

## CHAPTER XIII

### RICHARD COMES

As the sun set Rachel rose and walked to her hut. She was utterly dazed, she could not understand. Was this but a fiction of an overwrought and disordered mind, or had she seen a vision of things passing, or that had passed, far away? If it were a dream, then this was but another drop in her cup of bitterness. If a true vision--oh! then what did it mean to her? It meant that Richard Darrien lived, Richard, of whom her heart had been full for years. It meant that his heart was full of her also, for had she not seemed to hear him say that he had travelled from the Cape with the Boers to look for her, and was he not journeying alone through a hostile land to pursue his search? Who would do such a thing for the sake of a girl unless--unless? It meant that he would protect her, would rescue her from her terrible plight, would take her from among these savages to her home again--oh! and perhaps much more that she did not dare to picture to herself.

Yet how could such things be? They were contrary to experience, at any rate, to the experience of white folk, though natives would believe in them easily enough. Yet in Nature things might be possible which were generally held to be impossible. Her mother had certain gifts--had she, perhaps, inherited them? Had her helplessness appealed to the pity of some higher power? Had her ceaseless prayers been heard? Yet, why should the

universal laws be stretched for her? Why should she be allowed to lift a corner of the black veil of ignorance that hems us in, and see a glimpse of what lies beyond? If Richard were really coming, in a day or two she would have learned of his arrival naturally; there was no need that these mysterious influences should be set to work to inform her of his approach.

How selfish she was. The warning might concern him, not her. It was probable enough that the Zulus would kill a solitary white man, especially if they discovered that he proposed to visit their Inkosazana. Well, she had the power to protect him. If she "threw her mantle" over him, no man in all the land would dare to do him violence. Surely it was for this reason that she had been allowed to learn these things, if she had learned them, not for her own sake, but his. If she had learned them! Well, she would take the risk, would run the chance of failure and of mockery, yes, and of the loss of her power among these people. It should be done at once.

Rachel clapped her hands, and a maiden appeared whom she bade summon the captain of the guard without the gate. Presently he came, surrounded by a band of her women, since no man might visit the Inkosazana alone. Bidding him to cease from his salutations, she commanded him to go swiftly to the Great Place and pray of Dingaan that he would send her an escort and a litter, as she must see him that night on a matter which would not brook delay.

In an hour, just after she had finished her food, which she ate with more

appetite than she had known for days, it was reported that they were there. Throwing on her white cloak, and taking her horn wand, she entered the litter and, guarded by a hundred men, was borne swiftly to the House of Dingaan. At its gate she descended, and once more entered that court by the moonlight.

As before, there sat the King and his indunas without the Great Hut, and while she walked towards them every man rose crying "Hail! Inkosazana." Yes, even Dingaan, mountain of flesh though he was, struggled from his stool and saluted her. Rachel acknowledged the salutation by raising her wand, motioned to them to be seated, and waited.

"Art thou come, White One," asked Dingaan, "to make clear those dark words thou spokest to us a moon ago?"

"Nay, King," she answered, "what I said then, I said once and for all. Read thou the saying as thou wilt, or let the Ghost-people interpret it to thee. Hear me, King and Councillors. Ye have kept me here when I would be gone, my business being ended, that I might be a judge among this people. Ye have told me that the rivers were in flood, that the beast I rode was sick, that evil would befall the land if I deserted you. Now I know, and ye know, that if it pleased me I could have departed when and whither I would, but it was not fitting that the Inkosazana should creep out of Zululand like a thief in the night, so I abode on in my house yonder. Yet my heart grew wrath with you, and I, to whom the white people listen also, was half minded to bring hither the thousands of the Amaboona who are

encamped beyond the Buffalo River, that they might escort me to my home."

Now at these bold words the King looked uneasy, and one of the councillors whispered to another,

"How knows she that the white men are camped beyond the Buffalo?"

"Yet," went on Rachel, "I did not do so, for then there must have been much fighting and bloodshed, and blood I hate. But I have done this. With these Amaboona travels an English chief, a young man, one Darrien, whom I knew from long years ago, and who does me reverence. Him, then, I have commanded to journey hither, and to lead me to my own place across the Tugela. To-night I am told he sleeps a short three days' journey from this town, and I am come here to bid you send out swift messengers to guide him hither."

She ceased, and they stared at her awhile. Then the King asked,

"What messenger is it, Inkosazana, that thou hast sent to this white chief, Dario? We have seen none pass from thy house."

"Dost thou think, then, King, that thou canst see my messengers? My thoughts flew from me to him, and called in his ear in the night, and I saw his coming in the still pool that lies near my huts."

"Ow!" exclaimed one of the Council, "she sent her thoughts to him like

birds, and she saw his coming in the water of the pool. Great is the magic of the Inkosazana."

"The chief, Darrien," went on Rachel, without heeding the interruption, although she noted that it was Mopo of the withered hand who had spoken from beneath the blanket wrapped about his head, "may be known thus. He is fair of face, with eyes like my eyes, and beard and hair of the colour of gold. If I saw right, he rides upon a black horse with one white foot and his only companion is a Kaffir named Quabi who, I think," and she passed her hand across her forehead, "yes, who was surely visiting a relation of his, at this, the Great Place, when I crossed the Tugela."

Now the King asked if any knew of this Quabi, and an induna answered in an awed voice, that it was true that a man so called had been in the town at the time given by the Inkosazana, staying with a soldier whose name he mentioned, but who was now away on service. He had, however, departed before the Inkosazana arrived, or so he believed, whither he knew not.

"I thought it was so," went on Rachel. "As I saw him in the pool he is a thin man whose shoulders stoop, and whose beard is white, although his hair is black. He wears no ring upon his head."

"That is the man," said the induna, "being a stranger I noted him well, as it was my business to do."

"Summon the messengers swiftly, King," went on Rachel, "and let them

depart at once, for know that this white chief and his servant are under the protection of the Heavens, and if harm comes to them, then I lay my curse upon the land, and it shall break up in blood and ruin. Bid them say to Darrien, that the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, she who stood with him once on the rock in the river while the lightnings fell and the lions roared about them, sends him greetings and awaits him."

Now Dingaan turned to an induna and said,

"Go, do the bidding of the Inkosazana. Bid swift runners search out this white chief, and lead him to her house, and remember that if aught of ill befalls him, those men die, and thou diest also."

The induna leapt up and departed, and Rachel also made ready to go. A moment later the captain of the gate entered, fell upon his knees before Dingaan, and said,

"O King, tidings."

"What are they, man?" he asked.

"King, the watchmen report that it has been called from hilltop to hilltop that a white man who rides a black horse, has crossed the Buffalo, and travels towards the Great Place. What is thy pleasure? Shall he be killed or driven back?"

"When did that news come?" asked the King in the silence which followed this announcement.

"Not a minute gone," he answered. "The inner watchman ran with it, and is without the gates. There has been no other tidings from the West for days."

"Thy watchmen call but slowly, King, the water in the pool speaks swifter," said Rachel, then still in the midst of a heavy silence, for this thing was fearful to them, she turned and departed.

"So it is true, so it is true!" Rachel kept repeating to herself, the words suiting themselves to the time of the footfall of her bearers. She was spent with all the labour and emotions of that long day, culminating in the last scene, when she must play her dangerous, superhuman part before these keen-witted savages. She could think no more; scarcely could she undress and throw herself upon her bed in the hut. Yet that night she slept soundly, better than she had done since Noie went away. No dreams came to trouble her and in the morning she woke refreshed.

But now doubts did come. Might she not be mistaken after all? She knew the marvellous powers of the natives in the matter of the transmission of news, powers so strange that many, even among white people, attributed them to witchcraft. She had no doubt, therefore, as to the fact of some Englishman or Boer having entered Zululand. Doubtless the news of his arrival had been conveyed over scores of miles of country by the calling

of it as the captain said, from hill to hill, or in some other fashion. But might not this arrival and the circumstance of her dream or vision be a mere coincidence? What was there to show that the stranger who was riding a black horse was really Richard Darrien? Perhaps it was all a mistake, and he was only one of those white wanderers of the stamp of the outcast Ishmael who, even at that date, made their way into savage countries for the purposes of gain or to enjoy a life of licence. And yet, and yet Quabi, of whom she also dreamed, had visited the Great Place--as she dreamed.

The next two days were terrible to Rachel. She endured them as she had endured all those that went before, trying the cases that were brought to her, keeping up her appearance of distant dignity and utter indifference. She asked no questions, since to do so would be to show doubt and weakness, although she was aware that the tale of her vision had spread through the land, and that the issue of the matter was of intense interest to thousands. From some talk which she overheard while she pretended to be listening to evidence, she learned even that two men going to execution had discussed it, saying that they regretted they would not live to know the truth. On the second day she did hear one piece of news, for although she sat by her pool and again tried to sleep by its waters, these remained blind and dumb.

The induna, Tamboosa, on one of his ceremonial visits, after speaking of the health of her mare, which, it seemed was improving, mentioned incidentally that the messengers running night and day had met the white



man and "called back" that he was safe and well. He added that had it not been for her vision this said white man would certainly have been killed as a spy.

"Yes, I knew that," answered Rachel, indifferently, although her heart thumped within her bosom. "I forget if I said that the Inkosi was to be brought straight here when he arrives. If not, let it be known that such is my command. The King can receive him afterwards if it pleases him to do so, as probably we shall not depart until the next day."

Then she yawned, and as though by an afterthought asked if any news had been "called back" from Noie.

Tamboosa answered, No; no system of intelligence had been organised in the direction in which she had gone, for that country was empty of enemies, and indeed of population. However, this would not distress the Inkosazana, who had only to consult her Spirit to see all that happened to her servant.

Rachel replied that of course this was so, but as a matter of fact she had not troubled about the matter, then waved her hand to show that the interview was at an end.

It was the morning of the third day, and while Rachel was delivering judgment in a case, a messenger entered and whispered something to the induna on duty, who rose and saluted her.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Only this, Inkosazana; the white Inkoos from the Buffalo River has arrived, and is without."

"Good," said Rachel, "let him wait there." Then she went on with her judgment. Yes, she went on, although her eyes were blind, and the blood beating in her ears sounded like the roll of drums. She finished it, and after a decent interval, bowed her head in acknowledgement of the customary salutes, and made the sign which intimated that the Court was to be cleared.

Slowly, slowly, all the crowd melted away, leaving her alone with her women.

"Go," she said to one of them, "and bid the captain admit this white chief. Say that he is to come unarmed and alone. Then depart, all of you. If I should need you I will call."

The girl went on her errand while her companions filed away through the back gate of the inner fence. Rachel glanced round to make sure of her solitude. It was complete, no one was left. There she sat in state upon her carved stool, her wand in her hand, her white cloak upon her shoulders, and the sunlight that passed over the round of the hut behind her glinting on her hair till it shone like a crown of gold, but leaving

her face in shadow; sat quite still like some lovely tinted statue.

The gate of the inner fence opened and closed again after a man who entered. He walked forward a few paces, then stood still, for the flood of light that revealed him so clearly at first prevented him from seeing her seated in the shadow. Oh! there could be no further doubt--before her was Richard Darrien, the lad grown to manhood, from, whom she had parted so many years ago. Now, as then, he was not tall, though very strongly built, and for the rest, save for his short beard, the change in him seemed little. The same clear, thoughtful, grey eyes, the same pleasant, open face, the same determined mouth. She was not disappointed in him, she knew this at once. She liked him as well as she had done at the first.

Now he caught sight of her and stayed there, staring. She tried to speak, to welcome him, but could not, no words would come. He also seemed to be smitten with dumbness, and thus the two of them remained a while. At last he took off his hat almost mechanically, as though from instinct, and said vaguely,

"You are the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, are you not?"

"I am so called," she answered softly, and with effort.

The moment that he heard her voice, with a movement so swift that it was almost a spring, he advanced to her, saying,

"Now I am sure; you are Rachel Dove, the little girl who--Oh, Rachel, how lovely you have grown!"

"I am glad you think so, Richard," she answered again in the same low, deep voice, a voice laden with the love within her, and reddening to her eyes. Then she let fall her wand, and rising, stretched out both her hands to him.

They were face to face, now, but he did not take those hands; he passed his arms about her, drew her to him unresisting, and kissed her on the lips. She slipped from his embrace down on to her stool, white now as she had been red. Then while he stood over her, trembling and confused, Rachel looked up, her beautiful eyes filled with tears, and whispered,

"Why should I be ashamed? It is Fate."

"Yes," he answered, "Fate."

For so both, of them knew it to be. Though they had seen each other but once before, their love was so great, the bond between their natures so perfect and complete, that this outward expression of it would not be denied. Here was a mighty truth which burst through all wrappings of convention and proclaimed itself in its pure strength and beauty. That kiss of theirs was the declaration of an existent unity which circumstances did not create, nor their will control, and thus they confessed it to each other.

"How long?" she asked, looking up at him.

"Eight years to-day," he answered, "since I rode away after those waggons."

"Eight years," she repeated, "and no word from you all that time. You have behaved badly to me, Richard."

"No, no, I could not find out. I wrote three times, but always the letters were returned, except one that went to the wrong people, who were angry about it. Then two years ago, I heard that your father and mother had been in Natal, but had gone to England, and that you were dead. Yes, a man told me that you were dead," he added with a gulp. "I suppose he was speaking of somebody else, as he could not remember whether the name was Dove or Cove, or perhaps he was just lying. At any rate, I did not believe, him. I always felt that you were alive."

"Why did you not come to see, Richard?"

"Why? Because it was impossible. For years my father was an invalid, paralysed; and I was his only child, and could not leave him."

She looked a question at him.

"Yes," he answered with a nod, "dead, ten months ago, and for a few weeks

I had to remain to arrange about the property, of which he left a good deal, for we did well of late years. Just then I heard a rumour of an English missionary and his wife and daughter who were said to be living somewhere beyond the boundaries of Natal, in a savage place on the Transvaal side of the Drakensberg, and as some Boers I knew were trekking into that country I came with them on the chance--a pretty poor one, as the story was vague enough."

"You came--you came to seek the girl, Rachel Dove?"

"Of course. Otherwise why should I have left my farms down in the Cape to risk my neck among these savages?"

"And then," went on Rachel, "you or somebody else sent in the spy, Quabi, who returned to the Boer camp with his story about the Inkosazana-y-Zoola. You remember you brought him in limping to that old fellow with a grey beard and a large pipe, and the others who laughed at the tale. I mean when you said that this Inkosazana seemed very like an English maid, 'the daughter of a teacher,' whom you were looking for, and that you would go to find out the truth of the business."

"Yes, that's all right; but Rachel," he added with a start, "how do you know anything about it--Oom Piet and the rest, and the words I used? Your spies must be very good and quick, for you can't have seen Quabi."

"My spies are good and quick. Did you get my message sent by the King's

men? It was that she who stood with you on the rock in the river, greeted you and awaited you?"

"Yes, I could not understand. I do not understand now. Just before that they were going to kill me as a Boer spy. Who told you everything?"

"My heart," she answered smiling. "I dreamed it all. I suppose that I was allowed to save your life that I might bring you here to save me. Listen now, Richard, while I tell you the strangest story that you ever heard; and if you don't believe it, go and ask the King and his indunas."

Then she told him of her vision by the pool and all that happened after it. When she had finished Richard could only shake his head and say:

"Still I don't understand; but no wonder these Zulus have made a goddess of you. Well, Rachel, what is to happen now? If you are to stop here they mayn't care for me as a high priest."

"I am not; I am going home, and you must take me. I told them that you were coming to do so. You have your horse, have you not, the black horse with the white forefoot? Well, we will start at once--no, you must eat first, and there are things to arrange. Now stand at a distance from me and look as respectful as you can, for I fill a strange position here."

Then Rachel clapped her hands and the women came running in.

"Bring food for the Inkosi Darrien," she said, "and send hither the captain of the gate."

Presently the man arrived crouched up in token of respect, and shouting her titles.

"Go to the King," said Rachel, "and tell him the Inkosazana commands that the horse on which she came be brought to her at once, as she leaves Zululand for a while; also that an impi be assembled within an hour to escort her and this white chief, her servant, to the Tugela. Say that the Inkosi Darrien has brought her tidings which make it needful that she should travel hence speedily if the Zulus, her people, are to be saved from great misfortune, and say, too, that he goes with her. If the King or his indunas would see the Inkosazana, or the chief Darrien, let him or the indunas meet them on their road, since they have no time to visit the Great Place. Let Tamboosa be in command of the impi, and say also that if it is not here at once, the Inkosazana will be angry and summon an impi of her own. Go now, for the lives of many hang upon your speed; yes, the lives of the greatest in the land."

The man saluted and shot away like an arrow.

"Will they obey you?" asked Richard.

"I think so, because they are afraid of me, especially since I saw you coming. At any rate we must act at once, it is our best chance--before



they have time to think. Here is some food--eat. Woman, go, tell the guard that the Inkosi's horse must be fed at the gate, for he will need it presently, and his servant also."

"I have no servant, Inkosazana," broke in Richard. "I left Quabi at a kraal fifty miles away, laid up with a cut foot. As soon as he is better he will slip back across the Buffalo River."

Then while Richard ate, which he did heartily enough, for joy had made him very hungry, they talked, who had much to tell. He asked her why she thought it necessary to leave Zululand at once. She answered, for two reasons, first because of her desperate anxiety about her father and mother, as to whom her heart foreboded ill, and secondly for his own sake. She explained that the Zulus who had set her up as an image or a token of the guiding Spirit of their nation, were madly jealous concerning her, so jealous that if he remained here long she was by no means certain that even her power could protect him when they came to understand that he was much to her. It was impossible that she could see him often, and much more so that he could remain in her kraal. Therefore if they were detained he would be obliged to live at some distance from her where an assegai might find him at night or poison be put in his food. At present they were impressed by her foreknowledge of his arrival, and that was why he had been admitted to her at once. But this would wear off--and then who could say, especially if Ishmael returned?

He asked who Ishmael was and what he had to do with her. Rachel told him

briefly, and though she suppressed much, he looked very grave at that story.

While she was finishing it a woman called without for leave to enter, and, as before, Rachel bade him stand in a respectful attitude, and at a distance from her. Richard obeyed, and the woman came in to say that certain of the King's indunas craved audience with her. They were admitted and saluted her in their usual humble fashion, but of Richard, beyond eyeing him curiously and, as she thought, hostilely, they took not the slightest heed.

"Are all things ready for my journey, as I commanded?" asked Rachel at once.

"Inkosazana," answered their spokesman, "they are ready, for how canst thou be disobeyed? Tamboosa and the impi wait without. Yet, Inkosazana, the heart of the Black One and the hearts of his councillors, and of all the Zulu people are cut in two because thou wouldst go and leave them mourning. Their hearts are sore also with this white man Dario, who has come to lead thee hence, so sore, that were he not thy servant," the induna added grimly, "he at least should stay in Zululand."

"He is my servant," answered Rachel haughtily, "whom I sent for. Let that suffice. Remember my words, all of you, and let them be told again in the ears of the King, that if any harm comes to this white chief who is my guest and yours, then there will be blood between me and the people of the

Zulus that shall be terribly avenged in blood."

The indunas seemed to cower at this declaration, but made no answer. Only the chief of them said:

"The King would know if the Inkosi, thy servant, brings thee any tidings of the Amaboona, the white folk with whom he has been journeying."

"He brings tidings that they seek peace with the Zulus, to whom they will do no hurt if no hurt is done to them. Shall I tell them that the Zulus also seek peace?"

"The King gave us no message on that matter, Inkosazana," replied the induna. "He awaits the coming of the prophets of the Ghost-folk to interpret the meaning of thy words, and of the omen of the falling star."

"So be it," said Rachel. "When my servant, Noie, returns, let her be sent on to me at once, that I may hear and consider the words of her people," and she began to rise from her seat to intimate that the interview was finished.

"Inkosazana," said the induna hurriedly, "one question from the King--when dost thou return to Zululand?"

"I return when it is needful. Fear not, I think that I shall return, but I say to the King and to all of you: Be careful when I come that there is no

blood between me and you, lest great evil fall upon your heads from Heaven. I have spoken. Good fortune go with you till we meet again."

The indunas looked at each other, then rose and departed humbly as they had entered.

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An hour later, surrounded by the impi, and followed by Richard, Rachel was on the Tugela road. At the crest of a hill she pulled rein and looked back at the great kraal, Umgugundhlovu. Then she beckoned Richard to her side and said:

"I think that before long I shall see that hateful place again."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because of the way in which those indunas looked at each other just now. There was some evil secret in their eyes. Richard, I am afraid."