

CHAPTER XI. THE COUNSEL OF BALEKA

I rose, I praised the king with a loud voice, and I went from the Intunkulu, the house of the king. I walked slowly through the gates, but when I was without the gates the anguish that took me because of my burnt hand was more than I could bear. I ran to and fro groaning till I came to the hut of one whom I knew. There I found fat, and having plunged my hand in the fat, I wrapped it round with a skin and passed out again, for I could not stay still. I went to and fro, till at length I reached the spot where my huts had been. The outer fence of the huts still stood; the fire had not caught it. I passed through the fence; there within were the ashes of the burnt huts--they lay ankle-deep. I walked in among the ashes; my feet struck upon things that were sharp. The moon was bright, and I looked; they were the blackened bones of my wives and children. I flung myself down in the ashes in bitterness of heart; I covered myself over with the ashes of my kraal and with the bones of my wives and children. Yes, my father, there I lay, and on me were the ashes, and among the ashes were the bones. Thus, then, did I lie for the last time in my kraal, and was sheltered from the frost of the night by the dust of those to whom I had given life. Such were the things that befell us in the days of Chaka, my father; yes, not to me alone, but to many another also.

I lay among the ashes and groaned with the pain of my burn, and groaned also from the desolation of my heart. Why had I not tasted the poison, there in the hut of Chaka, and before the eyes of Chaka? Why did I not

taste it now and make an end? Nay, I had endured the agony; I would not give him this last triumph over me. Now, having passed the fire, once more I should be great in the land, and I would become great. Yes, I would bear my sorrows, and become great, that in a day to be I might wreak vengeance on the king. Ah! my father, there, as I rolled among the ashes, I prayed to the Amatongo, to the ghosts of my ancestors. I prayed to my Ehlose, to the spirit that watches me--ay, and I even dared to pray to the Umkulunkulu, the great soul of the world, who moves through the heavens and the earth unseen and unheard. And thus I prayed, that I might yet live to kill Chaka as he had killed those who were dear to me. And while I prayed I slept, or, if I did not sleep, the light of thought went out of me, and I became as one dead. Then there came a vision to me, a vision that was sent in answer to my prayer, or, perchance, it was a madness born of my sorrows. For, my father, it seemed to me that I stood upon the bank of a great and wide river. It was gloomy there, the light lay low upon the face of the river, but far away on the farther side was a glow like the glow of a stormy dawn, and in the glow I saw a mighty bed of reeds that swayed about in the breath of dawn, and out of the reeds came men and women and children, by hundreds and thousands, and plunged into the waters of the river and were buffeted about by them. Now, my father, all the people that I saw in the water were black people, and all those who were torn out of the reeds were black--they were none of them white like your people, my father, for this vision was a vision of the Zulu race, who alone are "torn out of the reeds." Now, I saw that of those who swam in the river some passed over very quickly and some stood still, as it were, still in the water--as in life,

my father, some die soon and some live for many years. And I saw the countless faces of those in the water, among them were many that I knew. There, my father, I saw the face of Chaka, and near him was my own face; there, too, I saw the face of Dingaan, the prince, his brother, and the face of the boy Umslopogaas and the face of Nada, my daughter, and then for the first time I knew that Umslopogaas was not dead, but only lost.

Now I turned in my vision, and looked at that bank of the river on which I stood. Then I saw that behind the bank was a cliff, mighty and black, and in the cliff were doors of ivory, and through them came light and the sound of laughter; there were other doors also, black as though fashioned of coal, and through them came darkness and the sounds of groans. I saw also that in front of the doors was set a seat, and on the seat was the figure of a glorious woman. She was tall, and she alone was white, and clad in robes of white, and her hair was like gold which is molten in the fire, and her face shone like the midday sun. Then I saw that those who came up out of the river stood before the woman, the water yet running from them, and cried aloud to her.

"Hail, Inkosazana-y-Zulu! Hail, Queen of the Heavens!"

Now the figure of the glorious woman held a rod in either hand, and the rod in her right hand was white and of ivory, and the rod in her left hand was black and of ebony. And as those who came up before her throne greeted her, so she pointed now with the wand of ivory in her right hand, and now with the wand of ebony in her left hand. And with the wand

of ivory she pointed to the gates of ivory, through which came light and laughter, and with the wand of ebony she pointed to the gates of coal, through which came blackness and groans. And as she pointed, so those who greeted her turned, and went, some through the gates of light and some through the gates of blackness.

Presently, as I stood, a handful of people came up from the bank of the river. I looked on them and knew them. There was Unandi, the mother of Chaka, there was Anadi, my wife, and Moosa, my son, and all my other wives and children, and those who had perished with them.

They stood before the figure of the woman, the Princess of the Heavens, to whom the Umkulunkulu has given it to watch over the people of the Zulu, and cried aloud, "Hail, Inkosazana-y-Zulu! Hail!"

Then she, the Inkosazana, pointed with the rod of ivory to the gates of ivory; but still they stood before her, not moving. Now the woman spoke for the first time, in a low voice that was sad and awful to hear.

"Pass in, children of my people, pass in to the judgment. Why tarry ye? Pass in through the gates of light."

But still they tarried, and in my vision Unandi spoke: "We tarry, Queen of the Heavens--we tarry to pray for justice on him who murdered us. I, who on earth was named Mother of the Heavens, on behalf of all this company, pray to thee, Queen of the Heavens, for justice on him who

murdered us."

"How is he named?" asked the voice that was low and awful.

"Chaka, king of the Zulus," answered the voice of Unandi. "Chaka, my son."

"Many have come to ask for vengeance on that head," said the voice of the Queen of the Heavens, "and many more shall come. Fear not, Unandi, it shall fall. Fear not, Anadi and ye wives and children of Mopo, it shall fall, I say. With the spear that pierced thy breast, Unandi, shall the breast of Chaka be also pierced, and, ye wives and children of Mopo, the hand that pierces shall be the hand of Mopo. As I guide him so shall he go. Ay, I will teach him to wreak my vengeance on the earth! Pass in, children of my people--pass in to the judgment, for the doom of Chaka is written."

Thus I dreamed, my father. Ay, this was the vision that was sent me as I lay in pain and misery among the bones of my dead in the ashes of my kraal. Thus it was given me to see the Inkosazana of the Heavens as she is in her own place. Twice more I saw her, as you shall hear, but that was on the earth and with my waking eyes. Yes, thrice has it been given to me in all to look upon that face that I shall now see no more till I am dead, for no man may look four times on the Inkosazana and live. Or am I mad, my father, and did I weave these visions from the woof of my madness? I do not know, but it is true that I seemed to see them.

I woke when the sky was grey with the morning light; it was the pain of my burnt hand that aroused me from my sleep or from my stupor. I rose shaking the ashes from me, and went without the kraal to wash away their defilement. Then I returned, and sat outside the gates of the Emposeni, waiting till the king's women, whom he named his sisters, should come to draw water according to their custom. At last they came, and, sitting with my kaross thrown over my face to hide it, looked for the passing of Baleka. Presently I saw her; she was sad-faced, and walked slowly, her pitcher on her head. I whispered her name, and she drew aside behind an aloe bush, and, making pretence that her foot was pierced with a thorn, she lingered till the other women had gone by. Then she came up to me, and we greeted one another, gazing heavily into each other's eyes.

"In an ill day did I hearken to you, Baleka," I said, "to you and to the Mother of the Heavens, and save your child alive. See now what has sprung from this seed! Dead are all my house, dead is the Mother of the Heavens--all are dead--and I myself have been put to the torment by fire," and I held out my withered hand towards her.

"Ay, Mopo, my brother," she answered, "but flesh is nearest to flesh, and I should think little of it were not my son Umslopogaas also dead, as I have heard but now."

"You speak like a woman, Baleka. Is it, then, nothing to you that I, your brother, have lost--all I love?"

"Fresh seed can yet be raised up to you, my brother, but for me there is no hope, for the king looks on me no more. I grieve for you, but I had this one alone, and flesh is nearest to flesh. Think you that I shall escape? I tell you nay. I am but spared for a little, then I go where the others have gone. Chaka has marked me for the grave; for a little while I may be left, then I die: he does but play with me as a leopard plays with a wounded buck. I care not, I am weary, but I grieve for the boy; there was no such boy in the land. Would that I might die swiftly and go to seek him."

"And if the boy is not dead, Baleka, what then?"

"What is that you said?" she answered, turning on me with wild eyes.

"Oh, say it again--again, Mopo! I would gladly die a hundred deaths to know that Umslopogaas still lives."

"Nay, Baleka, I know nothing. But last night I dreamed a dream," and I told her all my dream, and also of that which had gone before the dream.

She listened as one listens to the words of a king when he passes judgement for life or for death.

"I think that there is wisdom in your dreams, Mopo," she said at length.

"You were ever a strange man, to whom the gates of distance are no bar. Now it is borne in upon my heart that Umslopogaas still lives, and now I

shall die happy. Yes, gainsay me not; I shall die, I know it. I read it in the king's eyes. But what is it? It is nothing, if only the prince Umslopogaas yet lives."

"Your love is great, woman," I said; "and this love of yours has brought many woes upon us, and it may well happen that in the end it shall all be for nothing, for there is an evil fate upon us. Say now, what shall I do? Shall I fly, or shall I abide here, taking the chance of things?"

"You must stay here, Mopo. See, now! This is in the king's mind. He fears because of the death of his mother at his own hand--yes, even he; he is afraid lest the people should turn upon him who killed his own mother. Therefore he will give it out that he did not kill her, but that she perished in the fire which was called down upon your kraals by witchcraft; and, though all men know the lie, yet none shall dare to gainsay him. As he said to you, there will be a smelling out, but a smelling out of a new sort, for he and you shall be the witch-finders, and at that smelling out he will give to death all those whom he fears, all those whom he knows hate him for his wickedness and because with his own hand he slew his mother. For this cause, then, he will save you alive, Mopo--yes, and make you great in the land, for if, indeed, his mother Unandi died through witchcraft, as he shall say, are you not also wronged by him, and did not your wives and children also perish by witchcraft? Therefore, do not fly; abide here and become great--become great to the great end of vengeance, Mopo, my brother. You have much wrong to wreak; soon you will have more, for I, too, shall be gone, and

my blood also shall cry for vengeance to you. Hearken, Mopo. Are there not other princes in the land? What of Dingaan, what of Umhlangana, what of Umpanda, brothers to the king? Do not these also desire to be kings? Do they not day by day rise from sleep feeling their limbs to know if they yet live, do they not night by night lie down to sleep not knowing if it shall be their wives that they shall kiss ere dawn or the red assegai of the king? Draw near to them, my brother; creep into their hearts and learn their counsel or teach them yours; so in the end shall Chaka be brought to that gate through which your wives have passed, and where I also am about to tread."

Thus Baleka spoke and she was gone, leaving me pondering, for her words were heavy with wisdom. I knew well that the brothers of the king went heavily and in fear of death, for his shadow was on them. With Panda, indeed, little could be done, for he lived softly, speaking always as one whose wits are few. But Dingaan and Umhlangana were of another wood, and from them might be fashioned a kerrie that should scatter the brains of Chaka to the birds. But the time to speak was not now; not yet was the cup of Chaka full.

Then, having finished my thought, I rose, and, going to the kraal of my friend, I doctored my burnt hand, that pained me, and as I was doctoring it there came a messenger to me summoning me before the king.

I went in before the king, and prostrated myself, calling him by his royal names; but he took me by the hand and raised me up, speaking

softly.

"Rise, Mopo, my servant!" he said. "Thou hast suffered much woe because of the witchcraft of thine enemies. I, I have lost my mother, and thou, thou hast lost thy wives and children. Weep, my councillors, weep, because I have lost my mother, and Mopo, my servant, has lost his wives and children, by the witchcraft of our foes!"

Then all the councillors wept aloud, while Chaka glared at them.

"Hearken, Mopo!" said the king, when the weeping was done. "None can give me back my mother; but I can give thee more wives, and thou shalt find children. Go in among the damsels who are reserved to the king, and choose thee six; go in among the cattle of the king, and choose thee ten times ten of the best; call upon the servants of the king that they build up thy kraal greater and fairer than it was before! These things I give thee freely; but thou shalt have more, Mopo--yes! thou shalt have vengeance! On the first day of the new moon I summon a great meeting, a bandhla of all the Zulu people: yes, thine own tribe, the Langeni, shall be there also. Then we will mourn together over our woes; then, too, we will learn who brought these woes upon us. Go now, Mopo, go! And go ye also, my councillors, leaving me to weep alone because my mother is dead!"

Thus, then, my father, did the words of Baleka come true, and thus, because of the crafty policy of Chaka, I grew greater in the land than

ever I had been before. I chose the cattle, they were fat; I chose the wives, they were fair; but I took no pleasure in them, nor were any more children born to me. For my heart was like a withered stick; the sap and strength had gone from my heart--it was drawn out in the fire of Chaka's hut, and lost in my sorrow for those whom I had loved.