

## CHAPTER XXI. THE DEATH OF CHAKA

Now, on the morrow, two hours before midday, Chaka came from the hut where he had sat through the night, and moved to a little kraal surrounded by a fence that was some fifty paces distant from the hut. For it was my duty, day by day, to choose that place where the king should sit to hear the counsel of his indunas, and give judgment on those whom he would kill, and to-day I had chosen this place. Chaka went alone from his hut to the kraal, and, for my own reasons, I accompanied him, walking after him. As we went the king glanced back at me over his shoulder, and said in a low voice:--

"Is all prepared, Mopo?"

"All is prepared, Black One," I answered. "The regiment of the Slayers will be here by noon."

"Where are the princes, Mopo?" asked the king again.

"The princes sit with their wives in the houses of their women, O King," I answered; "they drink beer and sleep in the laps of their wives."

Chaka smiled grimly, "For the last time, Mopo!"

"For the last time, O King."

We came to the kraal, and Chaka sat down in the shade of the reed fence, upon an ox-hide that was brayed soft. Near to him stood a girl holding a gourd of beer; there were also present the old chief Inguazonca, brother of Unandi, Mother of the Heavens, and the chief Umxamama, whom Chaka loved. When we had sat a little while in the kraal, certain men came in bearing cranes' feathers, which the king had sent them to gather a month's journey from the kraal Duguza, and they were admitted before the king. These men had been away long upon their errand, and Chaka was angry with them. Now the leader of the men was an old captain of Chaka's, who had fought under him in many battles, but whose service was done, because his right hand had been shorn away by the blow of an axe. He was a great man and very brave.

Chaka asked the man why he had been so long in finding the feathers, and he answered that the birds had flown from that part of the country whither he was sent, and he must wait there till they returned, that he might snare them.

"Thou shouldst have followed the cranes, yes, if they flew through the sunset, thou disobedient dog!" said the king. "Let him be taken away, and all those who were with him."

Now some of the men prayed a little for mercy, but the captain did but salute the king, calling him "Father," and craving a boon before he died.

"What wouldst thou?" asked Chaka.

"My father," said the man, "I would ask thee two things. I have fought many times at thy side in battle while we both were young; nor did I ever turn my back upon the foe. The blow that shore the hand from off this arm was aimed at thy head, O King; I stayed it with my naked arm. It is nothing; at thy will I live, and at thy will I die. Who am I that I should question the word of the king? Yet I would ask this, that thou wilt withdraw the kaross from about thee, O King, that for the last time my eyes may feast themselves upon the body of him whom, above all men, I love."

"Thou art long-winded," said the king, "what more?"

"This, my father, that I may bid farewell to my son; he is a little child, so high, O King," and he held his hand above his knee.

"Thy first boon is granted," said the king, slipping the kaross from his shoulders and showing the great breast beneath. "For the second it shall be granted also, for I will not willingly divide the father and the son. Bring the boy here; thou shalt bid him farewell, then thou shalt slay him with thine own hand ere thou thyself art slain; it will be good sport to see."

Now the man turned grey beneath the blackness of his skin, and trembled a little as he murmured, "The king's will is the will of his servant;

let the child be brought."

But I looked at Chaka and saw that the tears were running down his face, and that he only spoke thus to try the captain who loved him to the last.

"Let the man go," said the king, "him and those with him."

So they went glad at heart, and praising the king.

I have told you this, my father, though it has not to do with my story, because then, and then only, did I ever see Chaka show mercy to one whom he had doomed to die.

As the captain and his people left the gate of the kraal, it was spoken in the ear of the king that a man sought audience with him. He was admitted crawling on his knees. I looked and saw that this was that Masilo whom Chaka had charged with a message to him who was named Bulalio, or the Slaughterer, and who ruled over the People of the Axe. It was Masilo indeed, but he was no longer fat, for much travel had made him thin; moreover, on his back were the marks of rods, as yet scarcely healed over.

"Who art thou?" said Chaka.

"I am Masilo, of the People of the Axe, to whom command was given to run

with a message to Bulalio the Slaughterer, their chief, and to return on the thirtieth day. Behold, O King, I have returned, though in a sorry plight!"

"It seems so!" said the king, laughing aloud. "I remember now: speak on, Masilo the Thin, who wast Masilo the Fat; what of this Slaughterer? Does he come with his people to lay the axe Groan-Maker in my hands?"

"Nay, O King, he comes not. He met me with scorn, and with scorn he drove me from his kraal. Moreover, as I went I was seized by the servants of Zinita, she whom I wooed, but who is now the wife of the Slaughterer, and laid on my face upon the ground and beaten cruelly while Zinita numbered the strokes."

"Hah!" said the king. "And what were the words of this puppy?"

"These were his words, O King: 'Bulalio the Slaughterer, who sits beneath the shadow of the Witch Mountain, to Bulalio the Slaughterer who sits in the kraal Duguza--To thee I pay no tribute; if thou wouldst have the axe Groan-Maker, come to the Ghost Mountain and take it. This I promise thee: thou shalt look on a face thou knowest, for there is one there who would be avenged for the blood of a certain Mopo.'"

Now, while Masilo told this tale I had seen two things--first, that a little piece of stick was thrust through the straw of the fence, and, secondly, that the regiment of the Bees was swarming on the slope

opposite to the kraal in obedience to the summons I had sent them in the name of Umhlangana. The stick told me that the princes were hidden behind the fence waiting the signal, and the coming of the regiment that it was time to do the deed.

When Masilo had spoken Chaka sprang up in fury. His eyes rolled, his face worked, foam flew from his lips, for such words as these had never offended his ears since he was king, and Masilo knew him little, else he had not dared to utter them.

For a while he gasped, shaking his small spear, for at first he could not speak. At length he found words:--

"The dog," he hissed, "the dog who dares thus to spit in my face! Hearken all! As with my last breath I command that this Slaughterer be torn limb from limb, he and all his tribe! And thou, thou darest to bring me this talk from a skunk of the mountains. And thou, too, Mopo, thy name is named in it. Well, of thee presently. Ho! Umxamama, my servant, slay me this slave of a messenger, beat out his brains with thy stick. Swift! swift!"

Now, the old chief Umxamama sprang up to do the king's bidding, but he was feeble with age, and the end of it was that Masilo, being mad with fear, killed Umxamama, not Umxamama Masilo. Then Inguazonca, brother of Unandi, Mother of the Heavens, fell upon Masilo and ended him, but was hurt himself in so doing. Now I looked at Chaka, who stood shaking the

little red spear, and thought swiftly, for the hour had come.

"Help!" I cried, "one is slaying the King!"

As I spoke the reed fence burst asunder, and through it plunged the princes Umhlangana and Dingaan, as bulls plunge through a brake.

Then I pointed to Chaka with my withered hand, saying, "Behold your king!"

Now, from beneath the shelter of his kaross, each Prince drew out a short stabbing spear, and plunged it into the body of Chaka the king. Umhlangana smote him on the left shoulder, Dingaan struck him in the right side. Chaka dropped the little spear handled with the red wood and looked round, and so royally that the princes, his brothers, grew afraid and shrank away from him.

Twice he looked on each; then he spoke, saying: "What! do you slay me, my brothers--dogs of mine own house, whom I have fed? Do you slay me, thinking to possess the land and to rule it? I tell you it shall not be for long. I hear a sound of running feet--the feet of a great white people. They shall stamp you flat, children of my father! They shall rule the land that I have won, and you and your people shall be their slaves!"

Thus Chaka spoke while the blood ran down him to the ground, and again

he looked on them royally, like a buck at gaze.

"Make an end, O ye who would be kings!" I cried; but their hearts had turned to water and they could not. Then I, Mopo, sprang forward and picked from the ground that little assegai handled with the royal wood--the same assegai with which Chaka had murdered Unandi, his mother, and Moosa, my son, and lifted it on high, and while I lifted it, my father, once more, as when I was young, a red veil seemed to wave before my eyes.

"Wherefore wouldst thou kill me, Mopo?" said the king.

"For the sake of Baleka, my sister, to whom I swore the deed, and of all my kin," I cried, and plunged the spear through him. He sank down upon the tanned ox-hide, and lay there dying. Once more he spoke, and once only, saying: "Would now that I had hearkened to the voice of Nobela, who warned me against thee, thou dog!"

Then he was silent for ever. But I knelt over him and called in his ear the names of all those of my blood who had died at his hands--the names of Makedama, my father, of my mother, of Anadi my wife, of Moosa my son, and all my other wives and children, and of Baleka my sister. His eyes and ears were open, and I think, my father, that he saw and understood; I think also that the hate upon my face as I shook my withered hand before him was more fearful to him than the pain of death. At the least, he turned his head aside, shut his eyes, and groaned. Presently they



opened again, and he was dead.

Thus then, my father, did Chaka the King, the greatest man who has ever lived in Zululand, and the most evil, pass by my hand to those kraals of the Inkosazana where no sleep is. In blood he died as he had lived in blood, for the climber at last falls with the tree, and in the end the swimmer is borne away by the stream. Now he trod that path which had been beaten flat for him by the feet of people whom he had slaughtered, many as the blades of grass upon a mountain-side; but it is a lie to say, as some do, that he died a coward, praying for mercy. Chaka died, as he had lived, a brave man. Ou! my father, I know it, for these eyes saw it and this hand let out his life.

Now he was dead and the regiment of the Bees drew near, nor could I know how they would take this matter, for, though the Prince Umhlangana was their general, yet all the soldiers loved the king, because he had no equal in battle, and when he gave he gave with an open hand. I looked round; the princes stood like men amazed; the girl had fled; the chief Umxamama was dead at the hands of dead Masilo; and the old chief Inguazonca, who had killed Masilo, stood by, hurt and wondering; there were no others in the kraal.

"Awake, ye kings," I cried to the brothers, "the impi is at the gates! Swift, now stab that man!"--and I pointed to the old chief--"and leave the matter to my wit."

Then Dingaan roused himself, and springing upon Inguazonca, the brother of Unandi, smote him a great blow with his spear, so that he sank down dead without a word. Then again the princes stood silent and amazed.

"This one will tell no tales," I cried, pointing at the fallen chief.

Now a rumour of the slaying had got abroad among the women, who had heard cries and seen the flashing of spears above the fence, and from the women it had come to the regiment of the Bees, who advanced to the gates of the kraal singing. Then of a sudden they ceased their singing and rushed towards the hut in front of which we stood.

Then I ran to meet them, uttering cries of woe, holding in my hand the little assegai of the king red with the king's blood, and spoke with the captains in the gate, saying:--

"Lament, ye captains and ye soldiers, weep and lament, for your father is no more! He who nursed you is no more! The king is dead! now earth and heaven will come together, for the king is dead!"

"How so, Mopo?" cried the leader of the Bees. "How is our father dead?"

"He is dead by the hand of a wicked wanderer named Masilo, who, when he was doomed to die by the king, snatched this assegai from the king's hand and stabbed him; and afterwards, before he could be cut down himself by us three, the princes and myself, he killed the chiefs

Inguazonca and Umxamama also. Draw near and look on him who was the king; it is the command of Dingaan and Umhlangana, the kings, that you draw near and look on him who was the king, that his death at the hand of Masilo may be told through all the land."

"You are better at making of kings, Mopo, than at the saving of one who was your king from the stroke of a wanderer," said the leader of the Bees, looking at me doubtfully.

But his words passed unheeded, for some of the captains went forward to look on the Great One who was dead, and some, together with most of the soldiers, ran this way and that, crying in their fear that now the heaven and earth would come together, and the race of man would cease to be, because Chaka, the king, was dead.

Now, my father, how shall I, whose days are few, tell you of all the matters that happened after the dead of Chaka? Were I to speak of them all they would fill many books of the white men, and, perhaps, some of them are written down there. For this reason it is, that I may be brief, I have only spoken of a few of those events which befell in the reign of Chaka; for my tale is not of the reign of Chaka, but of the lives of a handful of people who lived in those days, and of whom I and Umslopogaas alone are left alive--if, indeed, Umslopogaas, the son of Chaka, is still living on the earth. Therefore, in a few words I will pass over all that came about after the fall of Chaka and till I was sent down by Dingaan, the king, to summon him to surrender to the king who was called

the Slaughterer and who ruled the People of the Axe. Ah! would that I had known for certain that this was none other than Umslopogaas, for then had Dingaan gone the way that Chaka went and which Umhlangana followed, and Umslopogaas ruled the people of the Zulus as their king. But, alas! my wisdom failed me. I paid no heed to the voice of my heart which told me that this was Umslopogaas who sent the message to Chaka threatening vengeance for one Mopo, and I knew nothing till too late; surely, I thought, the man spoke of some other Mopo. For thus, my father, does destiny make fools of us men. We think that we can shape our fate, but it is fate that shapes us, and nothing befalls except fate will it. All things are a great pattern, my father, drawn by the hand of the Umkulunkulu upon the cup whence he drinks the water of his wisdom; and our lives, and what we do, and what we do not do, are but a little bit of the pattern, which is so big that only the eyes of Him who is above, the Umkulunkulu, can see it all. Even Chaka, the slayer of men, and all those he slew, are but as a tiny grain of dust in the greatness of that pattern. How, then, can we be wise, my father, who are but the tools of wisdom? how can we build who are but pebbles in a wall? how can we give life who are babes in the womb of fate? or how can we slay who are but spears in the hands of the slayer?

This came about, my father. Matters were made straight in the land after the death of Chaka. At first people said that Masilo, the stranger, had stabbed the king; then it was known that Mopo, the wise man, the doctor and the body-servant of the king, had slain the king, and that the two great bulls, his brothers Umhlangana and Dingaan, children of

Senzangacona, had also lifted spears against him. But he was dead, and earth and heaven had not come together, so what did it matter? Moreover, the two new kings promised to deal gently with the people, and to lighten the heavy yoke of Chaka, and men in a bad case are always ready to hope for a better. So it came about that the only enemies the princes found were each other and Engwade, the son of Unandi, Chaka's half-brother. But I, Mopo, who was now the first man in the land after the kings, ceasing to be a doctor and becoming a general, went up against Engwade with the regiment of the Bees and the regiment of the Slayers and smote him in his kraals. It was a hard fight, but in the end I destroyed him and all his people: Engwade killed eight men with his own hand before I slew him. Then I came back to the kraal with the few that were left alive of the two regiments.

After that the two kings quarrelled more and more, and I weighed them both in my balance, for I would know which was the most favourable to me. In the end I found that both feared me, but that Umhlangana would certainly put me to death if he gained the upper hand, whereas this was not yet in the mind of Dingaan. So I pressed down the balance of Umhlangana and raised that of Dingaan, sending the fears of Umhlangana to sleep till I could cause his hut to be surrounded. Then Umhlangana followed upon the road of Chaka his brother, the road of the assegai; and Dingaan ruled alone for awhile. Such are the things that befall princes of this earth, my father. See, I am but a little man, and my lot is humble at the last, yet I have brought about the death of three of them, and of these two died by my hand.

It was fourteen days after the passing away of the Prince Umhlangana that the great army came back in a sorry plight from the marshes of the Limpopo, for half of them were left dead of fever and the might of the foe, and the rest were starving. It was well for them who yet lived that Chaka was no more, else they had joined their brethren who were dead on the way; since never before for many years had a Zulu impi returned unvictorious and without a single head of cattle. Thus it came about that they were glad enough to welcome a king who spared their lives, and thenceforth, till his fate found him, Dingaan reigned unquestioned.

Now, Dingaan was a prince of the blood of Chaka indeed; for, like Chaka, he was great in presence and cruel at heart, but he had not the might and the mind of Chaka. Moreover, he was treacherous and a liar, and these Chaka was not. Also, he loved women much, and spent with them the time that he should have given to matters of the State. Yet he reigned awhile in the land. I must tell this also; that Dingaan would have killed Panda, his half-brother, so that the house of Senzangacona, his father, might be swept out clean. Now Panda was a man of gentle heart, who did not love war, and therefore it was thought that he was half-witted; and, because I loved Panda, when the question of his slaying came on, I and the chief Mapita spoke against it, and pleaded for him, saying that there was nothing to be feared at his hands who was a fool. So in the end Dingaan gave way, saying, "Well, you ask me to spare this dog, and I will spare him, but one day he will bite me."

So Panda was made governor of the king's cattle. Yet in the end the words of Dingaan came true, for it was the grip of Panda's teeth that pulled him from the throne; only, if Panda was the dog that bit, I, Mopo, was the man who set him on the hunt.