thee from the pursuing impi by showing no alarm, even as the múti upon thy neck saved thee when Umzilikazi lay prone and stupified?”

“E-hé! but that is indeed so. And it was thy múti which saved me from the hatred of Tambusa and Tola but a few days since,” I answered. “But, tell me now, Lalusini, was not that tale true which was told me by old Gegesa?”

“It was true so far as she knew. Ha! when Umzilikazi’s slaying dogs came to hale me forth in the black night, I laughed to myself, for I knew I had that by which the alligators should not harm me. I leaped into the dreadful pool where so many have died—and—

came out quietly on the other side what time those dogs returned to report to Umzilikazi that the sorceress he hated would trouble him no more; but perhaps in that they lied—ah, ah, Untúswa, perhaps they lied! Not for nothing did that Great One from whom I sprung cause me to be taught the deepest mysteries of the magic of the wise. And thyself, Untúswa, through many wanderings earnest thou here?”

“Whau! Not to thee need I tell of my wanderings, Lalusini, thou to whom all things are known.” I said.

“And I think among such things are all thy wanderings,” she laughed. “Thou camest here to deliver the Amandebeli into the hand of Dingane.”

“That is so, Lalusini; and for thy death the whole House of Matyobane should have died a thousand deaths. And now?”

“And now? We will see what the future may unfold.”

Thus we sat and talked on far into the night, and many a question did I put to Talumni concerning her own wanderings, and how she had first appeared at Nkunkundhlovu. I found she had been there before my own arrival; but when I asked why she had taken another name, and whether Dingane really believed the account she had given of herself, she said:

“I know not how clear of suspicion is the King’s mind, but that it is not entirely clear let this tell: Never once has the Great Great One desired that I should become an inmate of the isigodhlo. Now Dingane’s love for handsome women is known to the whole nation, and I—well I am not quite the least comely of my sex, Untúswa.” This she said with a playful smile. “Therefore it may be that he suspects something.”

Then I told her about Tambusa, and how his enmity placed me in daily peril. Her face clouded somewhat.

“We must suffer him for the present, Untúswa,” she said. “He may be necessary to me in my plans, and to compass his death would be to jeopardise those plans. He and Umhlela are all powerful in the nation, yet they must remain so for a little longer. Still, be wary and cautious, for even the shield of my múti may not always be broad enough to shelter thee.”

The night had fled as we sat thus together—yes, indeed, it had fled—and now Lalusini bade me leave her and return, so that I might have time to travel while it was yet dark, and mix with those who were about outside of Nkunkundhlovu in the morning. This

would be the easier, as the morning would be a misty one, for which reason, indeed, she had chosen this night for our meeting.

Thus we parted, and it was arranged that I should not seek her out again until she sent me word, as before. She wanted for nothing—there were those who supplied her wants, and her dwelling-place was safe and secure. None dared invade it.

As once more I threaded my way along the river-bank in the darkness, I sang softly to myself, not in fear, as many of our people do, to keep away evil ghosts, but in joy. My beautiful sorceress wife! Au! Was there ever another such?—and she seemed to have returned to me from the dark deeps of the dead. But with my joy there mingled another thought. The desire for vengeance seemed to have passed—the longing to deliver my former nation over to the spears of Dingane seemed wondrously to have diminished. I remembered old comradeship—and friends, many and brave, who had charged with me in close and serried line, shoulder to shoulder, in the lightning rush of our might as we hurled ourselves on the foe; who had sprung forward with redoubled courage to the rallying wave of my white shield; and now it seemed that I desired no longer the destruction of these. With the recovery of Lalusini, my rancour against Umzilikazi even seemed to melt away. But only to accomplish such destruction had I been allowed to konza to Dingane, wherefore now I was as one who is jammed against a tree between the long horns of a fierce and savage cow—he cannot remain thus for ever, and does he but move, why one horn or the other must pierce him. Well, at present, with the Amabuna threatening us, we had enough to take care of for some time to come. Umzilikazi could not be attended to until afterwards.

While comforting myself with this thought, something happened. There was a rustling in the grass, and a quick patter of feet. It was the darkest hour of the night, namely, that which precedes the dawn; but my eyes, well accustomed to the gloom, could distinguish the swift glide of fleeing shapes—indeed, a frightened, snarling yelp arose, as one of the shapes nearly came against me as I stood to listen. But they fled—those wild creatures of the night—after the manner of beasts who disperse when suddenly startled from their prey.

Then there came to my ears a low wail, as the moaning of a woman in fear, or in pain, perhaps both.

Chapter Eighteen.

The Refugees of the Ngome.

At first I liked it not, for strange tagati beings are about in the darkness—half-man, half-beast—who rend those that wander alone at night. But even of such I felt no fear then, wherefore I went straight to the spot whence the sound came; and, ready to use my spear if need be, called out to know who it was that spoke.

The answer came almost beneath my feet, and in the darkness I could make out a form lying there. I bent down and touched it. It was the form of a woman.

“Remain by me till dawn,” gasped a voice hoarse with pain and fear. “Those horrible beasts. They will rend me again. Oh, kill me, for I suffer agonies!”

“Who art thou?” I said, not liking this encounter.

“Nomshasa, the wife of Untúswa,” came the feeble answer.

Whau, Nkose! Then, indeed, did I well-nigh leap for amazement. For the name was that of one of my Swazi wives—that one who had mysteriously disappeared, and whom I had never expected to behold again. Bending over her, I strove, to raise her head; but as I moved her, though ever so gently, she shrieked.

“Ah—touch me not! I am torn in pieces. Those horrible beasts! Put me out of my pain. One blow at the back of the head will do it.”

Now the first streak of dawn had begun to lighten the earth, and by it I could see that what she said was so indeed. The hyenas which I had disturbed had indeed begun to devour her, and her body was hideously torn. But how had she come into that helpless plight? Then, by the fast increasing light, she knew me, and called me by name.

And I, Nkose, gazing at her, I was filled with horror. The whole of her scalp was one mass of blood, and it seemed as though her skull had been battered in. Her elbow joints were smashed and swollen; so too, were her wrists, and there were marks of frightful burns upon her body. The marvel was she was alive at all. I was full of pity for her, for she had been a handsome and pleasing girl, and during the short time since the King had given her to me to wife she had always done well by me.

Now, making a great effort, she told me her tale. During my absence against, the Amabuna she had been seized by order of Umhlela, and questioned as to my doings, but

could tell nothing that would go against me in an accusation of witchcraft. She was kept a close prisoner in a hut until the return of Tambusa, when she had been put to the torture to force her to confess. They had burned her with fire, had broken her joints with heavy knob-sticks, and that not on one day, but on many; but she would say nothing, till at last, losing patience, Tambusa had ordered her to be thrown outside and knobkerried. But the slayers had done their work in bungling fashion, and so she had waited until night and dragged herself away in the darkness to die alone. Then, when faint and too weak to move, the hyenas had fallen upon her.

No, the King could not have known, for it was in order to condemn me before him that they had tortured her, she said. But when I asked why they should have selected her rather than the other two, then, Nkose, came in the old, old tale, the mischief that can be wrought by a woman's tongue. That vision which Nomshasa had beheld while asleep at my side she could not keep to herself. She had chattered about it, and this coming to the ears of the two principal indunas who, in their jealous hatred, were watching my every movement, had put it into their minds to use her as a means of substantiating a charge of witchcraft against me, such a charge as Dingane himself would hardly venture to shield me from the penalty of. But the poor girl had been heavily punished indeed for giving way to the weakness of women—the wagging of too long a tongue; though in her constancy under the torments they heaped upon her she had shown no weakness at all, but rather the strength and bravery of the most valiant of warriors; and this I told her.

She was greatly pleased, and a drawn smile came over her face in the midst of her pain.

“I loved thee, Untúswa,” she said, “and I rejoiced when the King gave me, a captive girl who might have been made a slave, to wife to such a noted warrior as thou. And I think thou didst prefer me a little to the other two, but thou wert ever kind to me, and the torturers might have torn me into small pieces before I would have let fall one word to harm thee. And now I think I were better dead, for there might in time be others whom thou might prefer to me; yet for a little while I have been first.”

All this was said, not as I have told it to you, Nkose, but slowly and in gasps, and I, well, thinking of Lalusini, it seemed that her words were those of wisdom, for I had known experience of the jealousy of women. Yet I said:

“Thou wouldst ever have lived in great honour, Nomshasa, and have been counted great among my wives.”

“But not greatest—” she said, attempting to smile. “Yet hearken, Untúswa, and be warned. Return not to Nkunkundhlovu, for death awaits thee there. There is another

great bull of the House of Senzangakona who would fain roar in this kraal. Mpande would welcome such a fighter as thee."

The dawn had now spread, and soon the sun would come forth from behind the rim of the world. And now, in the full daylight, the terrible injuries that poor Nomshasa had received, both from the torturers and the teeth and claws of the beasts, looked so awful that every living moment must be to her a moment of intense agony. She could not live. She must have seen into my thoughts, for she said:

"It is time to give me rest, Untúswa. Yet return not to Dingane. They who were appointed to slay me jeered me beneath their blows, saying that before another sun or two set thy shade should join mine. Wherefore, flee. And now—Strike!"

I looked at her, and my heart was heavy with pity and wrath. Then I said:

"I will strike indeed, Nomshasa, for thy pain is too great. Yet let this lighten it. When the day of my power comes, be assured that the pangs of Tambusa and all who bore part in this matter shall be greater than thine. Now—art thou ready?"

"I am. No death could I have preferred to death at thy hand, Untúswa. Yet, hold my hand in thine unarmed one as the blow falls."

I turned her gently over upon her side, but she groaned with the agony of it. Then with my left hand I held hers. For a moment I looked at her. Her eyes were closed, and something like a smile was upon her face. I raised my right arm aloft, then with one quick crashing blow brought the heavy knob-stick down. It fell, fair—just where the base of the skull joins the back of the neck. Her agony was over. No shudder even ran through her, so completely, so suddenly had death overtaken her.

Notwithstanding the warning of Nomshasa, I still took my way in the direction of Nkunkundhlovu, for I thought I might perhaps gather from those I should meet whether the danger threatening was very near or not; whereas by taking a contrary direction it might overtake me suddenly and unawares, as peril springs out upon one who is blind. Yet I proceeded with great caution, so that presently, seeing several men approach, armed with spears and shields, I dropped out of sight to let them pass.

But soon after them came another—a tall man and ringed. Him I surveyed a moment, and recognised Silwane. But, to my surprise, when I would have accosted him he turned away, as though not aware of my presence. This looked strange, but while I was pondering as to what it could mean, I heard Silwane begin to sing softly to himself. I listened as the words grew louder and louder, yet not so as they could have been heard

from afar. And the words were strange, for he sang of a buffalo-bull for whom hunters lay in wait, whom their circle had well-nigh closed around; that the Ngome mountains were wild and broken, full of great forests and impenetrable hiding-places; and that there, and there only, had the hunted buffalo fled, that there, and there only, might he be safe. So he kept on singing. To any who heard, he might have been muttering an ordinary hunting-song, but to me, listening, ah! I saw his meaning. He had not really failed to observe me, but the last thing he desired was to do so in fact; and now he raised that song in urgent warning. Ah! he was a man, indeed, Nkose, was that same Silwane; a valiant fighter when we met in battle in opposite ranks; a true and faithful brother of the spear now that we had fought side by side.

So I saw through his warning and the advice it conveyed, yet before acting upon it I would take counsel with Lalusini. To this end I turned back, and travelling with great caution, at length I gained the strange earth cave where she dwelt.

She was surprised when she saw me, and somewhat disturbed. I told her all that had occurred—the death of poor Nomshasa and her warning; the meeting and warning of Silwane. But when I came to Nomshasa's idea that I should join in the plots of Mpande she shook her head.

"That will not do, Untúswa. That will not further my plans at all. Au! It seems that our places are reversed," she went on, with a laugh; "but it will not be always so. I know this people better than thou dost, and am in a better position to watch and wait, and, if need be, act. Now the only way by which Mpande can sit in the seat of Dingane is with the aid of the Amabuna, and we have no need of these white invaders. Here is my counsel, Untúswa. Flee hence to the Ngome forests beyond the Black Umfolosi, and lie hidden awhile. There dwell a number of men who have sought refuge, and who will welcome thee among them."

"A wanderer again! Well, if it must be. But how is it that these people, if refugees, are allowed to dwell in the heart of the land unsought for?"

"Because the King does not really desire their death. They are made up of men who have been smelt out by the izanusi, and have managed to escape; others whom the King has doomed, not really meaning that they should be slain, or the izinduna have plotted to destroy, and who having been warned in time, fled; also the relatives of these men, dreading lest the doom should fall upon them also. Now these men are so numerous as almost to constitute a tribe in themselves; they are wild and fierce, but will welcome such another fighter. That is the only plan, Untúswa; thou must flee to the Bapongqolo. Did not even the warning of Silwane convey that? Was it not about a hunted buffalo who found safety in the Ngome forests?"

“That is so, Lalusini,” I answered. “Yet it seems that I have found thee after all this time of sorrow, only that we must lose sight of each other immediately.” And I looked at her sadly.

“Patience, Untúswa,” she said. “I am planning to make thee great, that thou and I together may rule the world. Say, are we not of the sort who are born to that end?” And, coming over to me, she placed both hands upon my shoulders, looking up into my face; nor had she to look up very much, for, tall as I was, she, for a woman, was of splendid stature.

“I think, indeed, we are well fitted to rule it,” I answered, with pride.

“Then go now, a wanderer once more, Untúswa, but only for a short while. Besides, it may be that I will find thee but, even among the fierce Bapongqolo, from time to time,” she added.

“Why, then, go I forth with joy,” I answered. “Farewell, Lalusini. Delay not to find me out.”

She gave me a few things which I might need, food, and a casting-spear or two, and a large new war-shield—I having come forth with but a small dancing shield—and thus once more fared I forth a wanderer, a fugitive from the parent nation, even as from its offshoot. Verily it seemed as though I were to find no rest.

Now the undertaking before me was, to a man of my experience and familiarity with peril, no very great one, for by using ordinary caution I could always travel unobserved. I avoided the kraals of men, moving mostly at night. Twice I saw in the distance bodies of armed warriors who might or might not have been in search of me; but these I easily eluded, though delayed thereby; and the third evening after parting with Lalusini I was well in among the wildest solitudes of the Ngome forest.

And they were solitudes, Nkose. The great slopes and spurs of the mountains were covered with dense forest surging up in seas of foliage against the immense rock walls of the Lebombo mountains. Below, chasms and deep ravines through which the mountain streams whimpered, half hidden beneath the decaying vegetation and rotting tree-trunks of ages. And of animal life, of bird life, of insect life—whau! the air was never still. By day the black chasms boomed with the hoarse bark of the dog-snouted baboons, and at night thundered from cliff to cliff the roar of the lion. Birds chattered and piped, and the buzz of insects hung ever upon the air, but of man and his habitations never a sign.

“Now,” thought I, “where are these people of whom Lalusini spoke? for these solitudes are not altogether to my mind. I like better not to dwell alone,” But still I wandered through unpeopled forests, seeing no sign of man, I grew uneasy. There was abundance of game, easily slain, too. Still I desired converse.

This, however, came my way at last, and in right startling manner did it come. I had turned the corner of a great rock, where the track I had been following opened into a grassy glade. Suddenly there sprang up right at my feet several men fully armed, who, with a loud shout, called on me to halt.

Chapter Nineteen.

The Vengeance of the Refugees.

“An impi sent by Dingane,” was my first thought, as I gassed upon the fierce countenances and the spears poised aloft with threatening flash.

“Who art thou—and whence?” said he who appeared to be the leader, a tall man and savage of mien.

“Rather, who are ye?” I answered, with another question, affronted by the insolent tone employed by the speaker.

“See these,” he answered swiftly. “Speak or die! You are one man, and these are several.”

“Yet I have fought with several before this day, O Unknown,” I retorted, with a swift movement, throwing up my shield in defence, at the same time backing towards the rock, so that they could not get round me. So I stood ready for a merry fight, for the leader alone would have taken up all my attention, so tall and strong was he—and there were others.

To my surprise they did not come on. The leader again spoke.

“Once more, who art thou? He who wanders in the retreat of the Bapongqolo must needs give an account of himself.”

“E-hé!” assented the others.

Then I lowered shield and weapons at once.

“I am Untúswa, the son of Ntelani. Perchance ye have heard of him, ye who are refugees.”

By the look which they exchanged I knew they had heard of me. Then the leader said:

“What seek you here, Untúswa, for in truth that is a name which is known?”

“I seek a refuge among the people who are in refuge,” I said.

“Why then, thou art welcome, Untúswa,” he replied. “I am Sifadu, the son of Kona, and I wielded a sharp spear in the ranks of the Imbele-bele, of which I was a captain. But Tola,

that jackal-spawned cheat, did name my father at a witch-finding, and he, being old, died the death of the black ants; but I and the remainder of his house escaped—and here we are.”

“Tola will name no more, Sifadu,” I said. “The knob-sticks of the King’s slayers have put that form of pleasure beyond his reach.”

“He is dead, then! Haul I am glad, and yet not, for one day I had promised myself the delight of having him enticed here that he might die the death my father suffered through him. I would pay ten cows as the price of that pleasure—yes, willingly.” And the look on the face of Sifadu was such that it was perhaps as well for Tola in the long run that he had died the swift and painless death of the knobstick.

Thus we conversed, Sifadu and I, and as we journeyed I told him and the others a great deal of what had happened; of the invasion of the Amabuna, and how we had destroyed many of them. They had heard something of this, but I, who had taken part in it, was able to tell them everything. But what they especially wanted to know about was the rumour of plotting in favour of Mpande. Of this, however, I could not tell them much, because I knew but little myself.

The principal place of the Bapongqolo consisted not of one large kraal, but a number of small ones; and so scattered were these, and so carefully hidden, away in the dense forest which covered the slopes of a vast hollow or bowl, that it would be well-nigh impossible to strike them all at one blow; and to this end was such concealment planned. Impossible, too, would it have been for any considerable number of men to have penetrated the hollow without their advance having been long since known to the inhabitants, so dense and rock-strewn were the approaches; and, indeed, all such were under the observation of small outpost kraals, which served the purposes of pickets.

I gathered that these refugees were counted by hundreds. They were of all ages, from quite old men down to boys. Most of them, however, were middle-aged men in their prime; but whether the fact of being refugees kept them ever on the alert, all had a quick, ready, and fearless look, together with fine and well-knit frames, that stamped them as a warrior clan of no contemptible strength. And to Sifadu all seemed to look up as to a recognised chief.

Of this Sifadu I knew not quite what to make. He was friendly at first, but as time went by he seemed to look at me with jealous and suspicious eyes, as though he thought that a man of my standing and prowess would hardly be content with the position of one among many, wherein he was right, perhaps. Of one thing, however, I was certain. Did I

or any other man desire the chieftainship of these outlaws Sifadu would first have to be dead.

For the present, however, I had no such thoughts. I was content to dwell quietly and unmolested, and await the turn events might take. So, as time went by, I seemed to have become as one of the Bapongqolo. Together we hunted the wild game of the forest—together we made descents in search of plunder into the Swazi country or the lands of the Amatonga, or levied tribute from the kraals lying beyond the outskirts of our own fastnesses; and so feared were we that none thought of resistance or retaliation.

“Of a truth, Untúswa, the day might come when Dingane himself would be glad to join us,” said Sifadu to me, as we were returning from one of these forays. “With our help, even we might save him his seat. Then should we not be among the highest of the nation? Then would there not be some who might groan aloud because the son of Kona had returned?”

Such a thought as this had been in my own mind, but I desired not to foster it in that of others, at least, not until I had determined upon my own plans; so to Sifadu I replied lightly on the matter, treating it as of no importance.

Lalusini had kept her word, and twice had arranged that we should meet and hold long converse together. But on the second of these occasions her news was great. The Amabuna had crossed the Tugela in great force, intending to march upon Nkunkundhlovu. There had been a tremendous battle, but the army of Dingane had defeated them and had driven them back; and but for their horses would have stamped them out entirely. Then the English at Tegwini had undertaken to interfere in this quarrel, and had crossed the Tugela with a large impi of Amakafula. These, however, got no further than the bank of the Tugela, for the King’s warriors made meat of that impi until the river ran red with their blood; and, in his wrath and disgust at this breach of faith on the part of the whites at Tegwini, Dingane sent an impi there to eat them up, too. Whau! and they would have been eaten up but that they took to the water—took refuge on a ship that was there—for these whites, Nkose, had no business to interfere in a quarrel which concerned them not. They were not of the blood of the Amabuna, and they had ever been treated as friends by the house of Senzangakona since the great Tshaka had allowed them the use of the lands on which they then dwelt. So they were rightly served.

Now all these tales of war and of great battles fired my blood, for I would fain have been in them; yet here I was, hiding away as a fugitive. But when I would have boldly returned, craving only that Dingane would allow me to wield a spear in the ranks of his troops, Lalusini dissuaded me. The hostility of Tambusa and Umhlela burned as hot

against me as ever, and indeed I had fled not any too soon. She bade me wait. She herself was high in favour with the King by reason of the victories which had attended the Zulu arms, for she had foretold them.

Not without risk did I thus meet Lalusini. I could not reveal the real relationship between us, and the suspicions of the fierce Bapongqolo once fairly aroused, I might be slain suddenly and without warning, and no opportunity given me of explanation or self-defence. Indeed, after the first time, I thought I noticed a frost of suspiciousness in the converse of those people towards me as we sat around our fires at night. But the second time something so unlooked for happened that it gave them all something else to think about.

Lalusini had finished telling me all there was of news when, of a sudden, her manner became strange and suspicious.

“We are being watched, Untúswa,” she said quietly.

“Watched? Why then, it will be bad—ah, very bad—for the watcher.”

And hardly had the words escaped me than I darted from her side. I hurled myself through the thickness of the bush, but something was already crashing through it away from me. I made out the form of a man.

“Now, stop!” I cried—a casting assegai poised for a throw. “Stop! or I cleave thee to the heart.”

I was about to hurl the spear fair between the shoulders of the fleeing man—who was now not many paces in front—when he stopped suddenly. I went at him. He turned round and faced me, a glare of hate and fury in his eyes that seemed to scorch—to burn. And I—Whau! I stood as one suddenly turned to stone, the uplifted assegai powerless in my stiffened grasp. For the face was that of a ghost—the dreadful glare of hate and fury that paralysed me was upon the face of a ghost. I was gazing upon one whom I had seen slain, whom my own eyes had beheld clubbed to death by the King’s slayers—Tola, the chief of the witch doctors.

We stood for a moment thus, motionless, I gazing upon the horrible form of one I knew to be dead, as it stood there, shadowed in the gloom of the trees. Then, slowly raising an arm, the voice came, deep and hollow—

“Retire—or I put that upon thee which shall blast and wither thy heart and turn to water thy courage; which shall change the most valiant of fighting-men into the most cowardly of women.”

Awful as were the words, the effect upon me was not that intended. He had better have kept silence, for now I knew him to be alive, and I sprang upon him. He had a spear, and struck furiously at me with it; but I turned the blow, and then we closed. He fought and bit and kicked, and, powerful as I was, the lithe and slippery witch doctor for long defied my efforts to secure him, for I was anxious to take him alive. At last it seemed I should be obliged to kill him, when something was dropped over his head which, the next moment, was rolled round and round in a thick covering of stuff. It was Lalusini’s blanket. She had come to my aid just at the right time. We had no difficulty in securing him now, and with strips cut from his own skin cloak we bound his hands firmly behind him, and his feet. Then we removed the blanket.

“Greeting, Tola!” I said. “I thought thou wert dead; but I had forgotten, a great izanusi such as thou could not die, which is well, for not far off is one who longeth to welcome thee.”

“Have a care, Untúswa, have a care,” he snarled. “Dost thou not fear?”

“Why, no,” I answered. “The múti which protects me is greater than any which can be turned against me. But thou, what canst thou fear, O great izanusi who cannot die?”

I was but mocking him, Nkose, for now I saw through the plot. He had purposely been allowed to escape in the turmoil what time all the other izanusi had been slain; and I laughed at myself for my fears on first beholding him.

We left Tola lying there helpless; and, removing a little distance, we said out all we had to say. Then we took leave of each other.

“Use care, Untúswa, for it is that man’s life or thine,” said Lalusini, as we parted. “On no account let him escape.”

“Have no fear as to that, Lalusini,” I answered. “There is one who will take even better care of him than I could.”

When she had gone I unbound Tola’s ankles, and told him to walk. Now, seeing himself in my power, he began to talk fair. He promised to do all for me if I would but let him go—to rid me of my enemies, to make me the greatest man, next to the King. But I only mocked him.

“A live izanusi may do great things,” I said. “But a dead izanusi—whau!—of what use is he? And, Tola, I seem to remember that thou art dead—dead by order of the Great Great One. How then canst thou serve me?”

Then he began on another story. He could teach me things—could reveal mysteries which would render me all-powerful against every form of harm. But I only laughed at this, saying that he would soon have an opportunity of testing his powers in his own favour; and thus, ever with a watchful eye upon him, we travelled on together until we entered the hollow where were the kraals of the Bapongqolo.

“There are many here who will give thee warm greeting, chief of the izanusi,” I said. “Some even, upon whom thou hast looked before.”

Now people began to crowd around us, and, recognising my prisoner, shouts of hatred and threats were hurled at him. They would have torn him from me, but I restrained them.

“Go, call Sifadu,” I said. “I have brought him a long-desired guest.”

At the mention of Sifadu’s name the terror stamped upon the face of Tola was frightful to behold. We, standing around, enjoyed this, for scarcely a man there but had seen some relative haled to the place of doom at the bidding of this hyena; some indeed to writhe in torment for long before they died. Then Tola, foaming at the mouth, rolled on the ground in convulsions; but for this they cared nothing, as a mere witch-finding trick. They pricked him with their assegais until he came to again, roaring with laughter the while. And as he came to again, Sifadu appeared.

“Welcome, Tola,” he cried. “Welcome! We have long awaited thee. Ha, and a right warm welcome shall be thine, ah, ah! a right warm welcome.”

And thrusting his face close to that of the witch doctor he gnashed his teeth in a grin of such hardly-to-be-restrained fury that I thought he would have seized the other with his churning jaws like a beast.

“Welcome, Tola,” he went on. “A warm welcome to thee, in the name of all my house whom thou didst eat up. Whau! There were my two young wives. How nicely their tender limbs shrivelled and burned as they died the death of the hot stones as witches, smelt out by thee Tola—by thee, Tola—thou prince of smellers out!” and with the two repetitions he sliced off the witch doctor’s ears with the keen blade of his broad assegai. A frightful howl escaped the sufferer.

“Then there was my mother and another of my father’s wives; they were lashed to death with switches to make them confess—by thy orders. Tola. Haul Does this feel good—and this—and this?” And he lashed the prisoner’s naked body with a green hide thong until the air rang with screams.

“Then there was my father, Kona. He was eaten by black ants—at thy word, Tola—by black ants. It took nearly a day for him to die in that torment, raving and roaring as a madman. And now I think this shall be thine own end. Whau! The black ants—the good black ants—the fierce black ants—the hungry black ants. They shall be fed—they shall be fed.”

Now, Nkose, looking at Sifadu, I thought he came very near being a madman at that moment, so intense was his hate and fury, so difficult the restraint he put upon himself not to hack the vile witch doctor into pieces there and then with his own hand. He foamed at the mouth, he ground his teeth, his very eyeballs seemed about to roll from their sockets. But the face of Tola, ah! never did I see such terror upon that of any living man. The crowd, looking on, roared like lions, stifling Sifadu’s voice. They called to him the death of relatives—of fathers, of brothers, of wives, all of whose deaths lay at the doors of the izanusi. They wished that this one had a hundred lives that they might take a hundred days in killing him. There were several nests of black ants at no distance. Then somebody cried out that there was a particularly large one under a certain tree.

“Under a tree!” cried Sifadu. “Ha. I have an idea! Bring him along.”

They flung themselves upon Tola, whose wild howling was completely drowned by the ferocious yells of the crowd. But as they were dragging him roughly over the ground Sifadu interposed.

“Gahlé, brothers. Do not bruise him. The ants like their meat uninjured.”

Amid roars of delight the miserable wretch was dragged to the place of torment. Already some had knocked the top off the ants’ nest, and were stirring it with sticks to infuriate the insects. Right over the nest grew a long bough a little more than the height of a tall man from the ground. Now Sifadu’s idea took shape.

A wedge of wood was inserted between the victim’s teeth. This had the effect of holding his jaws wide open, nor by any effort could he dislodge the gag. Then his ankles being strongly bound together, he was hoisted up to the branch above, and left hanging by the feet, so that his head and gaping mouth just touched the broken top of the ant heap. Then as he writhed and twisted and howled in his agony—for the infuriated insects

swarmed all over him—into his nostrils, mouth, severed ears, everywhere—the Bapongqolo crowded around gloating over his torments, and shouting into his ears the names of those whom he himself had doomed to a like torment. It was long indeed before he died, but though I have seen many a terrible form of death, never did I see any man suffer as did this one. And yet, Nkose, it was just that he should, for had not he himself been the means of dooming many innocent persons to that very death? Wherefore the revenge of the refugees was a meet and a just one.

Chapter Twenty.

The Bapongqolo Return.

Notwithstanding that I, and I alone, had brought to him his bitterest enemy to be dealt with, Sifadu's manner towards me became, as time went on, more and more one of suspicion and distrust. He feared lest I should desire the chieftainship of this refugee clan; for by this time I was as completely one of themselves as he was, and he thought, perhaps rightly, that a man who had once commanded the fighting force of a great warrior nation was not likely to be content to remain for ever a mere nobody.

But this attitude taken up by Sifadu compelled me to do the very thing which he desired least, and that in self-defence. I laboured to create a following, and before I had been many moons among them I had attached fully half the outlaws to myself. Further, I knew that in the event of a quarrel between us I could count upon even more, for Sifadu was but indifferently liked. His bravery was beyond suspicion; indeed, it was through fear of his prowess that none disputed his supremacy. But he was of a quarrelsome disposition, fierce and terrible when roused, and had a sullen and gloomy mind; whereas I, for my part, have ever got on well among fighting-men, and as for gloomy thoughts, whau! they are the worst kind of múti, worse than useless indeed. True, I who once had been among the first of a great nation was now an outlaw and an exile from two great nations; but men's fortunes change, and it might well be that in the near future my serpent would remember me, and my place be higher than ever—indeed I dared not think how high.

News at length reached us of another great battle. The Amabuna had again advanced upon Nkunkundhlovu, but before they could reach it a large impi sent by Dingane had reached them. Whau! that was a fight, said our informants. The Amabuna had drawn their waggons together, as their manner is, and the Amazulu strove for half a day to carry their camp with a rush. But it was of no use. The long guns shot hard and quick, and when the impi got almost within striking distance, and would have swarmed over the waggons, the Amabuna loaded their guns with several small bullets at a time, instead of only one, and our warriors went down in heaps. They could not stand against it, and this time a tale of defeat was brought back to the King.

Now the Amabuna, quick to take advantage of their success, pressed on immediately. But Dingane this time did not wait for them. He was warned that his brother, Mpande, was plotting against him, and he knew better than to be caught between the Amabuna on one side and his own rebellious people on the other. So he had decided to retire.

This was the news which reached us in our retreat, and whereas this would be the tract of country for which the King would make, it would be our retreat no longer. So we were forced to take a line.

Now, Sifadu's plan was to hand over the whole band of refugees to Mpande, whose emissaries had been among us of late trying to win us over to the side of that prince. But my mind on the matter was different. I had no great opinion of Mpande, whereas Dingane was a real King—one to whom it was good to konza. My flight had been due to the hostility and intriguing of Tambusa, not to the displeasure of the King; and, now that the Great Great One was sore pressed by his enemies, I desired to wield a spear in defence of him. On this matter, too, Lalusini, whom I saw from time to time, was of the same mind as myself, though at that time she would not open her mind to me freely, bidding me, with a smile, to be still and wait.

Soon Sifadu, having his plans ready, called a council of the Bapongqolo to make known to the clan at large what he expected of it. The warriors came, several hundreds of them, in full war adornments, and fully armed, and Sifadu addressed them in a long speech. He recalled how it was that they came to be there, living the life of exiles and outcasts. He reminded them of their relatives slain, their houses stamped flat, their cattle seized to swell the herds of Dingane. The miserable cheat, Tola, whose bones lay broken and scattered around the nest of the black ants, in which they had put him to a just death, was only the mouthpiece of Dingane; the real oppressor was the King himself. Now, would they put themselves beneath the foot of such a King as that when they might obtain revenge for their wrongs, and at the same time lead a quiet life by doing konza to one who had promised them immunity and reward if they aided him now? But they must do this quickly for their own sakes, for their former oppressor with what remained of his army would be upon them in their retreat immediately.

Thus spoke Sifadu, but his words, and the words of others who argued in like manner, were not received as he intended. By more than half of those assembled they were received in silence. The old instinct of trained and disciplined warriors rendered these averse to turning against the King, especially so great a king as Dingane. Besides, it was by no means certain that even a combination of both forces against him would be attended with success. Then, too, they could not bring themselves to enter into alliance with the Amabuna.

Then I spoke. I pointed out that there were several hundreds of us—all good fighting-men—that if we all went in to offer our spears to the King, he, being pressed by enemies, would right gladly receive us. So should we all regain our place in the nation, and be outlaws no longer.

As I went on, the murmurs of assent which greeted my words grew into shouts. The people had long been tired of their runaway state, and here was a chance to set themselves right. They were also not a little tired of the rule of Sifadu.

This Sifadu saw, and leaping up, his countenance ablaze with fury, he came at me, his great spear aloft. So quickly was it done that I had barely time to throw up my shield. So powerful the blow that the blade pierced the tough bull-hide and stuck fast. Then Sifadu, following up his attack in swift fury, struck over my shield with his knob-stick. It was a terrible blow, and partly reached me. I felt half stunned, but infuriate with the pain. So, with a shout, I quit defence and went at Sifadu with a will.

A frightful commotion now arose. The friends of Sifadu would have rushed to his aid, but that they saw that those favourable to me were more numerous. These sprung to meet them, and all being fully armed it looked as though a bloody battle was about to be fought. But some cried aloud against interference, saying that the two of us should strive for the mastery, and to this counsel I added my voice. Sifadu, though, had no voice save to growl and grind his teeth like a maddened beast.

So we fought, we two—none hindering. Our shields flapped together, and for a moment we were immovable—pressing each other equally hard—each striving to run in under the guard of the other. Then the spear-blades—Sifadu having disentangled his—would flash and glance like threads of fire as we leaped and feinted—yet neither of us able to drive home either stroke or stab. A silence had fallen upon the onlookers now, and every head was bent eagerly forward. All this I could see, while never taking my gaze from my enemy.

At last my chance came. Pretending to stumble, I threw myself forward, and with one swift sweep of my assegai I sheared through Sifadu's leg, gashing the thigh to the bone. He sank to the earth uttering a terrible howl. All the muscles were divided—from the principal blood-vessels red jets were spurting. Whau! He was in a sea of it. But even then, weakening each moment, he gathered strength to hurl his great knobstick at my face. I was prepared for this, however, and caught it on my shield; nor did I hurry to run in and finish him, knowing that while he could move a finger he would still gather himself together for one last desperate slash at me.

“Hamba-gahle, Sifadu,” I said—not mocking him. “This quarrel was not of my seeking, but the son of Ntelani never yet refused a fight.”

He made no reply, glaring at me in hate until very soon he sank down into unconsciousness and death. And all the warriors shouted in assent of my words, save some few—near friends of Sifadu; but for them I cared nothing. And presently some of

the older among them came to me, and we talked. We agreed to carry out my plan of returning to the nation, and that at once.

“Whau, Untúswa! Thou hast commanded men from thy youth; it is fitting that thou shouldst be our leader now,” said one of them, after he had talked. “Say I not well, brothers?” turning to the rest.

“E-hé! Siyavuma!” (“We consent”) they cried as one man. Thus, Nkose, I became chief of the Bapongqolo, the tribe of the Wanderers; but, in truth, the honour might be brief, indeed, for it might please the King to make a quick end both of chief and tribe.

Now that we had thus decided, we sent out men to find out how things were going between Dingane and the enemy, and from their report we judged that the time had arrived to come in and lie beneath the foot of the Elephant. The Bapongqolo women were left in concealment in the recesses of the Ngome forests, while we, to the number of several hundreds, marched forth.

Before we crossed the White Umfolosi, I and other of the principal of the refugees climbed to the heights overlooking the Mahlabatini plain. It was somewhat early in the morning, but the brightness of the new day was dimmed—dimmed by a great cloud. Far away to the southward it rose, that cloud—thicker and thicker, higher and higher—a great dull pillar of smoke. Nkunkundhlovu was in flames.

Through the thickness of the smoke-cloud we could see the red leap of the fire. Then was amazement our master. Had the Amabuna gained a victory—so great a victory that they had been able to penetrate to the Great Place of the Elephant whose tread shaketh the world? Whau! it could not be. The marvel was too great.

But as we looked, lo! over the rise which lay back from the river came dense black masses—masses of men—of warriors—for in the morning sunlight we could see the glint of their spears. They moved in regular rank, marching in columns, in perfect order. In perfect order! There lay the whole situation. This was no defeat. The Great Great One, for reasons of his own, had fired Nkunkundhlovu before retreating.

Nearer they drew, those masses of warriors—on, on—rank upon rank of them. We saw them enter the river and cross, and for long it seemed that the flood of the river must be arrested in its run, so vast were the numbers that blackened it as they crossed. Our blood burned within us at the sight of this splendid array. We longed to be among them, bearing our part as men. We had had more than enough of skulking like hunted leopards.

“Ho, Siyonyoba!” I cried to the second leader of the refugees. “Form up our spears in rank, that we go down now and throw in our lot with these.”

Right down we went. The black might of our retreating nation was halting now, rolling up in waves; and there, on the very spot where we were finally repulsed by you English in the battle of Nodwengu, Nkose, when we thought to eat up your red square of soldiers, there did we wanderers, whose lives were forfeit, bring our lives in our hands to lay them at the feet of the King.

(The battle historically known to us as that of Ulundi is always termed by the Zulus the battle of Nodwengu, because fought nearest to the kraal of that name.)

I had sent on men in advance to announce our arrival, and now, as we drew near, the army opened on either side of us so as to leave us a broad road.

A dead silence lay upon the whole dense array. I gave one glance back at those I led—led, it might be, to their death. Truly, a more warrior-like band never desired to serve any King. Their fugitive life had hardened the Bapongqolo. Even the picked regiments of Dingane’s army could not surpass them for hardihood and uprightness of bearing; and though we were probably going to our death, my blood thrilled with pride that I was the elected leader of so splendid a band.

I gave a signal, and striking their shields in measure as they marched, the Bapongqolo raised a great song in praise of Dingane:

“There hovers aloft a bird,
An eagle of war,
In circles and swoop
It floats above the world.
The eye of that eagle
Would burn up the world.
But the world is allowed to live.
So clement, so merciful, is that eagle who restrains his wrath.
He retires but to swoop and strike again.
Hau! The enemies of that war-eagle
 shall melt away like yonder smoke.
A vulture who devours the flesh of men;
So is that bird.
Yonder is flesh that he shall presently eat.
So great is he,
He retires but to swoop and strike again.”

So our song thundered forth as we marched straight onward. I gave another signal. Immediately every shield and weapon fell to the ground with one crash, and advancing nearer weaponless, we bent low, a forest of heads, and from every tongue in one roar there ascended the "Bayéte." For we were now in the presence of the King.

In stern silence Dingane sat gazing upon us. Then he, too, gave a signal. Immediately an armed regiment moved across our rear. Between us and the weapons we had thrown down stood a wall of armed men, and in this I read our sentence of death. We had risked our chance and had foiled. By my counsels, I had led these hundreds of brave men to their doom.

Chapter Twenty One.

The Embassy of Tambusa.

“What do I see? Untúswa, the wanderer? Untúswa, who fled from the north to konza to another King? Ha! Greeting, Untúswa, for it seems long since we have beheld thee.”

So spake Dingane, softly, flatteringly, even as Umzilikazi was wont to do what time the stake or the alligators were preparing for somebody, and I indeed felt dead already.

“And these,” went on the King, bending his stern gaze upon my following. “A warrior-like band indeed, and it seems a pity to slay such, yet must they all die.”

This he said almost to himself, else had the slayers been at work already. And I—the boldness of desperation came into me then.

“We are the King’s cattle,” I said. “We are here to place our lives beneath the foot of the Elephant. Yet, O Ruler of the World, there are some who should taste the goring of our horns. We are the King’s fighting-bulls. And, Great Great One, suffer us ere we die to spill once more the blood of the King’s enemies.”

“Yet, Untúswa, it sometimes happens that fighting-bulls, growing mad, turn and gore their owners. They had better have been slain first,” said Dingane, with dark suspicion in his tone.

Now I saw what was to be done, though I hardly knew what to say.

“I would ask the Great Great One wherefore these are here at all, but that they may drink the blood of the King’s enemies?” I urged, amazed at my own boldness. “Were they here for any other purpose, why then they were already dead, Father of the Wise. Au! they seek but to die in the ranks of those who fight. That is all, Calf of a Black Bull.”

And they on whose behalf I spoke uttered a great murmur of assent, together with words of bonga and the King’s titles.

Then I saw Dingane whisper to one who sat near him, and this one retired. Whau! that was a moment. We who sat there seemed already dead. Around crouched the two immense half circles of armed warriors, their shields lying on the ground before them—all in dead silence—and in his great chair made out of the carved trunk of a tree, the great white shield held aloft at the back of his head, the King sat, silent, stern, gloomy

looking. His attitude was that of one who waited. Waited for what? For the carrying out of his order decreeing, our death?

Then some new event was astir. There stood before the King a woman. Now my followers dared to breathe again, and the sound went up from every chest like a sob of relief. And seeing who the woman was, my own relief became greater still, for she was my sorceress-wife.

“Hearken, Mahlula,” said the King. “See you these?”

“I see them, Great Great One,” she answered, sweeping a majestic glance over us. “They are those known as the Bapongqolo. They are here to lay their lives beneath the foot of the Elephant, and to crave the right to die fighting for him.”

“And how dost thou know that, my sister?” said Dingane suspiciously.

“It is easily known, Father of the Wise, and that not even by my múti,” she answered. “There are many among them known by name, and all have the look of forest-dwellers. And he at their head, look at him.”

“Ha! And is it for good or for ill that they are here?”

“For good, Ruler of the Great. For these are fine wielders of the spear. And they are many,” she answered.

“That is well,” said Dingane. “You wanderers, I give you your lives. You shall join these lion-cubs, and plenty of prey lies awaiting your teeth.”

For some moments, Nkose, the roar that went up from all men’s throats would seem about to split the world, for to the praises rolled forth from those who were thus spared was added the bonga of the whole army.

“Now talk we of Untúswa,” said the King, when this had quieted down. “There is that about him which I like not entirely. What of him, Mahlula?”

She looked at me long and earnestly, as though she had never seen me before, but in her sweet eyes I read hope and courage. Then she said:

“I think he is a born leader of warriors, Great Great One.”

“Ha! Now shalt thou have a chance of showing thy powers, Mahlula,” said the King. “Thou, Untúswa,” pointing at me with his assegai, “shalt also be put to the proof. I name these the Bapongqolo, and of this regiment I create thee induna, for I have not yet known the predictions of Mahlula to prove false. Retire now with thy men and form them up among those yonder.”

They who had custodied us now fell back, and as we all gathered up our weapons again we thundered forth the war-song of Dingane. Then, when we had formed up at the place pointed out to us, in truth it seemed that the army had received a most valuable addition in ourselves. Then dancing was ordered, and the slaughter of cattle, and there was much feasting.

Now during an earlier part of the war the Amabuna had sent messages to Dingane proposing peace, and to such the King had listened. Trouble was threatening at home, for Mpande, the brother of Dingane, was still plotting, and had by now collected a considerable following. Further, the Amabuna were increasing in strength, numbers having crossed the mountains to join them; moreover, several of the tribes who did konza to the royal House had forgotten their tribute, sheltering themselves behind the Amabuna. So Dingane had listened to the peace proposals of the Amabuna, and had agreed to pay nearly twenty thousand cattle, and to return the guns and horses taken at Nkunkundhlovu. For a space then there was peace. The Amabuna did not even want the cattle just then; they would rather we should herd them for the time being. So far good.

But one day there came news. Mpande had crossed the Tugela and had fled to the Amabuna, declaring that he feared for his life. Au! and long since he would have owned no life to fear for, had the King but listened to the counsels of Tambusa, who would have caused him to be slain. But it was too late now, and already Dingane had reason to repent him of his mercy, for now that Mpande had promised them to divide the nation the Amabuna, ignoring all former promises and arrangements, sent word to Dingane demanding from him double the number of cattle at first agreed upon, and without even awaiting his reply they prepared to advance upon Nkunkundhlovu.

Not for nothing had Mpande plotted. He had gained over to his cause Nongalaza, an induna of importance. Nongalaza was old, and suffered from swollen limbs; but he was a skilled and courageous commander, and he took with him to the side of Mpande and the Amabuna the strength of four full regiments.

Now Dingane sent an embassy to the leaders of the Amabuna, and the induna he chose as his “mouth” was Tambusa. He had better have chosen some other messenger—better for Tambusa, but not better for me, Nkose, for it was during Tambusa’s absence that I and the Bapongqolo arrived to place our lives in the hand of the King.

This, then, is what was happening at that time within the camp of the Amabuna, and the tale I have from the mouths of several among those who had fled with Mpande and who witnessed that which was now done.

Tambusa entered the camp of the Amabuna attended by Nkombazana, one of his own followers. He was received but coldly by the Amabuna. Why had they broken faith with the Great Great One who sits at Nkunkundhlovu? he asked. They had demanded twice the number of cattle at first agreed upon. They were preparing to invade the country, and had declared their intention of setting up Mpande as King, having deposed Dingane. Who were they who took to themselves the right to make and unmake Kings for the Zulu nation? asked Tambusa, proud and defiant. Dingane was King of the Zulu nation, and as King he would live and die.

“Ah! die perhaps, that is right,” said one of the Amabuna, with an evil laugh.

“A King of the Amazulu does not die of words nor of fear,” replied Tambusa, fiercely scornful. “Yet hearken to my message, even the ‘word’ of the Great Great One, whose mouth I am. Thus he speaks: ‘We made an agreement, have I not kept it? I have returned the guns and horses I promised; I have sent in part of the cattle I promised, I would have sent in all, but you preferred to leave the remainder with me for the present. Well, it is there, send and take it, or shall I send it in? Now you demand twice the number, and this I do not understand. Now you prepare to invade us in armed force, and threaten to make Mpande King in my place. This also I do not understand, and have sent my induna, Tambusa, as my “mouth” to say so. He is also my “ears,” and will listen to and bring back your words to me.’ Thus spoke the Great Great One by whose light we live.”

“Ha! The Great Great One by whose light we live!” jeered some of the Amabuna. “A Great Great murderer, who shall soon die.”

To this Tambusa made no reply. His head was proudly erect, on his face a sneer of hate and scorn such as he could hardly conceal. Then the chief of the Amabuna spoke:

“To you we have nothing to say. To your captain”—for so he designated the King—“we have nothing to say. When the time comes we shall act, and come it will, very soon.”

“We, too, know how to act,” answered Tambusa. “Hlalani gahle! I retire.”

He turned to leave—turned, to find a line of guns pointed full upon him at but a few paces distant.

“Halt—Kafir!”

The tone, the insult, the scowl on the shaggy faces which glared at him from under their wide-brimmed hats, roused all the savage fighting blood in Tambusa, and those who beheld him say that the great veins in his forehead swelled until they seemed about to burst with the pressure of his head-ring. “Kafir!” Thus these refuse whites dared to address the chief induna of the royal race of Zulu, second only in greatness to the King himself! But he was helpless, for, as a peace ambassador, he had of course been obliged to lay down his arms on entering the camp.

Now he turned to the leaders of the Amabuna, who were talking with their heads together.

“See you this?” he said, waving his hand towards the line of men who stood threatening him with their guns. “See you this? I, a peace messenger, am insulted and threatened. I, a peace messenger, am detained, when I would depart as I came. In truth, it is not good to trust to the good faith of the Amabuna.”

“In truth it is not good to trust to the good faith of the Amazulu,” answered the leader sternly. “Say, were not our people peace messengers—our people whose bones lie outside Nkunkundhlovu—who trusted in the good faith of that murderer, your chief?”

“Ha! But you? You are a holy people—a people of God, you told the King. We are only poor, ignorant black people,” said Tambusa, taunting them, in his scornful wrath.

“But there is a God of justice,” quickly replied the leader, “and He has delivered you into our hands to be dealt with as one of the chief murderers of our people. The others He will deliver to us in time. But enough of that. This is the matter now. The treacherous and cruel murder of our people at Nkunkundhlovu was counselled by you, Tambusa. By you it was planned and arranged, by your orders it was carried out. What have you to say?”

“That is not the matter about which I am here,” replied the induna. “If ye would have me answer on that matter, ye should have sent men to bring me here, if they could have done it. It is a matter as to which now I will say no word.”

“That is perhaps as well,” answered the leader, “for here we have enough to prove your guilt over and over again.” And with the words Tambusa saw the trap into which he had walked. Mpande had denounced him to the Amabuna—Mpande, whose death he had repeatedly counselled. He was as good as dead. Yet he only smiled, rearing his tall and

stately form to its full height, and the smile was one of hatred and scorn and contempt. But so deeply did it sting those Amabuna that they broke forth into curses, and some of them, rising from their seats, shook their fists in his face, crowding around him, and fairly howling with rage, all talking at once as they heaped every abusive name upon him, the King and the whole Zulu race. But the smile of contempt and scorn only deepened on the face of Tambusa as he stood therein his great stature like some mighty tree, while they snarled and leaped around him like jackals. At last he who sat at the head of the council succeeded in quieting them.

“Then you have nothing to say—no reason to urge why the punishment of death should not be dealt out to you?” said this man, speaking solemnly. “There may be others, perhaps—others more guilty than yourself. If there is anything you can tell us—”

But here he stopped, for Tambusa had interrupted him by a loud, harsh laugh, so fierce that it sounded like a war-cry.

“Others? Anything I can tell you?” he repeated, with a very roar. “I, an induna of the right hand of the Great King, to give you information! Whau! ye must be madmen. Not to save a hundred lives would I give you information as to even the youngest boy just enrolled among those who bear shields. Do I fear death—I, Tambusa? Why, I stare it in the face every day. And I think, Ntshwai-ntshwai, when death has been the game some of you must have seen my face before.”

(Ntshwai-ntshwai. A nickname bestowed upon the Boers by the Zulus, being in fact an imitation of the swishing sound of their wide leather breeches as they moved.)

“He confesses!” cried those standing around. “Enough—enough. Let him be shot.”

The leader of the council, having obtained silence, spoke:

“On your own showing, Tambusa, you are guilty of counselling and planning the cruel and treacherous murder of our brothers at Nkunkundhlovu while they were at that place by the invitation of the King and Zulu nation. They were set upon and slain in cold blood while partaking of Zulu hospitality; and for your share in this unprovoked and abominable massacre this council adjudges you, Tambusa, to suffer death; and that, in execution of this sentence, you be taken outside the camp and forthwith shot.”

There was a deep silence as the leader ceased speaking. It was broken by the voice of Tambusa:

“I, too, have something to say.”

All started. Would this braggart, they thought, turn coward, and endeavour at the last moment to save his life? Ah, they little knew.

“Speak, then,” said the leader. “But let it be brief.”

“This boy,” said Tambusa, with a wave of the hand towards Nkombazana, who squatted a little distance off. “He has slain no Amabuna. Let him go home.”

No reply was made at first, and the Amabuna looked at each other. But Nkombazana, who had heard all, now sprang to his feet. He to go home, when his father and chief was to die here? No, no! Then, with flashing eyes, he began bellowing out the number of Amabuna he had slain. Why, he had helped to batter out the brains of that very party, and had ripped up white women with his own spear what time we rushed the waggon camp. If his chief was to die, he would die with him. A warrior must follow his chief everywhere.

Well, he obtained his wish. The leaders would have spared him at first, but when they heard him glorying in the slaughter of their countrymen—and countrywomen, too—they soon desisted in their attempts, and the Amabuna at large howled for his blood.

So Tambusa and his young follower were ordered to proceed in the midst of their armed guard to the outskirts of the camp to meet their death.

No further word did Tambusa speak, save one of commendation of the bravery shown by his follower. He strode forth in the midst of his guard, his head thrown back—his great stature and fearless countenance worthy of a Zulu of the noblest rank and birth. When they ordered him to halt he did so, and, facing round upon the line of levelled guns, stood proudly, with folded arms, his young follower standing equally fearless at his side. A line of flame shot forth, and a rolling crash. Tambusa and Nkombazana sunk quietly to the ground, pierced by many bullets, dying without a struggle.

Such, then, was the end of Tambusa, and although, Nkose, I had no liking for him nor he for me—indeed, had he lived he would ever have been my bitterest enemy—yet his end was that of a brave man, and in every way worthy of an induna of the Zulu nation who sat at the right hand of the King.

Chapter Twenty Two.

The Dividing of the Nation.

The time had been well chosen for the return of the Bapongqolo to the heart of the nation, for now the Amabuna were advancing upon us, and with them Nongalaza at the head of a strong army, made up of the rebel traitors whom he had induced to desert their true king. The killing of Tambusa while on a message of peace had infuriated Dingane. He ordered Nkunkundhlovu to be burnt, vowing to rebuild it no more until he had driven the rebels and their white friends from the land, and exacted a fearful vengeance for the slaughter of his faithful induna. So the izanusi were called up, and we were doctored for battle, and Lalusini, or Mahlula, as she was known here, together with her band of girls decked out in their richest dresses, stood forth and heartened the warriors by their songs of battle and victory; even as she had once heartened us to defeating, under the shadow of my white shield, these very warriors with whom I now fought, and a section of whom I was now leading. Yes, these hundreds of men, the Bapongqolo, were worth much to Dingane now.

The day had come at last, and the nation was divided. And now, with the one great struggle for the very life of the nation at our gates, Dingane showed himself, as he never had so shown himself before, as a noble and worthy warrior-king of a mighty warrior people.

It was the morning of the battle, that great struggle which should mean, to him and his, all or nothing. Ha! he was great, he was majestic, that warrior King, as he came forth to address his children—to hearten us for what lay before us. Not that we needed burning words of encouragement, for of all that dense array crouching there behind their shields, not one at that moment but longed for the gleam of the spears of Nongalaza to come into view.

Then the King stood forth arrayed in full war dress, his great form towering to the height of the waving ostrich plumes which rose above his head-ring—his head thrown back in royal pride as his eyes swept proudly over the dense ranks of those who adhered to him—and his words rolled like thunder upon the still air:

“My children, the day is upon us at last when the might of the People of the Heavens is to be put upon its sorest trial; the day which is to decide whether the name of Zulu is to blaze forth again in all its brightness, to strike terror once more upon the world, or to become a forgotten thing. For a space it has been hidden, but only that it might blaze forth again the more brightly. Yonder there come against us enemies. There are those who came among us with false words—calling themselves a holy people—and striving,

with fair words, to wrest from us the lands which, bit by bit, we have added to the greatness of our nation—a people which knows not how to keep faith—a people which, in its greed, knows not how to observe its own agreements—a nation which slays ambassadors bearing a peace message. But worse. With that people, who comes? Who but they who would divide the nation—who, to do this, have not scrupled to place their neck beneath the foot of this other race—of these Amabuna, the scum and refuse of all white peoples—they of our own blood—they who have grown great under the shadow of the House of Senzangakona. These indeed are worse than dogs, for even a dog will not bite the hand that fattens him. Ha! and with them is one of the House of Senzangakona—yet not, for it cannot be that a real bough of that great and royal tree can have joined with the refuse of all the white races, to turn and destroy his father's house. Some bastard must it be—changed at birth—some low, base bastard, foisted by fraud upon the House of Senzangakona. And he, he who would, by the favour of the Amabuna, call himself King, where is he? Not among those who come against us. He is not even a leader of men. See him skulk behind the guns of the Amabuna while my dog, Nongalaza, leads his army for him. His army! Hau! a pack of cur dogs whom the lion-cubs of Zulu shall disperse howling, for how shall so base and traitorous a band of runaways face and stand against the might of these?"

And as Dingane waved his hand over the assembled army a sound went up like the sullen roar of a sea-wave that curls and breaks. The King went on:

"My children! this is a time, not for talking, but for doing. I, your father, am here with you—I, your leader. Let the lion-cubs of Zulu fall on bravely under the eye of the lion. Lo! those who direct you are men to follow. Where is Umhlela? where is Silwane? where Nomapela and Untúswa?" And with each name a storm of applause rolled from the warriors. "Where they are, there follow. Lo! I see the enemy. Lo! there are they who come against us. In perfect order, rank upon rank, go now to meet them. Fall on and strike—and strike hard. Strike until not one of them is left. Go, my children! Go, lion-cubs of Zulu!"

Away in the distance a dust-cloud was advancing, and through it the sheen and flash of spears. With a great roar the whole army sprang to its feet and saluted the King, who stood, with head thrown back and outstretched arm, pointing with his spear towards the approaching host; and as the regiments formed up in columns and began their march, moving out over the plain like huge black serpents, the war-song of Dingane rolled forth like thunder upon the still and brooding air:

"Us'eziténí!
Asiyikuza sababona."

(“Thou art in among the enemy.
We shall never get a right of him.”)

Louder and louder it swelled, uttered in fierce, jerky roars, as the roars of ravening beasts who can no longer be restrained from their prey. Then the red mist was before all eyes. The host of Nongalaza was singing, too; but for that we had no ears, only eyes for the body of our foe. Our warriors now swung forward at a run, the ranks steadied and kept in line by the warning word of an induna, or a sub-captain. Otherwise none spoke.

Now they are before us. Their appearance is even as that of ourselves. They have the same shields, the same broad spears, the same discipline. But their courage? Ha! We have that—we, the chosen, we, the faithful. Now we are among them; there is the slap of shield meeting shield, the tramp of struggling feet, the soft tearing of spear ripping flesh. Ha! The red blood is flowing; warriors go down by hundreds—beaten to earth—ripped as they lie—as many of ours as of theirs. The savage, gargling groan of the dying, as they strive to drag themselves upward, and, spear in hand, die fighting still—the death-hiss of their slayers—the “I-ji!” that thrilling whistle that shakes the air—the laboured panting of those who strive—the shiver and clash of hard wood and the crunch of bone, as the heavy knob-sticks meet other hard wood, or perchance a skull—these are the sounds that turn the air itself verily warring. But neither side gives way—neither side yields a foot’s breadth—or, if so, it is but for a moment, to charge again in renewed fury.

Again and again this happens. No advantage can either side gain. Both strive with equal fury; both trained in valour and discipline under the same training. Whau! there will be none left to tell of this battle, so surely shall we make an end of each other.

Now I, with the Bapongqolo, being in command of the left “horn” of our army, am striving to surround that of the enemy, though his numbers are almost as great as our own, and in this I am partially succeeding. But what is the other “horn” doing? By this time we have gained some slightly rising ground, and now I can see. Ha! Can it be? Those on that side are fighting against us—fighting against their own brethren—fighting against their King. They have gone over to the side of Nongalaza.

But, so far from disheartening our people, this traitorous defection acts differently. Umhlela, watching and partly directing the battle from a little distance off, gives the word, and himself at the head of the force he has been holding in reserve, charges furiously upon these traitors, rolling them back upon the thick of Nongalaza’s force, and throwing the latter into confusion. Umhlela is a small man and old, but never was there a braver one. He is in the hottest of the battle, and they whom he leads follow like lions. The tossing of shields, and the tramp and pushing of striving feet, shakes both earth and air. Ha! Umhlela is down. A wounded warrior, supposed to be dead, has sprung to his feet, and with last stroke has cleft the brave induna through the heart. But the rallying

cry on the dying lips: "On, children of Zulu! The Lion watches you," thrills our people with renewed strength. Now we gain. The rebels are giving way. Now is the time. We press them harder and harder. Not hundreds now, but thousands lie slain, or writhing in death-throes. They are beginning to withdraw. The day is ours.

Is it? Ha! What is that shout, gathering in volume as it rolls along behind the rebel army—heartening those in front to face us more fiercely.

"They come, the Amabuna! The Amabuna are at hand!"

We who hear it can see Nongalaza riding on horseback along his rank—he and other of Mpande's indunas—and with shout and gesture they point behind them, then wave their men on. And in the distance can be heard the rattle of the discharge of guns.

"They come, the Amabuna!"

That cry loses us the day. The younger regiments waver, fall into confusion, and flee. The men of the Imbele-bele—a splendid ringed regiment—stand their ground. So, too, do the Bapongqolo. Then we have work to do. One glance behind us, and we can see the land covered with fleeing fugitives; but the spot whence the King watched the battle is empty. We have saved the King.

Well, we are doomed. Thick and fast our warriors fall, being hugely outnumbered, and it wants but the coming of the Amabuna to make an end of us completely.

Now Nongalaza came riding along in my direction, where I, at the head of the Bapongqolo, stood at bay, and waved on his army, crying aloud that they should make an end of us, at all events. So seeing the rebel host—which now was stronger than we—sweeping up to surround us, I gave the word to retreat, and not too soon either, for we had to fight our way through the closing "horns." But the land on that side was broken, and seamed with dongas; and Nongalaza's people, tumbling over each other in their hurry and confusion, were less quick than we. Yet many were slain in that rout, and ere night fell the land seemed alive with pursuers and pursued. But I set my face in the direction of the Ngome forests, where my outlawry had been spent. There, I knew, were holes and retreats wherein not all the men of Nongalaza twice over would succeed in finding me.

And, as night fell, the dull red glow of burning kraals lit up the land, and from afar you could hear the exultant war-song—the song of victory. Yet not altogether, for the song of Mpande was the song of bondage too, in that he, a prince of the House of Senzangakona, had purchased his kingship dear; for he had purchased it at the price of doing konza to

the Amabuna, in order to be allowed to hold it—in order to sit in the seat of Tshaka the Mighty, and of the warrior-king Dingane, who, however, might even yet be heard of again.

The slaughter on either side that day was immense, Nkose. Yet not by might or by bravery did Nongalaza win that victory. Oh, no! He won it by a trick. Had he not cried that the Amabuna were at hand, we should not have given way. But up till then we had gained no great advantage, and the approach of these people, who could gallop into our very midst and discharge their guns without harm to themselves, took all heart out of our warriors, already hard pressed by the forces of Nongalaza, nearly equal as these were to our own. So we fled, and lost the day. Yet we need not have, for the Amabuna were not really coming. But a good general will despise no method of snatching a victory, and Nongalaza was right.

Chapter Twenty Three.

A Hard Ordeal.

“Waken, Untúswa!”

The whisper was soft, so, too, was the touch, yet I sprang to my feet, grasping my spear. But at the same moment my grasp on it relaxed, for before me stood Lalusini.

Wearied with the hard fierce fighting of the day, I had crept into a secure hiding-place beneath a rock overhung with all manner of undergrowth, and had slept soundly. Yet my dreams had been full of warring and battle, and now my great assegai was clotted and foul with blood, and more than one deep gash on body or limb felt stiff and smarting.

But all thought of myself seemed at an end as I looked at Lalusini. There was a hard fierce look upon her face such as I had never seen there before, and in it I saw a strong likeness to Dingane.

“The time has come, Untúswa,” she said shortly. “Take thy spear, look well to its point, and follow me.”

“That I will gladly do, Lalusini,” I answered. “But, as we travel, tell me, what work is before me now?”

“One stroke of thy broad spear—the King’s Assegai—ha, ha! it is well named—it will be a royal weapon indeed! One stroke of thy broad spear and we shall be great together, great even as I have often predicted to thee. Come! Let us hasten.”

There was an eager fierceness in her tone and manner that kept me marvelling; however, I would see what her plan was.

She led the way—not speaking. We passed beneath spreading forest trees, where the thick undergrowth impeded our advance, and the silence of the shade was only broken by the call of birds. It seemed as though men’s feet had never trodden here; yet I knew the spot, for this was one of the very refuges I had at first thought of running for myself.

“There,” said Lalusini, in a quick, fierce whisper, pointing with her hand. “Strike hard and true. So shall we be great together.”

I went forward. In front was a low cliff, hanging over as though it had intended to form a cave, but was not quite sure of its own mind. Under the shelter thus formed, just screened from view in front by a dense growth of scrub lay the form of a man.

Cautiously I peered through the bushes, then put them aside. The form, which was turned away from me, did not stir. Noiselessly I stepped beside it, and then as I bent down to gaze into the face, I could hardly forbear a start. It was the face of Dingane—the face of the King.

Yes; it was the Great Great One himself. He was sound asleep, his head pillow'd on one hand, interposed between it and the rock. But how came he here, he who moved armed men in their countless might—he before whom the nations trembled and hid their heads—how came he here, in hiding and alone?

But was he alone? It seemed so, for I could descry no sign—no sound of the presence of men. And while I thus gazed, again that soft whisper breathed into my ear, “Strike, and strike hard! So shall we be great together!”

Strike! Nothing could have been easier. The large form lay there without movement, the heave of the breast, above the heart, turned towards me as though inviting the stroke. Yet, as I gazed, the noble majesty on the countenance of the sleeping King seemed to paralyse my arm. One blow, and Lalusini, by her sorcery, aided by my own warrior prowess, might set me upon Dingane's seat. Yet, I could not do it.

Then I thought the sleeper stirred.

“He wakes,” I whispered, withdrawing again behind the bushes. Lalusini followed me.

“And art thou so weak, Untúswa?” she said. “Au! For this have I laboured, for this have I plotted and exercised my magic until it was nearly too much forme. Yet not all for greatness, but for revenge. The blood of Tshaka the Mighty flowed over the spear of Dingane; now shall the blood of Dingane flow over thy spear!”

Still I moved not, and she went on:

“The blood of that Mighty One from whom I am sprang, and who caused me to learn my magic that through it vengeance might fall, shall it not be avenged? The time has come for which I have waited and striven. Now go, and make an end of it, Untúswa, so shall we be great together; else canst thou be great alone—or small—with no help from me.”

Now I nerved myself. That which she seemed to threaten looked too terrible, for in truth, by her I was as one bewitched.

“Go, Untúswa. My múti is upon him. He will not waken too readily,” she whispered, in her sweetest of tones, gently pushing me towards the cave once more.

Again I parted the bushes and peered through; again I stood over the sleeping King. A great white shield lay almost beneath him, and two broad assegais had slid from his relaxed grasp. I raised my spear—No, I could not do it.

Had he been awake, and standing up, the deed would be an easy one at that moment; but alone, deserted, and asleep—no, I could not thus slay him.

And then I thought of the favour he had shown me, even to allowing me the chance of escaping to the Bapongqolo, what time Tambusa and Umhlela had striven to compass my death. I thought how he had spared me, spared the Bapongqolo, and had raised me to honour when all men trembled at his frown; and now that he lay here, a deserted fugitive, I could not turn against him. His life lay within my hand, yet I could not take it. No, not to win greatness for myself; not even to retain Lalusini’s love.

“Farewell, Untúswa!” came that soft whisper behind me. “Farewell; we may meet no more.”

She stepped swiftly through the belt of bushes. For a moment I stood stupidly gazing after her, then I followed. But she had disappeared. I called her, I searched for her. All in vain.

Then I went back to the sleeping King. Him I would save at all events. I had helped in saving him during the battle yesterday, by holding back the impi of Nongalaza; to-day I would save him entirely by myself. Even now Lalusini might have gone to find those who would carry out her bidding readily enough.

“Awaken, Great Great One!” I said, not too loud, lest others ears might be about. “Thy servant knows of a better sleeping-place than this.”

At first Dingane seemed to arouse himself but slowly. Then he sprang up, gripping his shield and spears.

“Who art thou?” he cried, darting upon me his lion-like glance. “Ha! Untúswa, is it? Another traitor perhaps. How sayest thou, Untúswa? All, all are traitors.”

“No traitor am I, Black Elephant,” I answered. “It is safer, however, for the lion of Zulu to make his lair elsewhere.”

In the glance which Dingane bent upon me was distrust, suspicion, contempt by turns, but no sign of fear.

“What, Untúswa, and art thou faithful to me—thou, the wanderer—thou who art not of us, while they whom my hand has fed have deserted me—have turned their spears against me? Whau! It cannot be.”

“Who am I to fill the ears of the Great Great One with words,” I answered. “Yet, my father—wanderer or no wanderer—I know of no man whom the Lion of Zulu may more safely trust.”

“What, then, are thy counsels, Untúswa?” said the King.

“This, Lion. Hard by is a place known to none, where thou canst sit still in safety until the army is collected again. It was badly routed in the more open plain, yet here in these fastnesses none will dare venture—not even the Amabuna—until the trumpeting of the Elephant shall scatter the traitors and rebels once more. Such is my counsel, Ruler of the Great.”

“I will even trust thee, Untúswa,” said the King. “And now let us go forth.”

I picked up my shield and weapons, which, of course, I had let fall, being in the royal presence, and we took our way thence, I walking in advance and spying carefully around to guard against possible surprise.

For long we thus travelled, and when night came we sat and feasted upon the meat of a young impala which I had killed by a lucky spear-cast; but we slept away from any fire, and in a place of secure concealment. On the morrow we kept on our way once more, and by noon came to the resting-place I had designed for the King. This was a group of caves, somewhat high up among the rocks of the Lebombo range. Beneath, the slope fell away, bushy, but not too thickly so as to prevent us from descrying the approach of friend or foe, while on either side so strewn with rocks and boulders was the base of the cliff that retreat would be easy in the event of pursuit.

“Whau, Untúswa!” said the King, with a laugh in his eyes. “When Tambusa would have broken a nest of wasps around thy kraal, thou wert turning thy wanderings to good account!”

“That is so, Great Great One,” I answered, recalling to mind the words of Sifadu—“The day might come when Dingane himself would be glad to join us.” And strange it was that my enforced flight from the hate of the principal indunas should be the means of providing the King with a place of refuge and concealment in the day of his downfall.

So we rested there for many days, Dingane and I. Yes, this dreaded one, before whom all men and all nations had trembled, now treated me as a friend, so entirely does adversity draw the greater and the lesser together. Yet never for a moment did I forget who it was that I thus foregathered with; never was there aught that was unbecoming in word or tone or action of mine towards the King—the real and true ruler of the great Zulu nation.

Often would the thought of Lalusini return to me, of her purposed revenge, which she intended to seize through me. This, then, was that for which she had plotted—this the means by which I was to become great. Had I in refusing it acted the part of a fool? No, that could not be, for, Nkose, although I spared not such as would injure me or could not keep faith, yet never did I lift hand against any who did well by me. Wherefore now I rejoiced that I had not slain the King—had not slain a sleeping and helpless man at the bidding of a woman, even though that woman were Lalusini.

Sometimes a gloom would settle upon the mind of Dingane. His sun had set, he would declare. The power of Zulu was a thing of the past, now that the nation was divided. But at such times I would say what I could to cheer him, telling him portions of my own story, which, in truth, had been wonderful. The army was scattered. Time was needed to collect it, and that time, I thought, had now arrived. I saw that everything was at hand that the Great One might need, and then I prepared to depart.

“I know not, Untúswa,” he said, as I took leave of him. “But for thy faithfulness these many days I might bethink me that soon thou shouldst return at the head of an impi to earn the reward promised by Mpande and the Amabuna to him who should deliver to them the real King—”

But I interrupted; somewhat unbecomingly, I admit:

“If that is thy thought, father, slay me as I stand,” and dropping my weapons I advanced a pace or two.

“Nay, nay, Untúswa,” he said, “that is what I might have thought, not what I thought,” replied the King gently. “Fare-thee-well, Untúswa, and may success be thine. Fare-thee-well, Untúswa, my servant—Untúswa, my friend.”

“Bayéte!” I cried, with right hand aloft. Then I started upon my errand, and more than ever did I rejoice that my spear had remained bright in the face of the entreaties of Lalusini.

Chapter Twenty Four.

The Stroke of Sopuza.

“Bayéte, Nkulu-nkulu!
Father! we thy children have found thee at last!
Lo! long have we wandered weeping, but now we are comforted.
Come forth and show us the brightness of thy head-ring.”
Thus sang a great half circle of armed warriors, mustered on the slope beneath Dingane’s place of concealment.

Thus again and again they sang, but still Dingane did not appear.

For I had fulfilled my errand, Nkose, and this was the result—an array of warriors nearly as large as the original strength of the Amandebeli what time we followed Umzilikazi over the mountains. I had gone hither and thither, had turned night into day, had not spared myself, or feared danger. I had found out and rallied all the scattered bands which at heart had remained faithful to Dingane. I had drawn men from the kraals of Mpande himself, and from beneath the very shadow of the camps of the Amabuna. But one moon had died since I took leave of the King—I alone. Yet here I was, returning at the head of a splendid army—an army nearly as large as that with which Umzilikazi had founded a new nation. In truth, Dingane had not trusted me in vain.

Here were Silwane and Nomapela, and others of the old war-captains. Here was a remnant of the old Imbele-bele regiment—the Bapongqolo, too, my staunch refugees—and as much of the army as had survived the defeat by Nongalaza. All had in truth thought Dingane to be dead, but as I passed through their midst carrying word to the contrary, they had sprung to arms, and mustering swiftly and secretly, had returned to do konza to their rightful King. And here they were.

Now they redoubled their entreaties, singing louder and louder their songs of praise.

Sun of suns, come forth in thy brightness;
We thy children sit in darkest night.
If thou wilt not show us thy face.
Lion of Zulu - thy cubs still have teeth,
Teeth that are sharpened for war.

This time the King appeared. But before the great burst of sibonga which greeted his presence had died away he turned his back and retired, for by this means he chose to mark his displeasure over their seeming desertion.

Again and again they howled forth their songs of praise and entreaty. The King appeared again. This time he did not go back. He surveyed them a few moments in silence, then he called:

“Come hither, Untúswa.”

I disarmed, and crept up to where he stood.

“Sit here, Untúswa,” he said, pointing to the ground at his feet. “This is thy place. For the rest they can still remain at a distance.”

So I sat, Nkose, thinking how strange it was that I, who had begun my life as the son of an induna, should live to become the principal fighting chief of Umzilikazi’s army, and then come to earn the confidence of the Great Great One, the King of the mighty Zulu nation—should be bidden to sit near him while all others were kept at a distance—should live to become the most trusted councillor of two mighty Kings; for such I saw was the honour before me now.

Then Dingane, lifting up his voice, addressed the warriors. For the battle against Mpande’s force he commended them greatly. Their bravery was worthy of all praise, and not for lack of it on their part had Nongalaza won the day, having done so by a mere trick—a clever trick, it was true. But when they fled their terror had been too great. They had forgotten their King. One man alone had cleaved to the King, and that man was Untúswa—a wanderer—not even one of themselves. Still, remembering how valiantly they had fought, remembering how speedily they had returned to their rightful place, he would forget that.

The groans wherewith the listeners had heard his reproaches now turned to murmurs of delight. Dingane went on:

The nation was divided, but it must be reunited once more. With such as they whom he saw before him this might soon be done. Men of the pure blood of Zulu could not sit down for long beneath the sway of one who was a mere slave of the Amabuna. They would return—return to the strength and root of the great Zulu power, their rightful King. But those who had remained faithful would ever be held in the highest honour.

As the Great One finished speaking, a mighty roar went up from the assembled warriors. They hailed him as their guide, their father, their deliverer, and by every title of bonga. Then much time was given up to songs and dances, for all rejoiced that they were no longer a broken remnant, and that the King was at their head once more.

The plan which Dingane now decided on was a waiting one. He relied on desertions from Mpande, whom we now learned by means of our spies had been placed by the Amabuna in his seat, who now reigned King. Whau! was ever such a thing heard of? A King of the Amazulu, the conquerors of the world, holding his seat by favour of white people—and such white people! But it could not last—no, it could not last. The heavens might well fell.

We moved down to a more accessible site in the Ngome wilds, and there kraals were erected, and time was bestowed upon gathering together such of the nation as remained faithful, and encouraging others to come in. Meanwhile a careful look-out was kept upon a possible invasion; but Mpande, who seemed not to care about venturing beyond the Tugela, made no hostile movement, neither did the Amabuna, and for a time we enjoyed rest and a breathing-space while our plans were maturing.

I, for my part, was now advanced to a position of great honour, not less indeed than that formerly held by Tambusa himself. That induna was now dead; so too was Umhlela, as I have told you, Nkose; and such of my enemies who survived had but one fear now, and that was lest I might turn my greatness to account in compassing their destruction. But of this I had no thought, so completely was my mind full of how to restore the ascendancy of Dingane and the might of the nation.

All this while I saw nothing of Lalusini, nor by the most deftly veiled questionings could I obtain tidings of her from any. Whither had she gone? Would she not reappear as she had done before? And for all my greatness my heart was sore—very sore, as I thought of her and longed for her; yet never for a moment did I repent me that I had not slain the King at her bidding.

Now Dingane had built for himself a great kraal on one of the wildest slopes of the Ngome hills. It was surrounded by dense forests and rocks and precipices, and the ways of approach being but few, and always securely guarded, the King felt safe from all possibility of attack. But shortly an alarm was given. Impis from Mpande were reported near—not to attack us, for they were not large enough—but as spies. So the King sent forth two regiments under Silwane to cut them off, if possible, so that, finding themselves surrounded, they would accept the offer of their lives, and return to their allegiance. I, however, was not sent out.

Whau, Nkose! Well do I remember that evening. The sun had gone down in a mass of heavy cloud, and in the red glow that remained an awful and brooding silence rested upon the surrounding forests. Then it grew dark, and, after we had eaten, the King and I sat long into the night conversing, and upon him seemed to lie that gloom which had darkened his mind when he and I together had been fugitives and in hiding. But I strove

to cheer him, and our conversation being ended he dismissed me, and retired within the isigodhlo.

I, too, retired to rest. For long I lay thinking, not able to sleep; then I dozed off and dreamed. It seemed to me that once more I was back at Kwa'zingwenya. Once more, my heart full of rage over the disappearance of Lalusini, I was creeping stealthily to slay Umzilikazi in his sleep. Once more I sprang upon him, spear uplifted. Once more I heard the shouts of his bodyguard, as they swarmed to his aid. Then I awoke—awoke suddenly, and with a start. Ha! the shouts were real—I was not dreaming now—and with them I heard the hurried tramp of rushing feet go by my hut.

Those were times for quick thought—for quick action. In a moment I was outside the hut, fully armed, listening. Ha! The tumult, the shouting and tramp of feet! It came from the isigodhlo.

Thither I sprang. I could see the King's body-guard there before me, for the moon was up; could see the flash of spears, the sheen of white shields. Several dark bodies lay upon the ground, and at these they were stabbing and hacking. Just as I came up another was dragged forth by the heels and cut to pieces there and then.

The King had been stabbed. Such was the news now spoken in awed whispers. But, who were these? Emissaries of Mpande? No. By their head-rings and ornaments they were not of us. They were Amaswazi.

Quickly I took in what had happened. There was the hole in the fence through which these had crept. Even as I had stolen upon Umzilikazi so had these stolen upon Dingane, but with better effect.

Howls of horror over the deed went up from all. By this time the whole kraal was aroused, and such few as were left in it came flocking out. But I, being in great authority, quelled the tumult.

“How happened it?” I asked.

“Thus, father,” replied the captain of the King's guard, a young man, but just ringed. “Yonder crept these scorpions,” pointing to the hole I had already observed, “and struck the Great Great One in his sleep. But now are they all dead, we have made an end of them.”

“It were better to have prevented the deed, Sodosi,” I said severely. “Yet ‘all’ didst thou say? Wait! Follow me. I need but three or four.”

With this number I crept through the hole, and as we did so, there sprang up suddenly in the darkness under the shade of the fence two men, making for the forest edge as hard as they could run. But I could run, too, in those days, Nkose, and one of them as he reached it fell dead with the blade of my assegai driven right through his back. The other was attacked by my followers, and from the sounds of the struggle I judged that he was fighting well and desperately. But they could take care of him. I had another matter to attend to.

For in the gloom just in front of me I could hear a faint and stealthy rustle, and towards it I moved, silently and swiftly, listening the while lest I might be drawn into a trap. No! It was but one man. I could see a form, dark and tall, moving from tree to tree, but it seemed as though I would never come within striking distance. I was now far beyond my followers, but I felt somehow that the capture of this one fugitive was to be desired more than the deaths of all the others put together.

Still this figure eluded me, now showing for a moment in the moonlight, now vanishing in the shade. Here at last was an open space and the runaway could not diverge. One final effort, a mighty rush, and I was upon him.

“Yield now,” I roared, raising my bloodstained spear. “Yield or I cleave thee to the heart.”

“As thou wouldst have done Tola,” said a soft voice; and then I stood staring. The tall figure of the fugitive had halted, and, turned towards me, under the full light of the moon, I beheld the face of Lalasini.

“What hast thou done, woman?” I stammered, feeling bewitched.

“The stroke of Sopuza has fallen,” she answered simply. “The spirit of Tshaka the Mighty no longer roars aloud for blood. What then?”

“What then?” I repeated, now quite bewildered. “What then?”

But Lalasini laughed, a low, sweet, bewitching laugh.

“Art thou going to deliver me to be torn in pieces by the cubs of the Lion who is dead, Untúswa?”

For some moments I gazed at her as though I were changed into a stone. Then I turned away.

“Hlala gahle, Lalusini,” I said, over my shoulder. Again she laughed.

“Hamba gahle, son of Ntelani,” she said. “We shall again be together, but not great together—not great—ah, no!—never now.”

Her words seemed to beat within my brain as I took my way backward through the forest, and there was that in them which I liked. No, in truth I could not deliver her over to vengeance; any other person—but Lalusini—ah, no! I could not do it.

“The stroke of Sopuza” had indeed fallen, and these, Nkose, were the words of a prophecy uttered long before by an old magician as to the manner in which death should one day find out Dingane, and for this reason fierce war had been waged upon the tribe which owned Sopuza for chief, and whose dwelling was upon the Swazi border. But, secure in its mountain fastnesses, our impis had not always been able to reach it.

Quickly I took my way back to the kraal. The King was not dead, and had been inquiring for me; and when I entered the royal house, he spoke drowsily, calling me by name. I found that he had received several stabs, one of them cleaving his entrails in a frightful manner. He would hardly see the rising of another sun.

“Hither, Untúswa,” he murmured. “Didst thou make an end of those scorpions?”

“An end, indeed, Black Elephant,” I answered.

“All of them?”

“That is yet to be done, father. There will shortly be howling throughout the Swazi nation, for of that race are those who struck the Great Great One.”

“Yet I thought—or dreamed—that the hand of a woman was in it,” said the King.

“Ha! the women of the Amaswazi shall help to pay the penalty, then,” I answered, fearful lest the Great Great One should have recognised Lalusini, whom I would fain save.

“No matter, the stroke of Sopuza has fallen—ah, yes, it has fallen at last,” he murmured. “And now, Untúswa, send and gather together all the warriors. Bid that they come in full array of war; for I desire to feast my eyes upon the sight I have ever loved best.”

“That I have already done, father.”

“Thou art a very prince of indunas, Untúswa,” replied Dingane. “Hast thou gathered in all?”

“All, father. I have sent swift runners to Silwane’s impi and to all our outlying kraals.”

“That is well.”

Now the izanusi craved leave to enter, but Dingane would have none of them. There was but one in whose magic he had any faith, he said, and that was Mahlula; and since the battle Mahlula had been seen or heard of by none. Ha! I could have revealed a strange tale, Nkose, but that was furthest of all from my mind. Then the izanusi, thus refused admittance, set up a doleful howling outside the hut, until Dingane, wrathful, bade me go forth and drive them away, which I was glad to do.

All through the night I sat beside the King, never leaving him; all through the night bands of warriors were arriving at the kraal, and the tramp of their feet and the renewed wailings of the King’s women in their huts was all the sound that was heard; for men cared not to talk, so great a mourning and grief had fallen upon all.

With the dawn of day Dingane aroused himself.

“I will go forth, Untúswa. Give me the aid of thy shoulder.”

But even thus it was found that he could not walk, so I caused his chair to be brought, and thus he was borne forth, I supporting him; but although four stalwart warriors bent to the task, it was a hard one, for the men of the House of Senzangakona are large beyond the ordinary, as you know, Nkose.

Outside the kraal the warriors were mustered, squatting behind their great war-shields, forming a huge half circle even as on the day when they hailed the fugitive King in his place of concealment, only now their number had nearly doubled. There they sat, rank upon rank, motionless. As the King’s chair was lowered to the ground the whole of this dense mass of armed men threw their war-shields to the earth and fell prostrate upon them, and in the roar of the “Bayéte” which thundered forth was a subdued growl of grief and wrath. Then they arose, and squatted crouching as before.

The eyes of the dying King kindled, as he swept his glance over this splendid army, and his form seemed to gather renewed life as he sat upright in his chair, his shield-bearer holding on high the great white shield behind him. Then he spoke:

“My children, I have called you here because I desire that the last sight my eyes shall rest on shall be the sight which they have always loved the most to behold, the sight of warriors under arms, of warriors of Zulu.

“What prouder name has the world ever known? Warriors of Zulu! And you—you, my children, have well deserved it and worthily won it. Not in you was it to place your necks beneath the foot of any base slave of the Amabuna, any cur who seeks to roar like the lion, any calf who would fain stamp with the rumble of the elephant, any changeling bastard who would drag the House of Senzangakona into the dust beneath the shoes of the Amabuna. Not in you was it to do this. But you have faithfully cleaved to your real King in shadow as in sunshine, and see now the result. Look around on your own ranks. Very soon now should we have gone forth, for not always was it my intention to sit down here and rest. Then we would have swept the traitors of our own race and the Amabuna into one common pit, and covered them up and stamped them in there for ever.

“I cannot talk many more words to you, my children. But if you have been loyal and faithful to me, your well-being has ever been my care as your father, your brave deeds have ever been my pride as your King. The nation has been divided, but I would have knit it together again. I would have restored it through you, faithful ones, to all its former greatness. But now I have to leave you. The base hand of evil wizardry has found me in my sleep, has struck me down in the night, and now I go into the Dark Unknown.”

“Ma-yé!” moaned the warriors, their heads bowed in grief as Dingane paused. Then, gathering once more fresh strength, with an effort the dying King went on, and his voice rolled clear and strong like a call to battle:

“Lo! I see not the end. I know not who shall reunite this people, who shall deliver it from slavery and disgrace—extinction; for now I must leave it. My eyes are dim and the Dark Unknown is closing in around me. Yet still my last gaze is upon that sight which is the grandest the world ever saw—the warriors of Zulu under arms. Farewell, warriors of Zulu!”

The voice ceased. The head drooped forward on the chest. The great form would have fallen prone from the chair but for those who stood by. The King was dead.

Through the dense ranks there shivered forth one deep moan, and for long no man stirred. All sat in silence, mourning thus the loss of their father and King.

So died Dingane, the second of the mighty Kings of Zulu. Even as the great Tshaka had died the death of the spear at his hand, so died he the death of the spear, being struck in his sleep. But he died as he had lived, and his was the death of a true warrior-king—his

last gaze upon the ranks of his assembled army—face to face with it—his last words to it, words of commendation and loving farewell—and who shall say, Nkose, that such was not a great and glorious death?

Chapter Twenty Five.

Conclusion.

We buried the King with great ceremony and the sacrifice of beasts; and the whole army sat around in deep silence, the silence of grief and mourning for that the nation was now left without a head; but it was a silence that was rendered more awesome by the death-rites of the izanusi and the wailings of the women. Only for a short while, however, was the Great Great One to sit upon that seat, for he was taken up again in the dead of night and removed to a secret grave, known to but very few, as the custom is to keep secret the burial-places of kings.

Yes, with the passing away of Dingane the army was as a body without a head. At such a time the thought would often be in my mind how Lalusini would have me seize the opportunity of putting myself in Dingane's place; for I too was of a royal tree—that of Dingiswayo, of the tribe of Umtetwa, whose place had been seized by Tshaka—yet not near enough was I to the stem of that tree, being but a branch. But I could clearly see that if opportunity there had been it was now no more. The loyalty of the army to the House of Senzangakona was too great; and now, being without a head, the warriors began to talk among themselves of the expediency of doing konza to the other Great One of that House. So we consulted together—I and Silwane and some of the principal war-chiefs—and in a short time we sent messengers to Mpande, who was the rightful King now, however he might owe his seat to the Amabuna. But with the army that had followed the Great One who was dead turned into his own army, Mpande might perhaps remedy even that.

Our messengers returned accompanied by others, including an induna of note, assuring us of the royal favour. That decided us.

It was a great day, the day that saw the nation reunited once more. Mpande sat in state, as our army filed in to his kraal near the Tugela—for Nodwengu had not then been erected—singing songs of war and praises to the new King; and when as one man the whole number of those black ones threw down their weapons and shields and shouted aloud the “Bayéte,” bending low before him, the look upon the face of the King was one of gladness and great pride. Then he spoke to us. We had fought hard and valiantly for that Great One who was no more. We had been faithful to our rightful King, and had cleaved to him through his reverses. The stroke of some evil wizard had laid that Great One low in the dark hours of the night, but the House of Senzangakona was not dead yet, and we, quick to see this, had hastened to cry the “Bayéte” to the head of that house, and the head of the Zulu nation. By reason of the fidelity we had shown he assured us of his favour, for upon such he felt he could rely.

Then the principal indunas of the returning army were called up, one by one, and “named,” and thus were continued in the commands they had held up till now; some indeed being advanced to even greater honour—among them myself. And Mpande’s word stood, for he ever regarded those who had adhered to Dingane with greater favour than those who had divided the nation with him. But that day was passed in great rejoicing, and many cattle were slaughtered, and the feasting went on far into the night.

Towards its close I retired to my hut, thinking perhaps to find there my Swazi wives, who had been given me by that Great One who was gone. But they were not there, nor was any—and while I was thinking what had become of them the door was pushed softly open, and a voice said:

“Now, Untúswa, do I return. Am I welcome?”

Whau, Nkose! Then did I leap to my feet in amazement and joy. For the voice was that of Lalusini.

She had entered, and was standing upright within the hut.

“Welcome indeed, Lalusini,” I replied. “Art thou then tired of thy sorcery?”

“I think that is so, Untúswa. There is much that is weariful in it. I would have made thee great, and myself with thee—then whispering—I would have reigned with thee Queen over this nation, but now I think I must live and die the wife of an induna only. Well, ‘the stroke of Sopuza’ has fallen, that is something.”

I looked at her strangely in the firelight, for well I knew whose was the hand that directed “the stroke of Sopuza.” She went on:

“Ah, ah, Untúswa! The greatness I had destined for thee can never be thine. Thou art too faithful. I would have had thee do it—yet my heart went forth to thee, thou great, brave, honest fighter, whose spear refused to strike the sleeping one—who chose to serve a King in his downfall rather than be served as King thyself. Thou wilt never be greater than an induna thyself, and I—well, I think I shall never be greater than an induna’s wife.”

And with these words she began to spread the mats in the hut, and heaped more wood upon the fire, and saw that things were in their places. Then she came and sat beside me.

Well, what mattered further greatness? I was great enough, being high in the councils of those who, under the King, ruled the nation, and for long I sat thus in a high place, and the favour of Mpande was always over me. But I had indeed passed through strange things, even as old Gasitye had predicted I should when speaking from the ghost-cliff in the Valley of the Red Death. Yes, and even more was I destined to see, for soon the Amabuna were driven out in their turn, and the land they had seized from us was reft from them by the English. Howbeit on these we made no war, for they entered into a treaty with Mpande that the Zulu people should dwell on this side of the Tugela, and the English on the other; and this agreement they kept faithfully for a long space of time until they began to fear Cetywayo, and then—but, Nkose, about that you know, and I have already told far too long a tale for one night. Yet, it is strange that the sight of the horns of your oxen, branching through the mist, should have drawn forth not only the tale of the ghost-bull and the Valley of the Red Death, but a greater one still—even that of the downfall and death of Dingane, and the dividing of the great Zulu nation; but so it ever is with the lives of men, one thing leads on to another. And now, Nkose, I think the time has come for sleep. Sleep well, Nkose. Whau! I know not whether you will return to this country again to hear tales of its old doings of battle and of blood, of warrior-kings and sorcerers, and beasts that have the life of the ghosts of magicians within them, for I am old now, and my time is at hand for a longer sleep than that which now awaits me underneath your waggon. Nkose! Hlala gahle!

But though old Untúswa could thus turn in, and with his blanket over his head could snooze away snugly beneath the shelter of the waggon, to me slumber refused to come. The graphic tale I had just heard, the tale of the first downfall of the Zulu power told in the dead of night on the very spot whereon had been contested the fierce and determined struggle which had in effect decided the second—for it was the British success at Kambúla that rendered that at Ulundi assured—this tale, told, too, by a living actor in those stirring events of the bygone annals of a martial race, seemed to people all the surrounding waste; and looking forth, it needed no great tax on the imagination to conjure up the shades of slain warriors rising in hundreds from their common grave down yonder on the slope; and, shield and spear-armed, re-forming in wild and fantastic array of war.

And over and above such fanciful flights it was a tale to set one thinking—if one had never thought before—of the senselessness of deciding offhand the morality of this or that deed which helpeth to make history from one hard-and-fast point of view, and that point of view the British; or of stigmatising even a savage potentate as a treacherous and cruel monster, because he is not particular as to his methods when it becomes a question of preserving his nation's rights and his nation's greatness, what time such are threatened and invaded by Christians, whom subsequent events show to be the reverse of models of uprightness or fair dealing themselves. And it was even as old Untúswa had

said: "You white people and ourselves see things differently, and I suppose it will always be so."

Yes, it was a fitting episode in the annals of a warrior nation, that tale of fierce wars, and intrigue, and sturdy loyalty, and even of a chivalry, not exactly describable by the term "rude"; most of all, too, was it a tale essentially human, showing how the same desires and motives enkindle the same actions and their results in the heart that beats beneath a brown skin as in that which beats beneath a white one. And therein, perhaps, lay its greatest charm.