

Mitford Bertram

The White Shield



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Prologue

We were talking about Rorke's Drift and of Kambúla, in the battles fought at which places these two warriors had borne arms. They were fine, tall, martial-looking Zulus, and both head-ringed. They carried small shields, and a perfect arsenal of assegais – beautifully-made weapons for the most part. With none of these, however, could they be induced to part.

“What should you white people want with our poor weapons?” said one. “Have you not much better ones of your own? Where is your gun, *Umlúngu*?”

“Yonder,” I answered, pointing to my wagon, which, far away on the plain beneath, drawn by its span of twelve black Zulu oxen, seemed at that distance to creep along like some great centipede. “But I seldom carry it about, for there is little game in these parts, and a useless gun is much heavier than a stick.”

“And a Zulu spear is no heavier than a stick, but more useful,” cut in the other, with a quizzical laugh.

Then it took some time to explain that the weapon was wanted, not for use, but for show – in short, as a curio – in process of which explanation a voice from behind sang out —

“*Au! Nkose*¹ is fond of assegais!”

I knew that voice. Turning, I beheld the tall, gaunt form and sinewy limbs, the white-bearded countenance and bright eyes of old Untúswa, some time *induna* under the great Umzilikazi, Founder and first King of the Matabeli nation.

“Greeting, old friend!” I said, as he plunged eagerly forward to bestow upon me a hearty handgrip; which, by the way, left a sensation as of having shaken hands with a remarkably energetic skeleton. “Greeting to you, son of Ntelani, *induna* of the Elephant who of late trumpeted in the North! Greeting also to the King's Assegai!”

“You are my father, *Nkose*!” cried the old man, sinking down into a sitting posture in our midst. “Yes, the King's Assegai is still alive, like its old owner,” he said, exhibiting the splendid spear, and balancing it lovingly in his hands. “When I saw yonder wagon and the black oxen which draw it, I said to myself – ‘There goes the white man to whom I told that tale.’”

“True, Untúswa, and a right stirring tale it was. But I seem to remember, that when we parted on the Entonjaneni heights, the word was that other matters, at least as strange, remained to be told, should we behold each other again. And here now we do behold each other again, and the day is yet young. Further, here is good store of tobacco, and if there is anything which constitutes a better accompaniment to a story, why, I never heard of it.”

The eyes of old Untúswa brightened as he received the much-prized *gwai*, holding out both hands for it, as the courteous custom of this people is, even though the gift be no weightier than a threepenny-piece. For to receive anything with one hand only, would, to the minds of these “barbarians,” imply a contempt alike for the gift and for the giver.

High up on the ill-omened Hlobane Mountain we were seated, whose savage fastnesses I had spent days in exploring. It was early morning, and the weather was grey and depressing, seeming to threaten rain. Beneath lay a great panorama of desolate rolling plain and craggy spurs – treeless, forbidding – with here and there a kraal, dotted at intervals, symmetrical in its circular ring-fences.

¹ Nkose means “the chief”, and is a term of courtesy.

But here, where we sat, poised high above the world, I had come upon another small kraal, and, turning my pony loose to graze, had, as usual, tarried to make friends with its people.

Now, the older of the two warriors with whom I had been in converse, called aloud, and presently there appeared a couple of stalwart, shapely-limbed damsels, bearing a very large earthen bowl brimming with *tywala*, or corn-beer, and a basket containing roasted mealies. A goodly portion of the liquor was poured into a smaller bowl and handed to me, after the preliminary sip required by Zulu etiquette, the others taking draughts in common from the large earthen pot.

Zulus, like most uncivilised races, are extremely fond of listening to stories, and hold a good narrator in high repute; therefore, these two sat with faces all animation and heads bent eagerly forward. Then, having taken several copious pinches of snuff, old Untúswa commenced the tale which follows.

Chapter One. The Chief of the Blue Cattle

You will remember, *Nkose*, how we of the Royal House of Dingiswayo, of the tribe of Umtetwa, with the Amandebeli, went out from the land of Zulu to found a new nation, and how we shut back the overwhelming number of the spears of Tshaka in the gates of the great Kwahlamba mountains. So, too, you will remember how, having hailed our leader Umzilikazi as king we swept ever onward, to the west and to the north, stamping flat the tribes within our path and laying waste the land, leaving behind us a desert that the cubs of the Lion of Zulu would find difficult of crossing. So, too, you will remember, how we built the great Kraal of Ekupumuleni, and subdued all the tribes round about, and sat in our fair resting-place, feared as a great and mighty people. For of the races around, all came in to *konza* to Umzilikazi, and to pay tribute, and such as did not – well, it was not long before the trumpeting of the Elephant sounded in their ears, dwelt they even two or three moons distant. But there was one tribe or nation which refused thus to *konza*, and of it I shall speak presently.

As time went by, our new nation grew in numbers and strength – though the latter might be our weakness in the day of grave trial. For we had incorporated into our army the youth of such tribes as we had conquered and whom the king deemed capable of bearing arms. These Amaholi, or slaves, were really our dogs, and even of this they might have been proud, for in our veins ran the clear unmixed blood of the “People of the Heavens;” (Such is the literal meaning of the word “Amazulu”) but did the spears of Tshaka show upon the skyline there would not be one of these miserable jackals within a day’s march of them by the time they drew near. Howbeit, although they were too cowardly to fight for us, we did not fear lest they should turn and fight against us, for the spears of Tshaka would devour them just as readily as they would ourselves; nay, more readily, for we Amandebeli were as lions, and dealt back blow for blow, were the enemy tenfold our own strength.

Time passed by, and as our *impis* went farther and farther afield, reports came in of a wonderful land to the north: of a land whose streams were never dry, and where the grass was ever green, and rich, and sweet. Now, around the King’s kraal, Ekupumuleni, it was not always so, and for many moons we had suffered greatly for want of rain; indeed, the King had sent out expressly to take all the rain-makers of every tribe and race and to bring them in. These tried their powers, each and all, and failed, wherefore they were put to death, for Umzilikazi declared that, as they were highly honoured and loaded with gifts when they could perform their office, it was only fair that they should pay forfeit when they could not; and this fate befell most of our own rain-makers, who were tied with their heels round the backs of their necks, and flung into a water-hole. Indeed, the only one who escaped was Masuka, the old Mosutu, whom we took, and whose life I had saved at the burning of certain Bapedi kraals, and who, while declaring himself an *isanusi* but no rain-maker, yet managed to bring rain, and thus not only escaped death but was advanced to still further honour. He was now of a great age, this old man, and was little else than a human skin loosely covering a skeleton; yet his eyes were as bright and marvellous as ever.

That Masuka stood so high in the king’s favour and in such honour among the people delighted me greatly, for I knew that as long as this was so I was safe from any plots my enemies might lay against me. I was now second fighting *induna* of the whole army, and a *kehla*, or ringed man. I had won a place of great power, young as I was, and those whose bitter jealousy would have moved them to compass my downfall and death were many. Moreover Umzilikazi had become suspicious of late, and was inclined to suspect each and all of his principal captains of designs upon his life and seat; and there were times when I fancied his suspicions rested strongly on Kalipe, the chief *induna* of the army, and myself – but mostly upon myself.

Yet, *Nkose*, this idea, terrible as it was, did not fill me with unmingled dismay. That I, but yesterday an *umfane* and unringed, should now be in a position to be suspected of usurping Umzilikazi's seat, of aspiring to become King of the *Aba-ka-zulu*; *Hau!* This indeed would cause my veins to flow and my nerves to thrill with a strange proud tingling. Yet the other side of the picture was grim and dark, for from it loomed the stake of impalement – the death of the hot stones; or, at the mildest, the knob-sticks of the slayers. I remembered, too, the words which, in times past, had been spoken by Nangeza, my chief wife: “A man who is brave and cautious may climb to any height,” – and, indeed, she suffered me not to forget them, for she was as proud and ambitious as ever, and was continually inciting me to supplant Kalipe. Then once I held the army in the hollow of my hand, what easier than —

But at this point I would stop my ears and cry upon her to hold her peace, lest she brought me – brought us all – to a far more fearful and lingering death than that which I extended my breast to meet when I claimed and won the King's assegai – as I have already told you, *Nkose*. But Nangeza had a plotting brain and would ever be first – indeed, had the King taken her to wife, she would never have rested until she had made herself King over him or – until she had been led forth to the place of slaughter. Moreover, I would do nothing against Kalipe, whose word and ways were as straight as his path when the King's enemies lay before him, and although he was much older than I he would never show any jealousy because I had been promoted nearly to an equality with himself.

“It is the weakness of our nation, Untúswa,” he would say, “that we rend and devour each other like a pack of jackals; and every man plots, lest another rise to be a little greater than himself. Now, the man I would sooner see second to me, or even equal with me, is not the oldest, nor yet the richest man, but the bravest; and that man is, I believe, yourself, son of Ntelani, young in years as you are.”

Thus spake Kalipe, and, indeed, he meant his words; and while this was so, and I had old Masuka on my side, I feared the grudges and jealousy of no man.

Now, it was in the mind of the King to abandon Ekupumuleni, and to move farther northward, partly for the reasons I have given, partly that the arm of Tshaka stretched far, and he was never quite certain that we were beyond the reach of it. So he ordered me to take a force of warriors, and make an expedition into the country with the ever-flowing streams, and to verify such reports of it as had come in.

My command was but a small one, comprising perhaps sixty or seventy men – the merest handful, remembering that those through whom our path lay were in countless thousands, and that small cause indeed had they to love us. Yet such was the terror inspired by the very name of the Amandebeli – or *Aba-ka-zulu*, as these people termed us – that though they were in swarming numbers, they fled from their kraals as our tiny *impi* drew near, and took refuge among the hills. We laughed and shook our spears at them in proud contempt, and taking whatever we wanted, passed on our way, for we were only the eyes of the lion this time, not his teeth and claws, wherefore we left them their lives and their cattle.

But this was not to last for ever. Day by day as we progressed the country became fairer, swarming as it did with great herds of game – elephant and buffalo and kudu – in the forest tracts, and vast quantities of eland and spring-bok and other game upon the rolling treeless plains. And the cattle which the people owned were round and fat; and the people themselves, though not warriors, were rich and happy. We looked at each other and laughed in our delight. Here was the country we would occupy. Here was the fair land of plenty we had fled from Tshaka's spears to gain. Here was the land wherein we would set up our new nation, and these people already here should be our dogs – our slaves.

Thus we thought, thus we spake, although we were but a tiny handful among tens of thousands. The cattle of these people covered the land – fat and sleek. It was well. They should be ours. What a nation ours should become!

So resolving, we continued our march, already the proud march of the conqueror. It was evening, nigh to sundown. We had slaughtered oxen at the last kraal we passed, and had seized women and boys to carry our meat for us. We were ascending a long rise, intending to rest in the valley beyond, where a river flowed, when, lo! the crest of the hill was crowned with spears – bright spears – a forest of them moving and extending in waves of light beneath the now sinking sun.

At the sight a deep gasp broke from every chest, and up went every man's head with distended nostrils. We snuffed battle even as a hound snuffs the warm scent of a buck. We gripped our shields and our weapons, and we massed together, halting to see what the enemy would do next.

“*Haul* They are surrounding us,” muttered some of the warriors in their deep voices – their eyes glaring like those of hyenas hungering for blood. “Shall we fall upon them, *Induna* of the King? Shall we fall upon them?”

“Not so,” I answered, leaning on my shield and calmly taking snuff, though the wild expectation of battle and its delights caused my heart to beat and my pulses to thrill, for I was young yet, although so high up in a position of trust. “Not so. Let us see first if they are coming in to *konza* to the messengers of the Great Great One; but if they mean war, my children, by the head ring of *Senzangakona*, they shall have as much of it as they can stomach. Let no blow be struck until I give the word, but raise the song of the Great Great One, and advance in battle order. When I give the word we will walk through and through their ranks, leaving a broad path every way.”

So each warrior, striking his shield with his knobstick, raised the war song of *Umzilikazi* —

“*Yaingahlabi*
Leyo 'nkunzi!
Yai ukúfa!”

(“That bull did not (merely) gore.
It was death.”)

And thus we paced up the slope slowly, and roaring the terrible battle-song, which had told the tidings of blood and fire and widespread death along our nation's track, and as the excitement spread over us we began to “see red,” and the aspect of each warrior was so grim and ferocious, that those in front, hundreds though they were, hesitated before our unswerving advance, then halted and called for an *indaba*.

As we still advanced, singing loudly, we began to observe more closely those who opposed us, and all but hemmed us in. They were armed with spears, which seemed well made, with axes, and hard square shields. In aspect they were akin to the *Bapedi* and the people of old *Masuka*, but their faces were softer, as those of women, or of men who were not fond of war; their ranks, too, were loose and open, and in no order: indeed, I had little doubt but that, in the event of hostilities, we could carry out our original plan, and hew lanes through and through them. But now a voice called out to us —

“Who are ye, stranger people, who enter the land of the *Bakoni*? Who are ye? so few, yet singing songs of war?”

Our warriors shook their heads and growled like dogs. They understood not this language, but I understood it moderately well, having been at pains to learn from old *Masuka* both the tongues and customs of the people around, with all of which he was well-acquainted; and, indeed, it was because of my knowledge of these tongues that the King had sent me in command of such a small *impi*, which might easily have been led by a chief of far inferior rank.

“Of the *Bakoni*? Who is your chief, and where is he?” I cried in return.

“Ascend hither, strangers, then you may see and speak with him,” came the reply.

Not a shade of hesitation did our warriors show as I made known this request. They advanced up the hill, marching in rank and singing, as proudly disdainful of the vastly overwhelming numbers

in front as though safe at Ekupumuleni. Even the women and boys, staggering under their loads of meat, dared not leave us, although their own people were around them in force and we were but few.

We soon gained the brow of the rise, and spreading out on either hand in two long lines, their spears glittering in the sinking sun, we beheld the battle rank of the Bakoni warriors. But we beheld something more. Beyond the rise whereon we stood, beyond the small river which flowed at its base on the further side, was a wide rolling plain covered with cattle, and beyond the cattle lay the countless huts of an immense town.

Our eyes opened wide, and a deep-throated gasp escaped us. What a place to burn! What countless herds to sweep away! was the thought in each man's mind.

Behind this town rose a great hill, steep-sided, flat-topped, and belted by lines of cliffs. There were further hills beyond it, but this one stood out from all, seeming to stand by itself upon the plain. We almost forgot the near presence of a great number of enemies. These, however, now closed in around us.

"Draw near, strangers," said the man who had first hailed us, and who seemed to be a leader of some kind – "the Chief of the People of the Blue Cattle sits before you."

I beheld, seated upon a leopard skin, a man just past middle age. He was a well-built man, tall and sinewy, and more martial-looking than any of his people. He was seated alone, a few councillors attending him several paces in the background, and save for a battle-axe, no arms were near him. He wore ornaments of gold, as we noticed did quite a number of the people, and the axe itself was profusely inlaid with gold.

"This people," I thought, "if not warlike, is skilful in making weapons. Good. It shall make weapons for its masters, the conquerors of the world."

"Greeting, Chief of the Blue Cattle," I said, taking up the title by which he had been named; and, indeed, looking upon the countless herds which were scattered over the plain, I noticed that the greater number were of a bluish-white colour.

He frowned, thinking I accosted him with scant deference, which was true, for we Amazulu, People of the Heavens, do not bend low before the chiefs of such tribes as this.

"Why do you approach me with weapons in your hand, stranger? Is this a custom among yourselves when approaching a chief?"

"Our weapons were placed in our hands by the Great Great One – the Black Elephant, whose voice trumpets afar. Not until we return into his presence again do we lay them down," I answered shortly.

All this while I was keenly watching the chief's face, and I read therein a bragging nature, but a coward spirit underlying it. He, for his part, was noting our large stature and fearless bearing, our great shields and heavy-bladed spears, and I knew he was impressed thereby.

"What do you here, in my country, strangers?" he continued, frowning still deeper. "You enter it armed and slaughter our cattle, and seize upon our women and boys to act as your slaves," with a glance at the group behind us who had thrown off their loads to rest. "This must be explained."

"The explanation is short, O Chief of the Blue Cattle," I answered haughtily, standing straight and with my head thrown back. "We entered this, your country, as we would enter any country, at the bidding of the Great Great One, who sits at Ekupumuleni, the Black Elephant, who is King over the whole world and King over the Bakoni of course. This is the explanation, O Chief of the Blue Cattle."

At these words an enraged murmur arose from those immediately before us, and rolled along the ranks in a defiant shout. Still, with my head thrown back, I only laughed slightly.

"That is my explanation; now hear my advice," I went on. "Send back immediately your highest *indunas* with a large present of girls and cattle to the Great Great One who sits at Ekupumuleni. Then will he fix the terms upon which he will suffer you and your people to live, O Chief of the Blue Cattle."

To the first shout of rage now succeeded a deafening yell of exasperation as the people caught the gist of these proud words. There was a swift rush and the ranks tightened around us. Spears

were shaken towards us, and eyes glared with angry menace. But my little band made scarcely a movement; a hand here and there would shift nearer to the head of the deadly stabbing assegai, or a shield would quiver in sinewy grip. That was all, yet upon every face there glowed the light of battle. A moment and we should be hewing our way through those broad ranks to the inspiration of our fiercely maddening war-cry.

But the chief's command availed to arrest the rush of his exasperated fighting men, which was well for him; else had he fallen that moment – for I had marked him as first victim, nor could he have escaped me.

“What is thy name, leader of this band of strangers?” he said.

“Untúswa, son of Ntelani, of the tribe of Umtetwa, of the nation of Zulu, is my name. Ponder it well, O Chief of the Blue Cattle, for in truth thou shalt hear it again.”

Once more, a loud and angry shout arose from the warriors. Once more the words of the chief stayed the tumult.

“Look around, Untúswa, son of Ntelani,” he said, rising for the first time. “Yonder is our town – one of many. Behind it rises a hill, which is flat on the top, whereon grows abundant grass, and springs flow. It could carry the cattle of a nation and the fighting men of a nation, and the force who would climb it might just as well think to climb the Heavens themselves, for it is fortified from base to summit. Behold these,” designating the armed warriors; “these are but a handful among the fighting-men who obey my word. Yet I would quarrel with none, wherefore I will not suffer that violence should overtake you – even though you have offered insult to a mighty nation in the person of its chief. Depart now, ye strangers, in peace, while ye may. Farewell!”

“How is it called, this great and mighty town, my father?” I said, somewhat mockingly.

“It is called ‘The Queen of the World,’” he answered proudly.

“Ha! That is good,” I replied. “When the tread of the Elephant – Umzilikazi, the Great Great One, the Founder of Nations – shaketh yonder town, then the King and the Queen of the World will be mated? Till then, farewell, O Chief of the Blue Cattle!”

Then we departed even as we had come – slaves and all – no man hindering us. Yes, the name of Zulu was mighty indeed in those days.

Chapter Two. Treason in the Air

Strong as we felt in the might of our name and nation, we were too well skilled in the game of war to allow ourselves to be lulled into a blind security. Day after day, night after night, we kept a sharp look-out, expecting the forces of the Bakoni and their allies to fall upon us in overwhelming numbers. But they did not; which went to show that something of the terror of our name had travelled to the Chief of the Blue Cattle; nor, indeed, did I doubt but that messengers would follow shortly after us with gifts, and desiring to *konza* to Umzilikazi, even as had done all other nations within our reach.

At length we drew near to Ekupumuleni, and our hearts were light, for the thoughts of all of us were full of the richness of the country which lay awaiting our possession; and as we returned to the home of our wandering nation, the dryness of the land struck us as quite cheerless – not that it was so really, but only by comparison with the green, well-watered region we had just left.

Having sent messengers on to announce our arrival, we entered the great kraal, singing lustily the praises of the King. Umzilikazi was seated in his wonted place, at the upper end of the great open circle, and as we flung our weapons to the ground and, tossing our right hands aloft, roared the *Bayéte*, I could see that pleased expression I knew so well steal over his face.

“Greeting, son of Ntelani,” he said, as bending low, I drew near. “Seat thyself, and tell me what thou hast seen and done.”

This I did, and the Great Great One took snuff and listened. Then he ordered those women and boys whom he had taken as bearers to be brought before him.

Crouching low to the earth they came, those poor slaves, their eyes starting from their heads in fear. They had never seen anything like this – the splendour of our huge kraal and its shapeliness and strength; so different to their own town, which, though far larger, was utterly without shape or design – the stature and strength, and fierce bearing of our warriors, who had mustered in crowds to witness our return, and above all, the proud majesty of our King, and the roaring volume of praises which went up from every throat to hail his appearance. They bent low to the very earth, trembling with fear.

“It is good, it is good,” said the King, eyeing them between pinches of snuff. “These are right well-made specimens, albeit somewhat light of skin. I ordered thee to take no captives, Untúswa, yet the *impi* needed bearers for its goods, and thou hast chosen the pick and flower of the girls. Ah! ah! Untúswa; thou hast ever an eye for all that is best in that way.”

“*Yeh-bo Nkulu 'nkulu!*” I cried, delighted that I had pleased the King.

“I will choose the best, Untúswa. After that thou canst take the two that will suit thee; the remainder I will otherwise dispose of.”

Then the King dismissed us, ordering cattle to be slain for us to feast on, and we departed from his presence uttering shouts of *bonga*.

When I gained my hut I found Nangeza, my principal wife, awaiting me with ill-concealed impatience.

“Welcome, Untúswa,” she said. “And so upon the news you bring it depends whether we move onward or no?”

“Who am I, to seek to interpret the mind of the King?” I answered darkly, for Nangeza was ever trying to wring out of me what went on in the secret councils of the *izinduna*, and even in my private conferences with the Great Great One himself. This was all very well while I was unringed and a thoughtless boy, but now things were different. The less women had to say to such matters the better; but although I could see this now, Nangeza never could be brought to do so. She would show an evil temper at such times, and hint that she had been the making of me – that I had been ready enough to take counsel of her in times past, but that now I was somebody I thought I could do without

her. Then she would bid me beware, saying that, even as she had made me, it might still be within her power to unmake me. Now of this sort of talk, *Nkose*, I began to have more than enough. Nangeza might be the *inkosikazi*— she deserved that — but she should not be the chief, too.

(*Inkosikazi* means Chieftainess. The principal wife of a man of rank.)

She was now a tall, fine, commanding woman, and as fearless and ready of wit as she had been when a girl, yet with the lapse of time she had become too commanding — had developed an expression of hardness which does not become a woman. She had slaves to wait on her, and had little or no hard work to do herself. Moreover, by this time, I had two other wives, those two girls whom I had promised to *lobola* for when they had surprised me and Nangeza together; and I had kept my word. They were soft-hearted, merry, laughing girls, who never dreamed that the second fighting *induna* of the King's army ought to take his commands from women; wherefore it not unfrequently befell that I preferred their huts to that of Nangeza, my *inkosikazi*.²

A woman of Nangeza's disposition could not be other than a jealous woman. She hated my other two wives. She had borne me one child, a daughter, whereas the other two had each borne me a son, and she feared lest I should name one of these as my successor, and as chief son, thus conferring precedence over any she might hereafter bear me. You white people, *Nkose*, think that we Zulus keep our women in the lowest subjection. Well, we do not allow them to rule us, yet now and again we find one who tries hard to do so, and gives a great amount of trouble before we can convince her that it is not to be done; and Nangeza was one of these. And of her I was even then beginning to have more than enough.

Now she sullenly acquiesced in my reticence, for I would not unfold one word of the King's counsels. But she gave me a very dark look and turned away muttering. Yet during my absence events of the gravest moment had been transpiring.

In the evening Umzilikazi sent for me. I found him alone in his hut, and as I sat opposite him it seemed as though I were once more the *inceku* and shield-bearer, and that the dread ordeal which had terminated in the winning of my head-ring and the King's *Assegai* had been all a dream.

"What think you, Untúswa?" said the King at first. "Is it for good or for ill that we leave Ekupumuleni, 'The Place of Rest,' and depart for this new land?"

"It is for good, Great Great One. The land is better one than this. There is more room in it for a new nation to become mighty and rich."

"Yet there are some who would remain here, some who shake a doleful head over the prospect of going farther."

"Those who shake their heads against the will of the King may happen to shake them off, O Elephant."

"Ha! Thou sayest well, son of Ntelani. They may happen to shake them off — ah! ah! they may."

Now Umzilikazi spoke in that soft and pleasant voice of his, and I thought that trouble was gathering for somebody. Then as his keen eyes, half-closed, were fixed upon mine, piercing through and through my brain, I did not sit at ease, for I had been absent many moons, and certain powerful enemies of mine had not. Then he went on, still speaking in that soft and terrible voice.

"There are those who have reason to love Ekupumuleni, for it is not too far from the land of their birth. Good. Ekupumuleni shall indeed be their resting-place — their resting-place forever."

Now I knew that ill awaited somebody, and strangely, too, at that moment, I remembered Nangeza's dark looks and words. Yet how could the shadow of coming ill affect me? I aspired to be nothing but a fighting leader! My mind was the mind of the King. I cared nothing for intriguing or plotting. I only asked to lead my shields against the enemies of the King. The occupation I favoured most was that of fighting.

² It is customary for each wife of a Zulu of rank to have a hut to herself.

Then Umzilikazi went on to talk about this new land, and of the chief and people who owned the blue cattle.

“There will be spoil for all, for all who deserve it,” he said; “and these slaves you have brought back please me well. *Whau*, Untúswa! How is it that a man like you, and a fighting captain, has but three wives – only three?” he asked, laughing at me.

“I care not for such, Great Great One. I desire only to wield the King’s Assegai in battle,” I said.

“That is well. In a few days we shall see. Go now, Untúswa.”

I saluted and left the King. As I passed the gate of the *isigodhlo*, or royal enclosure, which gate was only wide enough to admit one man at a time, I met my father, Ntelani, entering. Not a word had the King let fall on the matter of my father, and this meeting, which was a surprise to both of us, seemed an evil omen; for now that I wore the head-ring, and had become great, and commanded the King’s troops, my father was more jealous than ever, and hated me more. We exchanged greetings, and then in the darkness I made my way to old Masuka’s hut.

I pushed the wicker door open and crept in. The old witch-doctor was awake, and, seated by his fire, looked more like a big black spider than a man, such a skin-and-bone old skeleton had he become.

“I have seen you, Untúswa,” he said, looking up.

“Greeting, father,” I replied.

“*Au!*” he said, handing me snuff. “And have you brought back cow and calf from the land of the Blue Cattle, Untúswa? The cow, whose milk keeps the life in my old frame, is dead – a lion killed her.”

“No cattle did I bring from the land of the Bakoni, father, though it will not be a long time before we go and take all of it,” I replied; “but there is a red cow in milk among my herd. Tomorrow she and her calf shall be driven in among your beasts, my father.”

The old man looked pleased. He loved cattle, and although by now he was one of the wealthiest among us, yet he never lost an opportunity of adding to his herds; but if any man gave him a cow he did not ask for more; unlike our own *izanusu*, who were wont to go on asking and asking until they had obtained ten or twelve beasts. Now I, each time that I was enriched by increase in my herd, or took spoil from an enemy, never failed to send a head or two to old Masuka; but from me our own *izanusu* got nothing – wherefore they hated me. But the old Mosutu had been the means of saving my life and making me great; wherefore I grudged him not such gifts from time to time.

When the King had caused Isilwana, the head *isanusi*, to be killed, for failing to cure a man who was wounded by the poisoned arrows of the mountain tribes, he had desired to put Masuka in his place; but the old man begged permission to refuse, saying that his *múti* (Medicine, or charm) would be of no avail if worked with others. So Umzilikazi, not sorry to set up a rivalry between the witch-doctors, had allowed him to go his own way; and since the rain-making, the old Mosutu had stood higher in the King’s favour than ever.

“That is well, my son,” he replied, “but delay not to send the cow with morning light, for by nightfall it may be that she will never be sent.”

“*Hau!*” I cried. “What mean you, my father?”

“You are brave, Untúswa, and I have made you great. It is a pity that such should die young.”

“What mean you, my father?” I cried again, seeing a deadly meaning in his words.

He gazed at me for a moment, then bending forward spoke low in the Sesutu tongue, which by this time he had taught me; and as I listened my horror became greater and greater, for it seemed as though a wide and black pit of darkness yawned at my feet, and I must either spring over it or into it. Verily, the enemies at work within a man’s kraal are more to be feared than any outside. I must warn the King this very night. Yet, was it too late?

“Even now I hear steps which seek thee, son of Ntelani,” he ended. “Yet go to meet them. I know not if thou wilt return.”

Obedient to the old man's injunction, I rose, and now I, too, heard steps in the silence of the night. With a heavy foreboding of trouble, I crept through the door of the hut, and stood upright.

"The King desires speech of thee, son of Ntelani," said a voice, as a man came in sight. I recognised him as one of the *izinceku* or household attendants, and I thought there was something of malice and mischief in his tone. But I lost no time in gaining the *isigodhlo*.

Now, the royal house was of great size, nearly twice that of the largest of any other. I approached, singing in a low voice the King's praises, to give notice that I was coming; then, disarming, I entered. The Great Great One was alone. A fire burning in the centre lighted up the interior brightly, and in its blaze I could see upon the royal countenance a look I did not like. But still less did I like what immediately followed.

"Thou dog and whelp of a dog!" hissed the King, as, with the rapidity of lightning, he dropped aside his skin robe and hurled a casting assegai at me. It grazed my head with a vicious "zip!" and buried itself in the side of the house, where it stuck quivering.

I did not move. Not a word did I speak, yet I felt that death and myself were closely shoulder to shoulder once more.

"Well, dog! Hast thou no word to say?" went on Umzilikazi, his hand gripping another casting spear.

"Yes, I have a 'word,' Great Great One. My life is ever in the hand of the King. But now I know of no reason why it should be taken," I answered boldly.

"No reason? *Au!* Can a nation serve two Kings, Untúswa, my dog?" he mocked.

"Now have the dreams of the Elephant been bad – now have the ears of the Great Great One been filled with dark and false things. Moreover, I know well that it was not really in thy mind to slay me, Father; else had yon spear been buried in something very different to the grass wall of the house," I ended, with my usual boldness, which was so great as sometimes to astonish myself nearly as much as it did those who witnessed it. But it was in the minds of men that I should never now be slain by order of the Great Great One, because I held the King's Assegai. Yet upon this I did not put overmuch trust.

"You have a ready tongue, Untúswa, and a ready wit," said Umzilikazi, no longer wrathfully. "The word is true, and well said, for I could hardly miss a man at that distance, even though there are some who think it is time to find a new King."

These last words were spoken low. I had heard enough from old Masuka not to require to ask their meaning. Yet I spoke in surprise and disgust, at the thought that such a thing should be possible.

"What is your thought on the matter, Untúswa?" said the King softly, eyeing me with his head on one side.

"*Au!* that is not a question to ask of me, Great Great One; for was I not on my way hither to point out those who think thus?" I said.

He started eagerly.

"Can you do this, Untúswa? Can you point them out?"

"I can, Great Great One. Shall I silently call together the slayers? The pool beyond Ncwelo's kraal is not far, and the moon will not take long to sink now. In the morning its water shall be red."

"Ha! The pool beyond Ncwelo's?" muttered the King. "Wait. Call not together the slayers, for I will see these evil-doers with my own eyes, will hear their treachery with my own ears. You and I will go forth together, Untúswa; then on the morrow they shall behold their last sunrise."

"How many men shall I bring for safeguard, Father?" I said. "Ten, perhaps, or more?"

"No men shalt thou bring, Untúswa. Thou and I will go forth together and witness the doings of these wizards, these *abatagati*, who meet at night."

I looked anxious, for this was a serious adventure. The risks were enormous. Of the exact number of conspirators we were in ignorance, but we, being only two, would be sure to find ourselves

at a great disadvantage in the event of discovery. Again, if any harm befell the King, should not I be held responsible for it? So I said —

“May I not go alone and bring back word, Black Elephant?”

I fancied Umzilikazi looked suspicious.

“Not so, Untúswa,” he said. “I will satisfy my own eyes, my own ears, and then – Hearken now. Take thy weapons, for it is time to start. Walk in front of me until we are without the gates. If we meet any man, harm him not. But any man who recognises the King, with the first words of royal greeting which pass his lips, slay him instantly and without a word, be he whom he may. I would not be known to have moved in this matter.”

Umzilikazi took a broad-bladed spear in his hand and a black shield, of smaller size than those used in war. It happened that I was armed in like manner, except that I had a large knobstick as well. Thus equipped, we started upon our adventure.

Chapter Three.

The Conspiracy of Ncwelo's Pool

We passed out of the *isigodhlo* by a secret way; known to and used by the King alone. The night was not a dark one, for the stars were shining bright and clear, and a waning moon hung low down in the heavens. As we stepped rapidly forth across the open plain we could make out the dim outline of the great kraal lying silent and slumbrous. Suddenly the figure of a man rose up, right across our path.

Now we were facing the setting moon, and the man was advancing stealthily in the direction of the kraal, wherefore we met. His face was in darkness. Not so ours, however, and as he recognised the lion countenance of the Great Great One, thus walking abroad by night, he was seized with a mighty fear, and, uttering the *Bayéte*, he crouched low – hiding his face that we might pass him. And he had looked on the things of this world for the last time, for the words of the Black Elephant were fresh in my ears. This man had recognised the King – had spoken the royal greeting – wherefore, as he crouched, the blade of my broad *umkonto* drove through between his shoulders, coming out far through his breast. So he died there in the night, uttering no further sound.

“That was well done, Untúswa,” whispered the King. “I have but one word, and now there is one *umtagati* the less. Proceed!”

So we stepped forward again, leaving the slain man lying there; and as we held on our way, I leading, and gripping my spear, all on the alert lest we should meet others prompt to recognise the King, we heard before and around us the howling of hyenas and the yelping of jackals, with now and again the thunder roar of a lion at no very great distance, also a strange and unearthly wail, which could come from no beast – but only, it might be, from the sad ghosts of those slain, who were weeping over their own shattered bones above the place of slaughter.

“This is a night for *abatagati* indeed,” growled the King. “Yet there will be more ghosts to weep, Untúswa, after our visit to Ncwelo's pool.”

“*Gahle, Nkulu 'nkulu,*” I whispered. (Gently, Great Great One.) “Yonder is Ncwelo's kraal. If his dogs hear us, will not their tongues be swift to put the conspirators to flight? Yonder by the shade of the trees must we pass, for they whom we seek will have eyes watching the plain in all directions.”

“Lead on, Untúswa,” whispered the King.

Some distance round, under the shade of the trees, had we to travel, for we dared not cross the open, though to do so were far more direct. *Au!* it was black where the light of the moon and the stars could not pierce, and we had to writhen our way as silently as serpents – indeed more silently, for twice the rustle of some great serpent uncoiling himself to withdraw slowly from our path, and his shrill angry hiss at being disturbed, caused us to pause in order to allow him to retreat.

At length I, who was leading, halted and held up a hand. It was not a sound that I had heard in front through the black gloom, but there had floated to my nostrils on the clear air of the night an odour. It was the smell of a horse. Now of horses among us there were but few – all belonging to the King – and at Ncwelo's kraal were none. The Great Great One perceived it too, for just then a shaft of moonlight between the tree-tops revealed his face, and upon it was the eager, smiling, terrible expression I had seen there more than once, but usually when leading us into the very thickest of the battle. Yet neither of us spake, and we resumed our way, though tenfold more cautiously than before.

Again I held up my hand. We were now where the ground ended. Before were several jagged pinnacles of rock; in front of these – air. We had made our way by a circuit to the high ground overlooking the back of Ncwelo's pool.

There it lay, the pool – its surface glistening in the moonlight, reflecting the stars – lying beneath us at a depth, it might be, of eight or ten times the length of a man; and the murmur of voices rose to our ears, together with the occasional stamp of a horse and the sound as of the shaking of a saddle.

The grasp of the King's hand tightened on my shoulder, as we drew ourselves yet nearer to the brink of the rocks and peered cautiously forth.

"Listen, Untúswa," he breathed into my ear. "Mark well the voices, lest the darkness prevent us from seeing the speakers. Ha!" he added, "that, at any rate, is a voice thou shouldst know."

And there in truth, *Nkose*, Umzilikazi spoke no lie; for the voice was that of Ntelani, my father.

It was raised in reproof. Someone at that moment was striking a light – with the stone fire-makers the white men used at that time – and there arose to our nostrils the odour of tobacco being smoked in a pipe. But while this light still flamed we made out with the greatest plainness the faces of six men.

Yes, in that flash we saw them all, for they were immediately below us. Two were white men, with rough faces covered with thick shaggy beards. They wore large hats and clothing made of dressed leather, and were armed with knives and long guns. They were tall, big men, but slow and heavy of speech and aspect. We knew them in a moment for Amabuna (Boers).

The other four were our own people: Tyuyumane, an influential *induna* and a relation of the King; Notalwa, the head of our witch doctors; Senkonya, another *induna*, and my father Ntelani. The latter was speaking:

"I fear lest the odour of *gwai* thus burned spread far into the stillness of the night, for none of us Amazulu use our *gwai* in such wise. Wherefore it will be known that white men are about."

But that Ibuna answered roughly that he cared nothing if it reached the nostrils of Umzilikazi himself, save that he uttered the King's name "Selekas," so badly did that people speak with our tongue.

The other, however, reproved him, which was well, for our people, traitors though they were, liked not to listen to that sort of talk.

"And now, Ntelani," went on this man, speaking softly and pleasantly, "if we help you in the matter, how do you propose to carry out the change?"

"Thus," replied my father, having paused awhile to take snuff and think. "Umzilikazi is great – he is a lion – a buffalo bull – an elephant. The young men are with him. The young men are all his dogs, for he gives them plenty of fighting and abundance of spoil. Moreover, he allows them to *tunga*³ while yet children, and exalts them to be *izinduna* over the heads of their fathers. Their fathers are to be their dogs. He loves not old men as *izinduna*. He creates *izinduna* out of children like himself."

Now the King pushed me as we lay and listened, for both of us understood this speech, which was not even dark. Then my father went on: —

"Here is my plan, leader of the Amabuna. We must have a King, but when the Elephant who now trumpets is henceforth trumpeting in black night the warriors will demand a leader, and no man is there who holds their hearts like one, a lion-cub which I have bred, for he is fearless in war, and him they will have to reign over them. This wish they must have granted, if only to accustom them to the change. He shall be King – King for a day – ah! ah!"

And my father chuckled with malice as he took more snuff.

"But what if he will not? What if he remains faithful to Umzilikazi?" said the leader of the Amabuna; for that people talks plain, and understands not our way of dark speaking.

"*Au!* Will he not?" sneered my father. "I tell thee, Ibuna, that he would slay the King with his own hand but to sit in his seat, if only for a day."

Now, *Nkose*, my fury well-nigh got the mastery over me. Such dangerous and fatal words uttered by my father in the hearing of the Great Great One struck dismay into my heart, for the minds of Kings are ever suspicious, and had not I been brought there half under suspicion myself? Besides, they were not true; for even were the chance to offer, I would not sit in the seat of Umzilikazi in his lifetime. For he had made me great, and, in reality, second only to himself. No thought of treason

³ Tunga means "Sew" – the head-ring – i.e. marry.

was in my heart, nor had there ever been since the time when, as a hot-headed and foolish boy, I had all but thrown away my life for the sake of a girl; but since then —*au!* had the whole nation turned against the King, I, even if the only one, would have kept faithful to him, would have given my life for his. Further, my father's intended treachery towards myself — towards the King and the nation — made my blood flow hot; for no promises of advantage on the part of these lying Amabuna would ever have deceived me, even could I see of what advantage they could be to us. I began to “see red.” It was all I could do not to plunge down the rocks and slay Ntelani where he sat, even though he were my own father. And something of this must have shown itself — I know not how — for again that grasp of iron was upon my shoulder, pressing me down, and the King's voice breathed into my ear —

“*Gahle, gahle, Untúswa.* Hast thou not even yet learned sound judgment, thou who art no more a boy, but a *kehla*, and the leader of warriors in battle? Give ear now while these creeping scorpions advance even further and further into the black jaws of death.”

So we lay and listened, and presently we knew all there was to know, and, in truth, the news was great, for many things had been hatching within the womb of Time. We learned that Tshaka, the Mighty One, the Lion of Zulu, was no more, and that Dingane, a brother of that Elephant, had reddened his spear in the Great One's blood, and now sat as King in Zululand. We learned that the Amabuna were coming up out of the west — advancing in great numbers, with guns and horses, desiring the land which lay between the Tugela and the sea — and to obtain this, their leaders sought the aid of our nation, promising to set up as King in Zululand he who should aid them the most in their war against Dingane. But before this should happen, Umzilikazi must be sent to join his father, for great as he might have reason to dread the power of Dingane, these plotters knew that he hated that of the Amabuna still more, and that by no inducement whatever could he be brought to listen to their promises, still less to trust in them.

All this we drank in as we lay there among the rocks, listening to that dark midnight plot — all this and more: how the old men were dissatisfied, because of the favour shown to the younger ones — yet this was necessary, *Nkose*, for ours was a young nation, which had to carve out its own place with the arms and assegais of its warriors, most of whom were young. So we lay in the black midnight stillness, listening to these *abatagati* squatted around by the rock-hung pool, and the dismal howling of beasts far and near seemed to re-echo their foul and evil plotting. But at the last we learned something more. Should I, the son of Ntelani, refuse to be made King — for a day — ah! yes, only for a day — the *induna* Tyuyumane was to reign. And with this understanding the Amabuna rose to depart. As they swung themselves into their saddles the one who had spoken more pleasantly said:

“The day after the new moon then, Ntelani, an Elephant will fall into the staked pit from which there is no escape. Our people, with guns and horses, will be at hand. Is that so?”

“That is so, leader of the Amabuna,” grunted my father. “*Au!* from the spear of a pitfall there is no escape, even for the Elephant.” And the others laughed deeply as they assented.

“My father,” I whispered, as the Amabuna rode off, “shall I not go down and slay yonder four?”

“Not so, Untúswa,” whispered the King in reply.

“Shall I not then go and call forth an *impi* to eat up those dirty white jackals, O Elephant for whom no pit shall be laid?”

“Not so, Untúswa. Ha! It is the whole nest of foul birds that shall be destroyed — not two only, that the remainder may take alarm and escape.”

After the Amabuna had gone, those four traitors sat there in the darkness and talked more freely, and in the course of this *indaba* it was arranged that Tyuyumane should sit in the seat of the Great Great One. But, first of all, on the day after the new moon, when the Amabuna should be at hand with their horses and guns, it was settled that I was to reign for a little while, only to accustom the younger warriors to the change; then I was to be sent to travel the road of Umzilikazi. All this these four fools talked over among themselves, little thinking what ears were drinking in their words — little dreaming what a sharp and fiery throne awaited Tyuyumane — and, indeed, all of them. Then

the moon sank down, and darkness lay upon the face of that wizard pool, and silently the conspirators rose and were gone.

“Ha! Untúswa,” whispered the King in mockery, “soon will the nation cry thee the *Bayéte*. How now? Dost thou not feel already great?”

“Mock me not, Black Elephant,” I pleaded; “mock me not that I am begotten of Ntelani, who is the very chief of fools. If the fooleries, which we have just heard seem to the mind of the Great Great One true, then let him slay me as I stand. If not, suffer that I slay their utterers.”

And, dropping my assegai – the King’s Assegai – I turned my breast to the Black Elephant, even as on that day when I stood expecting the death-stroke in the sight of all the nation.

“Not yet, Untúswa, not yet,” was the answer, uttered softly. “Lead on now, that we may return before these *abatagati* smell that the Lion has been on their track.”

Now, as we took our way beneath the blackness of the forest shades, it seemed to me, *Nkose*, that I was standing with one foot upon the point of an exceedingly lofty pinnacle, which point pierced more and more my foot, and yet on each and every side was the dizzy height of death. For now came back to me those plotting and foolish dreams of the days when my principal wife, Nangeza, and myself were making love without permission, and breaking daily the stern law of our nation. Then we had talked over the possibility which lay before every man who knew not fear, and who dared stake everything on fate, and how no man was more fitted to aspire to the rule of a warrior race than such a born warrior as myself; and, although now I had come to see the foolishness of such dreams – for I loved Umzilikazi as a dog does his master – and, further, was happy enough in my position as second fighting *induna* – yet it might be that Nangeza, who was ill-disposed to me now by reason of her evil and over-reaching temper, had whispered abroad such old tales – adding insidiously to them, as the manner is with women – and these might have reached the ears of the King – as what indeed did not? – and, taken with what he had just heard, might mean my downfall. Yet I could do nothing, save to trust in my steady and faithful services to the King, and the weight and general soundness of my counsel; for, young as I was, the Great Great One took counsel of me oft, though secretly – oftener, indeed, than of older *izinduna*, such as my father Ntelani, or even Mcumbete, who of all his counsellors was the most trusted.

Suddenly the King’s hand fell upon my shoulder again, pressing me down gently but firmly to the very earth. Not a moment too soon, for as we lay crouching there, over us passed the four conspirators – right over us, so that had they trodden but a foot’s breadth to one side they had touched us. They were now upon the edge of the brush, and we could see their forms clearly outlined against the stars. Moreover, each held his broad assegai in his right hand, for the man who wanders at night does well to be prepared for peril at every step. As for me, I desired nothing better than to have at them then and there; but that restraining grasp relaxed not on my shoulder, and the will of the Great Great One was sufficient. So we let those traitors go for the moment, but better had it been for them had we stricken them down in the darkness as they walked.

We regained the *isigodhlo* by the same secret way, and perceived of none. But before dismissing me for the night the King whispered a few orders. And then I knew that the morrow would witness terrible things – that, for some at least, it should bring forth that which might well make them wish they had never been born.

Chapter Four. The “Smelling-Out.”

On the morrow, ere yet the sun was up, heralds went running throughout Ekupumuleni, crying aloud that none might venture away from the kraal on pain of death. Others, again ran swiftly to the cattle outposts and outlying kraals, ordering all men to assemble immediately at the royal place. But before this I had already despatched several armed parties, picked warriors of my own regiment, who should form a belt round the kraals at a great distance, so that, being distributed in pickets, none might pass.

Now a great fear fell upon all the people when these ominous preparations became known; and this deepened, as presently it got noised abroad that the King’s dreams had been bad, for it was certain that a great witch-finding impended – greater, indeed, than had been known since Ekupumuleni was erected. An uneasy feeling of restlessness and suspicion had been astir for some little time, and now men whispered to each other with their blankets over their heads, fearing lest their words should fall upon the wrong ears.

Throughout the morning people continued to stream in from the outlying places, men and women, for children were not cited, the former carrying no weapons but sticks only. But all the warriors of my own regiment, to the number of several hundreds, were fully armed. Kalipe, also, the other war-captain, had as many of his own men under arms. The bulk of the people, however, were, as I said, unarmed.

“*Au!*” cried Nangeza, as I went into my hut to put on some of my war-adornments, “I think, Untúswa, this reminds me not a little of the morning following upon the death of the sleeping sentinel, Sekweni. They say, too, that this morning a man was found outside, not far from the gates, with his heart cleft in twain by the stroke of a broad *umkonto*— a broad *umkonto*, Untúswa. Ah! ah!” she jeered, letting her eyes rest with meaning upon my royal weapon, which was seldom out of my grasp. “Art thou not afraid, Untúswa? for the glance of Notalwa seeth far, and his tongue is long.”

“I know yet another tongue which is long, Nangeza,” I answered. “Tell me, thou fool, hast thou ever seen me afraid?”

“Once only, when I told thee thou mightest yet be King. Ah! ah!” she mocked.

I turned as I was departing and looked her full in the face.

“A warning, Nangeza!” I said. “There is a greater than Notalwa, and a long tongue is a worse thing than dangerous. It is wearisome. The King is not fond of those who wag their tongues overmuch, claiming to be in the counsels of his *izinduna*. Have a care, Nangeza!” And with these words I left her; yet not without seeing that she was alarmed.

Now, by the time the sun was at his highest in the heavens, the great kraal, Ekupumuleni, was packed full of people, and all were in a brooding and breathless state of dread; for the rumours which filled the air were as the early rumblings of a mighty storm brooding over the face of the world. It was known that the witch-doctors were making *múti*. It was whispered that the King’s sleeping visions had so shaped that vast and unmentionable wizardry had been at work. It was known further that a man of the House of Ncwelo had died in blood, wandering abroad in the night. Things looked dark for the House of Ncwelo. None doubted but that, before the sun went down, some, if not many, should walk in the darkness of the Great Unknown.

All the morning, from every direction, people came flocking. Ncwelo’s kraal to the number of nearly a hundred, Janisa’s clan, who were in charge of some of the cattle outposts, and the followings of many petty chiefs. All these took up positions in the circles within circles ranged around the inside of the great open space. But belting round the whole, hemming in all in a ring of iron – a fence of spear blades – were two half-moons of warriors fully armed, those of my own particular following,

and those of Kalipe. And at the high end of the kraal were two companies of slayers, or executioners, bearing thongs and heavy knob-sticks.

Seated among the *izinduna* awaiting the arrival of the Great Great One was my father Ntelani, the same morose and dissatisfied expression upon his face. But upon that of Tyuyumane, the King's relation, I thought I could detect a lively expression of fear – also upon that of Senkonya – and I laughed behind my shield, for I was in full dress as a war-captain.

“Ah! ah!” I said to myself. “The Great Great One was right. These *abatagati* are about to weep blood. No swift and merciful death in the darkness is to be theirs.”

Now the King came forth attended by his shield-bearer, and all the nation assembled there bowed low and thundered out the *Bayéte*. But the countenance of the Great Great One was gloomy and stern, as his gaze travelled over the enormous bending crowd. He advanced to his usual place, at the head of the open space, and seated himself. And then the *izanusis*, bedecked in all their hideousness of skulls and entrails and streaming blood and rattling bones, came dancing and howling before the King, and clamouring to be let loose upon the wizards who had bewitched his dreams.

Notalwa was at their head. He was arrayed in a cloak of quagga-skin vividly striped, and was crowned with the lower jaw of a sea-cow cunningly joined with the upper part of a lion's skull, the whole painted red and surmounted by cranes' feathers. For my own part, I laughed to myself at the sight of this cowardly boaster, who had never shed blood, save that of some wretched *umtagati* whom he had smelt out, trying to render his appearance terrific. So, too, did several among us war-captains. But the bulk of the people saw terror in him, and groaned loudly.

This hideous band began to dance before the King, sweeping the ground and air with wands tipped with giraffe tails, as they circled round, and howling —

“Great Great One! Black Buffalo Bull! Elephant who bears the world! give the word, that we may name the *abatagati*! Thou whose glance is brighter than the sun! give the word that we may consume them with lightning! Hou! Hou! Hou!”

With these and such-like bellowings did the *izanusis* rave for long; but the King sat and took snuff in silence, as though they were not there at all. At last he said —

“Away from me, ye jackals! ye who are impostors, and no *izanusis* at all! Still your howlings; for there is a greater than you, who shall find out quickly what ye never shall.”

I had my eyes upon Notalwa's face, and saw that he feared. The others fell back in awed silence, for there was that in the King's eyes, in the King's glance which meant death, and nothing less. And then old Masuka advanced to take their place.

His little bowed, shrivelled figure was undecked by gauds of any kind, but his eyes were keen and bright, and searching as ever. He was attended by three others – young men of our own people, whom the King had appointed to him to be instructed in his magic; for Umzilikazi was too clear-sighted to arouse disaffection among our own people by leaving the chief magic entirely in the hands of strangers. Besides, he wanted to set up a rival band to that of Notalwa.

“Hearken!” said the King. “This morning a man was found who had died in blood in the night – had died in blood under the very shadow of where I sit. Who is he that arrogates to himself the right to slay where that right is of one alone? Who dares take life without my decree? Here has been *tagati* of the most deadly kind!”

These words were taken up by a trumpet voiced *imbonga*⁴, and rolled forth aloud, that all the nation might hear. And the people heard, and the shivering that went through those crouched circles was as the shaking of the forest leaves just before a gale.

“Find him!” said the King, with a sweep of the hand.

⁴ an *imbonga* is a professional “praiser,” or herald.

The three who were learners of Masuka's sorcery sprang to their feet, and began to intone the witch-finding chant. Then they ran softly hither and thither, striking the ground with their tail-tipped wands. But the old Mosutu himself remained rigid and motionless where he had first been standing.

The three witch-finders, running lightly, entered among the people, for lanes had been left between the densely-serried ranks. As they advanced down these a dread silence lay upon all. Tens of thousands of eyeballs rolled white in chill apprehension. There alone, gloomy, and with lowering brow, sat the King, terrible in his fell and destroying wrath. Even I, who was in the counsels of the Great Great One, felt a shiver of awe; remembering, too, the words my father had let fall in the conclave of the midnight conspirators.

Down the ranks went the witch-finders, chanting, and twirling their rods. And behind them came a grim and fearsome company – the whole body of the slayers, namely – the fierce light of expectancy upon their dread faces, as each held his thong ready, grasping in a cruel grip the heavy knobstick.

Ha! The witch-finders have halted, and their singing rises shrill and loud. A man is touched with the fatal wand. In a moment a thong is about his neck, and two of the slayers are leading him forth to the great gate – are leading him forth to the place of slaughter – to die! Two more now are touched! They also are led forth in like manner immediately behind the first. A great gasp, like a sob, sways the multitude; and in dead silence a way is opened out for these ill-fated ones, passing through to their death. Then, as the people take up once more the chorus of the wizard song, an *imbonga*, standing at the King's side, names aloud those who have thus looked their last upon the sun. But the progress of the *izanusu* continues, and by the time they have gone half through the ranks some thirty men have been named: and now we can see these stringing up the slope outside the kraal, in the direction of the place of slaughter – they and their slayers – and, in the dead and awesome silence which now and again falls upon the immense crowd, can hear the dull crashing of broken skulls, and the distant and hollow groans, as the great knobsticks of the executioners are already beginning their fell work. And still the line of doomed men is ascending to the hill of death; and far above, like a gathering cloud in the heavens, the white pinions of vultures are wheeling and soaring, impatient to begin, for such a feast as this great destruction of evil-doers has never yet been theirs since they began to follow our migrating nation for their food.

By the time the witch-finders had made the complete round of those gathered together, upwards of fourscore men had been smelt out, and the remaining body of slayers, with disappointment upon their fierce countenances, stole envious looks out towards the place of death, where the crash of knobsticks and the hollow groans of the doomed had almost ceased. Not a cry, however, floated from thence, for no women had been among those named. All were warriors; and the warriors of our race faced death in those days without a cry, albeit the groan which often followed the crash of the knobstick was the voice of the parting *itongo*, or spirit, not of the body which had contained it. And of those who had been named a number were of Ncwelo's kraal; others were of the houses of other chiefs, including that of Senkonya; some few, indeed, were of my own particular fighters. These last, on being touched, were immediately disarmed by their brethren, and turned over to the slayers.

Now, when the three witch-finders had completed their task, and returned once more into the presence of the King, an immense sigh of gladness went up from all the people – a very heave of the bosom of a whole nation relieved; and with one voice all broke forth into a fierce song of thanksgiving that so many *abatagati* had been removed from their midst. But I, if nobody else, knew that they were crying aloud their thanks too soon. For among those thus named was no man of any great distinction, albeit a petty chief or two. I knew, however, that the greater number of them were of the families of chiefs, some of great note. There was to be yet another stage in this grim game, whose stakes were the lives of men. "Ye have done well, sons of the stranger's magic," said the King, as the three young *izanusu* returned to his presence, their eyeballs rolling, and their mouths still drooping foam after the frenzied excitement attendant upon the discharge of their dread office. "Well have ye done; and the

wizard spells of those ye have named soar aloft to the heavens beneath the wings of yonder vultures?” – with a glance in the direction of the hill of slaughter, upon which already multitudes of the great white pinions were beating down. “Still the blood which has been shed is not dry. Who am I, that others claim the right to slay – here, at my very gates? *Hau!* I am no King!” – and now the tone was fierce and bitter, and those who listened trembled once more. “I am a servant – a slave – lower than the lowest of the Amaholi – until those who shed this blood at my gates are made known. Wherefore, now, Masuka, hasten to rid us of them, so that we may sleep in peace once more. There are yet those who have not been within touch of the wand.”

A dead silence of eagerness and awe fell upon all the people at these words. For the only ones who had not been within touch of the witch-finder’s wand were the *izinduna* grouped at the side of the King, and the *izanus* themselves. Could it be that from these more victims were to be chosen? A flash of anxiety was to be seen on the faces of more than one of the councillors; and I, from where I stood, a little way down the circle of armed men, saw just such a shade of fear flit across that of Tyuyumane. My father’s lined features, however, only puckered into a contemptuous grin. But before Masuka had time to obey the King’s behest, Notalwa rushed forward howling that now was the time for him and his “dogs” – that the stranger’s *múti* had been tried, and that now it was his own turn.

Kalipe was standing near the Great Great One, and as the head *izanus* thus bounded forward he advanced a pace, and I could see that he held his broad *umkonto* gripped, and in readiness. So, too, did the picked warriors ranged at his back; and I, who knew what underlay all this, was likewise prepared to spring up, and deal forth death. But Umzilikazi changed not a muscle, as he sat playing with his broad-bladed spear, similar to the one which he had bestowed upon me. Yet in his eyes burned a soft and cruel light, as he met the glowering glances of Notalwa and the *izanus*.

“Patience!” he said, softly and pleasantly, waving these back. “Proceed, Masuka.”

The old Mosutu muttered a few words to one of his young assistants, who started off in the direction of the magician’s hut, and presently reappeared, bearing upon his head a large bowl of burnt clay. This was lowered to the earth, and now I knew that something terrible would be manifested; for I had already looked into that bowl myself, and terrible things had been shown me, which, indeed, came to pass, as you know, *Nkose*.

The bowl was half-filled with some black yet shining, liquid; and over this old Masuka crouched, spreading forth his skinny and clawlike hands; now chanting high, shrill snatches of a strange song, now muttering incantations in an unknown tongue. Then he looked up.

“Draw near, Black Elephant, thou ruler of the world,” he said. “Look in the face of this *múti*, and say what thou seest.”

Umzilikazi rose, and, advancing with majestic step, stood, and with head slightly bent, gazed downward into the bowl. All the people held their breath for awe.

“I see a face,” he said. “Yes; it is the face of a man having a ring on. Hither, Mcumbete! Look with me. Whose is the face?”

The old *induna*, his brow clouded with anxiety, advanced to the side of the King.

“*Hau!*” he cried, with a start of amazement. “It is indeed a face, Great Great One. It is the face of Ncwelo.”

A deep murmur of awe went up from all who heard. Ncwelo, though a chief of some influence, was not an *induna*. His place at the head of his people was near me. Glancing at him, I could see that his look was that of a man who knows himself to be already dead.

“Look again, Mcumbete,” said the King. “I see another face. Whose is it?”

“Ha!” cried the old *induna*, trembling with awe. “It is the face of Senkonya.”

A cruel smile played upon the King’s lips as he bade him look again.

“It is the face of Ntelani, Great Great One,” almost yelled the old *induna*.

“Look again, Mcumbete, look again,” laughed the King.

“I see now Tyuyumane,” faltered the old man. “Ha,” he went on, with a gasp. “Now I see a head, and it is wreathed in snakes – a head, a face. It is the face of Notalwa, the chief of the *izanusu*.”

The terror-stricken countenance, the shaking limbs, of the old *induna* were too true, too real, for any suspicion of make-believe. There was a silence of indescribable awe upon all who heard, all who beheld. It was broken by Notalwa.

Uttering hideous yells, the head *isanusi* leaped in the air, dancing and roaring, bellowing forth all his incantations and wizardry. Stripping off his zebra robe, he gashed himself until his body streamed with blood, mouthing out wild predictions as to the fate that would speedily befall our race for supplanting its own sorcerers in favour of the magic of a stranger. But the King, with a frown, bade him cease his bellowing, for he might early need all his magic for himself. The others named sat still as stones, but their demeanour was various. Upon the face of my father Ntelani, was the set drawnness of despair, but it was the courage of a dogged despair; fierce, fearless to the last. Senkonya, too, looked as one who had already tasted death, but Tyuyumane, ah! his look was that of one who had tasted death a hundred times over. He was a tall, strong man, with a sullen and evil face, very near in blood to the King – indeed, it had been whispered, though cautiously – that he was an elder son of Matyobane. Now he showed signs of strong and restless fear. His glance rolled to right and to left, as though seeking means of escape. But behind each of those thus named had stealthily closed up a group of armed warriors.

And now the attention of all was diverted to old Masuka, who had fallen into one of his trances, and was mouthing wildly. Then he began to speak. He told of a pool, overhung by rocks, and whose waters reflected the stars and the waning moon. He told of the assembling of men by stealth, and of the tramp of horses, of the talking together of men who wore head-rings, and of men who wore large hats. Then he described so exactly the *indaba* which we had witnessed – the Great Great One and I – that it seemed he must have been present concealed on the spot where we had lain and listened to it. But all this he told in a very low, and scarcely audible, voice, only to be heard by such few as were immediately bending over him, among whom was myself; for the King had beckoned me to his side. Then, when he had finished, he lay as still as though dead, and the faces had faded out of the *múti* bowl, whose contents were as smooth and shining as before.

“I think we have heard enough,” said Umzilikazi. Then turning to the *izimbonga*, he bade them cry aloud to the people to depart, but that, until the third day after the new moon, none should venture beyond the chain of the furthest tattle-posts. And the people leaped gladly to their feet, shouting the *Bayéte*, for their hearts were light again. Death had passed through their ranks, yet there were still many left.

As for those *izinduna* who were named last, few at that time knew what their fate was, or what became of them, nor yet of Notalwa, the head of the *izanusu*, who lay at first pretending to be dead. But I knew; likewise did I know that every one of those who had gone forth that day to the hill of slaughter was concerned in the treasonable plot which had for its object the death of the King. Yet, because of its mystery, and the witch-finding on such a large scale, and the slaughter of so many warriors as *abatagati*, a great fear rested upon all the people for many days. And the marvellous power of Masuka as a magician was in the minds of all; for, of course, none knew that the Great Great One and I had witnessed that dark and treasonable midnight gathering; nor, indeed, that any had.

Chapter Five. The Boer Laager

It was our custom, *Nkose*, when a man was smelt out as *umtagati*, that his whole family and kraal should be eaten up too; but Umzilikazi, who loved not killing for its own sake, except in war, forbore to observe this custom in its entirety. He spared the relatives of those who had been named, allowing their wives and children to live, only exacting a fine of cattle from each house. But the case of Ncwelo he regarded as the worst of the lot; for Ncwelo occupied a position of trust at an important outpost; and this position he had turned to account by hatching treason; wherefore, immediately upon his being named, a party of armed men was sent out to put every one of his house to the assegai – even to his very dogs – and to sweep off all his cattle into the royal herds. The same fate fell upon the house of Notalwa; but, as regarded the others, the Great Great One was of opinion that sufficient example had been made.

Now, although it meant death to whisper a word as to what had become of those five principal evildoers who had been named, yet my chief wife, Nangeza, would give me no rest on the subject; for herein was a mystery, and, being a woman, she must needs have a finger in it; so, thinking I would tell her, she tried all sorts of devices, such as creeping up to listen whenever I talked with another *induna*. At last, losing patience, I smote her; for, although we Amazulu do not beat our wives overmuch, as you white people say, yet there are times when hard wood is the only means of staying a woman's tongue. Besides, Nangeza was becoming altogether too troublesome, and already the young warriors would laugh among themselves, and put their hands to their mouths and say, "*Hau!* Untúswa is mighty in battle; a fighter who strikes hard. But – a chief? *Hau!* A woman is chief over him." Now, I thought things had gone far enough in this direction, wherefore I smote Nangeza.

She snarled like a she-leopard first struck by the spear.

"Good, Untúswa! Thou hast struck her through whom thou art made great. Thou shalt weep for it in blood one day."

I felt minded to kill her, and make an end of it all. But I refrained, and went to the huts of my other wives, instead, and made merry with them. "Now," I thought, "I will take ten, twenty, wives. So will Nangeza, perchance, find her match among all these."

The day of the new moon drew on, and all the fighting men of the nation were called up to Ekupumuleni, all, save such as were out in small parties spying for the Amabuna, and this especially to the south and westward. For several nights there was war-dancing, and all the regiments were doctored for battle; yet, against whom they were to be sent few among them knew, and those who did know told not. Finally came in two swift runners, one a little after the other. The Amabuna were drawing near, with many wagons and horses and guns, drawing near to take over our nation, to proclaim the traitor, Tyuyumane, King.

The night was rendered hideous with the howlings of the *izanus* making *múti*, because of the new moon, and in the morning we started from Ekupumuleni, strong to the strength of nearly our whole army. No war-songs were allowed to be sung, and all shouting and noise was forbidden. In silence we meant to steal upon and enclose this formidable enemy, who was as the on-sweeping locust-swarm – resistless, numberless, devouring.

Half a day's march beyond Ncwelo's kraal, our runners came in to say that the advance guard of the Amabuna was at hand – ten horsemen, armed with long guns, and with them nearly as many servants of a yellow colour, also mounted and armed. Then the King, who accompanied the *impi*, called me aside, and together we ascended a bush-crowned hill, whence we could see for a distance around.

For a great way the country was grown with bush about as high as a man's head, with here and there groves of forest trees. Now, from where we lay we could see at a long distance off the wagons of the Amabuna creeping onward, drawn by their long lines of oxen, and behind them herds of cattle, feeding as they travelled. But between all this and ourselves horsemen were riding – men similar to the two whom we had seen at that meeting of traitors by Ncwelo's Pool. They were advancing in a double line, little knowing whither – advancing carelessly, to greet the new King, Tyuyumane – to enslave, as they thought, a conquered nation. Umzilikazi's eyes glowed like those of a lion whose fangs are already in the throat of the giraffe.

“See there, Untúswa!” he whispered. “Now the game begins. Ha! ha!”

The Amabuna had arrived immediately beneath us, chattering carelessly in their ugly and head-cleaving tongue, which sounds to us as the croaking of many crows, and smoking *gwai* in their wooden pipes. But we could see what they could not – the low-lying, crouching shapes of hundreds of dark forms, writhing, crawling like serpents, among the long grass and thick bush around. Just then, however, the horses began to sniff uneasily, and throw forward their ears, as though they knew that an enemy lurked close at hand. The horsemen soon saw this, and halted; but at that moment there advanced towards them a man – one of ourselves. It was Notalwa.

Now, upon what followed, the King and I looked with eagerness; for Notalwa, being only a witch-doctor, and no warrior, the Great Great One had judged him the best-fitted to play this part, which was to detain the Amabuna in converse while our *impi* surrounded and stole in upon them the more completely – promising him, in the event of failure, the most terrible death by torture ever yet devised; and this evil-doer, being a coward and no warrior, had caught eagerly at a chance of saving his own forfeited life. So now he greeted the Amabuna, saying that Tyuyumane and the other traitors were behind him, and would be up in a very short time, for that now the deed was done, and the sun might soon blacken his face for a dead King.

But while he was yet speaking, one of the servants of the Amabuna caught sight of the gleam of a spotted shield in the bushes, and cried aloud his discovery. And then, further concealment being useless, our warriors rose in masses, and poured forward upon the Amabuna, still in complete silence, for all shouting had been strictly forbidden, lest it should travel to the ears of those with the wagons and the herds, who, being warned, might escape.

When they saw how entirely they were hemmed in, the thought of the Amabuna was no longer to dismount, but to fight their way through. They discharged their long guns into the thick of our on-rushing warriors, many of whom fell; and then, using them as clubs, strove to hew their way through the ranks of our shields.

But their horses were utterly terrified, and plunging and squealing, were almost beyond control. The leader of the Amabuna, whom I recognised as one of the two who had taken part in the *indaba* at the pool, was a mighty man in battle. He swept his clubbed gun, hither and thither, and men seemed to fall before him like grass before an advancing fire. But, as fast as they swept down our warriors, others would rise in their places. A line of spear-points barred the way at every turn, and soon the horses, disembowelled, hamstrung, were of no further use, as they sank down, uttering wild screams of agony and terror; and their riders, thus dismounted, were struck by countless spears the moment they touched the ground. *Hau, Nkose!* In far less time than I have taken to say these words those Amabuna and their servants were all dead men. Even their horses were cut to pieces; for when we “see red,” we Amazulu spare no living thing.

All, did I say? *Hau!* I should have said all, save one; for the leader of those, our enemies, who was a strong, fearless man, a fine fighter, had somehow or other succeeded in breaking through our lines. He was mounted on a powerful horse, which was wounded: we could see that. We could see also that the man was wounded, for he swayed in his saddle as he rode, and seemed to keep his seat only with great difficulty. But, wounded though it was, the horse was going swift as the wind.

Although the most fleet-footed of our warriors were streaming in pursuit, he was leaving them farther and farther behind.

“Hurry now, Untúswa,” said the King. “Push on thine own men, and send word to Kalipe, to form up the whole body of the army. Run not, so as not to arrive breathless, yet march as rapidly as possible, and strike yon evil-doers while yet surprise is in their midst. Strike them hard, and spare none; for these Amabuna are as a devastating plague of locusts in whatsoever land they appear. Go!”

I saluted hurriedly and already was speeding down the hillside. The warriors had formed into rank, awaiting the commands of the Great Great One. Quickly making known the word to Kalipe, we started, eager to pour forth the blood of this accursed people, before whom other nations go down, like trees before the storm, never to rise again.

We were not long in coming upon the wagons of the strangers – not far behind the man who had escaped – for, as we drew near, we could see them bringing their wagons together, so as to form a square enclosure. But most of their cattle were still outside. We could see them, too, as they moved hither and thither – large men most of them, with hairy faces, and clad in the tanned skins of animals; indeed, their wide leather breeches made a swishing sound as they walked. We could make out their women, too, helping to fortify the camp, as hard as the fighting men; and many a grunt and smothered burst of laughter went up from our young warriors at the sight of those, for their women looked even as sacks, and yet more devoid of shape, and their faces, looking out from great bonnets were ugly. Yet they worked hard, pushing at the wheels of the wagons, and talking in their harsh and displeasing tongue.

Now we consulted hurriedly together, Kalipe and I, and sent forward a strong body of the fleetest-footed of our warriors, that they should drive off the cattle. These dashed forward with wild yelling, and soon we saw them in among the herdsman, spearing right and left. The Amabuna, behind the wagons opened fire upon them; but, beyond killing a good many of their own cattle, the fire was harmless, for our people were sheltered behind the beasts as they swept them away.

Meanwhile we had been forming up, in shape like a half-moon; and, as the bellowing, plunging mass of horns and hides and lashing tails and eyeballs wildly rolling, receded in clouds of dust, we were already close upon the fortified camp of the Amabuna. The wagons seemed to spout forth flashes of fire, the dust jetted up beneath our feet where the bullets struck. Our men, too, began to fall; for as we drew nearer we were in the most deadly range, and the long guns of the Amabuna shot both strong and true.

Now we raised the war shout, and our moon-shaped formation extended its horns until the wagon-fort was completely encircled with our men. We rush forward! *Hau!* it is as the breaking of the sea upon the shore as we pour over the wagons. But those within shoot into our faces. The foremost of our ranks drop back. That blaze of fire, the tearing of the shot, daunts them.

“Turn not!” I cry. “Who will be named coward! On, on! the eye of the Black Elephant watches his children. Which of them shall it behold flee?”

Flourishing aloft my shield, I leap over the tongue of a wagon. Others pour after me. Ha! we are within the enclosure. Then a gun is pointed full at my chest, and, as the flash spurts forth, I see through it the countenance of the evil Ibuna, who spoke ill and roughly of the King.

But though I see the flash, the bullet passes over my head unhurt, yet it hums into the thick of those behind, and there is more than one yell of death. Now I spring upon this great Ibuna, but before I can strike him my assegai – the King’s Assegai – is dashed from my hand by a clubbed gun. It has been done by one of their women – a great, ugly, toad-like witch, with grey hair. But immediately half a dozen spears enter her body, and she falls yelling. At the same time, under cover of my shield, I seize the great *umkonto* again, and close with the leader, hand to hand. He has a knife – no time has he to load – and we are at too close quarters for the long gun to be clubbed again. He aims now a furious kick at me. Ha! is it thus that such vermin fight? Then I leap upon him, and with one mighty stroke my great assegai lays him open from the throat downwards.

“*Hau!* dog of the Amabuna,” I cried, as he fell, “dost care now that the smoke of thine ugly carcase should reach the nostrils of the King?”

Now was a terrible medley of Amabuna and children of the Great Great One. The air was black and heavy with smoke, and the jarring crash of weapons, and the thunder of the shock, as our *impi* came, thick and fast, pouring over the wagons on all sides, and a forest of tufted shields was dancing in the moke, and blades tossed redly on high, reeking with the stream of life. And against the vaporous gloom could be seen the outlined faces of our warriors, the children of blood, as, with teeth bared, they threw their heads back and howled like hyenas because they could not get enough to slay, could not get at it quick enough. And the Amabuna fought – yes, they fought – and when it came to the last their women fought more fiercely than the men; yet all were brave. But what could they do against us, against our might? Driven hither and thither, broken up into handfuls, they stood back to back, men and women alike, sick with wounds and the flow of their own blood, that ran in streams; yet they struck and struck. Ha! our spears were blunted that day, and reddened indeed, and our pealing yells of rage and victory rent the skies again and again!

All were slain. We spared none. Their women also we killed, for not even among the younger did we see any who were fit to spare and take before the King, so evil-featured and unwashed and shapeless were these. The children, too, were slain, having their brains dashed out against the wagon-wheel, or flung into the air to be caught upon the spears of the warriors as they descended again.

The battle was over now, for none were left to fight. Our warriors, like wild beasts who had tasted blood, were rolling their eyes hither and thither in search of more life to destroy. But there was none.

Then something seemed to move in one of the wagons. There was a wild howl, and a rush. My brother Mgwali was first. Plunging his hand beneath some sacking, he drew out the body of a little child.

It was a girl-child, and as Mgwali plucked it from its place of shelter, and held it aloft by the back of its clothing, I could see that it was yet unhurt. But it was terribly frightened. Its great blue eyes were starting from its head, and its long hair, like shining threads of sunlight, streamed down over the dark shoulder and arm of Mgwali, dabbling in the blood which yet lay undried upon him.

“*Hau!* Throw it up, Mgwali!” cried those who stood by, gripping their assegais ready to receive its little body on the blades. But before this could happen I leaped to the spot.

“Hold!” I roared, extending my stick. “Hold!”

The young men snarled, like hungry dogs reft of a bone. But they dared say no word, knowing that he who disputed my orders in the field of battle tasted death that moment. Still Mgwali held the child aloft, gazing at me in wonder. But at a further glance from me he set it down.

“See!” I said. “This is not a child of the Amabuna. It has the look of a child of a race of kings!”

The little thing sat on the ground, staring at the ring of grim faces and bloody weapons, trembling, and too frightened even to cry. And there was a look about it which moved me to spare its life. Its eyes were blue as the heavens above, and its soft skin and pink cheeks, and red, flower-like mouth marked it off as quite a different race to the leather-skinned herd we had just slain. So I began to speak it fair and soft, and found that it understood a few of my words, and, lo! it crept over to me, and began to hide behind my shield, hoping to shut out the fierce faces of the warriors who stood looking on, uttering many a deep-throated gasp of amazement. And well they might, *Nkose*; for here was I, the fiercest fighter of all that blood-stained *impi*– I, who had slain with my own hand as many of the foe as any other could boast of – and yet here was this little thing, with the eyes of heaven, and hair like a stream of sunlight, shrinking up against me for protection and shelter, as though I were her father. In truth, it was strange.

Not now, however, was the time for indulging in any further softness of this kind; so, placing the little one in the care of Mgwali, and making it known that whoever should attempt to harm her should pay the penalty with his life, I went to muster the warriors, who were busy plundering the wagons.

Great stores of *gwai* were there, and sacks of corn and flour, and all manner of things which were good. Such, however, were spoil for the Great Great One, to whom, of course, we had despatched runners immediately, announcing our victory.

Now we mustered our ranks to return in triumph to the King. *Whau!* we had lost many. In heaps our slain lay around – for the long guns of the Amabuna shot quickly and true. And there, in the midst of their wagon-fort, lay the ripped corpses of the Amabuna; and already the vultures were gathering in clouds overhead. Then as we marched, black and terrible, to the place where the Great Great One awaited, with the thunder of one loud and mighty voice, the warriors sang —

*“Ningepinde nimhlab ’Umzilikazi,
Leyo ’Nkunzi mnyama,
Leyo ’Búbese mninimandhla!
Ca-bo! Ca-bo!”*

*“Not again shall you stab Umzilikazi,
That Black Bull,
That Mighty Lion!
Oh, no! Oh, no!”*

Chapter Six.

The Burning of Ekupumuleni

The spoils which were taken from the wagons of the Amabuna pleased the King greatly. The wagons themselves were useless to us, because none among us understood how to make the oxen draw them. So a party of men was ordered off to burn them, having first removed all the iron parts which might be of use. But what pleased the Great Great One most was the number of long guns and the plentiful supply of powder and ball which we took; and this, indeed, some of us did understand the use of moderately well. Howbeit, it was long before we became skilled in the use of them, and by that time, *Nkose*, nearly all the powder and ball was expended. But the tiny captive, with the eyes of heaven and hair like the crest of the sun, the Great Great One said I had done right to save. Yet, as he knew not what to do with her, he ordered that I should be a father to her for the present, adding that, as the last time I had spared one from the slaughter it had brought good to him and the nation – meaning the case of old Masuka – so now, perhaps, the same would hold. Now, I was right glad of the King's decision, *Nkose*, for I had already begun to look upon this little one as child of my own. So I made her over to the youngest of my wives, Fumana, who took care of her and loved her greatly.

Now, although we had made an end, utter and complete, of those Amabuna who came against us, and of the *abatagati* among ourselves who had plotted with them, yet the mind of Umzilikazi was not at ease. For he knew something of that people, had heard how they swarmed in such numbers over the country to the westward as to leave no further room, but were crowded out, and ever moving onward to seize upon new lands. Even then, as we had heard, they were plotting to seize land from Dingane, and if, as might befall, the Zulu power was worsted, and the House of Senzangakona forced to seek out other country, might not we have the remaining strength of Dingane falling upon us any day, even as we had fallen upon and swept aside those who lay in our own path? Further, although of those Amabuna whom we had eaten up, not one was left alive to carry back the tidings to his own people, yet, sooner or later, such tidings would reach them, and then we might expect their vengeance. Now, if those comparatively few whom we had slain – some score and a half of families – had fought so fiercely and dealt so much death amid our ranks with their long guns, what sort of foes would their kinsfolk prove, assailing us in force and unhampered by women and children? Or they might form a temporary alliance with Dingane; and then how should we stand against the combined strength of two such terrible and formidable foes?

All these considerations were debated gravely by the King and a secret council of the *izinduna*, of whom I was one, and it was decided to abandon Ekupumuleni and the surrounding country, and to march upon and seize the fair lands occupied by the People of the Blue Cattle, upon which I had reported. Howbeit, the real reason for this decision was not to be talked about, a good and sufficient reason for the people at large being that the land upon which we meant to swoop down was better than that wherein we now dwelt.

It took time to send round to all the cattle outposts and muster the nation at large, but this was done at last. The cattle and the movable property was sent on in charge of the women and slaves, and for several days the *izanusis* were busy making *múti*, and doctoring us all for our new undertaking. Then came the last night we were to spend in Ekupumuleni, and through the hours of darkness the wild howlings of the *izanusis* sounded at intervals; for it was no light thing thus quitting the place which had been our home for so long a time.

But with dawn of day, when all men turned out fully armed – for a muster of our whole fighting strength had been ordered to march out from Ekupumuleni in fitting state – a shiver of amazement, and horror, and dismay ran through all. And well it might. For in the middle of the great open space had been reared four stakes, and, impaled upon each, quivered the trussed-up body of a man; and the

groan of horror and of fear deepened, for in the agonised, distorted features of those four all men recognised the traitorous *izinduna* and the head witch-doctor, Notalwa.

This, then, was the secret of their fate, which so far had lain in dark and terrible mystery. They had been kept for such an end.

Five chief traitors had there been; yet here were but four! The first astonishment over, men looked at each other – their eyes asking in mute surprise where was the fifth? And of those who thus marvelled none wondered more than myself.

On the centre stake, raised half the height of a man above the others, was the body of Tyuyumane. On either hand of him were impaled Ncwelo and Senkonya, and, a little in front, Notalwa. Where, then, was Ntelani? Where, then, was my father? Well, wherever he was, it was not there.

The stake of impalement is a terrible thing, *Nkose*, and was seldom used among us – only once, indeed, since we had gone out from Zululand, and then in the case of three chiefs who had come in to *konza* to Umzilikazi, and had departed, laughing at their promise. Now, however, by the hideous fate to which he had adjudged these ringleaders of the conspiracy, it was clear that the King intended to strike terror into all who might at any future time be tempted to travel the same road.

They were still alive, those wretches – for a man may live a day or more in that torment, and these had not long been on the stakes. And as we stood gazing upon them thus suffering, several *izimbonga* came running forth from the *isigodhlo* – roaring like lions, trumpeting like elephants, bellowing like bulls – shouting the praise and the royal titles of the King. And from the whole army, ranged on either side of the open space in two immense half-moons, these were taken up, and re-echoed again and again.

But Umzilikazi, advancing down the centre, with his head thrown proudly back, halted, and held up his hand.

“Cry not to me the *Bayéte*

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