

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CURSE OF THE INKOSAZANA

That night the regiment and Rachel slept upon the bank of the river, and nothing happened save that lions carried off two soldiers, while two more who had been injured against the rocks, died. Also others fell sick. On the following morning food arrived in plenty from the neighbouring kraals, and with it some girls of high birth to attend upon the Inkosazana.

But with these Rachel would have nothing to do, and when they came near to her only said:

"Where is Noie, daughter of Seyapi? Lead me to Noie."

So they began their march again, Rachel walking as before in the centre of a ring of soldiers, and that night slept at a kraal upon a hill. Here messengers from the King met them charged with many fine words, to which Rachel listened without understanding them, and then scared them away with her laughter. Also they brought a beautiful cloak made of the skins of a rare white monkey, and this she took and wrapped herself in it, for she seemed to understand that her clothes were ragged.

That day they passed through fertile country, where much corn was grown. Here they saw a strange sight, for as they went clouds seemed to arise in

the sky from behind them, which presently were seen to be not clouds, but tens of millions of great winged grasshoppers that lit upon the corn, devouring it and every other green thing. Within a few hours nothing was left except the roots and bare branches, while the women of that land ran to and fro wailing, knowing that next winter they and their children must starve, and the cattle lowed about them hungrily, for the locusts had devoured all the grass. Moreover, having eaten everything, these insects themselves began to die in myriads so that soon the air was poisoned. The waters were also poisoned with their dead bodies, and at once sickness came which presently grew into a pestilence.

Now the men of the country sent a deputation to the Inkosazana, praying her to remove the curse, but when they had spoken she only repeated the words she had used upon the banks of the Buffalo River.

"Not on my head, not on my head! There is blood between the Inkosazana and her people of the Zulus. Famine and war and death upon the people of the Zulus because they have shed the holy blood!"

Then the men grew afraid and went away, and the regiment marched on accompanied by the myriads of the locusts that wasted all the land through which they passed.

At length, followed by a wail of misery, they came to the Great Place and entered it, preceded by the locusts which already were heaped up in the streets like winter leaves, and for lack of other provender gnawed at the

straw of the huts, and the shields and moochas of the soldiers. It was a strange sight to see the men trying to stamp them to death, and the women and children rushing to and fro shrieking and brushing them from their hair.

Amid such scenes as these they passed through the town of Umgugundhlovu into which Rachel had been brought in order that the people might see that their Inkosazana had returned, and on to that kraal upon the hill, where she had spent all those weary weeks until Richard came. She reached it as the sun was setting, and although she did not seem to know any of them was received with joy and adoration by the women who had been her attendants. Here she slept that night, for they thought that she must be too weary to see the King at once; moreover, he desired first to receive the reports of Tamboosa and the captains, and to learn all that had happened in this strange business.

Next morning, whilst Rachel sat by the pool in which, once she had seen the vision of Richard, Tamboosa and an escort came to bring her to Dingaan. When they told her this, she said neither yea nor nay, but, refusing to enter a litter they had brought, walked at the head of them, back to the Great Place, and, watched by thousands, through the locust-strewn streets to the Intunkulu, the House of the King. Here, in front of his hut, and surrounded by his Council, sat Dingaan and the indunas who rose to greet her with the royal salute. She advanced towards them slowly, looking more beautiful than ever she had done, but with wild, wandering eyes. They set a stool for her, and she sat down on the stool,

staring at the ground. Then as she said nothing, Dingaan, who seemed very sad and full of fear, commanded Tamboosa to report all that had happened in the ears of the Council, and he took up his tale.

He told of the journey to the Tugela, and of how the Inkosazana and the white lord, Dario, had crossed the river alone but a few hours after Ibubesi, ordering him to follow next day, also alone, with the white ox that bore her baggage. He told how he had done so, and on reaching Ramah had found the white Umfundusi and his wife lying dead in their room, and on the floor of it a Zulu of the men who had been sent with Ibubesi, also dead, and in the garden of the house a man of the people of Ibubesi, dying, who, with his last breath narrated to him the story of the taking of the Inkosazana and the white lord, by Ibubesi. He told of how he had run to the town of Mafooti, to find out the truth, and of the message that he had sent by the herd boy to Ibubesi and his people. Lastly he told all the rest of that story, of how he had come back to Zululand "as though he had wings," and finding the regiment that had escorted the Inkosazana still in camp near the river, had returned with them to attack Mafooti, which they discovered to be deserted by its people.

While he described how by the flare of the lightning they saw the Inkosazana standing on the roof of a hut, how they captured the wild beast, Ibubesi, how they learned that the Spirit of the Inkosazana was "wandering," and the dreadful words she said, the burning of Mafooti, and the fearful death of Ibubesi by fire, all the Council listened in utter silence. Thus they listened also whilst he showed how evil after evil had

fallen upon the regiment, evil by fire and water and sickness, as evil had fallen upon the land also by the plague of locusts.

At length Tamboosa's story was finished, and certain men were brought forward bound, who had been the captains of the band that went with Ishmael, among them those who had killed, or caused to die, the white teacher and his wife.

Upon the stern command of the King these men also told their story, saying that they had not meant to kill the white man and that what they did was done at the word of Ibubesi, whom they were ordered to obey in all things, but who, as they now understood, had dared to lay a plot to capture the Inkosazana for himself. When they had finished the King rose and poured out his wrath on them, because through their deeds the Spirit of the Inkosazana had been driven away, and her curse laid upon the land, where already it was at work. Then he commanded that they should be led thence, all of them, and put to a terrible death, and with them those captains of the regiment who had spoken against the following of the people of Mafooti, who should, he said, have been destroyed, every one.

At his words executioners rushed in to seize these wretched men, and then it was that Rachel, who all this while had sat as though she heard nothing, lifted her head and spoke, for the first time.

"Set them free, set them, free!" she commanded. "Vengeance is from Heaven, and Heaven will pour it out in plenty. Not on my hands, not on my hands

shall be the blood of those who sent the Spirit of the Inkosazana to wander in the skies. Who was it that bade an impi run to Ramah, and what did they there in the house of those who gave me birth? When the Master calls, the dogs must search and kill. Set them free, lest there be more blood between the Inkosazana and her people of the Zulus."

When he heard these words, spoken in a strange, wailing voice, Dingaan trembled, for he knew that it was he who had bidden his dogs to run.

"Let them go," he said, "and let the land see them no more for ever."

So those men went thankfully enough, and the land saw them no more. As they passed the gate other men entered, starved and hungry-looking men, whose bones almost pierced their skins, and who carried in their hands remnants of shields that looked as though they had been gnawed by rats. They saluted the King with feeble voices, and squatted down upon the ground.

"Who are those skeletons," he asked angrily, "who dare to break in upon my Council?"

"King," answered their spokesman, "we are captains of the Nobambe, the Nodwenge, and the Isangu regiments whom thou didst send to destroy the chief, Madaku and his people, who dwell far away in the swamp land to the north near where the Great River runs into the sea. King, we could not come at this chief because he fled away on rafts and in boats, he and his

people, and we lost our path among the reeds where again and again we were ambushed, and many of us sank in the swamps and were drowned. Also, we found no food, and were forced to live upon our shields," and he held up a gnawed fragment in his hand. "So we perished by hundreds, and of all who went forth but twenty-one times ten remain alive."

When Dingaan heard this he groaned, for his arms had been defeated and three of his best regiments destroyed. But Rachel laughed aloud, the terrible laugh at which all who heard it shivered.

"Did I not say," she asked, "that Heaven would pour out its vengeance in plenty because of the blood that runs between the Spirit of the Inkosazana and her people of the Zulus?"

"Truly this curse works fast and well," exclaimed Dingaan. Then, turning to the men, he shouted: "Be gone, you starved rats, you cowards who do not know how to fight, and be thankful that the Great Elephant (Chaka) is dead, for surely he would have fed you upon shields until you perished."

So these captains crept away also.

Ere they were well gone a man appeared craving audience, a fat man who wore a woeful countenance, for tears ran down his bloated cheeks. Dingaan knew him well, for every week he saw him, and sometimes oftener.

"What is it, Movo, keeper of the kine," he asked anxiously, "that you

break in on me thus at my Council?"

"O King," answered the fat man, "pardon me, but, O King, my tidings are so sad that I availed myself of my privilege, and pushed past the guards at the gate."

"Those who bear ill news ever run quickly," grunted the King. "Stop that weeping and out with it, Movo."

"Shaker of the Earth! Eater up of Enemies!" said Movo, "thou thyself art eaten up, or at least thy cattle are, the cattle that I love. A sore sickness has fallen on the great herd, the royal herd, the white herd with the twisted horns, and," here he paused to sob, "a thousand of them are dead, and many more are sick. Soon there will be no herd left," and he wept outright.

Now Dingaan leapt up in his wrath and struck the man so sharply with the shaft of the spear he held that it broke upon his head.

"Fat fool that you are," he exclaimed. "What have you done to my cattle? Speak, or you shall be slain for an evil-doer who has bewitched them."

"Is it a crime to be fat, O King," answered the indignant Movo, rubbing his skull, "when others are so much fatter?" and he looked reproachfully at Dingaan's enormous person. "Can I help it if a thousand of thy oxen are now but hides for shields?"

"Will you answer, or will you taste the other end of the spear?" asked Dingaan, grasping the broken shaft just above the blade. "What have you done to my cattle?"

"O King, I have done nothing to them. Can I help it if those accursed beasts choose to eat dead locusts instead of grass, and foam at the mouth and choke? Can the cattle help it if all the grass has become locusts so that there is nothing else for them to eat? I am not to blame, and the cattle are not to blame. Blame the Heavens above, to whom thou, or rather," he added hastily, "some wicked wizard must have given offence, for no such thing as this has been known before in Zululand."

Again Rachel broke in with her wild laughter, and said:

"Did I not tell thee that vengeance would be poured down in plenty, poured down like the rain, O Dingaan? Vengeance on the King, vengeance on the people, vengeance on the soldiers, vengeance on the corn, vengeance on the kine, vengeance on the whole land, because blood runs between the Spirit of the Inkosazana and the race of the Amazulu, whom once she loved!"

"It is true, it is true, White One, but why dost thou say it so often?" groaned the maddened Dingaan. "Why show the whip to those who must feel the blow? Now, you Movo, have you done?"

"Not quite, O King," answered the melancholy Movo, still rubbing his head.

"The cattle of all the kraals around are dying of this same sickness, and the crops are quite eaten, so that next winter everyone must perish of famine."

"Is that all, O Movo?"

"Not quite, O King, since messengers have come to me, as head keeper of the kine, to say that all the other royal herds within two days' journey are also stricken, although if I understand them right, of some other pest. Also, which I forgot to add--"

"Hunt out this bearer of ill-tidings," roared Dingaan, "hunt him out, and send orders that his own cattle be taken to fill up the holes in my blanket."

Now some attendants sprang on the luckless Movo and began to beat him with their sticks. Still, before he reached the gates he succeeded in turning round weeping in good earnest and shouted:

"It is quite useless, O King, all my cattle are dead, too. They will find nothing but the horns and the hoofs, for I have sold the hides to the shield-makers."

Then they thrust him forth.

He was gone, and for a while there was silence, for despair filled the

hearts of the King and his Councillors, as they gazed at Rachel dismayed, wondering within themselves how they might be rid of her and of the evils which she had brought upon them because of the blood of her people which lay at her doors.

Whilst they still stared thus in silence yet another messenger came running through the gate like one in great haste.

"Now I am minded to order this fellow to be killed before he opens his mouth," said Dingaan, "for of a surety he also is a bearer of ill-tidings."

"Nay, O King," cried out the man in alarm, "my news is only that an embassy awaits without."

"From whom?" asked Dingaan anxiously. "The white Amaboona?"

"Nay, O King, from the queen of the Ghost-people to whom thou didst dispatch Noie, daughter of Seyapi, a while ago."

Hearing the name Noie, Rachel lifted her head, and for the first time her face grew human.

"I remember," said Dingaan. "Admit the embassy."

Then followed a long pause. At length the gate opened and through it

appeared Noie herself, clad in a garb of spotless white, and somewhat travel-worn, but beautiful as ever. She was escorted by four gigantic men who were naked except for their moochas, but wore copper ornaments on their wrists and ankles, and great rings of copper in their ears. After her came three litters whereof the grass curtains were tightly drawn, carried by bearers of the same size and race, and after these a bodyguard of fifty soldiers of a like stature. This strange and barbarous-looking company advanced slowly, whilst the Council stared at them wondering, for never before had they seen people so huge, and arriving in front of the King set down the litters, staring back in answer with their great round eyes.

As they came Rachel rose from her stool and turned slowly so that she and Noie, who walked in front of the embassy, stood face to face. For a moment they gazed at each other, then Noie, running forward, knelt before Rachel and kissed the hem of her robe, but Rachel bent down and lifted her up in her strong arms, embracing her as a mother embraces a child.

"Where hast thou been, Sister?" she asked. "I have sought thee long."

"Surely on thy business, Zoola," answered Noie, scanning her curiously.

"Dost thou not remember?"

"Nay, I remember naught, Noie, save that I have sought thee long. My Spirit wanders, Noie."

"Lady," she said, "my people told me that it was so. They told me many terrible things, they who can see afar, they for whom distance has no gates, but I did not believe them. Now I see with my own eyes. Be at peace, Lady, my people will give thee back thy Spirit, though perchance thou must travel to find it, for in their land all spirits dwell. Be at peace and listen."

"With thee, Noie, I am at peace," replied Rachel, and still holding her hand, she reseated herself upon the stool.

"Where are the messengers?" asked Dingaan. "I see none."

"King," answered Noie, "they shall appear."

Then she made signs to the escort of giants, some of whom came forward and drew the curtains of the litters, whilst others opened huge umbrellas of split cane which they carried in their hands.

"Now what weapons are these?" asked Dingaan. "Daughter of Seyapi, you know that none may appear before the King armed."

"Weapons against the sun, O King, which my people hate."

"And who are the wizards that hate the sun?" queried Dingaan again in an astonished voice. Then he was silent, for out of the first litter came a little man, pale as the shoot from a bulb that has grown in darkness, with

large, soft eyes like the eyes of an owl, that blinked in the light, and long hair out of which all the colour seemed to have faded.

As the man, who, like Noie, was dressed in a white robe, and in size measured no more than a twelve-year-old child, set his sandalled feet upon the ground, one of the huge guards sprang forward to shield him with the umbrella, but being awkward, struck his leg against the pole of the litter and stumbled against him, nearly knocking him to the ground, and in his efforts to save himself, letting fall the umbrella. The little man turned on him furiously, and holding one hand above his head as though to shield himself from the sun, with the other pointed at him, speaking in a low sibilant voice that sounded like the hiss of a snake. Thereon the guard fell to his knees, and bending down with outstretched arms, beat his forehead on the earth as though in prayer for mercy. The sight of this giant making supplication to one whom he could have killed with a blow, was so strange that Dingaan, unable to restrain his curiosity, asked Noie if the dwarf was ordering the other to be killed.

"Nay, King," answered Noie, "for blood is hateful to these people. He is saying that the soldier has offended many times. Therefore he curses him and tells him that he shall wither like a plucked leaf and die without seeing his home again."

"And will he die?" asked Dingaan.

"Certainly, King; those upon whom the Ghost-people lay their curse must

obey the curse. Moreover, this man deserves his doom, for on the journey he killed another to take his food."

"Of a truth a terrible people!" said Dingaana uneasily. "Bid them lay no curse on me lest they should see more blood than they wish for."

"It is foolish to threaten the Great Ones of the Ghost-folk, King, for they hear even what they seem not to understand," answered Noie quietly.

"Wow!" exclaimed the King; "let my words be forgotten. I am sorry that I troubled them to come so far to visit me."

Meanwhile the offender had crept back upon his hands and knees, looking like a great beaten dog, whilst another soldier, taking his umbrella, held it over the angry dwarf. Also from the other litters two more dwarfs had descended, so like to the first that it was difficult to tell them apart, and were in the same fashion sheltered by guards with umbrellas. Mats were brought for them also, and on these they sat themselves down at right angles to Dingaana, and to Rachel, whose stool was set in front of the King, whilst behind them stood three of their escort, each holding an umbrella over the head of one of them with the left hand, while with the right they fanned them with small branches upon which the leaves, although they were dead, remained green and shining.

With Dingaana and his Council the three dwarfs did not seem to trouble

themselves, but at Rachel they peered earnestly. Then one of them made a sign and muttered something, whereon a soldier of the escort stepped forward with a fourth umbrella, which he opened over the heads of Rachel, and of Noie who stood at her side.

"Why does he do that?" asked Dingaan. "The Inkosazana is not a bat that she fears the sun."

"He does it," answered Noie, "that the Inkosazana may sit in the shade of the wisdom of the Ghost-people, and that her heart which is hot with many wrongs, may grow cool in the shade."

"What does he know about the Inkosazana and her wrongs?" asked Dingaan again, but Noie only shrugged her shoulders and made no answer.

Now one of the dwarfs made another sign, whereon more guards advanced, carrying small bowls of polished wood. These bowls they set upon the ground before the three dwarfs, one before each of them, filling them to the brim with water from a gourd.

"If your people are thirsty, Noie," exclaimed the King, "I have beer for them to drink, for at least the locusts have left me that. Bid them throw away the water, and I will give them beer."

"It is not water, King," she answered, "but dew gathered from certain trees before sunrise, and it is their spirits that are thirsty for

knowledge, not their bodies, for in this dew they read the truth."

"Then the Inkosazana must be of their family, Noie, for she read of the coming of the white chief Dario in water, or so they say."

"Perhaps, O King, if it is so these prophets will know it and acknowledge her."

Now for a long while there was silence, so long a while indeed that Dingaam and his Councillors began to move uneasily, for they felt as though the dwarf men were fingering their heart-strings. At length the three dwarfs lifted their wrinkled faces that were bleached to the colour of half-ripe corn, and gazed at each other with their round, owl-like eyes; then as though with one accord they said to each other:

"What seest thou, Priest?" and at same sign from them Noie translated the words into Zulu.

Now the first of them, he who had cursed the soldier, spoke in his low hissing voice, a voice like to the whisper of leaves in the wind, Noie rendering his words.

"I see two maidens standing by a house that moves when cattle draw it. One of them is dark-skinned, it is she," and he pointed to Noie, "the other is fair-skinned, it is she," and he pointed to Rachel. "They cast, each of them, a hair from her head into the air. The black hair falls to the

ground, but a spirit catches the hair of gold and bears it northward. It is the spirit of Seyapi whom the Zulus slew. Northwards he bears it, and lays it in the hand of the Mother of the Trees, and with it a message."

"Yes, with it a message," repeated the other two nodding their heads.

Then one of them drew a little package wrapped in leaves from his robe, and motioned to Noie that she should give it to Rachel. Noie obeyed, and the man said:

"Let us see if she has vision. Tell us, thou White One, what lies within the leaves."

Rachel, who had been sitting like a person in a dream, took the packet, and, without looking at it, answered:

"Many other leaves, and within the last of them a hair from this head of mine. I see it, but three knots have been tied therein. They are three great troubles."

"Open," said the dwarf to Noie, who cut the fibre binding the packet, and unfolded many layers of leaves. Within the last leaf was a golden hair, and in it were tied three knots.

Noie laid the hair upon the head of Rachel--it was hers. Then she showed it to the King and his Council, who stared at the knots not knowing what

to say, and after they had looked at it, refolded it in the leaves and returned the packet to the dwarf.

Now the dwarf who had read the picture in his bowl turned to him who sat nearest and asked:

"What seest thou, Priest?"

The man stared at the limpid water and answered:

"I see this place at night. I see yonder King and his Councillors talking to a white man with evil eyes and the face of a hawk, who has been wounded on the head and foot. I read their lips. They bargain together; it is of the bringing of an old prophet and his wife hither by force. I see the prophet and his wife in a house, and with them Zulus. By the command of the white man with the evil eyes the Zulus kill the prophet whose head is bald, and his wife dies upon the bed. Before they kill the prophet he slays one of the Zulus with smoke that comes from an iron tube."

When he heard all this Dingaan groaned, but the dwarf who had spoken, taking no heed of him, said to the third dwarf:

"What seest thou, Priest?" to which that dwarf answered:

"I see the White One yonder standing on a hut, but her Spirit has fled from her, it has fled from her to haunt the Trees. In her hand is a spear,

and below is the white man with, the evil eyes, held by Zulus. I read her words: she says that there is blood," and he shivered as he said the word, "yes, blood between her Spirit and the people of the Zulus. She prophesies evil to them. I see the ill; I see many burnt in a great fire. I see many drowned in an angry river. I see the demons of sickness lay hold of many. I see her Spirit call up the locusts from the coast land. I see it bring disaster on their arms; I see it scatter plague among their cattle; I see a dim shape that it summons striding towards this land. It travels fast over a winter veld, and the head of it is the head of a skull, and the name of it is Famine."

As he ended his words the three dwarfs bent forward, and with one movement seized their bowls and emptied them on to the ground, saying:

"Earth, Earth, drink, drink and bear record of these visions!"

Now the Council was much disturbed, for, although there were great witch doctors among them, none had known magic like to this. Only Dingaan stared down brooding. Then he looked up, and his fat body shook with hoarse laughter.

"You play pretty tricks, little men," he said, "with your giants and your boughs and your huts that open, and your bowls of water. But for all that they are only tricks, since Noie, or others have told you of these things that happened in the past. Now if you are wizards indeed, read me the riddle of the words of the Inkosazana that she spoke before her Spirit

left her because of the evil acts of the wolf, Ibubesi. Show me the answer to them in your bowls of water, little men, or be driven hence as cheats and liars. Also tell us your names by which we may know you."

When Noie had translated this speech the three dwarfs gathered themselves under one umbrella, and spoke to each other; then they slid back to their places, and the first of them, he who had cursed the soldier, said:

"King of the Zulus, I am Eddo, this on my right is Pani, and that on my left is Hana. We are children of the Mother of the Trees; we are high-priests of the Grey-people, the Dream-people, who rule by dreams and wisdom, not by spears as thou dost, O King. We are the Ghost-kings whom the ghosts obey, we are the masters of the dead, and the readers of hearts. Those are our names and titles, O King. We have travelled hither because thou sentest a messenger of our own blood who whispered a strange tale in the ear of the Mother of the Trees, a tale of one of whom we knew already but desired to see," and all three of them nodded towards Rachel seated on her stool. "We will read thy riddle, O King, but first thou must fix the fee."

"What do you demand, Ghost-people?" asked Dingaan. "Cattle are somewhat scarce here just now, and wives, I think, would be of little use to you. What is there, then, that you desire, and I can give?"

They looked at each other, then Eddo said, pointing with his thin hand upon which the nails grew long:

"We ask for the White One who sits there. We think that her Spirit dwells with us already, and we ask her body that we may join it to the Spirit again."

Now the Council murmured, but Dingaan replied:

"Once we sought to keep her in whom dwelt the Inkosazana of the Zulus. But things have gone amiss, and she brings curses on us. If shape and spirit were joined together again, mayhap the curses would be taken off our heads. Yet we dare not give her to you, unless she gives herself of her own will. Moreover, first the divination, then the pay. Is that enough?"

"It is enough," they answered, speaking all together. "Set out the matter, King of the Zulus, and we will see what we can do."

Then Dingaan beckoned to a man with a withered hand who sat close to him, listening and noting all things, but saying nothing, and said:

"Stand forth, thou Mopo, and tell the tale."

So Mopo rose and began his story. He told how he alone among the people of the Zulus had thrice seen the spirit of the Inkosazana in the days of the "Black-One-who-was-gone." He told how many moons ago the white man, Ibubesi, had come to the Great Place speaking of a beautiful white maiden who was known by the name of the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, a maiden who ruled

the lightning, and was not as other maidens are, and how he had been sent to see her, and found that as was the Spirit of the Inkosazana which he knew, so was this maiden.

"Wow!" he added, "save that the one walked on air and the other on earth, they are the same."

Moreover, as a spirit she seemed wise. He told of the trapping of Noie, and of the decoying of Rachel into Zululand, and of the interview between her and the King by moonlight when she smelt out Noie. Now he was going on to speak of the question put by Dingaan to the Inkosazana, and the answer that she gave to him, when one of the little men who all this while sat as though they were asleep, blinking their eyes in the light--it was Eddo--said:

"Surely thou forgettest something. Tongue of the King, thou who are named Mopo, or Umbopa, Son of Makedama; thou forgettest certain words which the Inkosazana whispered to thee when she threw her cloak about thy head ere thou fleddest away from the Council of the King. Of course, we do not know the words, but why dost thou not repeat them, Tongue of the King?"

Mopo stared at them, and his teeth chattered, then he answered:

"Because they have nothing to do with the story, Ghost-men; because they were of my own death, which is a little matter."

The three dwarfs turned their heads towards each other and said, each to the other:

"Hearest thou, Priest, and hearest thou, Priest, and hearest thou, Priest? He says that the words were of his own death and have nothing to do with the story," and they smiled and nodded, and appeared to go to sleep again.

Now Mopo went on with his tale. He told of the question of the King, how he had asked the Inkosazana whether he should fall upon the Boers or let them be; of how she had searched the Heavens with her eyes; of how the meteor had travelled before them, and burst over the kraal, Umgugundhlovu, that star which she said was thrown by the hand of the Great-Great, the Umkulunkulu, and of how she had sworn that she also heard the feet of a people travelling over plain and mountain, and saw the rivers behind them running red with blood. Lastly, he told of how she had refused to add to or take from her words, or to set out their meaning.

Then Mopo sat himself down again in the circle of the Councillors, and watched and hearkened like a hungry wolf.

"Ye have heard, Ghost-men," said the King. "Now, if ye are really wise, interpret to us the meaning of this saying of the Inkosazana, and of the running star which none can read."

The priests awoke and consulted with each other, then Eddo said:

"This matter is too high for us, King of the Zulus."

Dingaan heard, and laughed angrily.

"I thought it, I thought it!" he cried. "Ye are but cheats after all who, like any common doctor, repeat the gossip that ye have heard, and pretend that it is a message from Heaven. Now why should I not whip you from my town with rods till ye see that red blood which ye so greatly fear?"

At the mention of the word blood, the little men seemed to curl up like cut grass before fire; then Eddo smiled, a sickly smile, and answered:

"Be gentle, King, walk softly, King. We are but poor cheats, yet we will do our best, we, or another for us. A new bowl, a big bowl, a red bowl for the red King, and fill it to the brim with dew."

As he piped out the words a man from among their company appeared with a vessel much larger than those into which they had gazed, and made of beautiful, polished, blood-hued wood that gleamed in the sunlight. Eddo took it in his hand and another slave filled it with water from the gourd; the last drop of the water filled it to the brim. Then the three of them muttered invocations over it, and Eddo, beckoning to Noie, bade her bear it to the Inkosazana that she might gaze therein.

Rachel received it and looked; as she looked all the emptiness left her eyes which grew quick and active and full of horror.

"Thou seest something, Maiden?" queried Eddo.

"Aye," answered Rachel, "I see much. Must I speak?"

"Nay, nay! Breathe on the water thrice and fix the visions. Now bear the bowl to yonder King and let him look. Perchance he also will see something."

Rachel breathed on the water thrice, rose like one in a trance, and advancing to Dingaan placed the brimming bowl upon his knees.

"Look, King, look," cried Eddo, "and tell us if in what thou seest lies an answer to the oracle of the Inkosazana."

Dingaan stared at the water, angrily at first, as one who smells a trick. Then his face changed.

"By the head of the Black One," he said, "I see people fighting in this kraal, white men and Zulus, and the white men are mastered and the Zulus drag them out to death. The Zulus conquer, O my people. It is as I thought that it would be--that is the meaning of the riddle of the Inkosazana."

"Good, good," said the Council. "Doubtless it shall come to pass."

But the dwarf Eddo only smiled again and waved his hand.

"Look once more, King," he said in his low, hissing voice, and Dingaan looked.

Now his face darkened. "I see fire," he said. "Yes, in this kraal.

Umgugundhlovu burns, my royal House burns, and yonder come the white men riding upon horses. Oh! they are gone."

Eddo waved his hand, saying:

"Look again and tell us what thou seest, King."

Unwillingly enough, but as though he could not resist, Dingaan looked and said:

"I see a mountain whereof the top is like the shape of a woman, and between her knees is the mouth of a cave. Beneath the floor of that cave I see bodies, the body of a great man and the body of a girl; she must have been fair, that girl."

Now when he heard this the Councillor who was named Mopo, he with the withered hand, started up, then sat down again, but all were so intent upon listening to Dingaan that none noticed his movements save Noie and the priests of the ghosts.

"I see a man, a fat man come out of the cave," went on Dingaan. "He seems

to be wounded and weary, also his stomach is sunken as though with hunger. Two other men seize him, a tall warrior with muscles that stand out on his legs, and another that is thin and short. They drag him up the mountain to a great cleft that is between the breasts of her who sits thereon. They speak with him, but I cannot see their faces, for they are wrapped in mist, or the face of the fat man, for that also is wrapped in mist. They hale him to the edge of the cleft, they hurl him over, he falls headlong, and the mist is swept from his face. Ah! it is my own face!" [Footnote: See "Nada the Lily," CHAPTER XXXV.]

"Priest," whispered each of the little men to his fellow in the dead silence that followed, "Priest, this King says that he sees his own face. Priest, tell me now, has not the spirit of the Inkosazana interpreted the oracle of the Inkosazana? Will not yonder King be hurled down this cleft? Is he not the star that falls?"

And they nodded and smiled at each other.

But Dingaan leapt up in his rage and terror, and with him leapt up the Councillors and witch doctors, all save he who was named Mopo, son of Makedama, who sat still gazing at the ground. Dingaan leapt up, and seizing the bowl hurled it from him so that the water in it fell over Rachel like rain from the clouds. He leapt up, and he cursed the Ghost-priests as evil wizards, bidding them begone from his land. He raved at them, he threatened them, he cursed them again and again. The little men sat still and smiled till he grew weary and ceased. Then they spoke to

each other, saying:

"He has sprinkled the White One with the dew of out Trees, and henceforth she belongs to the Trees. Is it not so, Priest?"

They nodded in assent, and Eddo rose and addressed the King in a new voice, a shrill commanding voice, saying:

"O man, thou that art called a King and causest much blood to flow, thou are but a bubble on a river of blood, thou slayer that shalt be slain, thou thrower of spears upon whom the spear shall fall, thou who shalt look upon the Face of Stone that knows not pity, thou whom the earth shall swallow, thou who shalt perish at the hands of--"

"The faces of the slayers were veiled, Priest," broke in the other two dwarfs, peeping up at him from beneath the shadow of their umbrellas; "surely the faces of those slayers were veiled, O Priest."

"Thou who shalt perish at the hands of avengers whose faces are veiled, thy riddle is read for thee as the Mother of the Trees decreed that it should be read. It is well read, it is truly read, it shall befall in its season. Now give to thy servants their reward and let them depart in peace. Give to them, that White One whose lost Spirit spoke to thee from the water."

"Take her," roared Dingaan, "take her and begone, for to the Zulus she and

Noie, the witch, bring naught but ill."

But one of the Council cried:

"The Inkosazana cannot be sent away with these magicians unless it is her will to go."

Then the little men nodded to Noie, and Noie whispered in the ear of Rachel.

Rachel listened and answered: "Whither thou goest, Noie, thither I go with thee, I who seek my Spirit."

So Noie took Rachel by the hand and led her from the Council-place of the King, and as she went, followed by the Ghost-priests and their escort, for the last time all the Councillors rose up and gave to her the royal salute. Only Dingaan sat upon the ground and beat it with his fists in fury.

Thus did the Inkosazana-y-Zoola depart from the Great Place of the King of the Zulus, and Mopo, the son of Makedama, shading his eyes with his hand, watched her go from between his withered fingers.