

## CHAPTER XX. MOPO BARGAINS WITH THE PRINCES

Eight-and-twenty days went by, my father, and on the nine-and-twentieth it befell that Chaka, having dreamed a dream in his troubled sleep, summoned before him certain women of the kraal, to the number of a hundred or more. Some of these were his women, whom he named his "sisters," and some were maidens not yet given in marriage; but all were young and fair. Now what this dream of Chaka may have been I do not know, or have forgotten, for in those days he dreamed many dreams, and all his dreams led to one end, the death of men. He sat in front of his hut scowling, and I was with him. To the left of him were gathered the girls and women, and their knees were weak with fear. One by one they were led before him, and stood before him with bowed heads. Then he would bid them be of good cheer, and speak softly to them, and in the end would ask them this question: "Hast thou, my sister, a cat in thy hut?"

Now, some would say that they had a cat, and some would say that they had none, and some would stand still and make no answer, being dumb with fear. But, whatever they said, the end was the same, for the king would sigh gently and say: "Fare thee well, my sister; it is unfortunate for thee that there is a cat in thy hut," or "that there is no cat in thy hut," or "that thou canst not tell me whether there be a cat in thy hut or no."

Then the woman would be taken by the slayers, dragged without the kraal,

and their end was swift. So it went on for the most part of that day, till sixty-and-two women and girls had been slaughtered. But at last a maiden was brought before the king, and to this one her snake had given a ready wit; for when Chaka asked her whether or no there was a cat in her hut, she answered, saying that she did not know, "but that there was a half a cat upon her," and she pointed to a cat's-skin which was bound about her loins.

Then the king laughed, and clapped his hands, saying that at length his dream was answered; and he killed no more that day nor ever again--save once only.

That evening my heart was heavy within me, and I cried in my heart, "How long?"--nor might I rest. So I wandered out from the kraal that was named Duguza to the great cleft in the mountains yonder, and sat down upon a rock high up in the cleft, so that I could see the wide lands rolling to the north and the south, to my right and to my left. Now, the day was drawing towards the night, and the air was very still, for the heat was great and a tempest was gathering, as I, who am a Heaven-Herd, knew well. The sun sank redly, flooding the land with blood; it was as though all the blood that Chaka had shed flowed about the land which Chaka ruled. Then from the womb of the night great shapes of cloud rose up and stood before the sun, and he crowned them with his glory, and in their hearts the lightning quivered like a blood of fire. The shadow of their wings fell upon the mountain and the plains, and beneath their wings was silence. Slowly the sun sank, and the shapes of cloud gathered

together like a host at the word of its captain, and the flicker of the lightning was as the flash of the spears of a host. I looked, and my heart grew afraid. The lightning died away, the silence deepened and deepened till I could hear it, no leaf moved, no bird called, the world seemed dead--I alone lived in the dead world.

Now, of a sudden, my father, a bright star fell from the height of heaven and lit upon the crest of the storm, and as it lit the storm burst. The grey air shivered, a moan ran about the rocks and died away, then an icy breath burst from the lips of the tempest and rushed across the earth. It caught the falling star and drove it on towards me, a rushing globe of fire, and as it came the star grew and took shape, and the shape it took was the shape of a woman. I knew her now, my father; while she was yet far off I knew her--the Inkosazana who came as she had promised, riding down the storm. On she swept, borne forward by the blast, and oh! she was terrible to see, for her garment was the lightning, lightnings shone from her wide eyes and lightnings were in her streaming hair, while in her hand was a spear of fire, and she shook it as she came. Now she was at the mouth of the pass; before her was stillness, behind her beat the wings of the storm, the thunder roared, the rain hissed like snakes; she rushed on past me, and as she passed she turned her awful eyes upon me, withering me. She was there! she was gone! but she spoke no word, only shook her flaming spear. Yet it seemed to me that the storm spoke, that the rocks cried aloud, that the rain hissed out a word in my ear, and the word was:--

"Smite, Mopo!"

I heard it in my heart, or with my ears, what does it matter? Then I turned to look; through the rush of the tempest and the reek of the rain, still I could see her sweeping forward high in air. Now the kraal Duguza was beneath her feet, and the flaming spear fell from her hand upon the kraal and fire leaped up in answer.

Then she passed on over the edge of the world, seeking her own place. Thus, my father, for the third and last time did my eyes see the Inkosazana-y-Zulu, or mayhap my heart dreamed that I saw her. Soon I shall see her again, but it will not be here.

For a while I sat there in the cleft, then I rose and fought my way through the fury of the storm back to the kraal Duguza. As I drew near the kraal I heard cries of fear coming through the roaring of the wind and the hiss of the rain. I entered and asked one of the matter, and it was told me that fire from above had fallen on the hut of the king as he lay sleeping, and all the roof of the hut was burned away, but that the rain had put out the fire.

Then I went on till I came to the front of the great hut, and I saw by the light of the moon, which now shone out in the heavens, that there before it stood Chaka, shaking with fear, and the water of the rain was running down him, while he stared at the great hut, of which all the thatch was burned.

I saluted the king, asking him what evil thing had happened. Seeing me, he seized me by the arm, and clung to me as, when the slayers are at hand, a child clings to his father, drawing me after him into a small hut that was near.

"What evil thing has befallen, O King?" I said again, when light had been made.

"Little have I known of fear, Mopo," said Chaka, "yet I am afraid now; ay, as much afraid as when once on a bygone night the dead hand of Baleka summoned something that walked upon the faces of the dead."

"And what fearest thou, O King, who art the lord of all the earth?"

Now Chaka leaned forward and whispered to me: "Hearken, Mopo, I have dreamed a dream. When the judgment of those witches was done with, I went and laid me down to sleep while it was yet light, for I can scarcely sleep at all when darkness has swallowed up the world. My sleep has gone from me--that sister of thine, Baleka, took my sleep with her to the place of death. I laid me down and I slept, but a dream arose and sat by me with a hooded face, and showed me a picture. It seemed to me that the wall of my hut fell down, and I saw an open place, and in the centre of the place I lay dead, covered with many wounds, while round my corpse my brothers Dingaan and Umhlangana stalked in pride like lions. On the shoulders of Umhlangana was my royal kaross, and there was blood

on the kaross; and in the hand of Dingaan was my royal spear, and there was blood upon the spear. Then, in the vision of my dream, Mopo, thou didst draw near, and, lifting thy hand, didst give the royal salute of Bayete to these brothers of mine, and with thy foot didst spurn the carcase of me, thy king. Then the hooded Dream pointed upwards and was gone, and I awoke, and lo! fire burned in the roof of my hut. Thus I dreamed, Mopo, and now, my servant, say thou, wherefore should I not slay thee, thou who wouldst serve other kings than I, thou who wouldst give my royal salute to the princes, my brothers?" and he glared upon me fiercely.

"As thou wilt, O King!" I answered gently. "Doubtless thy dream was evil, and yet more evil was the omen of the fire that fell upon thy hut. And yet--" and I ceased.

"And yet--Mopo, thou faithless servant?"

"And yet, O King, it seems to me in my folly that it were well to strike the head of the snake and not its tail, for without the tail the head may live, but not the tail without the head."

"Thou wouldst say, Mopo, that if these princes die never canst thou or any other man give them the royal names. Do I hear aright, Mopo?"

"Who am I that I should lift up my voice asking for the blood of princes?" I answered. "Judge thou, O King!"

Now, Chaka brooded awhile, then he spoke: "Say, Mopo, can it be done this night?"

"There are but few men in the kraal, O King. All are gone out to war; and of those few many are the servants of the princes, and perhaps they might give blow for blow."

"How then, Mopo?"

"Nay, I know not, O King; yet at the great kraal beyond the river sits that regiment which is named the Slayers. By midday to-morrow they might be here, and then--"

"Thou speakest wisely, my child Mopo; it shall be for to-morrow. Go summon the regiment of the Slayers, and, Mopo, see that thou fail me not."

"If I fail thee, O King, then I fail myself, for it seems that my life hangs on this matter."

"If all the words that ever passed thy lips are lies, yet is that word true, Mopo," said Chaka: "moreover, know this, my servant: if aught miscarries thou shalt die no common death. Begone!"

"I hear the king," I answered, and went out.

Now, my father, I knew well that Chaka had doomed me to die, though first he would use me to destroy the princes. But I feared nothing, for I knew this also, that the hour of Chaka was come at last.

For a while I sat in my hut pondering, then when all men slept I arose and crept like a snake by many paths to the hut of Dingaan the prince, who awaited me on that night. Following the shadow of the hut, I came to the door and scratched upon it after a certain fashion. Presently it was opened, and I crawled in, and the door was shut again. Now there was a little light in the hut, and by its flame I saw the two princes sitting side by side, wrapped about with blankets which hung before their brows.

"Who is this that comes?" said the Prince Dingaan.

Then I lifted the blanket from my head so that they might see my face, and they also drew the blankets from their brows. I spoke, saying: "Hail to you, Princes, who to-morrow shall be dust! Hail to you, sons of Senzangacona, who to-morrow shall be spirits!" and I pointed towards them with my withered hand.

Now the princes were troubled, and shook with fear.

"What meanest thou, thou dog, that thou dost speak to us words of such ill-omen?" said the Prince Dingaan in a low voice.



"Where dost thou point at us with that white and withered hand of thine, Wizard?" hissed the Prince Umhlangana.

"Have I not told you, O ye Princes!" I whispered, "that ye must strike or die, and has not your heart failed you? Now hearken! Chaka has dreamed another dream; now it is Chaka who strikes, and ye are already dead, ye children of Senzangaona."

"If the slayers of the king be without the gates, at least thou shalt die first, thou who hast betrayed us!" quoth the Prince Dingaan, and drew an assegai from under his kaross.

"First hear the king's dream, O Prince," I said; "then, if thou wilt, kill me, and die. Chaka the king slept and dreamed that he lay dead, and that one of you, the princes, wore his royal kaross."

"Who wore the royal kaross?" asked Dingaan, eagerly; and both looked up, waiting on my words.

"The Prince Umhlangana wore it--in the dream of Chaka--O Dingaan, shoot of a royal stock!" I answered slowly, taking snuff as I spoke, and watching the two of them over the edge of my snuff-spoon.

Now Dingaan scowled heavily at Umhlangana; but the face of Umhlangana was as the morning sky.

"Chaka dreamed this also," I went on: "that one of you, the princes, held his royal spear."

"Who held the royal spear?" asked Umhlangana.

"The Prince Dingaan held it--in the dream of Chaka--O Umhlangana, sprung from the root of kings!--and it dripped blood."

Now the face of Umhlangana grew dark as night, but that of Dingaan brightened like the dawn.

"Chaka dreamed this also: that I, Mopo, your dog, who am not worthy to be mentioned with such names, came up and gave the royal salute, even the Bayete."

"To whom didst thou give the Bayete, O Mopo, son of Makedama?" asked both of the princes as with one breath, waiting on my words.

"I gave it to both of you, O twin stars of the morning, princes of the Zulu--in the dream of Chaka I gave it to both of you."

Now the princes looked this way and that, and were silent, not knowing what to say, for these princes hated each other, though adversity and fear had brought them to one bed.

"But what avails it to talk thus, ye lords of the land," I went on,

"seeing that, both of you, ye are already as dead men, and that vultures which are hungry to-night to-morrow shall be filled with meat of the best? Chaka the king is now a Doctor of Dreams, and to clear away such a dream as this he has a purging medicine."

Now the brows of these brothers grew black indeed, for they saw that their fate was on them.

"These are the words of Chaka the king, O ye bulls who lead the herd! All are doomed, ye twain and I, and many another man who loves us. In the great kraal beyond the river there sits a regiment: it is summoned--and then--good-night! Have ye any words to say to those yet left upon the earth? Perhaps it will be given to me to live a little while after ye are gone, and I may bring them to their ears."

"Can we not rise up now and fall upon Chaka?" asked Dingaan.

"It is not possible," I said; "the king is guarded."

"Hast thou no plan, Mopo?" groaned Umhlangana. "Methinks thou hast a plan to save us."

"And if I have a plan, ye Princes, what shall be my reward? It must be great, for I am weary of life, and I will not use my wisdom for a little thing."

Now both the princes offered me good things, each of them promising more than the other, as two young men who are rivals promise to the father of a girl whom both would wed. I listened, saying always that it was not enough, till in the end both of them swore by their heads, and by the bones of Senzangacona, their father, and by many other things, that I should be the first man in the land, after them, its kings, and should command the impis of the land, if I would but show them a way to kill Chaka and become kings. Then, when they had done swearing, I spoke, weighing my words:--

"In the great kraal beyond the river, O ye Princes, there sit, not one regiment but two. One is named the Slayers and loves Chaka the king, who has done well by them, giving them cattle and wives. The other is named the Bees, and that regiment is hungry and longs for cattle and girls; moreover, of that regiment the Prince Umhlangana is the general, and it loves him. Now this is my plan--to summon the Bees in the name of Umhlangana, not the Slayers in the name of Chaka. Bend forward, O Princes, that I may whisper in your ears."

So they bent forward, and I whispered awhile of the death of a king, and the sons of Senzangacona nodded their heads as one man in answer. Then I rose up, and crept from the hut as I had entered it, and rousing certain trusty messengers, I dispatched them, running swiftly through the night.