

## CHAPTER XVI

### WAR

Now men began to whisper together and Goza groaned at my side.

"Rather would I look down a live lion's throat than see the dead," he murmured. But I, who was anxious to learn how far Zikali would carry his tricks, contemptuously told him to be silent.

Presently the king called me to him and said--

"Macumazahn, you white men are reported to know all things. Tell me now, is it possible for the dead to appear?"

"I am not sure," I answered doubtfully; "some say that it is and some say that it is not possible."

"Well," said the king. "Have you ever seen one you knew in life after death?"

"No," I replied, "that is--yes. That is--I do not know. When you will tell me, King, where waking ends and sleep begins, then I will answer."

"Macumazahn," he exclaimed, "just now I announced that you were no liar, who perceive that after all you are a liar, for how can you both have seen, and not seen, the dead? Indeed I remember that you lied long ago, when you gave it out that the witch Mameena was not your lover, and afterwards showed that she was by kissing her before all men, for who kisses a woman who is not his lover, or his mother? Return, since you will not tell me the truth."

So I went back to my stool, feeling very small and yet indignant, for how was it possible to be definite about ghosts, or to explain the exact facts of the Mameena myth which clung to me like a Wait-a-bit thorn.

Then after a little consultation Cetewayo said--

"It is our desire, O Opener of Roads, that you should draw wisdom from the fount of Death, if indeed you can do so. Now let any who are afraid depart and wait for us who are not afraid, alone

and in silence at the mouth of the kloof."

At this some of the audience rose, but after hesitating a little, sat down again. Only Goza actually took a step forward, but on my remarking that he would probably meet the dead coming up that way, collapsed, muttering something about my pistol, for the fool seemed to think I could shoot a spirit.

"If indeed I can do so," repeated Zikali in a careless fashion.

"That is to be proved, is it not? Perhaps, too, it may be better for every one of you if I fail than if I succeed. Of one thing I warn you, should the dead appear stir not, and above all touch not, for he who does either of these things will, I think, never live to look upon the sun again. But first let me try an easier fashion."

Then once again he took up the skull that he said had been his daughter's, and whispered to it, only to lay it down presently.

"It will not serve," he said with a sigh and shaking his locks.

"Noma tells me that she died a child, one who had no knowledge of war or matters of policy, and that in all these things of the world she still remains a child. She says that I must seek some one who thought much of them; one, too who still lives in the heart of a man who is present here, if that be possible, since from such a heart alone can the strength be drawn to enable the

dead to appear and speak. Now let there be silence--Let there be silence, and woe to him that breaks it."

Silence there was indeed, and in it Zikali crouched himself down till his head almost rested on his knee, and seemed to go to sleep. He awoke again and chanted for half a minute or so in some language I could not understand. Then voices began to answer him, as it seemed to me from all over the kloof, also from the sky or rock above. Whether the effect was produced by ventriloquism or whether he had confederates posted at various points, I do not know.

At any rate this lord of "multitudes of spirits" seemed to be engaged in conversation with some of them. What is more, the thing was extremely well done, since each voice differed from the other; also I seemed to recognize some of them, Dingaan's for instance, and Panda's, yes, and that of Umbelazi the Handsome, the brother of the king whose death I witnessed down by the Tugela.

You will ask me what they said. I do not know. Either the words were confused or the events that followed have blotted them from my brain. All I remember is that each of them seemed to be speaking of the Zulus and their fate and to be very anxious to refer further discussion of the matter to some one else. In short they seemed to talk under protest, or that was my

impression, although Goza, the only person with whom I had any subsequent debate upon the subject, appeared to have gathered one that was different, though what it was I do not recall. The only words that remained clear to me must, I thought, have come from the spirit of Chaka, or rather from Zikali or one of his myrmidons assuming that character. They were uttered in a deep full voice, spiced with mockery, and received by the wizard with "Sibonga," or titles of praise, which I who am versed in Zulu history and idiom knew had only been given to the great king, and indeed since his death had become unlawful, not to be used. The words were--

"What, Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born, do you think yourself a Thing-that-should-never-die, that you still sit beneath the moon and weave witchcrafts as of old? Often have I hunted for you in the Under-world who have an account to settle with you, as you have an account to settle with me. So, so, what does it matter since we must meet at last, even if you hide yourself at the back of the furthest star? Why do you bring me up to this place where I see some whom I would forget? Yes, they build bone on bone and taking the red earth, mould it into flesh and stand before me as last I saw them newly dead. Oh! your magic is good, Spell-weaver, and your hate is deep and your vengeance is keen. No, I have nothing to tell you to-day, who rule a greater people than the Zulus in another land. Who are these little men who sit before you? One of them has a look of

Dingaan, my brother who slew me, yes, and wears his armlet. Is he the king? Answer not, for I do not care to know. Surely yonder withered thing is Siganda. I know his eye and the Iziqu on his breast. Yes, I gave it to him after the great battle with Zweede in which he killed five men. Does he remember it, I wonder? Greeting, Siganda; old as you are you have still twenty and one years to live, and then we will talk of the battle with Zweede. Let me begone, this place burns my spirit, and in it there is a stench of mortal blood. Farewell, O Conqueror!"

These were the words that I thought I heard Chaka say, though I daresay that I dreamt them. Indeed had it been otherwise, I mean had they really been spoken by Zikali, there would surely have been more in them, something that might have served his purpose, not mere talk which had all the inconsequence of a dream. Also no one else seemed to pay any particular attention to them, though this may have been because so many voices were sounding from different places at once, for as I have said, Zikali arranged his performance very well, as well as any medium could have done on a prepared stage in London.

In a moment, as though at a signal, the voices died away. Then other things happened. To begin with I felt very faint, as though all the strength were being taken out of me. Some queer fancy got a hold of me. I don't quite know what it was, but it had to do with the Bible story of Adam when he fell asleep and a

rib was removed from him and made into a woman. I reflected that I felt as Adam must have done when he came out of his trance after this terrific operation, very weak and empty. Also, as it chanced, presently I saw Eve--or rather a woman. Looking at the fire in a kind of disembodied way, I perceived that dense smoke was rising from it, which smoke spread itself out like a fan. It thinned by degrees, and through the veil of smoke I perceived something else, namely, a woman very like one whom once I had known. There she stood, lightly clad enough, her fingers playing with the blue beads of her necklace, an inscrutable smile upon her face and her large eyes fixed on nothingness.

Oh! Heaven, I knew her, or rather thought I did at the moment, for now I am almost sure that it was Nombe dressed, or undressed, for the part. That knowledge came with reflection, but then I could have sworn, being deceived by the uncertain light, that the long dead Mameena stood before us as she had seemed to stand before me in the hut of Zikali, radiating a kind of supernatural life and beauty.

A little wind arose, shaking the dry leaves of the aloes in the kloof; I thought it whispered--Hail, Mameena! Some of the older men, too, among them a few who had seen her die, in trembling voices murmured, "It is Mameena!" whereon Zikali scowled at them and they grew silent.

As for the figure it stood there patient and unmoved, like one who has all time at its disposal, playing with the blue beads. I heard them tinkle against each other, which proves that it was human, for how could a wraith cause beads to tinkle, although it is true that Christmas-story ghosts are said to clank their chains. Her eyes roved idly and without interest over the semi-circle of terrified men before her. Then by degrees they fixed themselves upon the tree behind which I was crouching, whereon Goza sank paralyzed to the ground. She contemplated this tree for a while that seemed to me interminable; it reminded me of a setter pointing game it winded but could not see, for her whole frame grew intent and alert. She ceased playing with the beads and stretched out her slender hand towards me. Her lips moved. She spoke in a sweet, slow voice, saying--

"O Watcher-by-Night, is it thus you greet her to whom you have given strength to stand once more beneath the moon? Come hither and tell me, have you no kiss for one from whom you parted with a kiss?"

I heard. Without doubt the voice was the very voice of Mameena (so well had Nombe been instructed). Still I determined not to obey it, who would not be made a public laughing-stock for a second time in my life. Also I confess this jesting with the dead seemed to me somewhat unholy, and not on any account would I take a part in it.

All the company turned and stared at me, even Goza lifted his head and stared, but I sat still and contemplated the beauties of the night.

"If it is the spirit of Mameena, he will come," whispered Cetewayo to Umnyamana.

"Yes, yes," answered the Prime Minister, "for the rope of his love will draw him. He who has once kissed Mameena, must kiss her again when she asks."

Hearing this I grew furiously indignant and was about to break into explanations, when to my horror I found myself rising from that stool. I tried to cling to it, but, as it only came into the air with me, let it go.

"Hold me, Goza," I muttered, and he like a good fellow clutched me by the ankle, whereon I promptly kicked him in the mouth, at least my foot kicked him, not my will. Now I was walking towards that Shape--shadow or woman--like a man in his sleep, and as I came she stretched out her arms and smiled oh! as sweetly as an angel, though I felt quite sure that she was nothing of the sort.

Now I stood opposite to her alongside the fire of which the smoke smelt like roses at the dawn, and she seemed to bend towards me.

With shame and humiliation I perceived that in another moment those arms would be about me. But somehow they never touched me; I lost sight of them in the rose-scented smoke, only the sweet, slow voice which I could have sworn was that of Mameena, murmured in my ear--well, words known to her and me alone that I had never breathed to any living being, though of course I am aware now that they must also have been known to somebody else.

"Do you doubt me any longer?" went on the murmuring. "Say, am I Nombe now? Or--or am I in truth that Mameena, whose kiss thrills your lips and soul? Hearken, Macumazahn, for the time is short. In the rout of the great battle that shall be, do not fly with the white men, but set your face towards Ulundi. One who was your friend will guard you, and whoever dies, no harm shall come to you now that the fire which burns in my heart has set all Zululand aflame. Hearken once more. Hans, the little yellow man who was named Light-in-Darkness, he who died among the Kendah people, sends you salutations and gives you praise. He bids me tell you that now of his own accord he renders to me, Mameena, the royal salute, because royal I must ever be; because also he and I who are so far apart are yet one in the love that is our life."

The smoke blew into my face, causing me to reel back. Cetewayo caught me by the arm, saying--

"Tell us, are the lips of the dead witch warm or cold?"

"I do not know," I groaned, "for I never touched her."

"How he lies! Oh! how he lies even about what our eyes saw," said Cetewayo reflectively as I blundered past him back to my seat, on which I sank half swooning. When I got my wits again the figure that pretended to be Mameena was speaking, I suppose in answer to some question of Zikali's which I had not heard. It said--

"O Lord of the Spirits, you have called me from the land of Spirits to make reply as to two matters which have not yet happened upon the earth. These replies I will give but no others, since the mortal strength that I have borrowed returns whence it came. The first matter is, if there be war between the White and Black, what will happen in that war? I see a plain ringed round with hills and on it a strange-shaped mount. I see a great battle; I see the white men go down like corn before a tempest; I see the spears of the impis redden; I see the white soldiers lie like leaves cut from a tree by frost. They are dead, all dead, save a handful that have fled away. I hear the ingoma of victory sung here at Ulundi. It is finished.

"The second matter is--what shall chance to the king? I see him tossed on the Black Water; I see him in a land full of houses,

talking with a royal woman and her councillors. There, too, he conquers, for they offer him tribute of many gifts. I see him here, back here in Zululand, and hear him greeted with the royal salute. Last of all I see him dead, as men must die, and hear the voice of Zikali and the mourning of the women of his house. It is finished. Farewell, King Cetewayo, I pass to tell Panda, your father, how it fares with you. When last we parted did I not prophesy to you that we should meet again at the bottom of a gulf? Was it this gulf, think you, or another? One day you shall learn. Farewell, or fare ill, as it may happen!"

Once more the smoke spread out like a fan. When it thinned and drew together again, the Shape was gone.

Now I thought that the Zulus would be so impressed by this very queer exhibition, that they would seek no more supernatural guidance, but make up their minds for war at once. This, however, was just what they did not do. As it happened, among the assembled chiefs, was one who himself had a great repute as a witch-doctor, and therefore burned with jealousy of Zikali who appeared to be able to do things that he had never even attempted. This man leapt up and declared that all which they had seemed to hear and see was but cunning trickery, carried out after long preparation by Zikali and his confederates. The voices, he said, came from persons placed in certain spots, or sometimes were produced by Zikali himself. As for the vision, it

was not that of a spirit but of a real woman, in proof of which he called attention to certain anatomical details of the figure. Finally, with much sense, he pointed out that the Council would be mad to come to any decision upon such evidence, or to give faith to prophecies, whereof the truth or falsity could only be known in the future.

Now a fierce debate broke out, the war party maintaining that the manifestations were genuine, the peace party that they were a fraud. In the end, as neither side would give way and as Zikali, when appealed to, sat silent as a stone, refusing any explanation, the king said--

"Must we sit here talking, talking, till daylight? There is but one man who can know the truth, that is Macumazahn. Let him deny it as he will, he was the lover of this Mameena while she was alive, for with my own eyes I saw him kiss her before she killed herself. It is certain, therefore, that he knows if the woman we seemed to see was Mameena or another, since there are things which a man never forgets. I propose, therefore, that we should question him and form our own judgment of his answer."

This advice, which seemed to promise a road out of a blind ally, met with instant acceptance.

"Let it be so," they cried with one voice, and in another minute

I was once more conducted from behind my tree and set down upon the stool in front of the Council, with my back to the fire and Zikali, "that his eyes might not charm me."

"Now, Watcher-by-Night," said Cetewayo, "although you have lied to us in a certain matter, of this we do not think much, since it is one upon which both men and women always lie, as every judge will know. Therefore we still believe you to be an honest man, as your dealings have proved for many years. As an honest man, therefore, we beg you to give us a true answer to a plain question. Was the Shape we saw before us just now a woman or a spirit, and if a spirit, was it the ghost of Mameena, the beautiful witch who died near this place nearly the quarter of a hundred years ago, she whom you loved, or who loved you, which is just the same thing, since a man always loves a woman who loves him, or thinks that he does?"

Now after reflection I replied in these words and as conscientiously as I could--

"King and Councillors, I do not know if what we all saw was a ghost or a living person, but, as I do not believe in ghosts, or at any rate that they come back to the world on such errands, I conclude that it was a living person. Still it may have been neither, but only a mere picture produced before us by the arts of Zikali. So much for the first question. Your second is--was

this spirit or woman or shadow, that of her whom I remember meeting in Zululand many years ago? King and Councillors, I can only say that it was very like her. Still one handsome young woman often greatly resembles another of the same age and colouring. Further, the moon gives an uncertain light, especially when it is tempered by smoke from a fire. Lastly, memory plays strange tricks with all of us, as you will know if you try to think of the face of any one who has been dead for more than twenty years. For the rest, the voice seemed similar, the beads and ornaments seemed similar, and the figure repeated to me certain words which I thought I alone had heard come from the lips of her who is dead. Also she gave me a strange message from another who is dead, referring to a matter which I believed was known only to me and that other. Yet Zikali is very clever and may have learned these things in some way unguessed by me, and what he has learned, others may have learned also. King and Councillors, I do not think that what we saw was the spirit of Mameena. I think it a woman not unlike to her who had been taught her lesson. I have nothing more to say, and therefore I pray you not to ask me any further questions about Mameena of whose name I grow weary."

At this point Zikali seemed to wake out of his indifference, or his torpor, for he looked up and said darkly--

"It is strange that the cleverest are always those who first fall

into the trap. They go along, gazing at the stars at night, and forget the pit which they themselves have dug in the morning. O-ho-ho! Oho-ho!"

Now the wrangling broke out afresh. The peace party pointed triumphantly to the fact that I, the white man who ought to know, put no faith in this apparition, which was therefore without doubt a fraud. The war party on the other hand declared that I was deceiving them for reasons of my own, one of which would be that I did not wish to see the Zulus eat up my people. So fierce grew the debate that I thought it would end in blows and perhaps in an attack on myself or Zikali who all the while sat quite careless and unmoved, staring at the moon. At length Cetewayo shouted for silence, spitting, as was his habit when angry.

"Make an end," he cried, "lest I cause some of you to grow quiet for ever," whereon the recriminations ceased. "Opener of Roads," he went on, "many of those who are present think like Macumazahn here, that you are but an old cheat, though whether or no I be one of these I will not say. They demand a sign of you that none can dispute, and I demand it also before I speak the word of peace or war. Give us then that sign or begone to whence you came and show your face no more at Ulundi."

"What sign does the Council require, Son of Panda?" asked Zikali quietly. "Let them agree on one together and tell me now at

once, for I who am old grow weary and would sleep. Then if it can be given I will give it; and if I cannot give it, I will get me back to my own house and show my face no more at Ulundi, who do not desire to listen again to fools who babble like contending waters round a stone and yet never stir the stone because they run two ways at once."

Now the Councillors stared at each other, for none knew what sign to ask. At length old Sigananda said--

"O King, it is well known that the Black One who went before you had a certain little assegai handled with the royal red wood, which drank the blood of many. It was with this assegai that Mopo his servant, who vanished from the land after the death of Dingaan, let out the life of the Black One at the kraal Duguza, but what became of it afterwards none have heard for certain. Some say that it was buried with the Black One, some that Mopo stole it. Others that Dingaan and Umhlagana burned it. Still a saying rose like a wind in the land that when that spear shall fall from heaven at the feet of the king who reigns in the place of the Black One, then the Zulus shall make their last great war and win a victory of which all the world shall hear. Now let the Opener of Roads give us this sign of the falling of the Black One's spear and I shall be content."

"Would you know the spear if it fell?" asked Cetewayo.

"I should know it, O King, who have often held it in my hand. The end of the haft is gnawed, for when he was angry the Black One used to bite it. Also a thumb's length from the blade is a black mark made with hot iron. Once the Black One made a bet with one of his captains that at a distance of ten paces he would throw the spear deeper into the body of a chief whom he wished to kill, than the captain could. The captain threw first, for I saw him with my eyes, and the spear sank to that place on the shaft where the mark is, for the Black One burned it there. Then the Black One threw and the spear went through the body of the chief who, as he died, called to him that he too should know the feel of it in his heart, as indeed he did."

I think that Cetewayo was about to assent to this suggestion, since he who desired peace believed it impossible that Zikali should suddenly cause this identical spear to fall from heaven. But Umnyamana, the Prime Induna, interposed hurriedly--

"It is not enough, O King. Zikali may have stolen the spear, for he was living and at the kraal Duguza at that time. Also he may have put about the prophecy whereof Sigananda speaks, or at least so men would say. Let him give us a greater sign than this that all may be content, so that whether we make war or peace it may be with a single mind. Now it is known that we Zulus have a guardian spirit who watches over us from the skies, she who is

called Nomkubulwana, or by some the Inkosazana-y-Zulu, the Princess of Heaven. It is known also that this Princess, who is white of skin and ruddy-haired, appears always before great things happen in our land. Thus she appeared before the Black One died. Also she appeared to a number of children before the battle of the Tugela. It is said, too, that but lately she appeared to a woman near the coast and warned her to cross the Tugela because there would be war, though this woman cannot now be found. Let the Opener of Roads call down Nomkubulwana before our eyes from heaven and we will admit, every man of us, that this is a sign which cannot be questioned."

"And if he does this thing, which I hold no doctor in the world can do, what shall it signify?" asked Cetewayo.

"O King," answered Umnyamana, "if he does so, it shall signify war and victory. If he does not do so, it shall signify peace, and we will bow our heads before the Amalungwana basi bodwe" (i.e., "the little English," used as a term of derision).

"Do all agree?" asked Cetewayo.

"We agree," answered every man, stretching out his hand.

"Then, Opener of Roads, it stands thus: If you can call Nomkubulwana, should there be such a spirit, to appear before our

eyes, the Council will take it as a sign that the Heavens direct us to fight the English."

So spoke Cetewayo, and I noted a tone of triumph in his voice, for his heart shrank from this war, and he was certain that Zikali could do nothing of the sort. Still the opinion of the nation, or rather of the army, was so strong in favour of it that he feared lest his refusal might bring about his deposition, if not his death. From this dilemma the supernatural test suggested by the Prime Minister and approved by the Council that represented the various tribes of people, seemed to offer a path of escape. So I read the situation, as I think rightly.

Upon hearing these words for the first time that night Zikali seemed to grow disturbed.

"What do my ears hear?" he exclaimed excitedly. "Am I the Umkulukulu, the Great-Great (i.e., God) himself, that it should be asked of me to draw the Princess of Heaven from beyond the stars, she who comes and goes like the wind, but like the wind cannot be commanded? Do they hear that if she will not come to my beckoning, then the great Zulu people must put a yoke upon their shoulders and be as slaves? Surely the King must have been listening to the doctrines of those English teachers who wear a white ribbon tied about their necks, and tell us of a god who suffered himself to be nailed to a cross of wood, rather than

make war upon his foes, one whom they call the Prince of Peace. Times have changed indeed since the days of the Black One. Yes, generals have become like women; the captains of the impis are set to milk the cows. Well, what have I to do with all this?

What does it matter to me who am so very old that only my head remains above the level of the earth, the rest of me being buried in the grave, who am not even a Zulu to boot, but a Dwandwe, one of the despised Dwandwe whom the Zulus mocked and conquered?

"Hearken to me, Spirits of the House of Senzangacona"--here he addressed about a dozen of Cetewayo's ancestors by name, going back for many generations. "Hearken to me, O Princess of Heaven, appointed by the Great-Great to be the guardian of the Zulu race. It is asked that you should appear, should it be your wish to signify to these your children that they must stand upon their feet and resist the white men who already gather upon their borders. And should it be your wish that they should lay down their spears and go home to sleep with their wives and hoe the gardens while the white men count the cattle and set each to his work upon the roads, then that you should not appear. Do what you will, O Spirits of the House of Senzangacona, do what you will, O Princess of Heaven. What does it matter to the Thing-that-never-should-have-been-born, who soon will be as though he never had been born, whether the House of Senzangacona and the Zulu people stand or fall?"

"I, the old doctor, was summoned here to give counsel. I gave counsel, but it passed over the heads of these wise ones like a shadow of which none took note. I was asked to prophesy of what would chance if war came. I called the dead from their graves; they came in voices, and one of them put on the flesh again and spoke from the lips of flesh. The white man to whom she spoke denied her who had been his love, and the wise ones said that she was a cheat, yes, a doll that I had dressed up to deceive them. This spirit that had put on flesh, told of what would chance in the war, if war there were, and what would chance to the King, but they mock at the prophecy and now they demand a sign. Come then, Nomkubulwana, and give them the sign if you will and let there be war. Or stay away and give them no sign if you will, and let there be peace. It is nought to me, nought to the Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born."

Thus he rambled on, as it occurred to me who watched and listened, talking against time. For I observed that while he spoke a cloud was passing over the face of the moon, and that when he ceased speaking it was quite obscured by this cloud, so that the Vale of Bones was plunged in a deep twilight that was almost darkness. Further, in a nervous kind of way, he did something more to his wizard's fire which again caused it to throw out a fan of smoke that hid him and the execution rock in front of which he sat.

The cloud floated by and the moon came out as though from an eclipse; the smoke of the fire, too, thinned by degrees. As it melted and the light grew again, I became aware that something was materializing, or had appeared on the point of the rock above us. A few seconds later, to my wonder and amazement, I perceived that this something was the spirit-like form of a white woman which stood quite still upon the very point of the rock. She was clad in some garment of gleaming white cut low upon her breast, that may have been of linen, but from the way it shone, suggested that it was of glittering feathers, egrets' for instance. Her ruddy hair was outspread, and in it, too, something glittered, like mica or jewels. Her feet and milk-hued arms were bare and poised in her right hand was a little spear.

Nor did I see alone, since a moan of fear and worship went up from the Councillors. Then they grew silent stared and stared.

Suddenly Zikali lifted his head and looked at them through the thin flame of the fire which made his eyes shine like those of a tiger or of a cornered baboon.

"At what do you gaze so hard, King and Councillors?" he asked.

"I see nothing. At what then do you gaze so hard?"

"On the rock above you stands a white spirit in her glory. It is the Inkosazana herself," muttered Cetewayo.

"Has she come then?" mocked the old wizard. "Nay, surely it is but a dream, or another of my tricks; some black woman painted white that I have smuggled here in my medicine bag, or rolled up in the blanket on my back. How can I prove to you that this is not another cheat like to that of the spirit of Mameena whom the white man, her lover, did not know again? Go near to her you must not, even if you could, seeing that if by chance she should not be a cheat, you would die, every man of you, for woe to him whom Nomkubulwana touches. How then, how? Ah! I have it. Doubtless in his pocket Macumazahn yonder hides a little gun, Macumazahn who with such a gun can cut a reed in two at thirty paces, or shave the hair from the chin of a man, as is well known in the land. Let him then take his little gun and shoot at that which you say stands upon the rock. If it be a black woman painted white, doubtless she will fall down dead, as so many have fallen from that rock. But if it be the Princess of Heaven, then the bullet will pass through her or turn aside and she will take no harm, though whether Macumazahn will take any harm is more than I can say."

Now when they heard this many remained silent, but some of the peace party began to clamour that I should be ordered to shoot at the apparition. At length Cetewayo seemed to give way to this pressure. I say seemed, because I think he wished to give way. Whether or not a spirit stood before him, he knew no more than

the rest, but he did know that unless the vision were proved to be mortal he would be driven into war with the English. Therefore he took the only chance that remained to him.

"Macumazahn," he said, "I know you have your pistol on you, for only the other day you brought it into my presence, and through light and darkness you nurse it as a mother does her firstborn. Now since the Opener of Roads desires it, I command you to fire at that which seems to stand above us. If it be a mortal woman, she is a cheat and deserves to die. If it be a spirit from heaven it can take no harm. Nor can you take harm who only do that which you must."

"Woman or spirit, I will not shoot, King," I answered.

"Is it so? What! do you defy me, White Man? Do so if you will, but learn that then your bones shall whiten here in this Vale of Bones. Yes, you shall be the first of the English to go below," and turning, he whispered something to two of the Councillors.

Now I saw that I must either obey or die. For a moment my mind grew confused in face of this awful alternative. I did not believe that I saw a spirit. I believed that what stood above me was Nombe cunningly tricked out with some native pigments which at that distance and in that light made her look like a white woman. For oddly enough at that time the truth did not occur to

me, perhaps because I was too surprised. Well, if it were Nombe, she deserved to be shot for playing such a trick, and what is more her death, by revealing the fraud of Zikali, would perhaps avert a great war. But then why did he make the suggestion that I should be commanded to fire at this figure? Slowly I drew out my pistol and brought it to the full cock, for it was loaded.

"I will obey, King," I said, "to save myself from being murdered. But on your head be all that may follow from this deed."

Then it was for the first time that a new idea struck me so clearly that I believe it was conveyed direct from Zikali's brain to my own. I might shoot, but there was no need for me to hit. After that everything grew plain.

"King," I said, "if yonder be a mortal, she is about to die. Only a spirit can escape my aim. Watch now the centre of her forehead, for there the bullet will strike!"

I lifted the pistol and appeared to cover the figure with much care. As I did so, even from that distance I thought I saw a look of terror in its eyes. Then I fired, with a little jerk of the wrist sending the ball a good yard above her head.

"She is unharmed," cried a voice. "Macumazahn missed her."

"Macumazahn does not miss," I replied loftily. "If that at which he aimed is unharmed, it is because it cannot be hit."

"O-ho-o!" laughed Zikali, "the White Man who does not know the taste of his own love's lips, says that he has fired at that which cannot be hit. Let him try again. No, let him choose another target. The Spirit is the Spirit, but he who summoned her may still be a cheat. There is another bullet in your little gun, White Man; see if it can pierce the heart of Zikali, that the King and Council may learn whether he be a true prophet, the greatest of all the prophets that ever was, or whether he be but a common cheat."

Now a sudden rage filled me against this old rascal. I remembered how he had brought Mameena to her death, when he thought that it would serve him, and since then filled the land with stories concerning her and me, which met me whatever way I turned. I remembered that for years he had plotted to bring about the destruction of the Zulus, and to further his dark ends, was now engaged in causing a fearful war which would cost the lives of thousands. I remembered that he had trapped me into Zululand and then handed me over to Cetewayo, separating me from my friends who were in my charge, and for aught I knew, giving them to death. Surely the world would be well rid of him.

"Have your will," I shouted and covered him with the pistol.

Then there came into my mind a certain saying--"Judge not that ye be not judged." Who and what was I that I should dare to arraign and pass sentence upon this man who after all had suffered many wrongs? As I was about to fire I caught sight of some bright object flashing towards the king from above, and instantaneously shifted my aim and pressed the trigger. The thing, whatever it might be, flew in two. One part of it fell upon Zikali, the other part travelled on and struck Cetewayo upon the knee.

There followed a great confusion and a cry of "The king is stabbed!" I ran forward to look and saw the blade of a little assegai lying on the ground and on Cetewayo's knee a slight cut from which blood trickled.

"It is nothing," I said, "a scratch, no more, though had not the spear been stopped in its course it might have been otherwise."

"Yes," cried Zikali, "but what was it that caused the cut? Take this, Sigananda, and tell me what it may be," and he threw towards him a piece of red wood.

Sigananda looked at it. "It is the haft of the Black One's spear," he exclaimed, "which the bullet of Macumazahn has severed from the blade."

"Aye," said Zikali, "and the blade has drawn the blood of the Black One's child. Read me this omen, Siganda; or ask it of her who stands above you."

Now all looked to the rock, but it was empty. The figure had vanished.

"Your word, King," said Zikali. "Is it for peace or war?"

Cetewayo looked at the assegai, looked at the blood trickling from his knee, looked at the faces of the councillors.

"Blood calls for blood," he moaned. "My word is--War!"