

CHAPTER VII

THE MESSAGE OF THE KING

So it chanced that Noie became a member of the Dove household. For obvious reasons she changed her name, and thenceforward was called Nonha. Also it happened that Mr. Dove abandoned his idea of settling as a missionary in Zululand, and instead, took up his residence at this beautiful spot. He called it Ramah because it was a place of weeping, for here all the family and dependents of Seyapi had been destroyed by the spear. Mrs. Dove thought it an ill-omened name enough, but after her manner gave way to her husband in the matter.

"I think there will be more weeping here before everything is done," she said.

Rachel answered, however, that it was as good as any other, since names could alter nothing. Here, then, at Ramah, Mr. Dove built him a house on that knoll where first he had pitched his camp. It was a very good house after its fashion, for, as has been said, he did not lack for means, and was, moreover, clever in such matters. He hired a mason who had drifted to Natal to cut stone, of which a plenty lay at hand, and two half-breed carpenters to execute the wood-work, whilst the Kaffirs thatched the whole as only they can do. Then he set to work upon a church, which was placed on the crest of the opposite knoll where the white man, Ishmael, had

appeared on the evening of their arrival. Like the house, it was excellent of its sort, and when at length it was finished after more than a year of labour, Mr. Dove felt a proud man.

Indeed at Ramah he was happier than he had ever been since he landed upon the shores of Africa, for now at length his dream seemed to be in the way of realisation. Very soon a considerable native village sprang up around him, peopled almost entirely by remnants of the Natal tribes whom Chaka had destroyed and who were but too glad to settle under the aegis of the white man, especially when they discovered how good he was. Of the doctrines which he preached to them day and night, most of them, it is true, did not understand much. Still they accepted them as the price of being allowed "to live in his shadow," but in the vast majority of cases they sturdily refused to put away all wives but one, as he earnestly exhorted them to do.

At first he wished to eject them from the settlement in punishment of this sin, but when it came to the point they absolutely refused to go, demonstrating to him that they had as much right to live there as he had, an argument that he was unable to controvert. So he was obliged to submit to the presence of this abomination, which he did in the hope that in time their hard hearts would be softened.

"Continue to preach to us, O Shouter," they said, "and we will listen. Mayhap in years to come we shall learn to think as you do. Meanwhile give us space to consider the point."

So he continued to preach, and contented himself with baptising the children and very old people who took no more wives. Except on this one point, however, they got on excellently together. Indeed, never since Chaka broke upon them like a destroying demon had these poor folk been so happy. The missionary imported ploughs and taught them to improve their agriculture, so that ere long this rich, virgin soil brought forth abundantly. Their few cattle multiplied also in an amazing fashion, as did their families, and soon they were as prosperous as they had been in the good old days before they knew the Zulu assegai, especially as, to their amazement, the Shouter never took from them even a calf or a bundle of corn by way of tax. Only the shadow of that Zulu assegai still lay upon them, for if Chaka was dead Dingaan ruled a few miles away across the Tugela. Moreover, hearing of the rise of this new town, and of certain strange matters connected with it, he sent spies to inspect and enquire. The spies returned and reported that there dwelt in it only a white medicine-man with his wife, and a number of Natal Kaffirs. Also they reported in great detail many wonderful stories concerning the beautiful maiden with a high name who passed as the white teacher's daughter, and who had already become the subject of so much native talk and rumour. On learning all these things Dingaan despatched an embassy, who delivered this message:

"I, Dingaan, king of the Zulus, have heard that you, O White Shouter, have built a town upon my borders, and peopled it with the puppies of the jackals whom Chaka hunted. I send to you now to say that you and your

jackals shall have peace from me so long as you harbour none of my runaways, but if I find but one of them there, then an Impi shall wipe you out. I hear also that there dwells with you a beautiful white maiden said to be your daughter, who is known, throughout the land as Inkosazana-y-Zoola. Now that is the name of our Spirit who, the doctors say, is also white, and it is strange to us that this maiden should bear that great name. Some of the Isanosis, the prophetesses, declare that she is our Spirit in the flesh, but that meat sticks in my throat, I cannot swallow it. Still, I invite this maiden to visit me that I may see her and judge of her, and I swear to you, and to her, by the ghosts of my ancestors, that no harm shall come to her then or at any time. He who so much as lays a finger upon her shall die, he and all his house. Because of her name, which I am told she has borne from a child, all the territories of the Zulus are her kraal and all the thousands of the Zulus are her servants. Yea, because of her high name I give to her power of life and death wherever men obey my word, and for an offering I send to her twelve of my royal white cattle and a bull, also an ox trained to riding. When she visits me let her ride upon the white ox that she may be known, but let no man come with her, for among the people of the Zulus she must be attended by Zulus only. I have spoken. I pray that she who is named Princess of the Zulus will appear before my messengers and acknowledge the gift of the King of the Zulus, that they may see her in the flesh and make report of her to me."

Now when Mr. Dove had received this message, one evening at sundown, he went into the house and repeated it to Rachel, for it puzzled him much,

and he knew not what to answer.

Rachel in her turn took counsel with Noie who was hidden, away lest some of the embassy should see and recognise her.

"Speak with the messengers," said Noie, "it is well to have power among the Zulus. I, who have some knowledge of this business, say, speak with them alone, and speak softly, saying that one day you will come."

So having explained the matter to her father, and obtained his consent, Rachel, who desired to impress these savages, threw a white shawl about her, as Noie instructed her to do. Then, letting her long, golden hair hang down, she went out alone carrying a light assegai in her hand, to the place where the messengers, six of them, and those who had driven the cattle from Zululand, were encamped in the guest kraal, at the gate of which, as it chanced, lay a great boulder of rock. On this boulder she took her stand, unobserved, waiting there till the full moon shone out from behind a dark cloud, turning her white robe to silver. Now of a sudden the messengers who were seated together, talking and taking snuff, looked up and saw her.

"Inkosazana-y-Zoola!" exclaimed one of them, rising, whereon they all sprang to their feet and perceiving this beautiful and mysterious figure, by a common impulse lifted their right arms and gave to her what no woman had ever received before--the royal salute.

"Bayète!" they cried, "Bayète!" then stood silent.

"I hear you," said Rachel, who spoke their tongue as well as she did her own. "It has been reported to me that you wished to see me, O Mouths of the King. Behold I am pleased to appear before you. What would you of Inkosazana-y-Zoola, O Mouths of the King?"

Then their spokesman, an old man of high rank, with a withered hand, stepped forward from the line of his companions, stared at her for a while, and saluted again.

"Lady," he said humbly, "Lady or Spirit, we would know how thou earnest by that great name of thine."

"It was given me as a child far away from here," she answered, "because in a mighty tempest the lightnings turned aside and smote me not; because the waters raged yet drowned me not; because the lions slept with me yet harmed me not. It came to me from the high Heaven that was my friend. I do not know how it came."

"We have heard the story," answered the old man (which indeed they had with many additions), "and we believe. We believe that the Heavens above gave thee their own name which is the name of the Spirit of our people. That Spirit I have seen in a dream, and she was like to thee, O Inkosazana-y-Zoola."

"It may be so, Mouth of the King, still I am woman, not spirit."

"Yet in every woman there dwells a spirit, or so we believe, and in thee a great one, or so we have heard and believe, O Lady of the Heavens. To thee, then, again we repeat the words of Dingaan and of his council which to-day we have said in the ears of him who thinks himself thy father. To thee the roads are open; thine are the cattle and the kraals; here is an earnest of them. Thine are the lives of men. Command now, if thou wilt, that one of us be slain before thee, and whilst thou watchest, he shall look his last upon the moon."

"I hear you," said Rachel, quietly, "but I seek the life of none who are good. I thank the King for his gift; I wish the King well. I remember that life and death lie in my hands. Say these words to the King."

"We will say them, but wilt thou not come, O Lady, as the King desires? A regiment shall meet thee on the river bank and lead thee to his house. Unharméd shalt thou come, unharméd shalt thou return, and what thou askest that shall be given thee."

"One day, perchance, I will come, but not now. Go in peace, O Mouths of the King."

As she spoke another dark cloud floated across the moon, and when it had passed away she stood no more upon the rock. Then, seeing that she was gone, those messengers gathered up their spears and mats, and returned

swiftly to Zululand.

When she reentered the house again Rachel told her father and mother all that had passed, laughing as she spoke.

"It seems scarcely right, my dear," said Mr. Dove, when she had done.

"Those benighted heathens will really believe that you are something unearthly."

"Then let them," she answered. "It can do no one any harm, and the power of life and death with the rest of it, unless it was all talk as I suspect, might be very useful one day. Who knows? And now the Princess of the Heavens will go and set the supper, as Noie--I beg pardon, Nonha--is off duty for the present."

Afterwards she asked Noie who was the old man with a withered hand who had spoken as the "King's Mouth."

"Mopo is his name, Mopo or Umbopo, none other, O Zoola," she answered. "It was he who stabbed T'Chaka, the Black One. It is said also that alone among men living, he has seen the White Spirit: the Inkosazana. Thrice he has seen her, or so goes the tale that my father, who knew everything, told to me. That is why Dingaan sent him here to make report of you." And she told her all the wonderful story of Mopo and of the death of T'Chaka, which Rachel treasured in her mind. [Footnote: For the history of Mopo, see "Nada the Lily."--AUTHOR.]

Such was Rachel's first introduction to the Zulus, an occasion on which her undoubted histrionic abilities stood her in good stead.

This matter of the embassy happened and in due course was almost forgotten, that is until a certain event occurred which brought it into mind. For some time, however, Rachel thought of it a good deal, wondering how it came about that her native name and the strange significance which they appeared to give to it had taken such a hold of the imagination of the Zulus. Ultimately she discovered that the white man, Ishmael, was the chief cause of these things. He had lived so long among savages that he had caught something of their mind and dark superstitions. To him, as to them, it seemed a marvellous thing that she should have acquired the title of the legendary Spirit of the Zulu people. The calm courage, too, so unusual in a woman, which she showed when she shot the warrior, and at the risk of her own life saved that of the girl, Noie, impressed him as something almost ultra-human, especially when he remembered his own conduct on that occasion. All of this story, of course, he did not tell to the Zulus for he feared lest they should take vengeance for his share in it. But of Rachel he discoursed to the King and his indunas, or great men, as a white witch-doctress of super-natural power, whose name showed that she was mixed up with the fortunes of the race. Therefore, in the end, Dingaan sent Mopo, "he who knew the Spirit," to make report of her.

When he was not absent upon his hunting or trading expeditions, Ishmael visited Ramah a great deal and, as Rachel soon discovered, not without an

object. Indeed, almost from the first, her feminine instincts led her to suspect that this man who, notwithstanding his good looks, repelled her so intensely, was falling in love with her, which in truth he had done once and for all at their first meeting. In the beginning he did not, it is true, say much that could be so interpreted, but his whole attitude towards her suggested it, as did other things. For instance, when he came to visit the Doves, he discarded his garments of hide, including the picturesque zebra-skin trousers, and appeared dressed in smart European clothes which he had contrived to obtain from Durban, and a large hat with a white ostrich feather, that struck Rachel as even more ludicrous than the famous trousers. Also he was continuously sending presents of game and of skins, or of rare karosses, that is, fur rugs, which he ordered to be delivered to her personally--tokens, all of them, that she could not misunderstand. Her father, however, misunderstood them persistently, although her mother saw something of the truth, and did her best to shield her from attentions which she knew to be unwelcome. Mr. Dove believed that it was his company which Ishmael sought. Indeed in this matter the man was very clever, contriving to give the clergyman the impression that he required spiritual instruction and comfort, which, of course, he found forthcoming in an abundant supply. When Mrs. Dove remonstrated, saying that she misdoubted her of him and his character, her husband answered obstinately, that it was his duty to turn a sinner from his way, and declined to pursue the conversation. So Ishmael continued to come.

For her part Rachel did her best to avoid him, instructing Noie to keep a constant look-out both with her eyes and through the Kaffirs, and to warn

her of his advent. Then she would slip away into the bush or down to the seashore, and remain there till he was gone, or if he came when she could not do so, in the evening for instance, would keep Noie at her side, and on the first opportunity retire to her own room.

Now the result of this method of self-protection was to cause Ishmael to hate Noie as bitterly as she hated him. He guessed that the girl knew the dreadful truth about him; that it was he, and no other, who had counselled Dingaam to kill her father and all his family, and take her by force into his house, and although she said nothing of it, he suspected that she had told everything to Rachel. Moreover, it was she who always thwarted him, who prevented him time upon time from having a single word alone with her mistress. Therefore he determined to be revenged upon Noie whenever an opportunity occurred.

But as yet he could find none, since if he were to tell the Zulus that she still lived, and cause her to be killed or taken away, he was sure that it would mean a final breach with the Dove family, all of whom had learned to love this beautiful orphan maid. So he nursed his rage in secret.

Meanwhile his passion increased daily, burning ever more fiercely for its continued repression, until at length the chance for which he had waited so long came to him.

Having become aware of Rachel's habit of slipping away whenever he

appeared, he showed himself on horseback at a little distance, then waited a while and, instead of going up to the mission station, rode round it, and hid in some bush whence he could command a view of the surrounding country. Presently he saw Rachel, who was alone, for she had not waited to call Noie, hurrying towards the seashore, along the edge of that kloof down which ran the stream where the crocodiles lived. Presently, when she had gone too far to return to the house if she caught sight of him, he followed after her, and, leaving his horse, at last came up with her seated on a rock by the pool in which she had bathed on the morning of the massacre.

Walking softly in his veld-schoens, or shoes made of raw hide, on the sand, Rachel knew nothing of his coming until his shadow fell upon her. Then she sprang up and saw him, smiling and bowing, the ostrich-plume hat in his hand. Her first impulse was to run away, but recovering herself she nodded in a friendly fashion, and bade him "Good day," adding:

"What are you doing here, Mr. Ishmael, hunting?"

"Yes," he answered, "that's it. Hunting you. It has been a long chase, but I have caught you at last."

"Really, I am not a wild creature, Mr. Ishmael," she said indignantly.

"No," he answered, "you are more beautiful and more dangerous than any wild creature."

Rachel looked at him. Then she made, as though she would pass him, saying that she was going home. Now Ishmael stood between two rocks filling the only egress from this place.

He stretched out his arms so that his fingers touched the rocks on either side, and said:

"You can't. You must listen to me first. I came here to say what I have wanted to tell you for a long time. I love you, and I ask you to marry me."

"Indeed," she replied, setting her face. "How can that be? I understood that you were already married--several times over."

"Who told you that?" he asked, angrily. "I know--that accursed little witch, Noie."

"Don't speak any ill of Noie, please; she is my friend."

"Then you have a liar for your friend. Those women are only my servants."

"It doesn't matter to me what they are, Mr. Ishmael. I have no wish to know your private affairs. Shall we stop this talk, which is not pleasant?"

"No," he answered. "I tell you that I love you and I mean to marry you, with your will or without it. Let it be with your will, Rachel," he added, pleadingly, "for I will make you a good husband. Also I am well-born, much better than you think, and I am rich, rich enough to take you out of this country, if you like. I have thousands of cattle, and a great deal of money put by, good English gold that I have got from the sale of ivory. You shall come with me from among all these savage people back to England, and live as you like."

"Thank you, but I prefer the savages, as you seem to have done until now. No, do not try to touch me; you know that I can defend myself if I choose," and she glanced at the pistol which she always carried in that wild land, "I am not afraid of you, Mr. Ishmael; it is you who are afraid of me."

"Perhaps I am," he exclaimed, "because those Zulus are right, you are tagati, an enchantress, not like other women, white or black. If it were not so, would you have driven me mad as you have done? I tell you I can't sleep for thinking of you. Oh! Rachel, Rachel, don't be angry with me. Have pity on me. Give me some hope. I know that my life has been rough in the past, but I will become good again for your sake and live like a Christian. But if you refuse me, if you send me back to hell--then you shall learn what I can be."

"I know what you are, Mr. Ishmael, and that is quite enough. I do not wish to be unkind, or to say anything that will pain you, but please go away,

and never try to speak to me again like this, as it is quite useless. You must understand that I will never marry you, never."

"Are you in love with somebody else?" he asked hoarsely, and at the question, do what she would to prevent it, Rachel coloured a little.

"How can I be in love here, unless it were with a dream?"

"A dream, a dream of a man you mean. Well, don't let him cross my path, or it will soon be the dream of a ghost. I tell you I'd kill him. If I can't have you, no one else shall. Do you understand?"

"I understand that I am tired of this. Let me go home, please."

"Home! Soon you will have no home to go to except mine--that is, if you don't change your mind about me. I have power here--don't you understand? I have power."

As he spoke these words the man looked so evil that Rachel shivered a little. But she answered boldly enough:

"I understand that you have no power at all against me; no one has. It is I who have the power."

"Yes, because as I said, you are tagati, but there are others----"

As these words passed his lips someone slipped by him. Starting back, he saw that it was Noie, draped in her usual white robe, for nothing would induce her to wear European clothes. Passing him as though she saw him not, she went to Rachel and said:

"Inkosazana, I was at my work in the house yonder and I thought that I heard you calling me down here by the seashore, so I came. Is it your pleasure that I should accompany you home?"

"For instance," he went on furiously, "there is that black slut whom you are fond of. Well, if I can't hurt you, I can hurt her. Daughter of Seyapi, you know how runaways die in Zululand, or if you don't you shall soon learn. I will pay you back for all your tricks," and he stopped, choking with rage.

Noie looked him up and down with her soft, dreamy brown eyes.

"Do you think so, Night-prowler?" she asked. "Do you think that what you did to the father and his house, you will do to the daughter also? Well, it is strange, but last night, just before the cock crew, I sat by Seyapi's grave, and he spoke to me of you, White Man. Listen, now, and I will tell you what he said," and stepping forward she whispered in his ear.

Rachel, watching, saw the man's swarthy face turn pale as he hearkened, then he lifted his hand as though to strike her, let it fall again, and

muttering curses in English and in Zulu, turned and walked, or rather staggered away.

"What did you tell him, Noie?" asked Rachel.

"Never mind, Zoola," she answered. "Perhaps the truth; perhaps what came into my mind. At any rate I frightened him away. He was making love to you, was he not, the low silwana (wild beast)? Ah! I thought so, for that he has wished to do for long. And he threatened, did he not? Well, you are right; he cannot hurt you at all, and me only a little, I think. But he is very dangerous and very strong, and can hurt others. If your father is wise he will leave this place, Zoola."

"I think so too," answered Rachel. "Let us go home and tell him so."