

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DREAM IN THE NORTH

Richard Darrien remembered drinking a bowl of milk in the hut in which he was imprisoned at Mafooti, and instantly feeling a cold chill run to his heart and brain, after which he remembered no more for many a day. At length, however, by slow degrees, and with sundry slips back into unconsciousness, life and some share of his reason and memory returned to him. He awoke to find himself lying in a hut roughly fashioned of branches, and attended by a Kaffir woman of middle age.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am named Mami," she answered.

"Mami, Mami! I know the name, and I know the voice. Say, were you one of the wives of Ibubesi, she who spoke with me through the fence?" and he strove to raise himself on his arm to look at her, but fell back from weakness.

"Yes, Inkoos, I was one of his wives."

"Was? Then where is Ibubesi now?"

"Dead, Inkoos. The fire has burned him up with his kraal Mafooti."

"With the kraal Mafooti! Where, then, is the Inkosazana? Answer, woman, and be swift," he cried in a hollow voice.

"Alas! Inkoos, alas! she is dead also, for she was in the kraal when the fire swept it, and was seen standing on the top of a hut where she had taken refuge, and after that she was seen no more."

"Then let me die and go to her," exclaimed Richard with a groan, as he fell back upon his bed, where he lay almost insensible for three more days.

Yet he did not die, for he was young and very strong, and Mami poured milk down his throat to keep the life in him. Indeed little by little something of his strength came back, so that at last he was able to think and talk with her again, and learned all the dreadful story.

He learned how the people of Mafooti, fearing the vengeance of Dingaan, had fled away from their kraal, carrying what they thought to be his body with them, lest it should remain in evidence against them, and taking all the cattle that they could gather. Every one of them had fled that could travel, only Ibubesi and a few sick, and certain folk who chanced to be outside the walls, remaining behind. It was from two of these, who escaped during the burning of the kraal by the Zulus, or by fire from the Heavens, they knew not which, that they had heard of the awful end of Ibubesi, and

of his prisoner, the Inkosazana. As for themselves, they had travelled night and day, till they reached a certain secret and almost inaccessible place in the great Quathlamba Mountains, in which people had lived whom Chaka wiped out, and there hidden themselves. In this place they remained, hoping that Dingaan would not care to follow them so far, and purposing to make it their home, since here they found good mealie lands, and fortunately the most of their cattle remained alive. That was all the story, there was nothing more to tell.

A day or two later Richard was able to creep out of the hut and see the place. It was as Mami had said, very strong, a kind of tableland ringed round with precipices that could only be climbed through a single narrow nek, and overshadowed by the great Quathlamba range. The people, who were engaged in planting their corn, gathered round him, staring at him as though he were one risen from the dead, and greeted him with respectful words. He spoke to several of them, including the two men who had seen the burning of Mafooti, though from a little distance. But they could tell him no more than Mami had done, except that they were sure that the Inkosazana had perished in the flames, as had many of the Zulus, who broke into the town. Richard was sure of it also--who would not have been?--and crept back broken-hearted to his hut, he who had lost all, and longed that he might die.

But he did not die, he grew strong again, and when he was well and fit to travel, went to the headmen of the people, saying that now he desired to leave them and return to his own place in the Cape Colony. The headmen

said No, he must not leave, for in their hearts they were sure that he would go, not to the Cape Colony, but to Zululand, there to discover all he could as to the death of the Inkosazana. So they told him that with them he must bide, for then if the Zulus tracked them out they would be able to produce him, who otherwise would be put to the spear, every man of them, as his murderers. The sin of Ibubesi who had been their chief, clung to them, and they knew well what Dingaana and Tamboosa had sworn should happen to those who harmed the white chief, Dario, who was under the mantle of their Inkosazana.

Richard reasoned with them, but it was of no use, they, would not let him go. Therefore in the end he appeared to fall in with their humour, and meanwhile began to plan escape. One dark night he tried it indeed, only to be seized in the mouth of the nek, and brought back to his hut. Next morning the headman spoke with him, telling him that he should only depart thence over their dead bodies, and that they watched him night and day; that the nek, moreover, was always guarded. Then they made an offer to him. He was a white man, they said, and cleverer than they were; let them come under his wing, let him be their chief, for he would know how to protect them from the Zulus and any other enemies. He could take over the wives of Ibubesi (at this proposition Richard shuddered), and they would obey him in all things, only he must not attempt to leave them--which he should never do alive.

Richard put the proposal by, but in the end, not because he wished it, but by the mere weight of his white man's blood, and for the lack of

anything else to do, drifted into some such position. Only at the wives of Ibubesi, or any other wives, he would not so much as look, a slight that gave offence to those women, but made the others laugh.

So, for certain long weeks he sat in that secret nook in the mountains as the chief of a little Kaffir tribe, occupying himself with the planting of crops, the building of walls and huts, the drilling of men and the settling of quarrels. All day he worked thus, but after the day came the night when he did not work, and those nights he dreaded. For then the languor, not of body, but of mind, which the poison the old witch-doctress had given to Ishmael had left behind it, would overcome him, bringing with it black despair, and his grief would get a hold of him, torturing his heart. For of the memory of Rachel he could never be rid for a single hour, and his love for her grew deeper day by day. And she was dead! Oh, she was dead, leaving him living.

One night he dreamed of Rachel, dreamed that she was searching for him and calling him. It was a very vivid dream, but he woke up and it passed away as such dreams do. Only all the day that followed he felt a strange throbbing in his head, and found himself turning ever towards the north. The next night he dreamed again of her, and heard her say, "The search has been far and long, but I have found you, Richard. Open your eyes now, and you will see my face." So he opened his eyes, and there, sure enough, in the darkness he perceived the outline of her sweet, remembered face, about which fell her golden hair. For one moment only he perceived it, then it was gone, and after that her presence never seemed to leave him. He could

not see her, he could not touch her, and yet she was ever at his side. His brain ached with the thought of her, her breath seemed to fan his hands and hair. At night her face floated before him, and in his dreams her voice called him, saying: "Come to me, come to me, Richard. I am in need of you. Come to me. I myself will be your guide."

Then he would wake, and remembering that she was dead, grew sure and ever surer that the Spirit of Rachel was calling him down to death. It called him from the north, always from the north. Soon he could scarcely walk southwards, or east or west, for ere he had gone many yards his feet turned and set his face towards the north, that was to the narrow neck between the precipices which the Kaffirs guarded night and day.

One evening he went to his hut to sleep, if sleep would come to him. It came, and with it that face and voice, but the face seemed paler, and the voice more insistent.

"Will you not listen to me," it said, "you who were my love? For how long must I plead with you? Soon my power will leave me, the opportunity will be passed, and then how will you find me, Richard, my lover? Rise up, rise up and follow ere it be too late, for I myself will be your guide."

He awoke. He could bear it no more. Perhaps he was mad, and these were visions of his madness, mocking visions that led him to his death. Well, if so, he still would follow them. Perhaps her body was buried in the north. If so, he would be buried there also; perhaps her Soul dwelt in the

north. If so, his soul would fly thither to join it. The Kaffirs would kill him in the pass. Well, if so, he would die with his face set northwards whither Rachel drew him.

He rose up and wrapped himself in a cloak of goatskins. He filled a hide bag with sun-dried flesh and parched corn, and hung it about his shoulders with a gourd of water, for after all he might live a little while and need food and drink. As he had no gun he took a staff and a knife and a broad-bladed spear, and leaving the hut, set his face northward and walked towards the mouth of the nek. At the first step which he took the torment in his head seemed to leave him, who fought no longer, who had seemed obedient to that mysterious summons. Quietness and confidence possessed him. He was going to his end, but what did it matter? The dream beckoned and he must follow. The moon shone bright, but he took no trouble to hide himself, it did not seem to be worth while.

Now he was in the nek and drawing near to the place where the guard was stationed, still he marched on, boldly, openly. As he thought, they were on the alert. They drew out from behind the rocks and barred his path.

"Whither goest thou, lord Dario?" asked their captain. "Thou knowest that here thou mayest not pass."

"I follow a Ghost to the north," he answered, "and living or dead, I pass."

"Ow!" said the captain. "He says that he follows a Ghost. Well, we have nothing to do with ghosts. Take him, unharmed if possible, but take him."

So, urged thereto by their own fears, since for their safety's sake they dared not let him go, the men sprang towards him. They sprang towards him where he stood waiting the end, for give back he would not, and of a sudden fell down upon their faces, hiding their heads among the stones. Richard did not know what had happened to them that they behaved thus strangely, nor did he care. Only seeing them fallen he walked on over them, and pursued his way along the nek and down it to the plains beyond.

All that night he walked, looking behind him from time to time to see if any followed, but none came. He was alone, quite alone, save for the dream that led him towards the north. At sunrise he rested and slept a while, then, awaking after midday, went on his road. He did not know the road, yet never was he in doubt for a moment. It was always clear to him whither he should go. That night he finished his food and again slept a while, going forward at the dawn. In the morning he met some Kaffirs, who questioned him, but he answered only that he was following a Dream to the north. They stared at him, seemed to grow frightened and ran away. But presently some of them came back and placed food in his path, which he took and left them.

He came to the kraal Mafooti. It was utterly deserted, and he wandered amidst its ashes. Here and there he found the bones of those who had perished in the fire, and turned them over with his staff wondering

whether any of them had belonged to Rachel. In that place he slept a night thinking that perhaps his journey was ended, and that here he would die where he believed Rachel had died. But when he waked at the dawn, it was to find that something within him still drew him towards the north, more strongly indeed than ever before.

So he left what had been the town Mafooti. Walking along the edge of the cleft into which Ishmael had leapt on fire, he climbed the walls built with so much toil to keep out the Zulus, and at last came to the river which Rachel had swum. It was low now, and wading it he entered Zululand. Here the natives seemed to know of his approach, for they gathered in numbers watching him, and put food in his path. But they would not speak to him, and when he addressed them saying that he followed a Dream and asking if they had seen the Dream, they cried out that he was tagali, bewitched, and fled away.

He continued his journey, finding each night a hut prepared for him to sleep in, and food for him to eat, till at length one evening he reached the Great Place, Umgugundhlovu. Through its streets he marched with a set face, while thousands stared at him in silence. Then a captain pointed out a hut to him, and into it he entered, ate and slept. At dawn he rose, for he knew that here he must not tarry; the spirit face of Rachel still hung before him, the spirit voice still whispered--"Forward, forward to the north. I myself will be your guide." In his path sat the King and his Councillors, and around them a regiment of men. He walked through them unheeding, till at length, when he was in front of the King, they barred

his road, and he halted.

"Who art thou and what is thy business?" asked an old Councillor with a withered hand.

"I am Richard Darrien," he answered, "and here I have no business. I journey to the north. Stay me not."

"We know thee," said the Councillor, "thou art the lord Dario that didst dwell in the shadow of the Inkosazana. Thou art the white chief whom the wild beast, Ibubesi, slew at the kraal Mafooti. Why does thy ghost come hither to trouble us?"

"Living or dead, ghost or man, I travel to the north. Stay me not," he answered.

"What seekest thou in the north, thou lord Dario?"

"I seek a Dream; a Spirit leads me to find a Dream. Seest thou it not, Man with the withered hand?"

"Ah!" they repeated, "he seeks a Dream. A Spirit leads him to find a Dream in the north."

"What is this Dream like?" asked Mopo of the withered hand.

"Come, stand at my side and look. There, dost thou see it floating in the air before us, thou who hast eyes that can read a Dream?"

Mopo came and looked, then his knees trembled a little and he said:

"Aye, lord Dario, I see and I know that face."

"Thou knowest the face, old fool," broke in Dingaen angrily. "Then whose is it?"

"O King," answered Mopo, dropping his eyes, "it is not lawful to speak the name, but the face is the face of one who sat where that wanderer stands, and showed thee certain pictures in a bowl of water."

Now Dingaen trembled, for the memory of those visions haunted him night and day; moreover he thought at times that they drew near to their fulfilment.

"The white man is mad," he said, "and thou, Mopo, art mad also. I have often thought it, and that it would be well if thou wentest on a long journey--for thy health. This Dario shall stay here a while. I will not suffer him to wander through my land crazing the people with his tales of dreams and visions. Take him and hold him; the Circle of the Doctors shall inquire into the matter."

So Dingaen spoke, who in his heart was afraid lest this wild-eyed Dario

should learn that he had given the Inkosazana to the dwarf folk when she was mad, to appease them after they had prophesied evil to him. Also he remembered that it was because of the murders done by Ibubesi that the Inkosazana had gone mad, and did not understand if Dario had been killed at the kraal Mafooti how it could be that he now stood before him. Therefore he thought that he would keep him a prisoner until he found out all the truth of the matter, and whether he were still a man or a ghost or a wizard clothed in the shape of the dead.

At the bidding of the King, guards sprang forward to seize Richard, but the old Councillor, Mopo, shrunk away behind him hiding his eyes with his withered hand. They sprang forward, and yet they laid no finger on him, but fell oft to right and left, saying:

"Kill us, if thou wilt, Black One, we cannot!"

"The wizard has bewitched them," said Dingaan angrily. "Here, you Doctors, you whose trade it is to catch wizards, take this white fellow and bind him."

Unwillingly enough the Doctors, of whom there were eight or ten sitting apart, rose to do the King's bidding. They came on towards Richard, some of them singing songs, and some muttering charms, and as they came he laughed and said:

"Beware! you Abangoma, the Dream is looking at you very angrily." Then

they too broke away to right and left, crying out that this was a wizard against whom they had no power.

Now Dingaan grew mad with wrath, and shouted to his soldiers to seize the white man, and if he resisted them to kill him with their sticks, for of witchcraft they had known enough in Zululand of late.

So thick as bees the regiment formed up in front of him, shouting and waving their kerries, for here in the King's Place they bore no spears.

"Make way there," said Richard, "I can stay no longer, I must to the north."

The soldiers did not stir, only a captain stepped out bidding him give up his spear and yield himself, or be killed. Richard walked forward and at a sign from the captain, men sprang at him, lifting their kerries, to dash out his brains. Then suddenly in front of Richard there appeared something faint and white, something that walked before him. The soldiers saw it, and the kerries fell from their hands. The regiment behind saw it, and turning, burst away like a scared herd of cattle. They did not wait to seek the gates, they burst through the fence of the enclosure, and were gone, leaving it flat behind them. The King and his Councillors saw it also, and more clearly than the rest.

"The Inkosazana!" they cried. "It is the Inkosazana who walks before him that she loved!" and they fell upon their faces. Only Dingaan remained

seated on his stool.

"Go," he said hoarsely to Richard, "go, thou wizard, north or south or east or west, if only thou wilt take that Spirit with thee, for she bodes evil to my land."

So Richard, who had seen nothing, marched away from the kraal Umgugundhlovu, and once more set his face towards the north, the north that drew him as it draws the needle of a compass.

The road that Rachel and the dwarfs had travelled he travelled also. Although from day to day he knew not where his feet would lead him, still he travelled it step by step. Nor did any hurt come to him. In the country where men dwelt, being forewarned of his coming by messengers, they brought him food and guarded him, and when he passed out into the wilderness some other power guarded him. He had no fear at all. At night he would lie down without a fire, and the lions would roar about him, but they never harmed him. He would plunge into a swamp or a river and always pass it safely. When water failed he would find it without search; when there was no food, it would seem to be brought to him. Once an eagle dropped a bustard at his feet. Once he found a buck fresh slain by leopards. Once when he was very hungry he saw that he had laid down to sleep by a nest of ostrich eggs, and this food he cooked, making fire after the native fashion with sharp sticks, as he knew how to do.

At length all the swamps were passed and in the third week of his

journeyings he reached the sloping uplands, on the edge of which he awoke one morning to find himself surrounded by a circle of great men, giants, who stood staring at him. He arose, thinking that at last his hour had come, as it seemed to him that they were about to kill him. But instead of killing him these huge men saluted him humbly, and offered him food upon their knees, and new hide shoes for his feet--for his own were worn out--and cloaks and garments of skin, which things he accepted thankfully, for by now he was almost naked. Then they brought a litter and wished him to enter it, but this he refused. Heeding them no more, as soon as he had eaten and filled his bag and water-bottle, he started on towards the north. Indeed, he could not have stayed if he had wished; his brain seemed to be full of one thought only, to travel till he reached his journey's end, whatever it might be, and before his eyes he saw one thing only, the spirit face of Rachel, that led him on towards that end. Sometimes it was there for hours, then for hours again it would be absent. When it was present he looked at it; when it was gone he dreamed of it, for him it was the same. But one thing was ever with him, that magnet in his heart which drew his feet towards the north, and from step to step showed him the road that he should travel.

A number of the giant men accompanied him. He noticed it, but took no heed. So long as they did not attempt to stay or turn him he was indifferent whether they came or went away. As a result he travelled in much more comfort, since now everything was made easy and ready for him. Thus he was fed with the best that the land provided, and at night shelters were built for him to sleep in. He discovered that a captain of

the giants could understand a few words of some native language which he knew, and asked him why they helped him. The captain replied by order of "Mother of Trees." Who or what "Mother of Trees" might be Richard was unable to discover, so he gave up his attempts at talk and walked on.

They traversed the fertile uplands and reached the edge of the fearful desert. It did not frighten him; he plunged into it as he would have plunged into a sea, or a lake of fire, had it lain in his way. He was like a bird whose instinct at the approach of summer or of winter leads it without doubt or error to some far spot, beyond continents and oceans, some land that it has never seen, leads it in surety and peace to its appointed rest. A guard of the giant men came with him into the desert, also carriers who bore skins of water. In that burning heat the journey was dreadful, yet Richard accomplished it, wearing down all his escort, until at its further lip but one man was left. There even he sank exhausted and began to beat upon a little drum that he carried, which drum had been passed on to him by those who were left behind. But Richard was not exhausted. His strength seemed to be greater than it had ever been before, or that which drew him forward had acquired more power. He wondered vaguely why a man should choose such a place and time to play upon a drum, and went on alone.

Before him, some miles away, he saw a forest of towering trees that stretched further than his eye could reach. As he approached that forest heading for a certain tall tree, why he knew not, the sunset dyed it red as though it had been on fire, and he thought that he discerned little

shapes flitting to and fro amidst the boles of trees. Then he entered the forest, whereof the boughs arched above him like the endless roof of a cathedral borne upon innumerable pillars. There was deep gloom that grew presently to darkness wherein here and there glow-worms shone faintly like tapers dying before an altar, and winds sighed like echoes of evening prayers. He could see to walk no longer, sudden weariness overcame him, so according to his custom he laid himself down to sleep at the bole of a great tree.

A while had passed, he never knew how long, when Richard was awakened from deep slumber by feeling many hands fiercely at work upon him. These hands were small like those of children; this he could tell from the touch of them, although the darkness was so dense that he was able to see nothing. Two of them gripped him by the throat so as to prevent him from crying out; others passed cords about his wrists, ankles and middle until he could not stir a single limb. Then he was dragged back a few paces and lashed to the bole of a tree, as he guessed, that under which he had been sleeping. The hands let go of him, and his throat being free he called out for help. But those vast forest aisles seemed to swallow up his voice. It fell back on him from the canopy of huge boughs above, it was lost in the immense silence. Only from close at hand he heard little peals of thin and mocking laughter. So he too grew silent, for who was there to help him here? He struggled to loose himself, for the impalpable power which had guided him so far was now at work within him more strongly than ever before. It called to him to come, it drew him onward, it whispered to him that the goal was near. But the more he writhed and twisted the deeper did

the cruel cords or creepers cut into his flesh. Yet he fought on till, utterly exhausted, his head fell forward, and he swooned away.