

CHAPTER XVI. MAMEENA--MAMEENA--MAMEENA!

That evening at sunset, just as I was about to trek, for the King had given me leave to go, and at that time my greatest desire in life seemed to be to bid good-bye to Zululand and the Zulus--I saw a strange, beetle-like shape hobbling up the hill towards me, supported by two big men. It was Zikali.

He passed me without a word, merely making a motion that I was to follow him, which I did out of curiosity, I suppose, for Heaven knows I had seen enough of the old wizard to last me for a lifetime. He reached a flat stone about a hundred yards above my camp, where there was no bush in which anyone could hide, and sat himself down, pointing to another stone in front of him, on which I sat myself down. Then the two men retired out of earshot, and, indeed, of sight, leaving us quite alone.

"So you are going away, O Macumazana?" he said.

"Yes, I am," I answered with energy, "who, if I could have had my will, would have gone away long ago."

"Yes, yes, I know that; but it would have been a great pity, would it not? If you had gone, Macumazahn, you would have missed seeing the end of a strange little story, and you, who love to study the hearts of men and women, would not have been so wise as you are to-day."

"No, nor as sad, Zikali. Oh! the death of that woman!" And I put my hand before my eyes.

"Ah! I understand, Macumazahn; you were always fond of her, were you not, although your white pride would not suffer you to admit that black fingers were pulling at your heartstrings? She was a wonderful witch, was Mameena; and there is this comfort for you--that she pulled at other heartstrings as well. Masapo's, for instance; Saduko's, for instance; Umbelazi's, for instance, none of whom got any luck from her pulling--yes, and even at mine."

Now, as I did not think it worth while to contradict his nonsense so far as I was concerned personally, I went off on this latter point.

"If you show affection as you did towards Mameena to-day, Zikali, I pray my Spirit that you may cherish none for me," I said.

He shook his great head pityingly as he answered:

"Did you never love a lamb and kill it afterwards when you were hungry, or when it grew into a ram and butted you, or when it drove away your other sheep, so that they fell into the hands of thieves? Now, I am very hungry for the fall of the House of Senzangakona, and the lamb, Mameena, having grown big, nearly laid me on my back to-day within the reach of the slayer's spear. Also, she was hunting my sheep, Saduko, into an evil

net whence he could never have escaped. So, somewhat against my will, I was driven to tell the truth of that lamb and her tricks."

"I daresay," I exclaimed; "but, at any rate, she is done with, so what is the use of talking about her?"

"Ah! Macumazahn, she is done with, or so you think, though that is a strange saying for a white man who believes in much that we do not know; but at least her work remains, and it has been a great work. Consider now. Umbelazi and most of the princes, and thousands upon thousands of the Zulus, whom I, the Dwande, hate, dead, dead! Mameena's work, Macumazahn! Panda's hand grown strengthless with sorrow and his eyes blind with tears. Mameena's work, Macumazahn! Cetewayo, king in all but name; Cetewayo, who shall bring the House of Senzangakona to the dust. Mameena's work, Macumazahn! Oh! a mighty work. Surely she has lived a great and worthy life, and she died a great and worthy death! And how well she did it! Had you eyes to see her take the poison which I gave her--a good poison, was it not?--between her kisses, Macumazahn?"

"I believe it was your work, and not hers," I blurted out, ignoring his mocking questions. "You pulled the strings; you were the wind that caused the grass to bend till the fire caught it and set the town in flames--the town of your foes."

"How clever you are, Macumazahn! If your wits grow so sharp, one day they will cut your throat, as, indeed, they have nearly done several

times already. Yes, yes, I know how to pull strings till the trap falls, and to blow grass until the flame catches it, and how to puff at that flame until it burns the House of Kings. And yet this trap would have fallen without me, only then it might have snared other rats; and this grass would have caught fire if I had not blown, only then it might have burnt another House. I did not make these forces, Macumazahn; I did but guide them towards a great end, for which the White House [that is, the English] should thank me one day." He brooded a while, then went on: "But what need is there to talk to you of these matters, Macumazahn, seeing that in a time to come you will have your share in them and see them for yourself? After they are finished, then we will talk."

"I do not wish to talk of them," I answered. "I have said so already. But for what other purpose did you take the trouble to come here?"

"Oh, to bid you farewell for a little while, Macumazahn. Also to tell you that Panda, or rather Cetewayo, for now Panda is but his Voice, since the Head must go where the Feet carry it, has spared Saduko at the prayer of Nandie and banished him from the land, giving him his cattle and any people who care to go with him to wherever he may choose to live from henceforth. At least, Cetewayo says it was at Nandie's prayer, and at mine and yours, but what he means is that, after all that has happened, he thought it wise that Saduko should die of himself."

"Do you mean that he should kill himself, Zikali?"

"No, no; I mean that his own idhlozi, his Spirit, should be left to kill him, which it will do in time. You see, Macumazahn, Saduko is now living with a ghost, which he calls the ghost of Umbelazi, whom he betrayed."

"Is that your way of saying he is mad, Zikali?"

"Oh, yes, he lives with a ghost, or the ghost lives in him, or he is mad--call it which you will. The mad have a way of living with ghosts, and ghosts have a way of sharing their food with the mad. Now you understand everything, do you not?"

"Of course," I answered; "it is as plain as the sun."

"Oh! did I not say you were clever, Macumazahn, you who know where madness ends and ghosts begin, and why they are just the same thing? Well, the sun is no longer plain. Look, it has sunk; and you would be on your road who wish to be far from Nodwengu before morning. You will pass the plain of Endondakusuka, will you not, and cross the Tugela by the drift? Have a look round, Macumazahn, and see if you can recognise any old friends. Umbezi, the knave and traitor, for instance; or some of the princes. If so, I should like to send them a message. What! You cannot wait? Well, then, here is a little present for you, some of my own work. Open it when it is light again, Macumazahn; it may serve to remind you of the strange little tale of Mameena with the Heart of Fire. I wonder where she is now? Sometimes, sometimes--" And he rolled his great eyes about him and sniffed at the air like a hound. "Farewell till we meet

again. Farewell, Macumazahn. Oh! if you had only run away with Mameena, how different things might have been to-day!"

I jumped up and fled from that terrible old dwarf, whom I verily believe-- No; where is the good of my saying what I believe? I fled from him, leaving him seated on the stone in the shadows, and as I fled, out of the darkness behind me there arose the sound of his loud and eerie laughter.

Next morning I opened the packet which he had given me, after wondering once or twice whether I should not thrust it down an ant-bear hole as it was. But this, somehow, I could not find the heart to do, though now I wish I had. Inside, cut from the black core of the umzimbiti wood, with just a little of the white sap left on it to mark the eyes, teeth and nails, was a likeness of Mameena. Of course, it was rudely executed, but it was--or rather is, for I have it still--a wonderfully good portrait of her, for whether Zikali was or was not a wizard, he was certainly a good artist. There she stands, her body a little bent, her arms outstretched, her head held forward with the lips parted, just as though she were about to embrace somebody, and in one of her hands, cut also from the white sap of the umzimbiti, she grasps a human heart--Saduko's, I presume, or perhaps Umbelazi's.

Nor was this all, for the figure was wrapped in a woman's hair, which I knew at once for that of Mameena, this hair being held in place by the necklet of big blue beads she used to wear about her throat.

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Some five years had gone by, during which many things had happened to me

that need not be recorded here, when one day I found myself in a rather remote part of the Umvoti district of Natal, some miles to the east of a mountain called the Eland's Kopje, whither I had gone to carry out a big deal in mealies, over which, by the way, I lost a good bit of money. That has always been my fate when I plunged into commercial ventures.

One night my wagons, which were overloaded with these confounded weevilly mealies, got stuck in the drift of a small tributary of the Tugela that most inopportunately had come down in flood. Just as darkness fell I managed to get them up the bank in the midst of a pelting rain that soaked me to the bone. There seemed to be no prospect of lighting a fire or of obtaining any decent food, so I was about to go to bed supperless when a flash of lightning showed me a large kraal situated upon a hillside about half a mile away, and an idea entered my mind.

"Who is the headman of that kraal?" I asked of one of the Kafirs who had collected round us in our trouble, as such idle fellows always do.

"Tshoza, Inkoosi," answered the man.

"Tshoza! Tshoza!" I said, for the name seemed familiar to me. "Who is

Tshoza?"

"Ikona [I don't know], Inkoosi. He came from Zululand some years ago with Saduko the Mad."

Then, of course, I remembered at once, and my mind flew back to the night when old Tshoza, the brother of Matiwane, Saduko's father, had cut out the cattle of the Bangu and we had fought the battle in the pass.

"Oh!" I said, "is it so? Then lead me to Tshoza, and I will give you a 'Scotchman.'" (That is, a two-shilling piece, so called because some enterprising emigrant from Scotland passed off a vast number of them among the simple natives of Natal as substitutes for half-crowns.)

Tempted by this liberal offer--and it was very liberal, because I was anxious to get to Tshoza's kraal before its inhabitants went to bed--the meditative Kafir consented to guide me by a dark and devious path that ran through bush and dripping fields of corn. At length we arrived--for if the kraal was only half a mile away, the path to it covered fully two miles--and glad enough was I when we had waded the last stream and found ourselves at its gate.

In response to the usual inquiries, conducted amid a chorus of yapping dogs, I was informed that Tshoza did not live there, but somewhere else; that he was too old to see anyone; that he had gone to sleep and could not be disturbed; that he was dead and had been buried last week, and so

forth.

"Look here, my friend," I said at last to the fellow who was telling me all these lies, "you go to Tshoza in his grave and say to him that if he does not come out alive instantly, Macumazahn will deal with his cattle as once he dealt with those of Bangu."

Impressed with the strangeness of this message, the man departed, and presently, in the dim light of the rain-washed moon, I perceived a little old man running towards me; for Tshoza, who was pretty ancient at the beginning of this history, had not been made younger by a severe wound at the battle of the Tugela and many other troubles.

"Macumazahn," he said, "is that really you? Why, I heard that you were dead long ago; yes, and sacrificed an ox for the welfare of your Spirit."

"And ate it afterwards, I'll be bound," I answered.

"Oh! it must be you," he went on, "who cannot be deceived, for it is true we ate that ox, combining the sacrifice to your Spirit with a feast; for why should anything be wasted when one is poor? Yes, yes, it must be you, for who else would come creeping about a man's kraal at night, except the Watcher-by-Night? Enter, Macumazahn, and be welcome."

So I entered and ate a good meal while we talked over old times.

"And now, where is Saduko?" I asked suddenly as I lit my pipe.

"Saduko?" he answered, his face changing as he spoke. "Oh! of course he is here. You know I came away with him from Zululand. Why? Well, to tell the truth, because after the part we had played--against my will, Macumazahn--at the battle of Endondakusuka, I thought it safer to be away from a country where those who have worn their karosses inside out find many enemies and few friends."

"Quite so," I said. "But about Saduko?"

"Oh, I told you, did I not? He is in the next hut, and dying!"

"Dying! What of, Tshoza?"

"I don't know," he answered mysteriously; "but I think he must be bewitched. For a long while, a year or more, he has eaten little and cannot bear to be alone in the dark; indeed, ever since he left Zululand he has been very strange and moody."

Now I remembered what old Zikali had said to me years before to the effect that Saduko was living with a ghost which would kill him.

"Does he think much about Umbelazi, Tshoza?" I asked.

"O Macumazana, he thinks of nothing else; the Spirit of Umbelazi is in him day and night."

"Indeed," I said. "Can I see him?"

"I don't know, Macumazahn. I will go and ask the lady Nandie at once, for, if you can, I believe there is no time to lose." And he left the hut.

Ten minutes later he returned with a woman, Nandie the Sweet herself, the same quiet, dignified Nandie whom I used to know, only now somewhat worn with trouble and looking older than her years.

"Greeting, Macumazahn," she said. "I am pleased to see you, although it is strange, very strange, that you should come here just at this time. Saduko is leaving us--on a long journey, Macumazahn."

I answered that I had heard so with grief, and wondered whether he would like to see me.

"Yes, very much, Macumazahn; only be prepared to find him different from the Saduko whom you knew. Be pleased to follow me."

So we went out of Tshoza's hut, across a courtyard to another large hut, which we entered. It was lit with a good lamp of European make; also a bright fire burned upon the hearth, so that the place was as light as

day. At the side of the hut a man lay upon some blankets, watched by a woman. His eyes were covered with his hand, and he was moaning:

"Drive him away! Drive him away! Cannot he suffer me to die in peace?"

"Would you drive away your old friend, Macumazahn, Saduko?" asked Nandie

very gently, "Macumazahn, who has come from far to see you?"

He sat up, and, the blankets falling off him, showed me that he was nothing but a living skeleton. Oh! how changed from that lithe and handsome chief whom I used to know. Moreover, his lips quivered and his eyes were full of terrors.

"Is it really you, Macumazahn?" he said in a weak voice. "Come, then, and stand quite close to me, so that he may not get between us," and he stretched out his bony hand.

I took the hand; it was icy cold.

"Yes, yes, it is I, Saduko," I said in a cheerful voice; "and there is no man to get between us; only the lady Nandie, your wife, and myself are in the hut; she who watched you has gone."

"Oh, no, Macumazahn, there is another in the hut whom you cannot see. There he stands," and he pointed towards the hearth. "Look! The spear is

through him and his plume lies on the ground!"

"Through whom, Saduko?"

"Whom? Why, the Prince Umbelazi, whom I betrayed for Mameena's sake."

"Why do you talk wind, Saduko?" I asked. "Years ago I saw Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti die."

"Die, Macumazahn! We do not die; it is only our flesh that dies. Yes, yes, I have learned that since we parted. Do you not remember his last words: 'I will haunt you while you live, and when you cease to live, ah! then we shall meet again'? Oh! from that hour to this he has haunted me, Macumazahn--he and the others; and now, now we are about to meet as he promised."

Then once more he hid his eyes and groaned.

"He is mad," I whispered to Nandie.

"Perhaps. Who knows?" she answered, shaking her head.

Saduko uncovered his eyes.

"Make 'the-thing-that-burns' brighter," he gasped, "for I do not perceive him so clearly when it is bright. Oh! Macumazahn, he is looking

at you and whispering. To whom is he whispering? I see! to Mameena, who also looks at you and smiles. They are talking. Be silent. I must listen."

Now, I began to wish that I were out of that hut, for really a little of this uncanny business went a long way. Indeed, I suggested going, but Nandie would not allow it.

"Stay with me till the end," she muttered. So I had to stay, wondering what Saduko heard Umbelazi whispering to Mameena, and on which side of me he saw her standing.

He began to wander in his mind.

"That was a clever pit you dug for Bangu, Macumazah; but you would not take your share of the cattle, so the blood of the Amakoba is not on your head. Ah! what a fight was that which the Amawombe made at Endondakusuka. You were with them, you remember, Macumazah; and why was

I not at your side? Oh! then we would have swept away the Usutu as the wind sweeps ashes. Why was I not at your side to share the glory? I remember now--because of the Daughter of Storm. She betrayed me for Umbelazi, and I betrayed Umbelazi for her; and now he haunts me, whose greatness I brought to the dust; and the Usutu wolf, Cetewayo, curls himself up in his form and grows fat on his food. And--and, Macumazah, it has all been done in vain, for Mameena hates me. Yes, I can read it

in her eyes. She mocks and hates me worse in death than she did in life, and she says that--that it was not all her fault--because she loves--because she loves--"

A look of bewilderment came upon his face--his poor, tormented face; then suddenly Saduko threw his arms wide, and sobbed in an ever-weakening voice:

"All--all done in vain! Oh! Mameena, Ma--mee--na, Ma--meena!" and fell back dead.

"Saduko has gone away," said Nandie, as she drew a blanket over his face. "But I wonder," she added with a little hysterical smile, "oh! how I wonder who it was the Spirit of Mameena told him that she loved--Mameena, who was born without a heart?"

I made no answer, for at that moment I heard a very curious sound, which seemed to me to proceed from somewhere above the hut. Of what did it remind me? Ah! I knew. It was like the sound of the dreadful laughter of Zikali, Opener-of-Roads--Zikali, the

"Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born."

Doubtless, however, it was only the cry of some storm-driven night bird.

Or perhaps it was an hyena that laughed--an hyena that scented death.