

## CHAPTER XIX

### ALLAN AWAKES

Now I have no intention of setting down all the details of that dreadful journey through Zululand, even if I could recall them, which, for a reason to be stated, I cannot do. I remember that at first I thought of proceeding to Ulundi with some wild idea of throwing myself on the mercy of Cetewayo under pretence that I brought him a message from Natal. Within a couple of hours, however, from the top of a hill I saw ahead of me an impi and with it captured wagons, which was evidently heading for the king's kraal. So as I knew what kind of a greeting these warriors would give me, I bore away in another direction with the hope of reaching the border by a circuitous route. In this too I had no luck, since presently I caught sight of outposts stationed upon rocks, which doubtless belonged to another impi or regiment. Indeed one soldier, thinking from my dress that I also was a Zulu, called to me for news from about half a mile away, in that

peculiar carrying voice which Kaffirs can command. I shouted back something about victory and that the white men were wiped out, then put an end to the conversation by vanishing into a patch of dense bush.

It is a fact that after this I have only the dimmest recollection of what happened. I remember off-saddling at night on several occasions. I remember being very hungry because all the food was eaten and the dog, Lost, catching a bush buck fawn, some of which I partially cooked on a fire of dead wood, and devoured. Next I remember--I suppose this was a day or two later--riding at night in a thunderstorm and a particularly brilliant flash of lightning which revealed scenery that seemed to be familiar to me, after which came a shock and total unconsciousness.

At length my mind returned to me. It was reborn very slowly and with horrible convulsions, out of the womb of death and terror. I saw blood flowing round me in rivers, I heard the cries of triumph and of agony. I saw myself standing, the sole survivor, on a grey field of death, and the utter loneliness of it ate into my soul, so that with all its strength it prayed that it might be numbered in this harvest. But oh! it was so strong, that soul which could not, would not die or fly away. So strong, that then, for the first time, I understood its immortality and that it could never die. This everlasting thing still clung for a

while to the body of its humiliation, the mass of clay and nerves and appetites which it was doomed to animate, and yet knew its own separateness and eternal individuality. Striving to be free of earth, still it seemed to walk the earth, a spirit and a shadow, aware of the hatefulness of that to which it was chained, as we might imagine some lovely butterfly to be that is fated by nature to suck its strength from carrion, and remains unable to soar away into the clean air of heaven.

Something touched my hand and I reflected dreamily that if I had been still alive, for in a way I believed that I was dead, I should have thought it was a dog's tongue. With a great effort I lifted my arm, opened my eyes and looked at the hand against the light, for there was light, to see it was so thin that this light shone through between the bones. Then I let it fall again, and lo! it rested on the head of a dog which went on licking it.

A dog! What dog? Now I remembered; one that I had found on the field of Isandhlwana. Then I must be still alive. The thought made me cry, for I could feel the tears run down my cheeks, not with joy but with sorrow. I did not wish to go on living. Life was too full of struggle and of bloodshed and bereavement and fear and all horrible things. I was prepared to exchange my part in it just for rest, for the blessing of deep, unending sleep in which no more dreams could come, no more cups of joy could be held to thirsting lips, only to be snatched away.

I heard something shuffling towards me at which the dog growled, then seemed to slink away as though it were afraid. I opened my eyes again, looked, and closed them once more in terror, for what I saw suggested that perhaps I was dead after all and had reached that hell which a certain class of earnest Christian promises to us as the reward of the failings that Nature and those who begat us have handed on to us as a birth doom. It was something unnatural, grey-headed, terrific--doubtless a devil come to torment me in the inquisition vaults of Hades. Yet I had known the like when I was alive. How had it been called? I remembered, "The-thing-that-never-should-have-been-born." Hark! It was speaking in that full deep voice which was unlike to any other.

"Greeting, Macumazahh," it said. "I see that you have come back from among the dead with whom you have been dwelling for a moon and more. It is not wise of you, Macumazahh, yet I am glad who have matched my skill against Death and won, for now you will have much to tell me about his kingdom."

So it was Zikali--Zikali who had butchered my friends.

"Away from me, murderer!" I said faintly, "and let me die, or kill me as you did the others."

He laughed, but very softly, not in his usual terrific fashion, repeating the word "murderer" two or three times. Then with his great hand he lifted my head gently as a woman might, saying--

"Look before you, Macumazahn."

I looked and saw that I was in some kind of a cave. Outside the sun was setting and against its brightness I perceived two figures, a white man and a white woman who were walking hand in hand and gazing into each other's eyes. They were Anscombe and Heda passing the mouth of the cave.

"Behold the murdered, O Macumazahn, dealer of hard words."

"It is only a trick," I murmured. "Kaatje saw them dead and buried."

"Yes, yes, I forgot. The fat fool-woman saw them dead and buried. Well, sometimes the dead come to life again and for good purpose, as you should know, Macumazahn, who followed the counsel of a certain Mameena and wandered here instead of rushing onto the Zulu spears."

I tried to think the thing out and could not, so only asked--

"How did I come? What happened to me?"

"I think the sun smote you first who had no covering on your head and the lightning smote you afterwards. Yet all the while that reason had left you, One led your horse and after the Heavens had tried to kill you and failed, perhaps because my magic was too strong for them, One sent that beast which you found, yes, sent it here to lead us to where you lay. There you were discovered and brought hither. Now sleep lest you should go further than even I can fetch you back again."

He held his hands above my head, seeming to grow in stature till his white hair touched the roof of the cave, and in an instant I fancied that I was falling away, deep, deep into a gulf of nothingness.

There followed another period of dreaming, in which dreams I seemed to meet all sorts of people, dead and living, especially Lady Ragnall, a friend of mine with whom I had been concerned in a very strange adventure among the Kendah people\* and with whom in days to come I was destined to be concerned again, although of course I knew nothing of this, in a still stranger adventure of what I may call a spiritual order, which I may or may not try to reduce to writing. It seemed to me that I was constantly dining with her *tete-a-tete* and that she told me all sorts of queer things between the courses. Doubtless these illusions occurred when I was fed.

[\*--See the book called The Ivory Child.--EDITOR.]

At length I woke up again, feeling much stronger, and saw the dog, Lost, watching me with its great tender eyes--oh! they talk of the eyes of women, but are they ever as beautiful as those of a loving dog? It lay by my low bed-stead, a rough affair fashioned of poles and strung with rimpis or strings of raw hide, and by it, stroking its head, sat the witch-doctress, Nombe. I remember how pleasing she looked, a perfect type of the eternal feminine with her graceful, rounded shape and her continual, mysterious smile which suggested so much more than any mortal woman has to give.

"Good-day to you, Macumazahn," she said in her gentle voice, "you have gone through much since last we met on the night before Goza took you away to Ulundi."

Now remembering all, I was filled with indignation against this little humbug.

"The last time we met, Nombe," I said, "was when you played the part of a woman who is dead in the Vale of Bones by the king's kraal."

She regarded me with a kindly commiseration, and answered,

shaking her head--

"You have been very ill, Macumazahn, and your spirit still tricks you. I played the part of no woman in any valley by the king's kraal, nor were my eyes rejoiced with the sight of you there or elsewhere till they brought you to this place, so changed that I should scarcely have known you."

"You little liar!" I said rudely.

"Do the white people always name those liars who tell them true things they cannot understand?" she inquired with a sweet innocence. Then without waiting for an answer, she patted my hand as though I were a fretful child and gave me some soup in a gourd, saying, "Drink it, it is good. The lady Heddana made it herself in the white man's fashion."

I drank the soup, which was very good, and as I handed back the gourd, answered--

"Kaatje has told me that the lady Heddana is dead. Can the dead make soup?"

She considered the point while she threw some bits of meat out of the bottom of the gourd to the dog, Lost, then replied--



"I do not know, Macumazahn, or indeed whether the dead eat as we do. Next time my Spirit visits me I will make inquiry and tell you the answer. But I do know that it is very strange that you, who always turn your back upon the truth, are so ready to accept falsehoods. Why should you believe that the lady Heddana is dead just because Kaatje told you so, when I who am still alive had sworn to you that I would protect her with my life? Nay, speak no more now. To-morrow if you are well enough you shall see and judge for yourself."

She drew up the kaross over me, again patted my hand in her motherly fashion and departed, still smiling, after which I went to sleep again, so dreamlessly that I think there was some native soporific in that soup.

On the following day two of Zikali's servants who did the rougher work of my sick room, if I may so call it, arrived and said that they were going to carry me out of the cave for a while, if that were my will. I who longed to breathe the fresh air again, said that it was very much my will, whereon they grasped the rough bedstead which I have described by either end and very carefully bore me down the cave and through its narrow entrance, where they set the bedstead in the shadow of the overhanging rock without. When I had recovered a little, for even that short journey tired me, I looked about me and perceived that as I had expected, I was in the Black Kloof, for there in front of me were the very huts

which we had occupied on our arrival from Swazi-Land.

I lay a while drawing in the sweet air which to me was like a draught of nectar, and wondering whether I were not still in a dream. For instance, I wondered if I had truly seen the figures of Anscombe and Heda pass the mouth of the cave, on that day when I awoke, or if these were but another of Zikali's illusions imprinted on my weakened mind by his will power. For of what he and Nombe told me I believed nothing. Thus marvelling I fell into a doze and in my doze heard whisperings. I opened my eyes and lo! there before me stood Anscombe and Heda. It was she who spoke the first, for I was tongue-tied; I could not open my lips.

"Dear Mr. Quatermain, dear Mr. Quatermain!" she murmured in her sweet voice, then paused.

Now at last words came to me. "I thought you were both dead," I said. "Tell me, are you really alive?"

She bent down and kissed my brow, while Anscombe took my hand.

"Now you know," she answered. "We are both of us alive and well."

"Thank God!" I exclaimed. "Kaatje swore that she saw you dead and buried."

"One sees strange things in the Black Kloof," replied Anscombe speaking for the first time, "and much has happened to us since we were parted, to which you are not strong enough to listen now. When you are better, then we will tell you all. So grow well as soon as you can."

After this I think I fainted, for when I came to myself again I was back in the cave.

Another ten days or so went by before I could even leave my bed, for my recovery was very slow. Indeed for weeks I could scarcely walk at all, and six whole months passed before I really got my strength again and became as I used to be. During those days I often saw Anscombe and Heda, but only for a few minutes at a time. Also occasionally Zikali would visit me, speaking a little, generally about past history, or something of the sort, but never of the war, and go away. At length one day he said to me--

"Macumazahn, now I am sure you are going to live, a matter as to which I was doubtful, even after you seemed to recover. For, Macumazahn, you have endured three shocks, of which to-day I am not afraid to talk to you. First there was that of the battle of Isandhlwana where you were the last white man left alive."

"How do you know that, Zikali?" I asked.

"It does not matter. I do know. Did you not ride through the Zulus who parted this way and that before you, shouting what you could not understand? One of them you may remember even saluted with his spear."

"I did, Zikali. Tell me, why did they behave thus, and what did they shout?"

"I shall not tell you, Macumazahn. Think over it for the rest of your life and conclude what you choose; it will not be so wonderful as the truth. At least they did so, as a certain doll I dressed up yonder in the Vale of Bones told you they would, she whose advice you followed in riding towards Ulundi instead of back to the river where you would have met your death, like so many others of the white people."

"Who was that doll, Zikali?"

"Nay, ask me not. Perhaps it was Nombe, perhaps another. I have forgotten. I am very old and my memory begins to play me strange tricks. Still I recollect that she was a good doll, so like a dead woman called Mameena that I could scarcely have known them apart. Ah! that was a great game I played in the Vale of Bones, was it not, Macumazahn?"

"Yes, Zikali, yet I do not understand why it was played."

"Being so young you still have the impatience of youth, Macumazahn, although your hair grows white. Wait a while and you will understand all. Well, you lay that night on the topmost rock of Isandhlwana, and there you saw and heard strange things. You heard the rest of the white soldiers come and lie down to rest among their dead brothers, and depart again unharmed. Oh! what fools are these Zulu generals nowadays. They send out an impi to attack men behind walls, spears against rifles, and are defeated. Had they kept that impi to fall on the rest of the English when they walked into the trap, not a man of your people would have been left alive. Would that have happened in the time of Chaka?"

"I think not, Zikali. Still I am glad that it did happen."

"I think not too, Macumazahn, but small men, small wit. Also like you I am glad that it did not happen, since it is the Zulus I hate, not the English who have now learned a lesson and will not be caught again. Oh! many a captain in Zululand is to-day flat as a pricked bladder, and even their victory, as they call it, cost them dear. For, mind you, Macumazahn, for every white man they killed two of them died. So, so! In the morning you left the hill--do not look astonished, Macumazahn. Perhaps those

captains on the rock beneath you let you go for their own purposes, or because they were commanded, for though weak I can still lift a stone or two, Macumazahn, and afterwards told me all about it. Then you found yourself alone among the dead, like the last man in the world, Macumazahn, and that dog at your side, also a horse came to you. Perhaps I sent them, perhaps it was a chance. Who knows? Not I myself, for as I have said, my memory has grown so bad. That was your first shock, Macumazahn, the shock of standing alone among the dead like the last man in the world. You felt it, did you not?"

"As I hope I shall never feel anything again. It nearly drove me mad," I answered.

"Very nearly indeed, though I have felt worse things and only laughed, as I would tell you, had I the time. Well, then the sun struck you, for at this season of the year it is very hot in those valleys for a white man with no covering to his head, and you went quite mad, though fortunately the dog and the horse remained as Heaven had made them. That was the second shock. Then the storm burst and the lightning fell. It ran down the rifle that you still carried, Macumazahn. I will show it to you and you will see that its stock is shattered. Perhaps I turned the flash aside, for I am a great thunder-herd, or perhaps it was One mightier than I. That was the third shock, Macumazahn. Then you were found, still living--how, the white man, your friend,

will tell you. But you should cherish that dog of yours, Macumazahn, for many a man might have served you worse. And being strong, though small, or perhaps because you still have work left to do in the world before you leave it for a while, you have lived through all these things and will in time recover, though not yet."

"I hope so, Zikali, though on the whole I am not sure that I wish to recover."

"Yes, you do, Macumazahn, because the religion of you white men makes you fear death and what may come after it. You think of what you call your sins and are afraid lest you should be tortured because of them, not understanding that the spirit must be judged not by what the flesh has done but by what the spirit desired to do, by will not by deed, Macumazahn. The evil man is he who wishes to do evil, not he who wishes to do good and falls now and again into evil. Oh! I have hearkened to your white teachers and I know, I know."

"Then by your own standard you are evil, Zikali, since you wished to bring about war, and not in vain."

"Oho! Macumazahn, you think that, do you, who cannot understand that what seems to be evil is often good. I wished to bring about war and brought it about, and maybe what bred the wish was

all that I have suffered in the past. But say you, who have seen what the Zulu Power means, who have seen men, women and children killed by the thousand to feed that Power, and who have seen, too, what the English Power means, is it evil that I should wish to destroy the House of the Zulu kings that the English House may take its place and that in a time to come the Black people may be free?"

"You are clever, Zikali, but it is of your own wrongs that you think. How about that skull which you kissed in the Vale of Bones?"

"Mayhap, Macumazahn, but my wrongs are the wrongs of a nation, therefore I think of the nation, and at least I do not fear death like you white men. Now hearken. Presently your friends will tell you a story. The lady Heddana will tell you how I made use of her for a certain purpose, for which purpose indeed I drew the three of you into Zululand, because without her I could not have brought about this war into which Cetewayo did not wish to enter. When you have heard that story, do not judge me too hardly, Macumazahn, who had a great end to gain."

"Yet whatever the story may be, I do judge you hardly, Zikali, who tormented me with a false tale, causing the woman Kaatje to lie to me and swear that she saw these two dead before her--how I know not."



"She did not lie to you, Macumazahn. Has not such a one as I the power to make a fat fool think that she saw what she did not see? As to how! How did I make you think in yonder hut of mine that you saw what you did not see--perhaps."

"But why did you mock me in this fashion, Zikali?"

"Truly, Macumazahn, you are blind as a bat in sunlight. When your friends have told you the story, you will understand why. Yet I admit to you that things went wrong. You should have heard that tale before Cetewayo brought you to the Vale of Bones. But the fool-woman delayed and blundered, and when she reached Ulundi the gates were shut against her as a spy, and not opened till too late, so that you only found her when you returned from the Council. I knew this, and that was why I dared to bid you fire at that which stood upon the rock. Had you heard Kaatje's tale you might have aimed straight, as also you would have certainly shot straight at me, out of revenge for the deaths of those you loved, Macumazahn, though whether you could have killed me before all the game is played is another matter. As it was, I was sure that you would not pierce the heart of one who might be a certain white woman, sure also that you would not pierce my heart whose death might bring about her death and that of another."

"You are very subtle, Zikali," I said in astonishment.

"So you hold because I am very simple, who understand the spirit of man--and some other things. For the rest, had you not believed that these two were dead, you would never have left Zululand. You would have tried to escape to get to them and have been killed. Is it not so?"

"Yes, I think I should have tried, Zikali. But why did you keep them prisoner?"

"For the same reason that I still keep them--and you--to hold them back a while from the world of ghosts. Had I sent them away after that night of the declaration of war, they would have been killed before they had gone an hour's journey. Oh! I am not so bad as you think, Macumazahn, and I never break my word. Now I have done."

"How goes the war?" I asked as he shuffled to his feet.

"As it must go, very ill for the Zulus. They have driven back the white men who gather strength from over the Black Water and will come on presently and wipe them out. Umnyamana would have had Cetewayo invade Natal and sweep it clean, as of course he should have done. But I sent him word that if he did so Nomkubulwana, yes, she and no other, had told me that all the

spirits would be against him, and he hearkened. When next you think me wicked, remember that, Macumazahn. Now it is but a matter of time, and here you must bide till all is finished.

That will be good for you who need rest, though the other two find it wearisome. Still for them it is good also to watch the fruit ripen on their tree of love. It will be the sweeter when they eat it, Macumazahn, and teach them how to live together. Oho! Oho-ho!" and he shambled off.