

## CHAPTER VII. SADUKO BRINGS THE MARRIAGE GIFT

We reached my wagons in the early morning of the following day, bringing with us the cattle and our wounded. Thus encumbered it was a most toilsome march, and an anxious one also, for it was always possible that the remnant of the Amakoba might attempt pursuit. This, however, they did not do, for very many of them were dead or wounded, and those who remained had no heart left in them. They went back to their mountain home and lived there in shame and wretchedness, for I do not believe there were fifty head of cattle left among the tribe, and Kafirs without cattle are nothing. Still, they did not starve, since there were plenty of women to work the fields, and we had not touched their corn. The end of them was that Panda gave them to their conqueror, Saduko, and he incorporated them with the Amangwane. But that did not happen until some time afterwards.

When we had rested a while at the wagons the captured beasts were mustered, and on being counted were found to number a little over twelve hundred head, not reckoning animals that had been badly hurt in the flight, which we killed for beef. It was a noble prize, truly, and, notwithstanding the wound in his thigh, which hurt him a good deal now that it had stiffened, Saduko stood up and surveyed them with glistening eyes. No wonder, for he who had been so poor was now rich, and would remain so even after he had paid over whatever number of cows Umbezi

chose to demand as the price of Mameena's hand. Moreover, he was sure, and I shared his confidence, that in these changed circumstances both that young woman and her father would look upon his suit with very favourable eyes. He had, so to speak, succeeded to the title and the family estates by means of a lawsuit brought in the "Court of the Assegai," and therefore there was hardly a father in Zululand who would shut his kraal gate upon him. We forgot, both of us, the proverb that points out how numerous are the slips between the cup and the lip, which, by the way, is one that has its Zulu equivalents. One of them, if I remember right at the moment, is: "However loud the hen cackles, the housewife does not always get the egg."

As it chanced, although Saduko's hen was cackling very loudly just at this time, he was not destined to find the coveted egg. But of that matter I will speak in its place.

I, too, looked at those cattle, wondering whether Saduko would remember our bargain, under which some six hundred head of them belonged to me. Six hundred head! Why, putting them at £5 apiece all round--and as oxen were very scarce just at that time, they were worth quite as much, if not more--that meant £3,000, a larger sum of money than I had ever owned at one time in all my life. Truly the paths of violence were profitable! But would he remember? On the whole I thought probably not, since Kafirs are not fond of parting with cattle.

Well, I did him an injustice, for presently he turned and said, with

something of an effort:

"Macumazahn, half of all these belong to you, and truly you have earned them, for it was your cunning and good counsel that gained us the victory. Now we will choose them beast by beast."

So I chose a fine ox, then Saduko chose one; and so it went on till I had eight of my number driven out. As the eighth was taken I turned to Saduko and said:

"There, that will do. These oxen I must have to replace those in my teams which died on the trek, but I want no more."

"Wow!" said Saduko, and all those who stood with him, while one of them added--I think it was old Tshoza:

"He refuses six hundred cattle which are fairly his! He must be mad!"

"No friends," I answered, "I am not mad, but neither am I bad. I accompanied Saduko on this raid because he is dear to me and stood by me once in the hour of danger. But I do not love killing men with whom I have no quarrel, and I will not take the price of blood."

"Wow!" said old Tshoza again, for Saduko seemed too astonished to speak, "he is a spirit, not a man. He is holy!"

"Not a bit of it," I answered. "If you think that, ask Mameena"--a dark saying which they did not understand. "Now, listen. I will not take those cattle because I do not think as you Kafirs think. But as they are mine, according to your law, I am going to dispose of them. I give ten head to each of my hunters, and fifteen head to the relations of him who was killed. The rest I give to Tshoza and to the other men of the Amangwane who fought with us, to be divided among them in such proportions as they may agree, I being the judge in the event of any quarrel arising."

Now these men raised a great cry of "Inkoosi!" and, running up, old Tshoza seized my hand and kissed it.

"Your heart is big," he cried; "you drop fatness! Although you are so small, the spirit of a king lives in you, and the wisdom of the heavens."

Thus he praised me, while all the others joined in, till the din was awful. Saduko thanked me also in his magnificent manner. Yet I do not think that he was altogether pleased, although my great gift relieved him from the necessity of sharing up the spoil with his companions. The truth was, or so I believe, that he understood that henceforth the Amangwane would love me better than they loved him. This, indeed, proved to be the case, for I am sure that there was no man among all those wild fellows who would not have served me to the death, and to this day my name is a power among them and their descendants. Also it has grown into

something of a proverb among all those Kafirs who know the story. They talk of any great act of liberality in an idiom as "a gift of Macumazana," and in the same way of one who makes any remarkable renunciation, as "a wearer of Macumazana's blanket," or as "he who has stolen Macumazana's shadow."

Thus did I earn a great reputation very cheaply, for really I could not have taken those cattle; also I am sure that had I done so they would have brought me bad luck. Indeed, one of the regrets of my life is that I had anything whatsoever to do with the business.

Our journey back to Umbezi's kraal--for thither we were heading--was very slow, hampered as we were with wounded and by a vast herd of cattle. Of the latter, indeed, we got rid after a while, for, except those which I had given to my men, and a hundred or so of the best beasts that Saduko took with him for a certain purpose, they were sent away to a place which he had chosen, in charge of about half of his people, under the command of his uncle, Tshoza, there to await his coming.

Over a month had gone by since the night of the ambush when at last we outspanned quite close to Umbezi's, in that bush where first I had met the Amangwane free-spears. A very different set of men they looked on this triumphant day to those fierce fellows who had slipped out of the trees at the call of their chief. As we went through the country Saduko

had bought fine moochas and blankets for them; also head-dresses had been made with the long black feathers of the sakabuli finch, and shields and leglets of the hides and tails of oxen. Moreover, having fed plentifully and travelled easily, they were fat and well-favoured, as, given good food, natives soon become after a period of abstinence.

The plan of Saduko was to lie quiet in the bush that night, and on the following morning to advance in all his grandeur, accompanied by his spears, present the hundred head of cattle that had been demanded, and formally ask his daughter's hand from Umbezi. As the reader may have gathered already, there was a certain histrionic vein in Saduko; also when he was in feather he liked to show off his plumage.

Well, this plan was carried out to the letter. On the following morning, after the sun was well up, Saduko, as a great chief does, sent forward two bedizened heralds to announce his approach to Umbezi, after whom followed two other men to sing his deeds and praises. (By the way, I observed that they had clearly been instructed to avoid any mention of a person called Macumazahn.) Then we advanced in force. First went Saduko, splendidly apparelled as a chief, carrying a small assegai and adorned with plumes, leglets and a leopard-skin kilt. He was attended by about half a dozen of the best-looking of his followers, who posed as "indunas" or councillors. Behind these I walked, a dusty, insignificant little fellow, attended by the ugly, snub-nosed Scowl in a very greasy pair of trousers, worn-out European boots through which his toes peeped, and nothing else, and by my three surviving hunters, whose appearance

was even more disreputable. After us marched about four score of the transformed Amangwane, and after them came the hundred picked cattle driven by a few herdsmen.

In due course we arrived at the gate of the kraal, where we found the heralds and the praisers prancing and shouting.

"Have you seen Umbezi?" asked Saduko of them.

"No," they answered; "he was asleep when we got here, but his people say that he is coming out presently."

"Then tell his people that he had better be quick about it, or I shall turn him out," replied the proud Saduko.

Just at this moment the kraal gate opened and through it appeared Umbezi, looking extremely fat and foolish; also, it struck me, frightened, although this he tried to conceal.

"Who visits me here," he said, "with so much--um--ceremony?" and with the carved dancing-stick he carried he pointed doubtfully at the lines of armed men. "Oh, it is you, is it, Saduko?" and he looked him up and down, adding: "How grand you are to be sure. Have you been robbing anybody? And you, too, Macumazahn. Well, you do not look grand. You look like an old cow that has been suckling two calves on the winter veld. But tell me, what are all these warriors for? I ask because I have

not food for so many, especially as we have just had a feast here."

"Fear nothing, Umbezi," answered Saduko in his grandest manner. "I have brought food for my own men. As for my business, it is simple. You asked a hundred head of cattle as the lobola [that is, the marriage gift] of your daughter, Mameena. They are there. Go send your servants to the kraal and count them."

"Oh, with pleasure," Umbezi replied nervously, and he gave some orders to certain men behind him. "I am glad to see that you have become rich in this sudden fashion, Saduko, though how you have done so I cannot understand."

"Never mind how I have become rich," answered Saduko. "I am rich; that is enough for the present. Be pleased to send for Mameena, for I would talk with her."

"Yes, yes, Saduko, I understand that you would talk with Mameena; but"--and he looked round him desperately--"I fear that she is still asleep. As you know, Mameena was always a late riser, and, what is more, she hates to be disturbed. Don't you think that you could come back, say, to-morrow morning? She will be sure to be up by then; or, better still, the day after?"

"In which hut is Mameena?" asked Saduko sternly, while I, smelling a rat, began to chuckle to myself.



"I really do not know, Saduko," replied Umbezi. "Sometimes she sleeps in one, sometimes in another, and sometimes she goes several hours' journey away to her aunt's kraal for a change. I should not be in the least surprised if she had done so last night. I have no control over Mameena."

Before Saduko could answer, a shrill, rasping voice broke upon our ears, which after some search I saw proceeded from an ugly and ancient female seated in the shadow, in whom I recognised the lady who was known by the pleasing name of "Worn-out-Old-Cow."

"He lies!" screeched the voice. "He lies. Thanks be to the spirit of my ancestors that wild cat Mameena has left this kraal for good. She slept last night, not with her aunt, but with her husband, Masapo, to whom Umbezi gave her in marriage two days ago, receiving in payment a hundred and twenty head of cattle, which was twenty more than you bid, Saduko."

Now when Saduko heard these words I thought that he would really go mad with rage. He turned quite grey under his dark skin and for a while trembled like a leaf, looking as though he were about to fall to the ground. Then he leapt as a lion leaps, and seizing Umbezi by the throat, hurled him backwards, standing over him with raised spear.

"You dog!" he cried in a terrible voice. "Tell me the truth or I will

rip you up. What have you done with Mameena?"

"Oh! Saduko," answered Umbezi in choking tones, "Mameena has chosen to get married. It was no fault of mine; she would have her way."

He got no farther, and had I not intervened by throwing my arms about Saduko and dragging him back, that moment would have been Umbezi's last, for Saduko was about to pin him to the earth with his spear. As it proved, I was just in time, and Saduko, being weak with emotion, for I felt his heart going like a sledge-hammer, could not break from my grasp before his reason returned to him.

At length he recovered himself a little and threw down his spear as though to put himself out of temptation. Then he spoke, always in the same terrible voice, asking:

"Have you more to say about this business, Umbezi? I would hear all before I answer you."

"Only this, Saduko," replied Umbezi, who had risen to his feet and was shaking like a reed. "I did no more than any other father would have done. Masapo is a very powerful chief, one who will be a good stick for me to lean on in my old age. Mameena declared that she wished to marry him--"

"He lies!" screeched the "Old Cow." "What Mameena said was that she had

no will towards marriage with any Zulu in the land, so I suppose she is looking after a white man," and she leered in my direction. "She said, however, that if her father wished to marry her to Masapo, she must be a dutiful daughter and obey him, but that if blood and trouble came of that marriage, let it be on his head and not on hers."

"Would you also stick your claws into me, cat?" shouted Umbezi, catching the old woman a savage cut across the back with the light dancing-stick which he still held in his hand, whereon she fled away screeching and cursing him.

"Oh, Saduko," he went on, "let not your ears be poisoned by these falsehoods. Mameena never said anything of the sort, or if she did it was not to me. Well, the moment that my daughter had consented to take Masapo as her husband his people drove a hundred and twenty of the most beautiful cattle over the hill, and would you have had me refuse them, Saduko? I am sure that when you have seen them you will say that I was quite right to accept such a splendid lobola in return for one sharp-tongued girl. Remember, Saduko, that although you had promised a hundred head, that is less by twenty, at the time you did not own one, and where you were to get them from I could not guess. Moreover," he added with a last, desperate, imaginative effort, for I think he saw that his arguments were making no impression, "some strangers who called here told me that both you and Macumazahn had been killed by certain evil-doers in the mountains. There, I have spoken, and, Saduko, if you now have cattle, why, on my part, I have another daughter, not quite so

good-looking perhaps, but a much better worker in the field. Come and drink a sup of beer, and I will send for her."

"Stop talking about your other daughter and your beer and listen to me," replied Saduko, looking at the assegai which he had thrown to the ground so ominously that I set my foot on it. "I am now a greater chief than the boar Masapo. Has Masapo such a bodyguard as these Eaters-up-of-Enemies?" and he jerked his thumb backwards towards the serried lines of fierce-faced Amangwane who stood listening behind us. "Has Masapo as many cattle as I have, whereof those which you see are but a tithe brought as a lobola gift to the father of her who had been promised to me as wife? Is Masapo Panda's friend? I think that I have heard otherwise. Has Masapo just conquered a countless tribe by his courage and his wit? Is Masapo young and of high blood, or is he but an old, low-born boar of the mountains?"

"You do not answer, Umbezi, and perhaps you do well to be silent. Now listen again. Were it not for Macumazahn here, whom I do not desire to mix up with my quarrels, I would bid my men take you and beat you to death with the handles of their spears, and then go on and serve the Boar in the same fashion in his mountain sty. As it is, these things must wait a little while, especially as I have other matters to attend to first. Yet the day is not far off when I will attend to them also. Therefore my counsel to you, Cheat, is to make haste to die or to find courage to fall upon a spear, unless you would learn how it feels to be brayed with sticks like a green hide until none can know that you

were once a man. Send now and tell my words to Masapo the Boar. And to Mameena say that soon I will come to take her with spears and not with cattle. Do you understand? Oh! I see that you do, since already you weep with fear like a woman. Then farewell to you till that day when I return with the sticks, O Umbezi the cheat and the liar, Umbezi, 'Eater-up-of-Elephants,'" and turning, Saduko stalked away.

I was about to follow in a great hurry, having had enough of this very unpleasant scene, when poor old Umbezi sprang at me and clasped me by the arm.

"O Macumazana," he exclaimed, weeping in his terror, "O Macumazana, if ever I have been a friend to you, help me out of this deep pit into which I have fallen through the tricks of that monkey of a daughter of mine, who I think is a witch born to bring trouble upon men. Macumazah, if she had been your daughter and a powerful chief had appeared with a hundred and twenty head of such beautiful cattle, you would have given her to him, would you not, although he is of mixed blood and not very young, especially as she did not mind who only cares for place and wealth?"

"I think not," I answered; "but then it is not our custom to sell women in that fashion."

"No, no, I forgot; in this as in other matters you white men are mad and, Macumazah, to tell you the truth, I believe it is you she really

cares for; she said as much to me once or twice. Well, why did you not take her away when I was not looking? We could have settled matters afterwards, and I should have been free of her witcheries and not up to my neck in this hole as I am now."

"Because some people don't do that kind of thing, Umbezi."

"No, no, I forgot. Oh! why can I not remember that you are quite mad and therefore that it must not be expected of you to act as though you were sane. Well, at least you are that tiger Saduko's friend, which again shows that you must be very mad, for most people would sooner try to milk a cow buffalo than walk hand in hand with him. Don't you see, Macumazahn, that he means to kill me, Macumazahn, to bray me like a green hide? Ugh! to beat me to death with sticks. Ugh! And what is more, that unless you prevent him, he will certainly do it, perhaps to-morrow or the next day. Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!"

"Yes, I see, Umbezi, and I think that he will do it. But what I do not see is how I am to prevent him. Remember that you let Mameena grow into his heart and behaved badly to him, Umbezi."

"I never promised her to him, Macumazahn. I only said that if he brought a hundred cattle, then I might promise."

"Well, he has wiped out the Amakoba, the enemies of his House, and there are the hundred cattle whereof he has many more, and now it is too late

for you to keep your share of the bargain. So I think you must make yourself as comfortable as you can in the hole that your hands dug, Umbezi, which I would not share for all the cattle in Zululand."

"Truly you are not one from whom to seek comfort in the hour of distress," groaned poor Umbezi, then added, brightening up: "But perhaps Panda will kill him because he has wiped out Bangu in a time of peace. Oh Macumazahn, can you not persuade Panda to kill him? If so, I now have more cattle than I really want--"

"Impossible," I answered. "Panda is his friend, and between ourselves I may tell you that he ate up the Amakoba by his especial wish. When the King hears of it he will call to Saduko to sit in his shadow and make him great, one of his councillors, probably with power of life and death over little people like you and Masapo."

"Then it is finished," said Umbezi faintly, "and I will try to die like a man. But to be brayed like a hide! And with thin sticks! Oh!" he added, grinding his teeth, "if only I can get hold of Mameena I will not leave much of that pretty hair of hers upon her head. I will tie her hands and shut her up with the 'Old Cow,' who loves her as a meer-cat loves a mouse. No; I will kill her. There--do you hear, Macumazahn, unless you do something to help me, I will kill Mameena, and you won't like that, for I am sure she is dear to you, although you were not man enough to run away with her as she wished."

"If you touch Mameena," I said, "be certain, my friend, that Saduko's sticks and your skin will not be far apart, for I will report you to Panda myself as an unnatural evil-doer. Now hearken to me, you old fool. Saduko is so fond of your daughter, on this point being mad, as you say I am, that if only he could get her I think he might overlook the fact of her having been married before. What you have to do is to try to buy her back from Masapo. Mind you, I say buy her back--not get her by bloodshed--which you might do by persuading Masapo to put her away. Then, if he knew that you were trying to do this, I think that Saduko might leave his sticks uncut for a while."

"I will try. I will indeed, Macumazah. I will try very hard. It is true Masapo is an obstinate pig; still, if he knows that his own life is at stake, he might give way. Moreover, when she learns that Saduko has grown rich and great, Mameena might help me. Oh, I thank you, Macumazah; you are indeed the prop of my hut, and it and all in it are yours. Farewell, farewell, Macumazah, if you must go. But why--why did you not run away with Mameena, and save me all this fear and trouble?"

So I and that old humbug, Umbezi, "Eater-up-of-Elephants," parted for a while, and never did I know him in a more chastened frame of mind, except once, as I shall tell.