

## CHAPTER XV

### ROBERTSON IS LOST

So I went and was conducted by Billali, the old chamberlain, for such seemed to be his office, who had been waiting patiently without all this while, back to our rest-house. On my way I picked up Hans, whom I found sitting outside the arch, and found that as usual that worthy had been keeping his eyes and ears open.

"Baas," he said, "did the White Witch tell you that there is a big impi encamped over yonder outside the houses, in what looks like a great dry ditch, and on the edge of the plain beyond?"

"No, Hans, but she said that this evening she would show us those in whose company we must fight."

"Well, Baas, they are there, some thousands of them, for I crept through the broken walls like a snake and saw them. And, Baas, I do not think they are men, I think that they are evil spirits who walk at night only."

"Why, Hans?"

"Because when the sun is high, Baas, as it is now, they are all sleeping. Yes, there they lie abed, fast asleep, as other people do at

night, with only a few sentries out on guard, and these are yawning and rubbing their eyes."

"I have heard that there are folk like that in the middle of Africa where the sun is very hot, Hans," I answered, "which perhaps is why She-who-commands is going to take us to see them at night. Also these people, it seems, are worshippers of the moon."

"No, Baas, they are worshippers of the devil and that White Witch is his wife."

"You had better keep your thoughts to yourself, Hans, for whatever she is I think that she can read thoughts from far away, as you guessed last night. Therefore I would not have any if I were you."

"No, Baas, or if I must think, henceforth, it shall be only of gin which in this place is also far away," he replied, grinning.

Then we came to the rest-house where I found that Robertson had already eaten his midday meal and like the Amahagger gone to sleep, while apparently Umslopogaas had done the same; at least I saw nothing of him. Of this I was glad, since that wondrous Ayesha seemed to draw vitality out of me and after my long talk with her I felt very tired. So I too ate and then went to lie down under an old wall in the shade at a little distance, and to reflect upon the marvellous things that I had heard.

Here be it said at once that I believed nothing of them, or at least very little indeed. All the involved tale of Ayesha's long life I dismissed at once as incredible. Clearly she was some beautiful woman who was more or less mad and suffered from megalomania; probably an Arab, who had wandered to this place for reasons of her own, and become the chieftainess of a savage tribe whose traditions she had absorbed and reproduced as personal experiences, again for reasons of her own.

For the rest, she was now threatened by another tribe and knowing that we had guns and could fight from what happened on the yesterday, wished naturally enough for our assistance in the coming battle. As for the marvellous chief Rezu, or rather for his supernatural attributes and all the cock-and-bull story about an axe--well, it was humbug like the rest, and if she believed in it she must be more foolish than I took her to be--even if she were unhinged on certain points. For the rest, her information about myself and Umslopogaas doubtless had reached her from Zikali in some obscure fashion, as she herself acknowledged.

But heavens! how beautiful she was! That flash of loveliness when out of pique or coquetry she lifted her veil, blinded like the lightning. But thank goodness, also like the lightning it frightened; instinctively one felt that it was very dangerous, even to death, and with it I for one wished no closer acquaintance. Fire may be lovely and attractive, also comforting at a proper distance, but he who sits on the top of it is cremated, as many a moth has found.

So I argued, knowing well enough all the while that if this particular human--or inhuman--fire desired to make an holocaust of me, it could do so easily enough, and that in reality I owed my safety so far to a lack of that desire on its part. The glorious Ayesha saw nothing to attract her in an insignificant and withered hunter, or at any rate in his exterior, though with his mind she might find some small affinity. Moreover to make a fool of him just for the fun of it would not serve her purpose, since she needed his assistance in a business that necessitated clear wits and unprejudiced judgment.

Lastly she had declared herself to be absorbed in some tiresome complication with another man, of which it was rather difficult to follow the details. It is true that she described him as a handsome but somewhat empty-headed person whom she had last seen two thousand years ago, but probably this only meant that she thought poorly of him because he had preferred some other woman to herself, while the two thousand years were added to the tale to give it atmosphere.

The worst of scandals becomes romantic and even respectable in two thousand years; witness that of Cleopatra with Cæsar, Mark Antony and other gentlemen. The most virtuous read of Cleopatra with sympathy, even in boarding-schools, and it is felt that were she by some miracle to be blotted out of the book of history, the loss would be enormous. The same applied to Helen, Phryne, and other bad lots. In fact now that one comes to think of it, most of the attractive personages in history, male or female, especially the latter, were bad lots. When we find someone to

whose name is added "the good" we skip. No doubt Ayesha, being very clever, appreciated this regrettable truth, and therefore moved her murky entanglements of the past decade or so back for a couple of thousand years, as many of us would like to do.

There remained the very curious circumstance of her apparent correspondence with old Zikali who lived far away. This, however, after all was not inexplicable. In the course of a great deal of experience I have observed that all the witch-doctor family, to which doubtless she belonged, have strange means of communication.

In most instances these are no doubt physical, carried on by help of messengers, or messages passed from one to the other. But sometimes it is reasonable to assume what is known as telepathy, as their link of intercourse. Between two such highly developed experts as Ayesha and Zikali, it might for the sake of argument safely be supposed that it was thus they learned each other's mind and co-operated in each other's projects, though perhaps this end was effected by commoner methods.

Whatever its interpretations, the issue of the business seemed to be that I was to be let in for more fighting. Well, in any case this could not be avoided, since Robertson's daughter, Inez, had to be saved at all costs, if it could possibly be done, even if we lost our lives in the attempt. Therefore fight we must, so there was nothing more to be said. Also without doubt this adventure was particularly interesting and I could only hope that good luck, or Zikali's Great Medicine, or rather

Providence, would see me through it safely.

For the rest the fact that our help was necessary to her in this war-like venture showed me clearly enough that all this wonderful woman's pretensions to supernatural powers were the sheerest nonsense. Had they been otherwise she would not have needed our help in her tribal fights, notwithstanding the rubbish she talked about the chief, Rezu, who according to her account of him, must resemble one of the fabulous "trolls," half-human and half-ghostly evil creatures, of whom I have read in the Norse Sagas, who could only be slain by some particular hero armed with a particular weapon.

Reflecting thus I went to sleep and did not wake until the sun was setting. Finding that Hans was also sleeping at my feet just like a faithful dog, I woke him up and we went back together to the rest-house, which we reached as the darkness fell with extraordinary swiftness, as it does in those latitudes, especially in a place surrounded by cliffs.

Not finding Robertson in the house, I concluded that he was somewhere outside, possibly making a reconnaissance on his own account, and told Hans to get supper ready for both of us. While he was doing so, by aid of the Amahagger lamps, Umslopogaas suddenly appeared in the circle of light, and looking about him, said,

"Where is Red-Beard, Macumazahn?"

I answered that I did not know and waited, for I felt sure that he had something to say.

"I think that you had better keep Red-Beard close to you, Macumazahn," he went on. "This afternoon, when you had returned from visiting the white doctress and having eaten, had gone to sleep under the wall yonder, I saw Red-Beard come out of the house carrying a gun and a bag of cartridges. His eyes rolled wildly and he turned first this way and then that, sniffing at the air, like a buck that scents danger. Then he began to talk aloud in his own tongue and as I saw that he was speaking with his Spirit, as those do who are mad, I went away and left him."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because, as you know, Macumazahn, it is a law among us Zulus never to disturb one who is mad and engaged in talking with his Spirit. Moreover, had I done so, probably he would have shot me, nor should I have complained who would have thrust myself in where I had no right to be."

"Then why did you not come to call me, Umslopogaas?"

"Because then he might have shot you, for, as I have seen for some time he is inspired of heaven and knows not what he does upon the earth, thinking only of the Lady Sad-Eyes who has been stolen away from him, as

is but natural. So I left him walking up and down, and when I returned later to look, saw that he was gone, as I thought into this walled hut. Now when Hansi tells me that he is not here, I have come to speak to you about him."

"No, certainly he is not here," I said, and I went to look at the bed where Robertson slept to see if it had been used that evening.

Then for the first time I saw lying on it a piece of paper torn from a pocketbook and addressed to myself. I seized and read it. It ran thus:

"The merciful Lord has sent me a vision of Inez and shown me where she is over the cliff-edge away to the west, also the road to her. In my sleep I heard her talking to me. She told me that she is in great danger--that they are going to marry her to some brute--and called to me to come at once and save her; yes, and to come alone without saying anything to anyone. So I am going at once. Don't be frightened or trouble about me. All will be well, all will be quite well. I will tell you the rest when we meet."

Horrorstruck I translated this insane screed to Umslopogaas and Hans. The former nodded gravely.

"Did I not tell you that he was talking with his Spirit, Macumazahn?" (I



had rendered "the merciful Lord" as the Good Spirit.) "Well, he has gone and doubtless his Spirit will take care of him. It is finished."

"At any rate we cannot, Baas," broke in Hans, who I think feared that I might send him out to look for Robertson. "I can follow most spoors, but not on such a night as this when one could cut the blackness into lumps and build a wall of it."

"Yes," I answered, "he has gone and nothing can be done at present," though to myself I reflected that probably he had not gone far and would be found when the moon rose, or at any rate on the following morning.

Still I was most uneasy about the man who, as I had noted for a long while, was losing his balance more and more. The shock of the barbarous and dreadful slaughter of his half-breed children and of the abduction of Inez by these grim, man-eating savages began the business, and I think that it was increased and accentuated by his sudden conversion to complete temperance after years of heavy drinking.

When I persuaded him to this course I was very proud of myself, thinking that I had done a clever thing, but now I was not so sure. Perhaps it would have been better if he had continued to drink something, at any rate for a while, but the trouble is that in such cases there is generally no half-way house. A man, or still more a woman, given to this frailty either turns aggressively sober or remains very drunken. At any rate, even if I had made a mess of it, I had acted for the best and

could not blame myself.

For the rest it was clear that in his new phase the religious associations of his youth had re-asserted themselves with remarkable vigour, for I gathered that he had been brought up almost as a Calvinist, and in the rush of their return, had upset his equilibrium. As I have said, he prayed night and day without any of those reserves which most people prefer in their religious exercises, and when he talked of matters outside our quest, his conversation generally revolved round the devil, or hell and its torments, which, to say the truth, did not make him a cheerful companion. Indeed in this respect I liked him much better in his old, unregenerate days, being, I fear, myself a somewhat worldly soul.

Well, the sum of it was that the poor fellow had gone mad and given us the slip, and as Hans said, to search for him at once in that darkness was impossible. Indeed, even if it had been lighter, I do not think that it would have been safe among these Amahagger nightbirds whom I did not trust. Certainly I could not have asked Hans to undertake the task, and if I had, I do not think he would have gone since he was afraid of the Amahagger. Therefore there was nothing to be done except wait and hope for the best.

So I waited till at last the moon came and with it Ayesha, as she had promised. Clad in a rich, dark cloak she arrived in some pomp, heralded by Billali, followed by women, also cloaked, and surrounded by a guard

of tall spearmen. I was seated outside the house, smoking, when suddenly she arrived from the shadows and stood before me.

I rose respectfully and bowed, while Umslopogaas, Goroko and the other Zulus who were with me, gave her the royal salute, and Hans cringed like a dog that is afraid of being kicked.

After a swift glance at them, as I guessed by the motion of her veiled head, she seemed to fix her gaze upon my pipe that evidently excited her curiosity, and asked me what it was. I explained as well as I could, expatiating on the charms of smoking.

"So men have learned another useless vice since I left the world, and one that is filthy also," she said, sniffing at the smoke and waving her hand before her face, whereon I dropped the pipe into my pocket, where, being alight, it burnt a hole in my best remaining coat.

I remember the remark because it showed me what a clever actress she was who, to keep up her character of antiquity, pretended to be astonished at a habit with which she must have been well acquainted, although I believe that it was unknown in the ancient world.

"You are troubled," she went on, swiftly changing the subject, "I read it in your face. One of your company is missing. Who is it? Ah! I see, the white man you name Avenger. Where is he gone?"

"That is what I wish to ask you, Ayesha," I said.

"How can I tell you, Allan, who in this place lack any glass into which to look for things that pass afar. Still, let me try," and pressing her hands to her forehead, she remained silent for perhaps a minute, then spoke slowly.

"I think that he has gone over the mountain lip towards the worshippers of Rezu. I think that he is mad; sorrow and something else which I do not understand have turned his brain; something that has to do with the Heavens. I think also that we shall recover him living, if only for a little while, though of this I cannot be sure since it is not given to me to read the future, but only the past, and sometimes the things that happen in the present though they be far away."

"Will you send to search for him, O Ayesha?" I asked anxiously.

"Nay, it is useless, for he is already distant. Moreover those who went might be taken by the outposts of Rezu, as perchance has happened to your companion wandering in his madness. Do you know what he went to seek?"

"More or less," I answered and translated to her the letter that Robertson had left for me.

"It may be as the man writes," she commented, "since the mad often see

well in their dreams, though these are not sent by a god as he imagines. The mind in its secret places knows all things, O Allan, although it seems to know little or nothing, and when the breath of vision or the fury of a soul distraught blows away the veils or burns through the gates of distance, then for a while it sees and learns, since, whatever fools may think, often madness is true wisdom. Now follow me with the little yellow man and the Warrior of the Axe. Stay, let me look upon that axe."

I interpreted her wish to Umslopogaas who held it out to her but refused to loose it from his wrist to which it was attached by the leathern thong.

"Does the Black One think that I shall cut him down with his own weapon, I who am so weak and gentle?" she asked, laughing.

"Nay, Ayesha, but it is his law not to part with this Drinker of Lives, which he names 'Chieftainess and Groan-maker,' and clings to closer by day and night than a man does to his wife."

"There he is wise, Allan, since a savage captain may get more wives but never such another axe. The thing is ancient," she added musingly after examining its every detail, "and who knows? It may be that whereof the legend tells which is fated to bring Rezu to the dust. Now ask this fierce-eyed Slayer whether, armed with his axe he can find courage to face the most terrible of all men and the strongest, one who is a wizard

also, of whom it is prophesied that only by such an axe as this can he be made to bite the dust."

I obeyed. Umslopogaas laughed grimly and answered,

"Say to the White Witch that there is no man living upon the earth whom I would not face in war, I who have never been conquered in fair fight, though once a chance blow brought me to the doors of death," and he touched the great hole in his forehead. "Say to her also that I have no fear of defeat, I from whom doom is, as I think, still far away, though the Opener-of-Roads has told me that among a strange people I shall die in war at last, as I desire to do, who from my boyhood have lived in war."

"He speaks well," she answered with a note of admiration in her voice.

"By Isis, were he but white I would set him to rule these Amahagger under me. Tell him, Allan, that if he lays Rezu low he shall have a great reward."

"And tell the White Witch, Macumazahn," Umslopogaas replied when I had translated, "that I seek no reward, save glory only, and with it the sight of one who is lost to me but with whom my heart still dwells, if indeed this Witch has strength to break the wall of blackness that is built between me and her who is 'gone down.'"

"Strange," reflected Ayesha when she understood, "that this grim

Destroyer should yet be bound by the silken bonds of love and yearn for one whom the grave has taken. Learn from it, Allan, that all humanity is cast in the same mould, since my longings and your longings are his also, though the three of us be far apart as are the sun and the moon and the earth, and as different in every other quality. Yet it is true that sun and moon and earth are born of the same black womb of chaos. Therefore in the beginning they were identical, as doubtless they will be in the end when, their journeyings done, they rush together to light space with a flame at which the mocking gods that made them may warm their hands. Well, so it is with men, Allan, whose soul-stuff is drawn from the gulf of Spirit by Nature's hand, and, cast upon the cold air of this death-driven world, freezes into a million shapes each different to the other and yet, be sure, the same. Now talk no more, but follow me. Slave" (this was addressed to Billali), "bid the guards lead on to the camp of the servants of Lulala."

So we went through the silent ruins. Ayesha walked, or rather glided a pace or two ahead, then came Umslopogaas and I side by side, while at our heels followed Hans, very close at our heels since he did not wish to be out of reach of the virtue of the Great Medicine and incidentally of the protection of axe and rifle.

Thus we marched surrounded by the solemn guard for something between a quarter and half a mile, till at length we climbed the debris of a mighty wall that once had encompassed the city, and by the moonlight saw beneath us a vast hollow which clearly at some unknown time had been the

bed of an enormous moat and filled with water.

Now, however, it was dry and all about its surface were dotted numerous camp-fires round which men were moving, also some women who appeared to be engaged in cooking food. At a little distance too, upon the further edge of the moat-like depression were a number of white-robed individuals gathered in a circle about a large stone upon which something was stretched that resembled the carcass of a sheep or goat, and round these a great number of spectators.

"The priests of Lulala who make sacrifice to the moon, as they do night by night, save when she is dead," said Ayesha, turning back towards me as though in answer to the query which I had conceived but left unuttered.

What struck me about the whole scene was its extraordinary animation and briskness. All the folk round the fires and outside of them moved about quickly and with the same kind of liveliness which might animate a camp of more natural people at the rising of the sun. It was as though they had just got up full of vigour to commence their daily, or rather their nightly round, which in truth was the case, since as Hans discovered, by habitude these Amahagger preferred to sleep during the day unless something prevented them, and to carry on the activities of life at night. It only remains to add that there seemed to be a great number of them, for their fires following the round of the dry moat, stretched further than I could see.



Scrambling down the crumpled wall by a zig-zag pathway, we came upon the outposts of the army beneath us who challenged, then seeing with whom they had to do, fell flat upon their faces, leaving their great spears, which had iron spikes on their shafts like to those of the Masai, sticking in the ground beside them.

We passed on between some of the fires and I noted how solemn and gloomy, although handsome, were the countenances of the folk by whom these were surrounded. Indeed, they looked like denizens of a different world to ours, one alien to the kindly race of men. There was nothing social about these Amahagger, who seemed to be a people labouring under some ancient ancestral curse of which they could never shake off the memory. Even the women rarely smiled; their clear-cut, stately countenances remained stern and set, except when they glowered at us incuriously. Only when Ayesha passed they prostrated themselves like the rest.

We went on through them and across the moat, climbing its further slope and here suddenly came upon a host of men gathered in a hollow square, apparently in order to receive us. They stood in ranks of five or six deep and their spear-points glimmering in the moonlight looked like long bands of level steel. As we entered the open side of the square all these spears were lifted. Thrice they were lifted and at each uplifting there rose a deep-throated cry of Hiya, which is the Arabic for She, and I suppose was a salutation to Ayesha.

She swept on taking no heed, till we came to the centre of the square where a number of men were gathered who prostrated themselves in the usual fashion. Motioning to them to rise she said,

"Captains, this very night within two hours we march against Rezu and the sun-worshippers, since otherwise as my arts tell me, they march against us. She-who-commands is immortal, as your fathers have known from generation to generation, and cannot be destroyed; but you, her servants, can be destroyed, and Rezu, who also has drunk of the Cup of Life, out-numbers you by three to one and prepares a queen to set up in my place over his own people and such of you as remain. As though," she added with a contemptuous laugh, "any woman of a day could take my place."

She paused and the spokesman of the captains said,

"We hear, O Hiya, and we understand. What wouldst thou have us do, O Lulala-come-to-earth? The armies of Rezu are great and from the beginning he has hated thee and us, also his magic is as thy magic and his length of days as thy length of days. How then can we who are few, three thousand men at the most, match ourselves against Rezu, Son of the Sun? Would it not be better that we should accept the terms of Rezu, which are light, and acknowledge him as our king?"

As she heard these words I saw the tall shape of Ayesha quiver beneath

her robes, as I think, not with fear but with rage, because the meaning of them was clear enough, namely that rather than risk a battle with Rezu, these people were contemplating surrender and her own deposition, if indeed she could be deposed. Still she answered in a quiet voice,

"It seems that I have dealt too gently with you and with your fathers, Children of Lulala, whose shadow I am here upon the earth, so that because you only see the scabbard, you have forgotten the sword within and that it can shine forth and smite. Well, why should I be wrath because the brutish will follow the law of brutes, though it be true that I am minded to slay you where you stand? Hearken! Were I less merciful I would leave you to the clutching hands of Rezu, who would drag you one by one to the stone of sacrifice and there offer up your hearts to his god of fire and devour your bodies with his heat. But I bethink me of your wives and children and of your forefathers whom I knew in the dead days, and therefore, if I may, I still would save you from yourselves and your heads from the glowing pot.

"Take counsel together now and say--Will you fight against Rezu, or will you yield? If that is your desire, speak it, and by to-morrow's sun I will begone, taking these with me," and she pointed to us, "whom I have summoned to help us in the war. Aye, I will begone, and when you are stretched upon the stone of sacrifice, and your women and children are the slaves of the men of Rezu, then shall you cry,

"Oh, where is Hiya whom our fathers knew? Oh, will she not return and

save us from this hell?'

"Yes, so shall you cry but there shall come no answer, since then she will have departed to her own habitations in the moon and thence appear no more. Now consult together and answer swiftly, since I weary of you and your ways."

The captains drew apart and began to talk in low voices, while Ayesha stood still, apparently quite unconcerned, and I considered the situation.

It was obvious to me that these people were almost in rebellion against their strange ruler, whose power over them was of a purely moral nature, one that emanated from her personality alone. What I wondered was, being what she seemed to be, why she thought it worth while to exercise it at all. Then I remembered her statement that here and nowhere else she must abide for some secret reason, until a certain mystical gentleman with a Greek name came to fetch her away from this appointed rendezvous. Therefore I supposed she had no choice, or rather, suffering as she did from hallucinations, believed herself to have no choice and was obliged to put up with a crowd of disagreeable savages in quarters which were sadly out of repair.

Presently the spokesman returned, saluted with his spear, and asked,

"If we go up to fight against Rezu, who will lead us in the battle, O

Hiya?"

"My wisdom shall be your guide," she answered, "this white man shall be your General and there stands the warrior who shall meet Rezu face to face and bring him to the dust," and she pointed to Umslopogaas leaning upon his axe and watching them with a contemptuous smile.

This reply did not seem to please the man for he withdrew to consult again with his companions. After a debate which I suppose was animated for the Amahagger, men of few words who did not indulge in oratory, all of them advanced on us and the spokesman said,

"The choice of a General does not please us, Hiya. We know that the white man is brave because of the fight he made against the men of Rezu over the mountain yonder; also that he and his followers have weapons that deal death from afar. But there is a prophecy among us of which none know the beginning, that he who commands in the last great battle between Lulala and Rezu must produce before the eyes of the People of Lulala a certain holy thing, a charm of power, without which defeat will be the portion of Lulala. Of this holy thing, this spirit-haunted shape of power, we know the likeness and the fashion, for these have come down among our priests, though who told it to them we cannot tell, but of it I will say this only, that it speaks both of the spirit and the body, of man and yet of more than man."

"And if this wondrous charm, this talisman of might, cannot be shown by

the white lord here, what then?" asked Ayesha coldly.

"Then, Hiya, this is the word of the People of Lulala, that we will not serve under him in the battle, and this also is their word that we will not go up against Rezu. That thou art mighty we know well, Hiya, also that thou canst slay if thou wilt, but we know also that Rezu is mightier and that against him thou hast no power. Therefore kill us if thou dost so desire, until thy heart is satisfied with death. For it is better that we should perish thus than upon the altar of sacrifice wearing the red-hot crowns of Rezu."

"So say we all," exclaimed the rest of the company when he had finished.

"The thought comes to me to begin to satisfy my heart with thy coward blood and that of thy companions," said Ayesha contemptuously. Then she paused and turning to me, added, "O Watcher-by-Night, what counsel? Is there aught that will convince these chicken-hearted ones over whom I have spread my feathers for so long?"

I shook my head blankly, whereat they murmured together and made as though they would go.

Then it was that Hans, who understood something of Arabic as he did of most African tongues, pulled my sleeve and whispered in my ear.

"The Great Medicine, Baas! Show them Zikali's Great Medicine."

Here was an idea. The description of the article required, a "spirit-haunted shape of power" that spoke "both of the spirit and the body of man and yet of more than man," was so vague that it might mean anything or nothing. And yet---

I turned to Ayesha and prayed her to ask them if what they wanted should be produced, whether they would follow me bravely and fight Rezu to the death. She did so and with one voice they replied,

"Aye, bravely and to the death, him and the Bearer of the Axe of whom also our legend tells."

Then with deliberation I opened my shirt and holding out the image of Zikali as far as the chain of elephant hair would allow, I asked,

"Is this the holy thing, the charm of power, of which your legend tells, O People of the Amahagger and worshippers of Lulala?"

The spokesman glanced at it, then snatching a brand from a watch-fire that burnt near by held it over the carving and stared, and stared again; and as he did, so did the others bending over him.

"Dog! would you singe my beard?" I cried in affected rage, and seizing the brand from his hand I smote him with it over the head.

But he took no heed of the affront which I had offered to him merely to assert my authority. Still for a few moments he stared although the sparks from the wood were frizzling in his greasy hair, then of a sudden went down on his face before me, as did all the others and cried out,

"It is the Holy Thing! It is the spirit-haunted Shape of Power itself, and we the Worshippers of Lulala will follow thee to the death, O white lord, Watcher-by-Night. Yes, where thou goest and he goes who bears the Axe, thither will we follow till not one of us is left upon his feet."

"Then that's settled," I said, yawning, since it is never wise to show concern about anything before savages. Indeed personally I had no wish to be the leader of this very peculiar tribe in an adventure of which I knew nothing, and therefore had hoped that they would leave that honour to someone else. Then I turned and told Umslopogaas what had passed, a tale at which he only shrugged his great shoulders, handling his axe as though he were minded to try its edge upon some of these "Dark-lovers," as he named the Amahagger people because of their nocturnal habits.

Meanwhile Ayesha gave certain orders. Then she came to me and said,

"These men march at once, three thousand strong, and by dawn will camp on the northern mountain crest. At sunrise litters will come to bear you and those with you if they will, to join them, which you should do by midday. In the afternoon marshall them as you think wise, for the battle will take place in the small hours of the following morning, since the



People of Lulala only fight at night. I have said."

"Do you not come with us?" I asked, dismayed.

"Nay, not in a war against Rezu, why it matters not. Yet my Spirit will go with you, for I shall watch all that passes, how it matters not and perchance you may see it there--I know not. On the third day from to-morrow we shall meet again in the flesh or beyond it, but as I think in the flesh, and you can claim the reward which you journeyed here to seek. A place shall be prepared for the white lady whom Rezu would have set up as a rival queen to me. Farewell, and farewell also to yonder Bearer of the Axe that shall drink the blood of Rezu, also to the little yellow man who is rightly named Light-in-Darkness, as you shall learn ere all is done."

Then before I could speak she turned and glided away, swiftly surrounded by her guards, leaving me astonished and very uncomfortable.