

CHAPTER XIX

RACHEL FINDS HER SPIRIT

Northward, ever northward, journeyed Rachel with the Ghost-priests; for days and weeks they journeyed, slowly, and for the most part at night, since these people dreaded the glare of the sun. Sometimes she was borne along in a litter with Noie upon the shoulders of the huge slaves, but more often she walked between the litters in the midst of a guard of soldiers, for now she was so strong that she never seemed to weary, nor even in the fever swamps where many fell ill, did any sickness touch her. Also this labour of the body seemed to soothe her wandering and tormented mind, as did the touch of Noie's hand and the sound of Noie's voice. At times, however, her madness got hold of her and she broke out into those bursts of wild laughter which had scared the Zulus. Then Eddo would descend from his litter and lay his long fingers on her forehead and look into her eyes in such a fashion that she went to sleep and was at peace. But if Noie spoke to her in these sleeps, she answered her questions, and even talked reasonably as she had done before the people of Mafooti laid the body of Richard at her feet, and she stood upon the roof of the hut which Ishmael strove to climb.

Thus it was that Noie came to learn all that had happened to her since they parted, for though she had gathered much from them, the Zulus could not, or would not tell her everything. In past days she had heard from

Rachel of the lad, Richard Darrien, who had been her companion years before through that night of storm on the island in the river, and now she understood that her lady loved this Richard, and that it was because of his murder by the wild brute, Ibubesi, that she had become mad.

Yes, she was mad, and for that reason Noie rejoiced that the dwarf people were taking her to their home, since if she could be cured at all, they were able to heal her, they the great doctors. Moreover, if these priests and the Zulus would have let her go, whither else could she have gone whose parents and lover were dead, except to the white people on the coast, who did not reverence the insane, as do all black folk, but would have locked her up in a house with others like her until she died. No although she knew that there were dangers before them, many and great dangers, Noie rejoiced that things had befallen thus.

Also in her tender care already Rachel improved much, and Noie believed that one day she would be herself again. Only she wished that she and her lady were alone together; that there were no priests with them, and above all no Eddo. For Eddo as she knew well was jealous of her authority over Rachel; jealous too of the love that they bore one to the other. He wished to use this crazed white chieftainess who had been accepted as their Inkosazana by the great Zulu people, for his own purposes. This had been clear from the beginning, and that was why when he first heard of her he had consented to go on the embassy to Dingaan, since by his magic he could foresee much of the future that was dark to Noie, whose blood was mixed and who had not all the gifts of the Ghost-kings.

Moreover, the Mother of the Trees was Noie's great aunt, being the sister of her grandfather, or of his father, Noie was not sure which, for she had dwelt among them but a few days, and never thought to inquire of the matter. But of one thing she was sure, that Eddo the first priest, hated this Mother of the Trees, who was named Nya, and desired that "when her tree fell" the next mother should be his servant, which Nya was not. Perhaps, reflected Noie, it was in his mind that her lady would fill this part, and being mad, obey him in all things.

Still she kept a watch upon her words, and even on her thoughts, for Eddo and his fellow-priests, Pani and Hana, were able to peer into human hearts, and read their secrets. Also she protected Rachel from him as much as she was able, never leaving her side for a moment, however weary she might be, for she feared lest he should become the master of her will. Only when the fits of madness fell upon her mistress, she was forced to allow Eddo to quell them with his touch and eye, since herself she lacked this power, nor dared she call the others to her help, for they were under the hand of Eddo.

Northward, ever northward. First they passed through the Zulus and their subject tribes who knew of them and of the Inkosazana. All of these were suffering from the curse that lay upon the land because, as they believed, there was blood between the Inkosazana and her people. The locusts devoured their crops and the plague ravaged their cattle, so that they were terrified of her, and of the little Grey-folk with whom she

travelled, the wizards who had shown fearful things to Dingaan and left him sick with dread. They fled at their approach, only leaving a few of their old people to prostrate themselves before this Inkosazana who wandered in search of her own Spirit, and the Dream-men who dwelt with the ghosts in the heart of a forest, and to pray her and them to lift this cloud of evil from the land, bringing gifts of such things as were left to them.

At length all the Zulus were passed, and they entered into the territories of other tribes, wild, wandering tribes.

But even these knew of the Ghost-kings, and attempted nothing against them, as they had attempted nothing against Noie and her escort when she travelled through this land on her embassy to the People of the Trees. Indeed, some of their doctors would visit them at their camps and ask an oracle, or an interpretation of dreams, or a charm against their enemies, or a deadly poison, offering great gifts in return. At times Eddo and his fellow-priests would listen, and the giants would bring a tiny bowl filled with dew into which they gazed, telling them the pictures they saw there, though this they did but seldom, as the supply of dew which they had brought with them from their own country ran low, and since it could not be used twice they kept it for their own purposes.

Next they came to a country of vast swamps, where dwelt few men and many wild beasts, a country full of fevers and reeds and pools, in which lived snakes and crocodiles. Yet no harm came to them from these things, for the

Ghost-priests had medicines that warded off sickness, and charms that protected them from all evil creatures, and in their bowls they read what road to take and how dangers could be avoided. So they passed the swamps safely; only here that slave whom Eddo had cursed at the kraal of Dingaan, and who from that day onward had wasted till he seemed to be nothing but a great skeleton, sickened and died.

"Did I not tell you that it should be so?" said Eddo to the other slaves, who trembled before him as reeds tremble in the wind. "Be warned, ye fools, who think that the strength of men lies in their bodies and their spears." Then he kicked the corpse of the dead giant gently with his sandalled foot, and bade his brothers throw him into a pool for the crocodiles to eat.

Having passed the swamps and many rivers, at length they turned westward, travelling for days over grassy uplands like to those of Natal, among which wandered pastoral tribes with their herds of cattle. On these plains were multitudes of game and many lions, especially in the bush-clad slopes of great isolated mountains that rose up here and there. These lions roared round them at night, but the priests did not seem to be afraid, for when the brutes became overbold they placed deadly poison in the carcasses of buck that the nomad tribes brought them as offerings, of which the lions ate and died in numbers. Also they sold some of the poison to the tribe for a great price in cattle, as to the delivery of which cattle they gave minute directions, for they knew that none dared to cheat the Mother of the Trees and her prophets.

After the plains were left behind, they reached a vast, fertile and low-lying country that sloped upwards for miles and miles, which, as Noie explained to Rachel, when she would listen, was the outer territory of the Ghost-people, for here dwelt the race of the Umkulus, or Great Ones, who were their slaves, that folk to which the soldiers of their escort belonged. Of these there were thousands and tens of thousands who earned their living by agriculture, since although they were so huge and fierce-looking, they did not fight unless they were attacked. The chiefs of this people had their dwellings in vast caves in the sides of cliffs which, if need be, could be turned into impregnable fortresses, but their real ruler was the Mother of the Trees, and their office was to protect the country of the Trees and furnish it with food, since the Tree-people were dreamers who did little work.

While they travelled through this land all the headmen of the Umkulus accompanied them, and every morning a council was held at which these made report to the priests of all that had chanced of late, and laid their causes before them for judgment. These causes Eddo and his fellow-priests heard and settled as seemed best to them, nor did any dare to dispute their rulings. Indeed, even when they deposed a high chief and set another in his place, the man who had lost all knelt before them and thanked them for their goodness. Also they tried criminals who had stolen women or committed murder, but they never ordered such men to be slain outright. Sometimes Eddo would look at them dreamily and curse them in his slow, hissing voice, bidding them waste in body and in mind, as he had done to

the soldier at Umgugundhlovu, and die within one year, or two, or three, as the case might be. Or sometimes, if the crime was very bad, he would command that they should be sent to "travel in the desert," that is, wander to and fro without food or water until death found them. Now and again miserable-looking men, mere skeletons, with hollow cheeks, and eyes that seemed to start from their heads, would appear at their camps weeping and imploring that the curse which had been laid upon them in past days should be taken off their heads. At such people Eddo and his brother-priests, Pani and Hana, would laugh softly, asking them how they throve upon the wrath of the Mother of the Trees, and whether they thought that others who saw them would be encouraged to sin as they had done. But when the poor wretches prayed that they might be killed outright with the spear, the priests shrank up in horror beneath their umbrellas, and asked if they were mad that they should wish them to "sprinkle their trees with blood."

One morning a number of these bewitched Umkulus, men, women and children, appeared, and when the three priests mocked them, as was their wont, and the guards, some of whom were their own relatives, sought to beat them away with sticks, threw themselves upon the ground and burst into weeping. Rachel, who was camped at a little distance with Noie, in a reed tent that the guard had made for her, which they folded up and carried as they did the umbrellas, heard the sound of this lamentation, and came out followed by Noie. For a space she stood contemplating their misery with a troubled air, then asked Noie why these people seemed so starved and why they wept. Noie told her that when she was on her embassy the head of their kraal, an

enormous man of middle age, whom she pointed out to Rachel, had sought to detain her because she was beautiful, and he wished to make her his wife, although he knew well that she was on an embassy to the Mother of the Trees. She had escaped, but it was for this reason that the curse of which they were perishing had been laid upon him and his folk.

Now Rachel went on to where the three priests sat beneath their umbrellas dozing away the hours of sunlight, beckoning to the doomed family to follow her.

"Wake, priests," she cried in a loud voice, and they looked up astonished, rubbing their eyes, and asked what was the matter.

"This," said Rachel. "I command you to lift the weight of your malediction off the head of these people who have suffered enough."

"Thou commandest us!" exclaimed Eddo astonished. "And if we will not, Beautiful One, what then?"

"Then," answered Rachel, "I will lift it and set it on to your heads, and you shall perish as they are perishing. Oh! you think me mad, you priests, who kill more cruelly than did the Zulus, and mad I am whose Spirit wanders. Yet I tell you that new powers grow within me, though whence they come I know not, and what I say I can perform."

Now they stared at her muttering together, and sending for a wooden bowl,

peeped into it. Whatever it was they saw there did not please them, for at length Eddo addressed the crowd of suppliants, saying:

"The Mother of the Trees forgives; the knot she tied she looses; the tree she planted she digs up. You are forgiven. Bones, put on strength; mouths, receive food; eyes, forget your blindness, and feet, your wanderings. Grow fat and laugh; increase and multiply; for the curse we give you a blessing, such is the will of the Mother of the Trees."

"Nay, nay," cried Rachel, when she understood their words, "believe him not, ye starvelings. Such is the will of the Inkosazana of the Zulus, she who has lost her Spirit and another's, and travels all this weary way to find them."

Then her madness seemed to come upon her again, for she tossed her arms on high and burst into one of her wild fits of laughter. But those whom she had redeemed heeded it not, for they ran to her, and since they dared not touch her, or even her robe, kissed the ground on which she had stood and blessed her. Moreover from that moment they began to mend, and within a few days were changed folk. This Noie knew, for they followed up Rachel to the confines of the desert, and she saw it with her eyes. Also the fame of the deed spread among the Umkulu people who groaned under the cruel rule of the Ghost-kings, and mad or sane, from that day forward they adored Rachel even more than the Zulus had done, and like the Zulus believed her to be a Spirit. No mere human being, they declared, could have lifted off the curse of the Mother of the Trees from those upon whom it had fallen.

Thenceforward Eddo, Pani, and Hana hid their judgments from Rachel, and would not suffer such suppliants to approach the camp. Also when they seized a number of men because these had conspired together to rebel against the Ghost-people, and brought them on towards their own country for a certain purpose, they forced them to act as bearers like the others, so that Rachel might not guess their doom. For now, with all their power, they also were afraid of this white Inkosazana, as Dingaan had been afraid.

So they travelled up this endless slope of fertile land, leaving all the kraals of the giant Umkulus behind them, and one morning at the dawn camped upon the edge of a terrible desert; a place of dry sands and sun-blasted rocks, that looked like the bottom of a drained ocean, where nothing lived save the fire lizards and certain venomous snakes that buried themselves in the sand, all except their heads, and only crawled out at night. After the people of the Umkulus this horrible waste was the great defence of the Ghost-kings, whose country it ringed about, since none could pass it without guides and water. Indeed, Noie had been forced to stay here for days with her escort, until the Mother of the Trees, learning of her coming in some strange fashion, had sent priests and guards to bring her to her land. But the Zulus who were with her they did not bring, except one witch-doctor to bear witness to her words. These they left among the Umkulus till she should return, nor were those Zulus sorry who had already heard enough of the magic of the Ghost-kings, and feared to come face to face with them.

But it is true that they also feared the Umkulus, whom, because of their great size and the fierceness of their air, the Zulus took to be evil spirits, though if this were so, they could not understand why they should obey a handful of grey dwarfs who lived far from them beyond the desert. Still these Umkulus did them no harm, for on her return Noie found them all safe and well.

That afternoon Rachel and the dwarfs plunged into the dreadful wilderness, heading straight for the ball of the sinking sun. Here, although she wished to do so, she was not allowed to walk, for fear lest the serpents should bite her, said Eddo, but must journey in the litter with Noie. So they entered it, and were borne forward at a great pace, the bearers travelling at a run, and being often changed. Also many other bearers came with them, and on the shoulders of each of them was strapped a hide bag of water. Of this they soon discovered the reason, for the sand of that wilderness was white with salt; the air also seemed to be full of salt, so that the thirst of those who travelled there was sharp and constant, and if it could not be satisfied they died.

It was a very strange journey, and although she did not seem to take much note of them at the time, its details and surroundings burned themselves deeply into Rachel's mind. The hush of the infinite desert, the white moonlight gleaming upon the salt, white sand; the tall rocks which stood up here and there like unfinished obelisks and colossal statues, the snowy clouds of dust that rose beneath the feet of the company; the hoarse

shouts of the guides, the close heat, the halts for water which was greedily swallowed in great gulps; the occasional cry and confusion when a man fell out exhausted, or because he had been bitten by one of the serpents--all these things, amongst others, were very strange.

Once Rachel asked vaguely what became of these outworn and snake-poisoned men, and Noie only shook her head in answer, for she did not think fit to tell her that they were left to find their way back, or to perish, as might chance.

All that night and for the first hours of the day that followed, they went forward swiftly, camping at last to eat and sleep in the shadow of a mass of rock that looked like a gigantic castle with walls and towers. Here they remained in the burning heat until the sun began to sink once more, and then went on again, leaving some of the bearers behind them, because there was no longer water for so many. There the great men sat in patient resignation and watched them go, they who knew that having little or no water, few of them could hope to see their homes again. Still, so great was their dread of the Ghost-priests, that they never dared to murmur, or to ask that any of the store of water should be given to them, they who were but cattle to be used until they died.

The second night's journey was like the first, for this desert never changed, its aspect, and on the following morning they halted beneath another pile of fantastic, sand-burnished rocks, from some of which hung salt like icicles. Here one of the bearers who had been denied water as a

punishment for laziness, although in truth he was sick, began to suck the salt-icicles. Suddenly he went raving mad, and rushing with a knife at Eddo, Pani, and Hana where they sat under their cane umbrellas that, for the sake of coolness, were damped with this precious water, he tried to kill them.

Then as they saw the knife gleaming, all their imperturbable calm departed from these dwarfs. They squeaked in terror with thin voices as rats speak; they rolled upon the ground yelling to the slaves to save them from a "red death." The man was seized and, though he fought with all his giant strength, held down and choked in the sand. Once, however, he twisted his head free, howling a curse at them. Also he managed to hurl his knife at Eddo, and the point of it scratched him on the hand, causing the pale blood to flow, a sight at which Eddo and the other priests broke into tears and lamentations, that continued long after the Umkulu was dead.

"Why are they such cowards?" asked Rachel, dreamily, for she had not seen the murder of the slave, and thought that Eddo had only scratched himself.

"Because they fear the sight of blood, Zoola," answered Noie, "which is a very evil omen to them. Death they do not fear who are already among ghosts, but if it is a red death, their souls are spilt with their life, or so they believe."

Towards noon that day the sky banked up with lurid-coloured clouds; the sun which should have shone so hotly, went out, and a hush that was almost

fearful in its heat and intensity, fell upon the desert. The Umkulu bearers became disturbed, and gathered together into knots, talking in low tones. Eddo and his brother priests who, either because of the adventure of the morning or the oppressive air, could not sleep, as was usual with them, were also disturbed. They crept from beneath their umbrellas which, as the sun had vanished, were of no use to them, and stood together staring at the salty plain, which under that leaden and lowering sky looked white as snow, and at the brooding clouds above. They even sent for their bowls to read in them pictures of what was about to happen, but there was no dew left, so these could not be used.

Then they consulted with the captains of the bearers, who told them what no magic was needed to guess that a mighty storm was gathering, and that if it overtook them in the desert, they would be buried beneath the drifting sand. Now this was a "white death" which the dwarfs did not seem to desire, so they ordered an instant departure, instead of delaying the start until sunset, as they had intended, for then, if all went well, they would have arrived at their homes by dawn, and not in the middle of the night. So that litters were made ready, and they went forward through the overpowering heat, that caused the bearers to hang out their tongues and reel as they walked.

Towards evening the storm began to stir. Little wandering puffs of wind blew upon them and died away, and lightnings flickered intermittently. Then a hot breeze sprang up that gradually increased in strength until the sand rolled and rippled before it, now one way and now another, for this

breeze seemed to blow in turn from every quarter of the heavens. Suddenly, however, after trying them all, it settled in the west, and drove straight into their faces with ever increasing force. Now Eddo thrust out his head between the curtains of his litter and called to the bearers to hurry, as they had but a little distance of desert left to pass, after which came the grass country where there would be no danger from the sand. They heard and obeyed, changing the pole gangs frequently, as those who carried the litters became exhausted.

But the storm was quicker than they; it burst upon them while they were still in the waste, though not in its full strength. Then the darkness came, utter darkness, for no moon or stars could be seen, and salt and sand drove down on them like hail. Through it all, the bearers fought on, though how they found their way Noie, who was watching them, could not guess, since no landmarks were left to guide them. They fought on, blinded, choked with the salt sand that drove into their eyes and lungs, till man after man, they fell down and perished. Others took their places, and yet they fought on.

It must have been near to midnight when the company, or those who were left of them, staggered to the edge of that dreadful wilderness which was but a vast plain of stone and sand, bordered on the west as on the east by slopes of fertile soil. For a while the fierce tempest lifted a little, and the light of the stars which struggled through breaks in the clouds showed that they were marching down a steep descent of grassland. Thus they went on for several more hours, till at length the bearers of the

litter in which were Rachel and Noie, who for a long time had been staggering to and fro like drunken men, came to a halt, and litter and all, sank to the ground, utterly exhausted.

Rachel and Noie disentangled themselves from the litter, for they were unhurt, and stood by it, not knowing where to go, till presently two other litters containing the priests came up, for the third had been abandoned, and its occupant crowded in with Eddo. Now a great clamour arose in the darkness, the priests hissing commands to the surviving bearers to take up the litter and proceed. But great as was their strength, this the poor men could not do. There they lay upon the ground answering that Eddo might curse them if he wished, or even kill them as their brothers had been killed, but they were unable to stir another step until they had rested and drunk. Where they were, there they must lie until rain fell. Then the priests wished Rachel to enter one of their litters, leaving Noie to walk, which they were afraid to do themselves. But when she understood, Rachel cut the matter short by answering,

"Not so, I will walk," and picking up the spear of one of the fallen Umkulu to serve as a staff, she took Noie by the hand and started forward down the hill.

One of the priests clasped her robe to draw her back, but she turned on him with the spear, whereon he shrank back into his litter like a snail into his shell and left her alone. So following the steep path they marched on, and after them came the two litters with the priests, carried

by all the bearers who could still stand, for these old men weighed no more than children. From far below them rose a mighty sound as of an angry sea.

"What is that noise?" called Rachel into the ear of Noie, for the gale was rising again.

"The sound of wind in the forest where the Tree-folk dwell," she answered.

Then the dawn broke, an awful, blood-red dawn, and by degrees they saw. Beneath them ran a shallow river, and beyond it, stretching for league upon league farther than the eye could see, lay the mighty forest whereof the trees soared two hundred feet or more into the air; the dark illimitable forest that rolled as the sea rolls beneath the pressure of the gale, and indeed, seen from above, looked like a green and tossing ocean. At the sight of the water Rachel and Noie began to run towards it hand in hand, for they were parched with thirst whose mouths were full of the salt dust of the desert. The bearers of the litters in which were the three priests ran also, paying no heed to the cries of the dwarfs within. At length it was reached, and throwing themselves down they drank until that raging thirst of theirs was satisfied; even Eddo and his companions crawled out of their litters and drank. Then having washed their hands and faces in the cool water, they forded the fleet stream, and, filled with a new life, followed the road that ran beyond towards the forest. Scarcely had they set foot upon the farther bank when the heart of the tempest, which had been eddying round them all night long, burst over them in its

fury. The lightnings blazed, the thunder rolled, and the wild wind grew to a hurricane, so fierce that the litters in which were Eddo, Pani, and Hana were torn from the grasp of the bearers and rolled upon the ground. From the wreck of them, for they were but frail things, the little grey priests emerged trembling, or rather were dragged by the hands of their giant bearers, to whom they clung as a frightened infant clings to its mother. Rachel saw them and, laughed.

"Look at the Masters of Magic!" she cried to Noie, "those who kill with a curse, those who rule the Ghosts," and she pointed to the tiny, contemptible figures with fluttering robes being dragged along by those giants whom but a little while before they had threatened with death.

"I see them," answered Noie into her ear. "Their spirits are strong when they are at peace, but in trouble they fear doom more than others. Now, if I were those Umkulu, I would make an end of them while they can."

But these great, patient men did otherwise; indeed, when the dwarfs, worn out and bewildered by the hurricane, could walk no more, they took them up and carried them as a woman carries a babe.

Now they were passing a belt of open land between the river and the forest in which terrified mobs of cattle rushed to and fro, while their herds, slave-men of large size like the Umkulu, tried to drive them to some place where they would be safe from the tempest. In this belt also grew broad fields of grain, which furnished food for the Tree-folk. At last they came

to the confines of the forest, and Rachel, looking round her with wondering eyes, saw at the foot of each great tree a tiny hut shaped like a tent, and in front of the hut a dwarf seated on the ground staring into a bowl of water, and beating his breast with his hands.

"What do they?" she asked of Noie.

"They strive to read their fates, Lady, and weep because the wind ripples the dew in their bowls, so that they can see nothing, and cannot be sure whether their tree will stand or fall. Follow me, follow me; I know the way, here we are not safe."

The hurricane was at its height; the huge trees about them rocked and bent like reeds, great boughs came crashing down; one of them fell upon a praying dwarf and crushed him to a pulp. Those around him saw it and uttered a wild shrill scream; Eddo, Pani, and Hana saw it and screamed also, in the arms of their bearers, for this sight of blood was terrible to them. The forest was alive with the voices of the storm, it seemed to howl and groan, and the lightnings illumined its gloomy aisles. The grandeur and the fearfulness of the scene excited Rachel; she waved the spear she carried, and began to laugh in the wild fashion of her madness, so that even the grey dwarfs, seated each at the foot of his tree, ceased from his prayers to glance at her askance.

On they went, expecting death at every step, but always escaping it, until they reached a wide clearing in the forest. In the centre of this clearing

grew a tree more huge than any that Rachel had ever dreamed of, the bole of it, that sprang a hundred feet without a branch, was thicker than Dinga'an's Great Hut, and its topmost boughs were lost in the scudding clouds. In front of this tree was gathered a multitude of people, men, women, and children, all dwarfs, and all of them on their knees engaged in prayer. At its bole, by a tent-shaped house, stood a little figure, a woman whose long grey hair streamed upon the wind.

"The Mother of the Trees," cried Noie through the screaming gale. "Come to her, she will shelter us," and she gripped Rachel's arm to lead her forward.

Scarcely had they gone a step when the lightning blazed above them fearfully, and with it came an awful rush of wind. Perhaps that flash fell upon the tree, or perhaps the wind snapped its roots. At least its mighty trunk burst in twain, and with a crash that for a moment seemed to master even the roar of the volleying thunder, down it came to earth. Two huge limbs fell on either side of Rachel and Noie, but they were not touched. A bough struck the Umkulu slave who was carrying Eddo, and swept off his head, leaving the dwarf unharmed. Another bough fell upon Pani and his bearer, and buried them in the earth beneath its bulk, so that they were never seen again. As it chanced the most of the worshippers were beyond the reach of the falling branches, but some of these that were torn loose in the fall, or shattered by the lightning, the wind caught and hurled among them, slaying several and wounding others.

In ten seconds the catastrophe had come and gone, the Queen-Tree that had ruled the forest for a thousand years was down, a stack of green leaves, through which the shattered branches showed like bones, and a prostrate, splintered trunk. The shock threw Noie and Rachel to the ground, but Rachel, rising swiftly, pulled Noie to her feet after her; then, acting upon some impulse, leapt forward, and climbing on to the trunk where it forked, ran down it till she almost reached its base, and stood there against the great shield of earth that had been torn up with the roots. After that last fearful outburst a stillness fell, the storm seemed to have exhausted itself, at any rate for a while. Rachel was able to get her breath and look about her.

All around were lines of enormous trees, solemn aisles that seemed to lead up to the Queen of the Trees, and down these aisles, piercing the shadows cast by the interlacing branches overhead, shone the lights of that lurid morning. Rachel saw, and something struggled in the darkness of her brain, as the light struggled in the darkness of the forest aisles. She remembered--oh! what was it she remembered? Now she knew. It was the dream she had dreamed upon the island in the river, years and years ago, a dream of such trees as these, and of little grey people like to these, and of the boy, Richard, grown to manhood, lashed to the trunk of one of the trees. What had happened to her? She could recall nothing since she saw the body of Richard upon its bier in the kraal Mafooti.

But this was not the kraal Mafooti, nor had Noie, who stood at her side, been with her there, Noie, who had gone on an embassy to her father's

folk, the dwarf people. Ah! these people were dwarfs. Look at them running to and fro screaming like little monkeys. She must have been dreaming a long, bad dream, whereof the pictures had escaped her. Doubtless she was still dreaming and presently would awake. Well, the torment had gone out of it, and the fear, only the wonder remained. She would stand still and see what happened. Something was happening now. A little thin hand appeared, gripping the rough bark at the side of the fallen tree.

She peeped over the swell of it and saw an old dwarf woman with long white hair, whose feet were set in a cleft of the shattered bole, and who hung to it as an ape hangs. Beneath her to the ground was a fall of full thirty feet, for the base of the bole was held high up by the roots, so that the little woman's hair hung down straight towards the ground, whither she must presently fall and be killed. Rachel wondered how she had come there, if she had clung to the trunk when it fell, or been thrown up by the shock, or lifted by a bough. Next she wondered how long it would be before she was obliged to leave go, and whether her white head or her back would first strike the earth all that depth beneath. Then it occurred to her that she might be saved.

"Hold my feet," she said to Noie, who had followed her along the trunk, speaking in her own natural voice, at the sound of which Noie looked at her in joyful wonder. "Hold my feet; I think I can reach that old woman," and without waiting for an answer she laid herself down upon the bole, her body hanging over the curve of it.

Now Noie saw her purpose, and seating herself with her heels set against the roughness of the bark, grasped her by the ankles. Supporting some of her weight on one hand, with the other Rachel reached downwards all the length of her long arm, and just as the grasp of the old woman below was slackening, contrived to grip her by the wrist. The dwarf swung loose, hanging in the air, but she was very light, of the weight of a five-year-old child, perhaps, no more, and Rachel was very strong. With an effort she lifted her up till the monkey-like fingers gripped the rough bark again. Another effort and the little body was resting on the round of the tree, one more and she was beside her.

Now Rachel rose to her feet again and laughed, but it was not the mad laughter that had scared Ishmael and the Zulus; it was her own laughter, that of a healthy, cultured woman.

The little creature, crouching on hands and knees at Rachel's feet, lifted her head and stared with her round eyes. At that moment, too, the sun broke out, and its rays, shining where they had never shone for ages, fell upon Rachel, upon her bright hair, and the white robes in which the dwarfs had clothed her, and the gleaming spear in her hand, causing her to look like some ancient statue of a goddess upon a temple roof.

"Who art thou," said the dwarf woman in the hissing voice of her race, "thou Beautiful One? I know! I know! Thou art that Inkosazana of the Zulus of whom we have had many visions, she for whom I sent. But the Inkosazana was mad, she had lost her Spirit; it has been seen here. Beautiful One,

thou art not mad."

"What does she say, Noie?" asked Rachel. "I can only understand some words."

Noie told her, and Rachel hid her eyes in her hand. Presently she let it fall, saying:

"She is right. I lost my Spirit for a while; it went away with another Spirit. But I think that I have found it again. Tell her, Noie, that I have travelled far to seek my Spirit, and that I have found it again."

Noie, who could scarcely take her eyes from Rachel's face, obeyed, but the old woman hardly seemed to heed her words; a grief had got hold of her. She rocked herself to and fro like a monkey that has lost its young, and cried out:

"My tree has fallen, the tree of my House, which stood from the beginning of the world, has fallen, but that of Eddo still stands," and she pointed to another giant of the forest that soared up, unharmed, at a little distance. "Nya's tree has fallen--Eddo's tree still stands. His magic has prevailed against me, his magic has prevailed against me!"

As she spoke a man appeared scrambling along the bole towards them; it was Eddo himself. His round eyes shone, on his pale face there was a look of triumph, for whoever might be lost, the danger had passed him by.

"Nya," he piped, tapping her on the shoulder, "thy Ghost has deserted thee, old woman, thy tree is down. See, I spit upon it," and he did so. "Thou art no longer Mother of the Trees; thou art only the old woman Nya. The Ghost people, the Dream people, the little Grey people, have a new queen, and I am her minister, for I rule her Spirit. Yonder she stands," and he pointed at the tall and glittering Rachel. "Now, thou new-born Mother of the Trees, who wast the Inkosazana of the Zulus, obey me. Give death to this old woman, the Red Death, that her spirit may be spilt with her blood, and lost for ever. Give it to her with that spear in thy hand, while I hide my eyes, and reign thou in her place through me," and he bowed his head and waited.

"Not the Red Death, not the Red Death," wailed Nya. "Give me the White Death and save my soul, Beautiful One, and in return I will give thee something that thou desirest, who am still the wisest of them all, although my Tree is down."

Noie whispered for a while in Rachel's ear. Then while all the dwarf people gathered beneath them, watching, Rachel bent forward, and putting her arms about the trembling creature, lifted her up as though she were a child, and held her to her bosom.

"Mother," she said, "I give thee no death, red or white; I give thee love. Thy tree is down; sit thou in my shadow and be safer On him who harms thee"--and she looked at Eddo--"on him shall the Red Death fall."