

CHAPTER XII

TRAPPED

Outside in the cool night air I recovered myself, sufficiently at any rate to be able to think, and saw at once that the thing was an illusion for which Zikali had prepared my mind very carefully by means of the young witch-doctress, Nombe. He knew well enough that this remarkable woman, Mameena, had made a deep impression on me nearly a quarter of a century before, as she had done upon other men with whom she had been associated. Therefore it was probable that she would always be present to my thought, since whatever a man forgets, he remembers the women who have shown him favour, true or false, for Nature has decreed it thus.

Moreover, this was one to be remembered for herself, since she was beautiful and most attractive in her wild way. Also she had brought about a great war, causing the death of thousands, and lastly her end might fairly be called majestic. All these

impressions Zikali had instructed Nombe to revivify by her continual allusions to Mameena, and lastly by her pretence that she saw her walking in front of me. Then when I was tired and hungry, in that place which for me was so closely connected with this woman, and in his own uncanny company, either by mesmerism or through the action of the drug he threw upon the fire, he had succeeded in calling up the illusion of her presence to my charmed sight. All this was clear enough, what remained obscure was his object.

Possibly he had none beyond an impish desire to frighten me, which is common enough among practitioners of magic in all lands. Well, for a little while he had succeeded, although to speak truth I remained uncertain whether in a sense I was not more thrilled and rejoiced than frightened. Mameena had never been so ill to look upon, and I knew that dead or living I had nothing to fear from her who would have walked through hell fire for my sake, would have done anything, except perhaps sacrifice her ambition. No, even if this were her ghost I should have been glad to see her again.

But it was not a ghost; it was only a fancy reproduced exactly as my mind had photographed her, almost as my eyes last saw her, when her kiss was still warm upon my lips.

Such were my thoughts as I stood outside that hut with the cold

perspiration running down my face, for to tell the truth my nerves were upset, although without reason. So upset were they that when suddenly a silent-footed man appeared out of the darkness I jumped as high as though I had set my foot on a puff-adder, and until I recognized him by his voice as one of Nombe's servants who had accompanied us from Swazi-Land, felt quite alarmed. As a matter of fact he had only come to tell me that our meal was ready and that the other "high White Ones" were waiting for me.

He led me round the fence that encircled Zikali's dwelling-place, to two huts that stood nearly behind it, almost against the face of the rock which, overhanging in a curve, formed a kind of natural roof above them. I thought they must have been built since I visited the place, as I, who have a good memory for such things, did not remember them. Indeed, on subsequent examination I found that they were quite new, for the poles that formed their uprights were still green and the grass of the thatch was scarcely dry. It looked to me as if they had been specially constructed for our accommodation.

In one of these huts, that to the right which was allotted to Anscombe and myself, I found the others waiting for me, also the food. It was good of its sort and well cooked, and we ate it by the light of some candles that we had with us, Kaatje serving us. Yet, although a little while before I had been desperately

hungry, now my appetite seemed to have left me and I made but a poor meal. Heda and Anscombe also seemed oppressed and ate sparingly. We did not talk much until Kaatje had taken away the tin plates and gone to eat her own supper by a fire that burned outside the hut. Then Heda broke out, saying that she was terrified of this place and especially of its master, the old dwarf, and felt sure that something terrible was going to happen to her. Anscombe did his best to calm her, and I also told her she had nothing to fear.

"If there is nothing to fear, Mr. Quatermain," she answered, turning on me, "why do you look so frightened yourself? By your face you might have seen a ghost."

This sudden and singularly accurate thrust, for after all I had seen something that looked very like a ghost, startled me, and before I could invent any soothing and appropriate fib, Nombe appeared, saying that she had come to lead Heda to her sleeping-place. After this further conversation was impossible since, although Nombe knew but few words of English, she was a great thought-reader and I feared to speak of anything secret in her presence. So we all went out of the hut, Nombe and I drawing back a little to the fire while the lovers said good-night to each other.

"Nombe," I said, "the Inkosikazi Heddana is afraid. The rocks of

this kloof lie heavy on her heart; the face of the Opener of Roads is fearful to her and his laughter grates upon her ears. Do you understand?"

"I understand, Macumazahn, and it is as I expected. When you yourself are frightened it is natural that she, an untried maiden, should be frightened also in this home of spirits."

"It is men we fear, not spirits, now when all Zululand is boiling like a pot," I replied angrily.

"Have it as you will, Macumazahn," she said, and at that moment her quiet, searching eyes and fixed smile were hateful to me.

"At least you admit that you do fear. Well, for the lady Heddana fear nothing. I sleep across the door of her hut, and while I who have learned to love her, live, I say--for her fear nothing, whatever may chance or whatever you may see or hear."

"I believe you, but, Nombe, you might die."

"Yes, I may die, but be sure of this, that when I die she will be safe, and he who loves her also. Sleep well, Macumazahn, and do not dream too much of what you heard and saw in Zikali's house."

Then before I could speak she turned and left me.

I did not sleep well; I slept very badly. To begin with, Maurice Anscombe, generally the most cheerful and nonchalant of mortals with a jest for every woe, was in a most depressed condition, and informed me of it several times, while I was getting ready to turn in. He said he thought the place hateful and felt as if people he could not see were looking at him (I had the same sensation but did not mention the fact to him). When I told him he was talking stuff, he only replied that he could not help it, and pointed out that it was not his general habit to be downcast in any danger, which was quite true. Now, he added, he was enjoying much the same sensations as he did when first he saw the Yellow-wood Swamp and got the idea into his head that he would kill some one there, which happened in due course.

"Do you mean that you think you are going to kill somebody else?"

I asked anxiously.

"No," he answered, "I think I am going to be killed, or something like it, probably by that accursed old villain of a witch-doctor, who I don't believe is altogether human."

"Others have thought that before now, Anscombe, and to be plain, I don't know that he is. He lives too much with the dead to be like other people."

"And with Satan, to whom I expect he makes sacrifices. The truth

is I'm afraid of his playing some of his tricks with Heda. It is for her I fear, not for myself, Allan. Oh! why on earth did you come here?"

"Because you wished it and it seemed the safest thing to do. Look here, my boy, as usual the trouble comes through a woman. When a man's single--you know the rest. You used to be able to laugh at anything, but now that you are practically double you can't laugh any more. Well, that's the common lot of man and you've got to put up with it. Adam was pretty jolly in his garden until Eve was started, but you know what happened afterwards. The rest of his life was a compound of temptation, anxiety, family troubles, remorse, hard labour with primitive instruments, and a flaming sword behind him. If you had left your Eve alone you would have escaped all this. But you see you didn't, and as a matter of fact, nobody ever does who is worth his salt, for Nature has arranged it so."

"You appear to talk with experience, Allan," he retorted blandly. "By the way, that girl Nombe, when she isn't star-gazing or muttering incantations, is always trying to explain to Heda some tale about you and a lady called Mameena. I gather that you were introduced to her in this neighbourhood where, Nombe says, you were in the habit of kissing her in public, which sounds an odd kind of a thing to do; all of which happened before she, Nombe, was born. She adds, according to Kaatje's interpretation, that

you met her again this afternoon, which, as I understand the young woman has been long dead, seems so incomprehensible that I wish you would explain."

"With reference to Heda," I said, ignoring the rest as unworthy of notice, "I think you may make your mind easy. Zikali knows that she is in my charge and I don't believe that he wants to quarrel with me. Still, as you are uncomfortable here, the best thing to do will be to get away as early as possible to-morrow morning, where to we can decide afterwards. And now I am going to sleep, so please stop arguing."

As I have already hinted, my attempts in the sleep line proved a failure, for whenever I did drop off I was pursued by bad dreams, which resulted from lying down so soon after supper. I heard the cries of desperate men in their mortal agony. I saw a rain-swollen river; its waters were red with blood. I beheld a vision of one who I knew by his dress to be a Zulu king, although I could not see his face. He was flying and staggering with weariness as he fled. A great hound followed him. It lifted its head from the spoor; it was that of Zikali set upon the hound's body, Zikali who laughed instead of baying. Then one whose copper ornaments tinkled as she walked, entered beside me, whispering into my ear. "A quarter of a hundred years have gone by since we talked together in this haunted kloof," she seemed to whisper, "and before we talk again face to face there remain to

pass of years"--

Here she ceased, though naturally I should have liked to hear the number. But that is just where dreams break down. They tell us only of what we know, or can evolve therefrom. Of what it is impossible for us to know they tell us nothing--at least as a general rule.

I woke up with a start, and feeling stifled in that hot place and aggravated by the sound of Anscombe's peaceful breathing, threw a coat about me and, removing the door-board, crept into the air. The night was still, the stars shone, and at a little distance the embers of the fire still glowed. By it was seated a figure wrapped in a kaross. The end of a piece of wood that the fire had eaten through fell on to the red ashes and flamed up brightly. By its light I saw that the figure was Nombe's. The eternal smile was still upon her face, the smile which suggested a knowledge of hidden things that from moment to moment amused her soul. Her lips moved as though she were talking to an invisible companion, and from time to time, like one who acts upon directions, she took a pinch of ashes and blew them, either towards Heda's hut or ours. Yes, she did this when all decent young women should have been asleep, like one who keeps some unholy, midnight assignation.

Talking with her master, Zikali, or trying to cast spells upon

us, confound her! thought I to myself, and very silently crept back into the hut. Afterwards it occurred to me that she might have had another motive, namely of watching to see that none of us left the huts.

The rest of the night went by somehow. Once, listening with all my ears, I thought that I caught the sound of a number of men tramping and of some low word of command, but as I heard no more, concluded that fancy had deceived me. There I lay, puzzling over the situation till my head ached, and wondering how we were to get clear of the Black Kloof and Zikali, and out of Zululand which I gathered was no place for white people at the moment.

It seemed to me that the only thing was to make start for Dundee on the Natal border, and for the rest to trust to fortune. If we got into trouble over the death of Rodd, unpleasant as this would be, the matter must be faced out, that was all. For even if any witness appeared against us, the man had been killed in self-defence whilst trying to bring about our deaths at the hands of Basutos. I could see now that I was foolish not to have taken this line from the first, but as I think I have already explained, what weighed with me was the terror of involving these young people in a scandal which might shadow all their future lives. Also some fate inch by inch had dragged me into Zululand. Fortunately in life there are few mistakes, and even worse than mistakes that cannot be repaired, if the wish towards reparation

is real and earnest. Were it otherwise not many of us would escape destruction in one form or another.

Thus I reflected until at length light flowing faintly through the smoke-hole of the hut told me that dawn was at hand. Seeing it I rose quietly, for I did not wish to wake Anscombe, dressed and left the hut. My object was to find Nombe, who I hoped would be still sitting by the fire, and send her to Zikali with a message that I wished to speak with him at once. Glancing round me in the grey dawn I saw that she was gone and that as yet no one seemed to be stirring. Hearing a horse snort at a little distance, I made my way towards the sound and in a little bay of the overhanging cliff discovered the cart and near by our beasts tied up with a plentiful supply of forage. Since so far as I could judge in that uncertain light, nothing seemed to be wrong with them except weariness, for three of them were still lying down, I walked on to the gate of the fence which surrounded Zikali's big hut, proposing to wait there until some one appeared by whom I could send my message.

I reached the gate which I tried and found to be fastened on its inner side. Then I sat down, lit my pipe and waited. It was extraordinarily lonesome in that place; at least this was the feeling that came over me. No doubt the sun was up behind the Ceza Stronghold that I have mentioned, which towered high behind me, for the sky above grew light with the red rays of its rising.

But all the vast Black Kloof with its huge fantastic rocks was still plunged in gloom, whereof the shadows seemed to oppress my heart, weary as I was with my wakeful night and many anxieties. I was horribly nervous also and, as it proved, not without reason. Presently I heard rustlings on the further side of the fence as of people creeping about cautiously, and the sound of whispering. Then of a sudden the gate was thrown open and through it emerged about a dozen Zulu warriors, all of them ringed men, who instantly surrounded me, seated there upon the ground.

I looked at them and they looked at me for quite a long while, since following my usual rule, I determined not to be the first to speak. Moreover, if they meant to kill me there was no use in speaking. At length their leader, an elderly man with thin legs, a large stomach and a rather pleasant countenance, saluted politely, saying--

"Good morning, O Macumazahn."

"Good morning, O Captain, whose name and business I do not know," I answered.

"The winds know the mountain on which they blow, but the mountain does not know the winds which it cannot see," he remarked with poetical courtesy; a Zulu way of saying that more people are

acquainted with Tom Fool than Tom Fool is aware of.

"Perhaps, Captain; yet the mountain can feel the winds," and I might have added, smell them, for the Kloof was close and these Kaffirs had not recently bathed.

"I am named Goza and come on an errand from the king, O Macumazahn."

"Indeed, Goza, and is your errand to cut my throat?"

"Not at present, Macumazahn, that is, unless you refuse to do what the king wishes."

"And what does the king wish, Goza?"

"He wishes, Macumazahn, that you, his friend, should visit him."

"Which is just what I was on my way to do, Goza." (This was not true, but it didn't matter, for, if a lie, in the words of the schoolgirl's definition, is an abomination to the Lord, it is a very present help in time of trouble.) "After we have eaten I and my friends will accompany you to the king's kraal at Ulundi."

"Not so, Macumazahn. The king said nothing about your friends, of whom I do not think he has ever heard any more than we have.

Moreover, if your friends are white, you will do well not to mention them, since the order is that all white people in Zululand who have not come here by the king's desire, are to be killed at once, except yourself, Macumazahn."

"Is it so, Goza? Well, as you will have understood, I am quite alone here and have no friends. Only I did not wish to travel so early."

"Of course we understand that you are quite alone and have no friends, is it not so, my brothers?"

"Yes, yes, we understand," they exclaimed in chorus, one of them adding, "and shall so report to the King."

"What kind of blankets do you like; the plain grey ones or the white ones with the blue stripes?" I asked, desiring to confirm them in this determination.

"The grey ones are warmer, Macumazahn, and do not show dirt so much," answered Goza thoughtfully.

"Good, I will remember when I have the chance."

"The promise of Macumazahn is known from of old to be as a tree that elephants cannot pull down and white ants will not eat,"

said the sententious Goza, thereby intimating his belief that some time or other they would receive those blankets. As a matter of fact the survivors of the party and the families of the others did receive them after the war, for in dealing with natives I have always made a point of trying to fulfil any promise or engagement made for value received.

"And now," went on Goza, "will the Inkosi be pleased to start, as we have to travel far to-day?"

"Impossible," I replied. "Before I leave I must eat, for who can journey upon yesterday's food? Also I must saddle my horse, collect what belongs to me, and bid farewell to my host, Zikali."

"Of meat we have plenty with us, Macumazahn, and therefore you will not hunger on the way. Your horse and everything that is yours shall be brought after you; since were you mounted on that swift beast and minded to escape, how could we catch you with our feet, and did you please to shoot us with your rifle, how could we who have only spears, save ourselves from dying? As for the Opener of Roads, his servants have told us that he means to sleep all to-day that he may talk with spirits in his dreams, and therefore it is useless for you to wait to bid him farewell. Moreover, the orders of the king are that we should bring you to him at once."

After this for a time there was silence, while I sat immovable revolving the situation, and the Zulus regarded me with a benignant interest. Goza took his snuff-box from his ear, shook out some into the palm of his hand and, after offering it to me in vain, inhaled it himself.

"The orders of the king are (sneeze) that we should bring you to him alive if possible, and if not (sneeze) dead. Choose which you will, Macumazahn. Perhaps you may prefer to go to Ulundi dead, which would--ah! how strong is this snuff, it makes me weep like a woman--save you the trouble of walking. But if you prefer that we should carry you, be so good, Macumazahn, first to write the words which will cause the grey blankets to be delivered to us, for we know well that even your bones would desire to keep your promise. Is it not a proverb in the land from the time of the slaying of Bangu when you gave the cattle you had earned to Saduko's wanderers?"

I listened and an idea occurred to me, as perhaps it had to Goza.

"I hear you, Goza," I said, "and I will start for Ulundi on my feet--to save you the trouble of carrying me. But as the times are rough and accidents may always happen; as, too, I wish to make sure that you should get those blankets, and it may chance that I shall arrive there on my back, first I will write words which, if they are delivered to the witch-doctress Nombe, will,

sooner or later, turn into blankets."

"Write the words quickly, Macumazahn, and they will be delivered," said Goza.

So I drew out my pocket-book and wrote--

"DEAR ANSCOMBE,--

"There is treachery afoot and I think that Zikali is at the bottom of it. I am being carried off to Cetewayo at Ulundi, by a party of armed Zulus who will not allow me to communicate with you, probably by Zikali's orders. You must do the best you can for Heda and yourself. Escape to Natal if you are able. Of course I will help if I get the chance, but if war is about to break out Cetewayo may kill me. I think that you can trust Nombe; also that Zikali does not wish to work you any ill unless he is obliged, though I have no doubt that he has trapped us here for some dark purpose of his own. Tell him through Nombe that if harm comes to you I will kill him if I live, and that if I die, I will settle the score with him afterwards. God save and bless you both. Keep up your courage and use your wits.

"Your friend,

"A. Q."

I tore out the sheet, folded, addressed it and presented it to Goza, remarking that although it seemed to be but paper, it really was fourteen blankets--if given at once to Nombe.

He nodded and handed it to one of his men, who departed in the direction of our huts. So, thought I to myself, Nombe knows all about this business, which means that it is being worked by Zikali. That is why she spoke to me as she did last night.

"It is time to start, Macumazahn, and I think you told us that you would prefer to do so on your feet," said Goza, looking suggestively at his spear.

"I am ready," I said, rising because I must. For a moment I contemplated the door in the kraal fence, wondering whether it would be safe to bolt through it and take refuge with Zikali. No, it was not safe, since Zikali sat there in his hut pulling the strings and probably might refuse to see me. Moreover, it was likely enough that before I could find him one of those broad spears would find my heart. There was nothing to be done except submit. Still I did call out in a loud voice--

"Farewell, Zikali. I leave you without a present against my will

who am being taken by soldiers to visit the king at Ulundi. When we meet again I will talk all this matter over with you."

There was no answer, and as Goza took the opportunity to say that he disliked the noise of shouting extremely, which sometimes made him do things that he afterwards regretted, I became silent.

Then we departed, I in the exact centre of that guard of Zulus, heavy-hearted and filled with fears both for myself and those I left behind me.

Down the Black Kloof we tramped, emerging on the sunlit plain beyond without meeting any one. A couple of miles further on we came to a small stream where Goza announced we would halt to eat. So we ate of cold toasted meat which one of the men produced from a basket he carried, unpalatable food but better than nothing. Just as we had finished I looked up and saw the soldier to whom my note had been given. He was leading my mare that had been saddled. On it were my large saddle-bags packed with my belongings, also my thick overcoat, mackintosh, waterbottle, and other articles down to a bag of tobacco, a spare pipe and a box of wax matches. Moreover, the man carried my double-barrelled Express rifle and a shot-gun that could be used for ball, together with two bags of cartridges. Practically nothing belonging to me had been forgotten.

I asked him who had collected the things. He replied the

doctress Nombe had done so and had brought him the horse saddled to carry them. He did not know who saddled the horse as he had seen no one but Nombe to whom he had given the writing which she hid away. In answer to further questions, he said that Nombe had sent me a message. It was--

"I bid farewell to Macumazahn for a little while and wish him good fortune till we meet again. Let him not be afraid in the battle, for even if he is hurt it will not be to death, since those go with him whom he cannot see, and protect him with their shields. Say to Macumazahn that I, Nombe, remember in the morning what I said in the night and that what seems to be quite lost is oftentimes found again. Wish him good fortune and tell him I am sorry that I had not time to cause his spare garments to be cleansed with water, but that I have been careful to find his little box with the white man's medicines."

I could extract nothing more from this soldier, who was either very stupid, or chose to appear so; nor indeed did I dare to put direct questions about the cart and those who travelled in it.

Soon we marched again, for Goza would not allow me to ride the horse, fearing that I should escape on it. Nor would he let me carry either of the guns lest I should make use of them. All day we travelled, reaching the Nongoma heights in the late afternoon. On this beautiful spot we found a kraal situated where afterwards

a magistracy was built when we conquered the country, whence there is one of the finest views in Zululand. There was no one in the kraal except two old women who appeared to be deaf and dumb for all I could get out of them. These aged dames, however, or others who were hidden, had made ready for our arrival, since a calf lay skinned and prepared for cooking, and by it big gourds filled with Kaffir beer and "maas" or curdled milk.

In due course we ate of these provisions, and after we had finished I gave Goza a stiff tot of brandy, of which Nombe, or perhaps Anscombe, had thoughtfully sent a bottle with my other baggage. The strong liquor made the old fellow talkative and enabled me to get a good deal of information out of him. Thus I learned that certain demands, as to which he was rather vague, had been made upon Cetewayo by the English Government, and that the King was now considering whether he should accede to them or fight. The Great Council of the nation was summoned to attend at Ulundi within a few days, when the matter would be decided. Meanwhile all the regiments were being gathered, or, as we should say, mobilized; an army, said Goza, greater than any that Chaka had ever led.

I asked him what I had to do with this business, that I, a peaceful traveller and an old friend of the Zulus, should be made prisoner and dragged off to Ulundi. He replied he did not know who was not in the council of the High Ones, but he thought that

Cetewayo the king wished to see me because I was their friend, perhaps that he might send me as a messenger to the white people. I asked him how the king knew that I was in the country, to which he replied that Zikali had told him I was coming, he did not know how, whereon he, Goza, was sent at once to fetch me. I could get no more out of him.

I wondered if it would be worth while to make him quite drunk and then attempt to escape on the horse, but gave up the idea. To begin with, his men were at hand and there was not enough brandy to make them all drunk. Also even if I succeeded in winning away here in the heart of Zululand, it would not help Anscombe or Heda and I should probably be cut off and killed before I could get out of the country. So I abandoned the plan and went to sleep instead.

Next morning we left Nongoma early in the hope of reaching Ulundi that evening if the Ivuna and Black Umfolozi Rivers proved fordable. As it chanced, although they were high, we were able to cross them, I seated on the horse which two of the Zulus led. Next we tramped for miles through the terrible Bekameezi Valley, a hot and desolate place which the Zulus swear is haunted. So unhealthy is this valley, which is the home of large game, that whole kraals full of people who have tried to cultivate the rich land, have died in it of fever, or fled away leaving their crops unreaped. Now no man dwells there. After this we climbed a

terrible mount to the high land of Mahlabatini, and having eaten, pushed on once more.

At length we sighted the great hill-encircled plain of Ulundi which may be called the cradle of the Zulu race as, politically speaking, it was destined to be its coffin. On the ridge to the west once stood the Nobamba kraal where dwelt Senzangacona, the father of Chaka the Lion. Nearer to the White Umfolozi was Panda's dwelling-place, Nodwengu, which once I knew so well, while on the slope of the hills of the north-east stood the town of Ulundi in which Cetewayo dwelt, bathed in the lights of sunset.

Indeed it and all the vast plain were red as though with blood, red as they were destined to be on the coming day of the last battle of the Zulus.