

CHAPTER IV. MAMEENA

For a while I contemplated the roof and sides of the hut by the light which entered it through the smoke-vent and the door-hole, wondering whose it might be and how I came there.

Then I tried to sit up, and instantly was seized with agony in the region of the ribs, which I found were bound about with broad strips of soft tanned hide. Clearly they, or some of them, were broken.

What had broken them? I asked myself, and in a flash everything came back to me. So I had escaped with my life, as the old dwarf, "Opener-of-Roads," had told me that I should. Certainly he was an excellent prophet; and if he spoke truth in this matter, why not in others? What was I to make of it all? How could a black savage, however ancient, foresee the future?

By induction from the past, I supposed; and yet what amount of induction would suffice to show him the details of a forthcoming accident that was to happen to me through the agency of a wild beast with a peculiarly shaped horn? I gave it up, as before and since that day I have found it necessary to do in the case of many other events in life. Indeed, the question is one that I often have had cause to ask where Kafir "witch-doctors" or prophets are concerned, notably in the instance of a certain Mavovo, of whom I hope to tell one day, whose predictions saved

my life and those of my companions.

Just then I heard the sound of someone creeping through the bee-hole of the hut, and half-closed my eyes, as I did not feel inclined for conversation. The person came and stood over me, and somehow--by instinct, I suppose--I became aware that my visitor was a woman. Very slowly I lifted my eyelids, just enough to enable me to see her.

There, standing in a beam of golden light that, passing through the smoke-hole, pierced the soft gloom of the hut, stood the most beautiful creature that I had ever seen--that is, if it be admitted that a person who is black, or rather copper-coloured, can be beautiful.

She was a little above the medium height, not more, with a figure that, so far as I am a judge of such matters, was absolutely perfect--that of a Greek statue indeed. On this point I had an opportunity of forming an opinion, since, except for her little bead apron and a single string of large blue beads about her throat, her costume was--well, that of a Greek statue. Her features showed no trace of the negro type; on the contrary, they were singularly well cut, the nose being straight and fine and the pouting mouth that just showed the ivory teeth between, very small. Then the eyes, large, dark and liquid, like those of a buck, set beneath a smooth, broad forehead on which the curling, but not woolly, hair grew low. This hair, by the way, was not dressed up in any of the eccentric native fashions, but simply parted in the middle and tied in a big knot over the nape of the neck, the little ears peeping

out through its tresses. The hands, like the feet, were very small and delicate, and the curves of the bust soft and full without being coarse, or even showing the promise of coarseness.

A lovely woman, truly; and yet there was something not quite pleasing about that beautiful face; something, notwithstanding its childlike outline, which reminded me of a flower breaking into bloom, that one does not associate with youth and innocence. I tried to analyse what this might be, and came to the conclusion that without being hard, it was too clever and, in a sense, too reflective. I felt even then that the brain within the shapely head was keen and bright as polished steel; that this woman was one made to rule, not to be man's toy, or even his loving companion, but to use him for her ends.

She dropped her chin till it hid the little, dimple-like depression below her throat, which was one of her charms, and began not to look at, but to study me, seeing which I shut my eyes tight and waited. Evidently she thought that I was still in my swoon, for now she spoke to herself in a low voice that was soft and sweet as honey.

"A small man," she said; "Saduko would make two of him, and the other"--who was he, I wondered--"three. His hair, too, is ugly; he cuts it short and it sticks up like that on a cat's back. Iya!" (i.e. Piff!), and she moved her hand contemptuously, "a feather of a man. But white--white, one of those who rule. Why, they all of them know that he is their master. They call him 'He-who-never-Sleeps.' They say that he

has the courage of a lioness with young--he who got away when Dingaan killed Piti [Retief] and the Boers; they say that he is quick and cunning as a snake, and that Panda and his great indunas think more of him than of any white man they know. He is unmarried also, though they say, too, that twice he had a wife, who died, and now he does not turn to look at women, which is strange in any man, and shows that he will escape trouble and succeed. Still, it must be remembered that they are all ugly down here in Zululand, cows, or heifers who will be cows. Piff! no more."

She paused for a little while, then went on in her dreamy, reflective voice:

"Now, if he met a woman who is not merely a cow or a heifer, a woman cleverer than himself, even if she were not white, I wonder--"

At this point I thought it well to wake up. Turning my head I yawned, opened my eyes and looked at her vaguely, seeing which her expression changed in a flash from that of brooding power to one of moved and anxious girlhood; in short, it became most sweetly feminine.

"You are Mameena?" I said; "is it not so?"

"Oh, yes, Inkoosi," she answered, "that is my poor name. But how did you hear it, and how do you know me?"

"I heard it from one Saduko"--here she frowned a little--"and others, and I knew you because you are so beautiful"--an incautious speech at which she broke into a dazzling smile and tossed her deer-like head.

"Am I?" she asked. "I never knew it, who am only a common Zulu girl to whom it pleases the great white chief to say kind things, for which I thank him"; and she made a graceful little reverence, just bending one knee. "But," she went on quickly, "whatever else I be, I am of no knowledge, not fit to tend you who are hurt. Shall I go and send my oldest mother?"

"Do you mean her whom your father calls the 'Worn-out-old-Cow,' and whose ear he shot off?"

"Yes, it must be she from the description," she answered with a little shake of laughter, "though I never heard him give her that name."

"Or if you did, you have forgotten it," I said dryly. "Well, I think not, thank you. Why trouble her, when you will do quite as well? If there is milk in that gourd, perhaps you will give me a drink of it."

She flew to the bowl like a swallow, and next moment was kneeling at my side and holding it to my lips with one hand, while with the other she supported my head.

"I am honoured," she said. "I only came to the hut the moment before

you woke, and seeing you still lost in swoon, I wept--look, my eyes are still wet [they were, though how she made them so I do not know]--for I feared lest that sleep should be but the beginning of the last."

"Quite so," I said; "it is very good of you. And now, since your fears are groundless--thanks be to the heavens--sit down, if you will, and tell me the story of how I came here."

She sat down, not, I noted, as a Kafir woman ordinarily does, in a kind of kneeling position, but on a stool.

"You were carried into the kraal, Inkoosi," she said, "on a litter of boughs. My heart stood still when I saw that litter coming; it was no more heart; it was cold iron, because I thought the dead or injured man was--" And she paused.

"Saduko?" I suggested.

"Not at all, Inkoosi--my father."

"Well, it wasn't either of them," I said, "so you must have felt happy."

"Happy! Inkoosi, when the guest of our house had been wounded, perhaps to death--the guest of whom I have heard so much, although by misfortune I was absent when he arrived."

"A difference of opinion with your eldest mother?" I suggested.

"Yes, Inkoosi; my own is dead, and I am not too well treated here. She called me a witch."

"Did she?" I answered. "Well, I do not altogether wonder at it; but please continue your story."

"There is none, Inkoosi. They brought you here, they told me how the evil brute of a buffalo had nearly killed you in the pool; that is all."

"Yes, yes, Mameena; but how did I get out of the pool?"

"Oh, it seems that your servant, Sikauli, the bastard, leapt into the water and engaged the attention of the buffalo which was kneading you into the mud, while Saduko got on to its back and drove his assegai down between its shoulders to the heart, so that it died. Then they pulled you out of the mud, crushed and almost drowned with water, and brought you to life again. But afterwards you became senseless, and so lay wandering in your speech until this hour."

"Ah, he is a brave man, is Saduko."

"Like others, neither more nor less," she replied with a shrug of her rounded shoulders. "Would you have had him let you die? I think the brave man was he who got in front of the bull and twisted its nose, not

he who sat on its back and poked at it with a spear."

At this period in our conversation I became suddenly faint and lost count of things, even of the interesting Mameena. When I awoke again she was gone, and in her place was old Umbezi, who, I noticed, took down a mat from the side of the hut and folded it up to serve as a cushion before he sat himself upon the stool.

"Greeting, Macumazahn," he said when he saw that I was awake; "how are you?"

"As well as can be hoped," I answered; "and how are you, Umbezi?"

"Oh, bad, Macumazahn; even now I can scarcely sit down, for that bull had a very hard nose; also I am swollen up in front where Sikauli struck me when he tumbled out of the tree. Also my heart is cut in two because of our losses."

"What losses, Umbezi?"

"Wow! Macumazahn, the fire that those low fellows of mine lit got to our camp and burned up nearly everything--the meat, the skins, and even the ivory, which it cracked so that it is useless. That was an unlucky hunt, for although it began so well, we have come out of it quite naked; yes, with nothing at all except the head of the bull with the cleft horn, that I thought you might like to keep."

"Well, Umbezi, let us be thankful that we have come out with our lives--that is, if I am going to live," I added.

"Oh, Macumazahn, you will live without doubt, and be none the worse. Two of our doctors--very clever men--have looked at you and said so. One of them tied you up in all those skins, and I promised him a heifer for the business, if he cured you, and gave him a goat on account. But you must lie here for a month or more, so he says. Meanwhile Panda has sent for the hides which he demanded of me to be made into shields, and I have been obliged to kill twenty-five of my beasts to provide them--that is, of my own and of those of my headmen."

"Then I wish you and your headmen had killed them before we met those buffalo, Umbezi," I groaned, for my ribs were paining me very much.

"Send Saduko and Sikauli here; I would thank them for saving my life."

So they came, next morning, I think, and I thanked them warmly enough.

"There, there, Baas," said Scowl, who was literally weeping tears of joy at my return from delirium and coma to the light of life and reason; not tears of Mameena's sort, but real ones, for I saw them running down his snub nose, that still bore marks of the eagle's claws. "There, there, say no more, I beseech you. If you were going to die, I wished to die, too, who, if you had left it, should only have wandered through the world without a heart. That is why I jumped into the pool, not because I

am brave."

When I heard this my own eyes grew moist. Oh, it is the fashion to abuse natives, but from whom do we meet with more fidelity and love than from these poor wild Kafirs that so many of us talk of as black dirt which chances to be fashioned to the shape of man?

"As for myself, Inkoosi," added Saduko, "I only did my duty. How could I have held up my head again if the bull had killed you while I walked away alive? Why, the very girls would have mocked at me. But, oh, his skin was tough. I thought that assegai would never get through it."

Observe the difference between these two men's characters. The one, although no hero in daily life, imperils himself from sheer, dog-like fidelity to a master who had given him many hard words and sometimes a flogging in punishment for drunkenness, and the other to gratify his pride, also perhaps because my death would have interfered with his plans and ambitions in which I had a part to play. No, that is a hard saying; still, there is no doubt that Saduko always first took his own interests into consideration, and how what he did would reflect upon his prospects and repute, or influence the attainment of his desires. I think this was so even when Mameena was concerned--at any rate, in the beginning--although certainly he always loved her with a single-hearted passion that is very rare among Zulus.

Presently Scowl left the hut to prepare me some broth, whereon Saduko at

once turned the talk to this subject of Mameena.

He understood that I had seen her. Did I not think her very beautiful?

"Yes, very beautiful," I answered; "indeed, the most beautiful Zulu woman I have ever seen."

And very clever--almost as clever as a white?

"Yes, and very clever--much cleverer than most whites."

And--anything else?

"Yes; very dangerous, and one who could turn like the wind and blow hot and blow cold."

"Ah!" he said, thought a while, then added: "Well, what do I care how she blows to others, so long as she blows hot to me."

"Well, Saduko, and does she blow hot for you?"

"Not altogether, Macumazahn." Another pause. "I think she blows rather like the wind before a great storm."

"That is a biting wind, Saduko, and when we feel it we know that the storm will follow."

"I dare say that the storm will follow, Inkoosi, for she was born in a storm and storm goes with her; but what of that, if she and I stand it out together? I love her, and I had rather die with her than live with any other woman."

"The question is, Saduko, whether she would rather die with you than live with any other man. Does she say so?"

"Inkoosi, Mameena's thought works in the dark; it is like a white ant in its tunnel of mud. You see the tunnel which shows that she is thinking, but you do not see the thought within. Still, sometimes, when she believes that no one beholds or hears her"--here I bethought me of the young lady's soliloquy over my apparently senseless self--"or when she is surprised, the true thought peeps out of its tunnel. It did so the other day, when I pleaded with her after she had heard that I killed the buffalo with the cleft horn.

"'Do I love you?' she said. 'I know not for sure. How can I tell? It is not our custom that a maiden should love before she is married, for if she did so most marriages would be things of the heart and not of cattle, and then half the fathers of Zululand would grow poor and refuse to rear girl-children who would bring them nothing. You are brave, you are handsome, you are well-born; I would sooner live with you than with any other man I know--that is, if you were rich and, better still, powerful. Become rich and powerful, Saduko, and I think that I shall

love you.'

"I will, Mameena,' I answered; 'but you must wait. The Zulu nation was not fashioned from nothing in a day. First Chaka had to come.'

"Ah!' she said, and, my father, her eyes flashed. 'Ah! Chaka! There was a man! Be another Chaka, Saduko, and I will love you more--more than you can dream of--thus and thus,' and she flung her arms about me and kissed me as I was never kissed before, which, as you know, among us is a strange thing for a girl to do. Then she thrust me from her with a laugh, and added: 'As for the waiting, you must ask my father of that. Am I not his heifer, to be sold, and can I disobey my father?' And she was gone, leaving me empty, for it seemed as though she took my vitals with her. Nor will she talk thus any more, the white ant who has gone back into its tunnel."

"And did you speak to her father?"

"Yes, I spoke to him, but in an evil moment, for he had but just killed the cattle to furnish Panda's shields. He answered me very roughly. He said: 'You see these dead beasts which I and my people must slay for the king, or fall under his displeasure? Well, bring me five times their number, and we will talk of your marriage with my daughter, who is a maid in some request.'

"I answered that I understood and would try my best, whereon he became

more gentle, for Umbezi has a kindly heart.

"My son,' he said, 'I like you well, and since I saw you save Macumazahn, my friend, from that mad wild beast of a buffalo I like you better than before. Yet you know my case. I have an old name and am called the chief of a tribe, and many live on me. But I am poor, and this daughter of mine is worth much. Such a woman few men have bred. Well, I must make the best of her. My son-in-law must be one who will prop up my old age, one to whom, in my need or trouble, I could always go as to a dry log,[*] to break off some of its bark to make a fire to comfort me, not one who treads me into the mire as the buffalo did to Macumazahn. Now I have spoken, and I do not love such talk. Come back with the cattle, and I will listen to you, but meanwhile understand that I am not bound to you or to anyone; I shall take what my spirit sends me, which, if I may judge the future by the past, will not be much. One word more: Do not linger about this kraal too long, lest it should be said that you are the accepted suitor of Mameena. Go hence and do a man's work, and return with a man's reward, or not at all."

[*--In Zululand a son-in-law is known as "isigodo so mkwenyana", the "son-in-law log," for the reason stated in the text.--EDITOR.]

"Well, Saduko, that spear has an edge on it, has it not?" I answered.

"And now, what is your plan?"

"My plan is, Macumazahn," he said, rising from his seat, "to go hence and gather those who are friendly to me because I am my father's son and still the chief of the Amangwane, or those who are left of them, although I have no kraal and no hoof of kine. Then, within a moon, I hope, I shall return here to find you strong again and once more a man, and we will start out against Bangu, as I have whispered to you, with the leave of a High One, who has said that, if I can take any cattle, I may keep them for my pains."

"I don't know about that, Saduko. I never promised you that I would make war upon Bangu--with or without the king's leave."

"No, you never promised, but Zikali the Dwarf, the Wise Little One, said that you would--and does Zikali lie? Ask yourself, who will remember a certain saying of his about a buffalo with a cleft horn, a pool and a dry river-bed. Farewell, O my father Macumazahn; I walk with the dawn, and I leave Mameena in your keeping."

"You mean that you leave me in Mameena's keeping," I began, but already he was crawling through the hole in the hut.

Well, Mameena kept me very comfortably. She was always in evidence, yet not too much so.

Heedless of her malice and abuse, she headed off the "Worn-out-old-Cow," whom she knew I detested, from my presence. She saw personally to my

bandages, as well as to the cooking of my food, over which matter she had several quarrels with the bastard, Scowl, who did not like her, for on him she never wasted any of her sweet looks. Also, as I grew stronger, she sat with me a good deal, talking, since, by common consent, Mameena the fair was exempted from all the field, and even the ordinary household labours that fall to the lot of Kafir women. Her place was to be the ornament and, I may add, the advertisement of her father's kraal. Others might do the work, and she saw that they did it.

We discussed all sorts of things, from the Christian and other religions and European policy down, for her thirst for knowledge seemed to be insatiable. But what really interested her was the state of affairs in Zululand, with which she knew I was well acquainted, as a person who had played a part in its history and who was received and trusted at the Great House, and as a white man who understood the designs and plans of the Boers and of the Governor of Natal.

Now, if the old king, Panda, should chance to die, she would ask me, which of his sons did I think would succeed him--Umbelazi or Cetewayo, or another? Or, if he did not chance to die, which of them would he name his heir?

I replied that I was not a prophet, and that she had better ask Zikali the Wise.

"That is a very good idea," she said, "only I have no one to take me to

him, since my father would not allow me to go with Saduko, his ward."

Then she clapped her hands and added: "Oh, Macumazahn, will you take me?"

My father would trust me with you."

"Yes, I dare say," I answered; "but the question is, could I trust myself with you?"

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Oh, I understand. Then, after all, I am more to you than a black stone to play with?"

I think it was that unlucky joke of mine which first set Mameena thinking, "like a white ant in its tunnel," as Saduko said. At least, after it her manner towards me changed; she became very deferential; she listened to my words as though they were all wisdom; I caught her looking at me with her soft eyes as though I were quite an admirable object. She began to talk to me of her difficulties, her troubles and her ambitions. She asked me for my advice as to Saduko. On this point I replied to her that, if she loved him, and her father would allow it, presumably she had better marry him.

"I like him well enough, Macumazahn, although he wearies me at times; but love-- Oh, tell me, what is love?" Then she clasped her slim hands and gazed at me like a fawn.

"Upon my word, young woman," I replied, "that is a matter upon which I

should have thought you more competent to instruct me."

"Oh, Macumazahn," she said almost in a whisper, and letting her head droop like a fading lily, "you have never given me the chance, have you?" And she laughed a little, looking extremely attractive.

"Good gracious!"--or, rather, its Zulu equivalent--I answered, for I began to feel nervous. "What do you mean, Mameena? How could I--" There I stopped.

"I do not know what I mean, Macumazahn," she exclaimed wildly, "but I know well enough what you mean--that you are white as snow and I am black as soot, and that snow and soot don't mix well together."

"No," I answered gravely, "snow is good to look at, and so is soot, but mingled they make an ugly colour. Not that you are like soot," I added hastily, fearing to hurt her feelings. "That is your hue"--and I touched a copper bangle she was wearing--"a very lovely hue, Mameena, like everything else about you."

"Lovely," she said, beginning to weep a little, which upset me very much, for if there is one thing I hate, it is to see a woman cry. "How can a poor Zulu girl be lovely? Oh, Macumazahn, the spirits have dealt hardly with me, who have given me the colour of my people and the heart of yours. If I were white, now, what you are pleased to call this loveliness of mine would be of some use to me, for then-- then-- Oh,

cannot you guess, Macumazahh?"

I shook my head and said that I could not, and next moment was sorry, for she proceeded to explain.

Sinking to her knees--for we were quite alone in the big hut and there was no one else about, all the other women being engaged on rural or domestic tasks, for which Mameena declared she had no time, as her business was to look after me--she rested her shapely head upon my knees and began to talk in a low, sweet voice that sometimes broke into a sob.

"Then I will tell you--I will tell you; yes, even if you hate me afterwards. I could teach you what love is very well, Macumazahh; you are quite right--because I love you." (Sob.) "No, you shall not stir till you have heard me out." Here she flung her arms about my legs and held them tight, so that without using great violence it was absolutely impossible for me to move. "When I saw you first, all shattered and senseless, snow seemed to fall upon my heart, and it stopped for a little while and has never been the same since. I think that something is growing in it, Macumazahh, that makes it big." (Sob.) "I used to like Saduko before that, but afterwards I did not like him at all--no, nor Masapo either--you know, he is the big chief who lives over the mountain, a very rich and powerful man, who, I believe, would like to marry me. Well, as I went on nursing you my heart grew bigger and bigger, and now you see it has burst." (Sob.) "Nay, stay still and do not try to speak. You shall hear me out. It is the least you can do,

seeing that you have caused me all this pain. If you did not want me to love you, why did you not curse at me and strike me, as I am told white men do to Kafir girls?" She rose and went on:

"Now, hearken. Although I am the colour of copper, I am comely. I am well-bred also; there is no higher blood than ours in Zululand, both on my father's and my mother's side, and, Macumazahn, I have a fire in me that shows me things. I can be great, and I long for greatness. Take me to wife, Macumazahn, and I swear to you that in ten years I will make you king of the Zulus. Forget your pale white women and wed yourself to that fire which burns in me, and it shall eat up all that stands between you and the Crown, as flame eats up dry grass. More, I will make you happy. If you choose to take other wives, I will not be jealous, because I know that I should hold your spirit, and that, compared to me, they would be nothing in your thought--"

"But, Mameena," I broke in, "I don't want to be king of the Zulus."

"Oh, yes, yes, you do, for every man wants power, and it is better to rule over a brave, black people--thousands and thousands of them--than to be no one among the whites. Think, think! There is wealth in the land. By your skill and knowledge the amabuto [regiments] could be improved; with the wealth you would arm them with guns--yes, and 'by-and-byes' also with the throat of thunder" (that is, or was, the Kafir name for cannon).[*] "They would be invincible. Chaka's kingdom would be nothing to ours, for a hundred thousand warriors would sleep

on their spears, waiting for your word. If you wished it even you could sweep out Natal and make the whites there your subjects, too. Or perhaps it would be safer to let them be, lest others should come across the green water to help them, and to strike northwards, where I am told there are great lands as rich and fair, in which none would dispute our sovereignty--"

[*--Cannon were called "by-and-byes" by the natives, because when field-pieces first arrived in Natal inquisitive Kafirs pestered the soldiers to show them how they were fired. The answer given was always "By-and-bye!" Hence the name.--
EDITOR]

"But, Mameena," I gasped, for this girl's titanic ambition literally overwhelmed me, "surely you are mad! How would you do all these things?"

"I am not mad," she answered; "I am only what is called great, and you know well enough that I can do them, not by myself, who am but a woman and tied with the ropes that bind women, but with you to cut those ropes and help me. I have a plan which will not fail. But, Macumazahn," she added in a changed voice, "until I know that you will be my partner in it I will not tell it even to you, for perhaps you might talk--in your sleep, and then the fire in my breast would soon go out--for ever."

"I might talk now, for the matter of that, Mameena."

"No; for men like you do not tell tales of foolish girls who chance to love them. But if that plan began to work, and you heard say that kings or princes died, it might be otherwise. You might say, 'I think I know where the witch lives who causes these evils'--in your sleep, Macumazahh."

"Mameena," I said, "tell me no more. Setting your dreams on one side, can I be false to my friend, Saduko, who talks to me day and night of you?"

"Saduko! Piff!" she exclaimed, with that expressive gesture of her hand.

"And can I be false," I continued, seeing that Saduko was no good card to play, "to my friend, Umbezi, your father?"

"My father!" she laughed. "Why, would it not please him to grow great in your shadow? Only yesterday he told me to marry you, if I could, for then he would find a stick indeed to lean on, and be rid of Saduko's troubling."

Evidently Umbezi was a worse card even than Saduko, so I played another.

"And can I help you, Mameena, to tread a road that at the best must be red with blood?"

"Why not," she asked, "since with or without you I am destined to tread

that road, the only difference being that with you it will lead to glory and without you perhaps to the jackals and the vultures? Blood! Piff! What is blood in Zululand?"

This card also having failed, I tabled my last.

"Glory or no glory, I do not wish to share it, Mameena. I will not make war among a people who have entertained me hospitably, or plot the downfall of their Great Ones. As you told me just now, I am nobody--just one grain of sand upon a white shore--but I had rather be that than a haunted rock which draws the heavens' lightnings and is drenched with sacrifice. I seek no throne over white or black, Mameena, who walk my own path to a quiet grave that shall perhaps not be without honour of its own, though other than you seek. I will keep your counsel, Mameena, but, because you are so beautiful and so wise, and because you say you are fond of me--for which I thank you--I pray you put away these fearful dreams of yours that in the end, whether they succeed or fail, will send you shivering from the world to give account of them to the Watcher-on-high."

"Not so, O Macumazana," she said, with a proud little laugh. "When your Watcher sowed my seed--if thus he did--he sowed the dreams that are a part of me also, and I shall only bring him back his own, with the flower and the fruit by way of interest. But that is finished. You refuse the greatness. Now, tell me, if I sink those dreams in a great water, tying about them the stone of forgetfulness and saying: 'Sleep

there, O dreams; it is not your hour'--if I do this, and stand before you just a woman who loves and who swears by the spirits of her fathers never to think or do that which has not your blessing--will you love me a little, Macumazahn?"

Now I was silent, for she had driven me to the last ditch, and I knew not what to say. Moreover, I will confess my weakness--I was strangely moved. This beautiful girl with the "fire in her heart," this woman who was different from all other women that I had ever known, seemed to have twisted her slender fingers into my heart-strings and to be drawing me towards her. It was a great temptation, and I bethought me of old Zikali's saying in the Black Kloof, and seemed to hear his giant laugh.

She glided up to me, she threw her arms about me and kissed me on the lips, and I think I kissed her back, but really I am not sure what I did or said, for my head swam. When it cleared again she was standing in front of me, looking at me reflectively.

"Now, Macumazahn," she said, with a little smile that both mocked and dazzled, "the poor black girl has you, the wise, experienced white man, in her net, and I will show you that she can be generous. Do you think that I do not read your heart, that I do not know that you believe I am dragging you down to shame and ruin? Well, I spare you, Macumazahn, since you have kissed me and spoken words which already you may have forgotten, but which I do not forget. Go your road, Macumazahn, and I go mine, since the proud white man shall not be stained with my black

touch. Go your road; but one thing I forbid you--to believe that you have been listening to lies, and that I have merely played off a woman's arts upon you for my own ends. I love you, Macumazahn, as you will never be loved till you die, and I shall never love any other man, however many I may marry. Moreover, you shall promise me one thing--that once in my life, and once only, if I wish it, you shall kiss me again before all men. And now, lest you should be moved to folly and forget your white man's pride, I bid you farewell, O Macumazana. When we meet again it will be as friends only."

Then she went, leaving me feeling smaller than ever I felt in my life, before or since--even smaller than when I walked into the presence of old Zikali the Wise. Why, I wondered, had she first made a fool of me, and then thrown away the fruits of my folly? To this hour I cannot quite answer the question, though I believe the explanation to be that she did really care for me, and was anxious not to involve me in trouble and her plottings; also she may have been wise enough to see that our natures were as oil and water and would never blend.