

AN AFRICAN ATTILA



"The King bids me tell thee that the stronger dog doth ever snatch the dainty morsel from the weaker." Page 20.

AN AFRICAN ATTLA

Tales of the Zulu Reign of Terror

By P. A. STUART

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TO YOU, MY SON,
YOU LITTLE KING OF SUNSHINE,
I INSCRIBE THESE TALES OF THAT OTHER KING, FOR
YOU, AS ONCE DID HE, HOLD UNDISPUTED SWAY
IN THE KINGDOM THAT YOU RULE

CONTENTS

	PAGE
AUTHOR'S NOTE	xi
THE KING'S DESIRE	I
HOW I SAVED THE KING'S LIFE	40
HOW I WON MY WIFE	73
THE KING SEEKS TO HAVE ME "REMOVED"	98
MABOZO THE EXECUTIONER	135
THE "LITTLE BUFFALO"	170
THE BABOON KINGDOM	188
THE KING'S JEST	220
THE BREAKING OF THE STORM	250

ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>"The King bids me tell thee that the stronger dog doth ever snatch the dainty morsel from the sceaker."</i>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	<i>Facing page</i>
<i>"To thy proper place, thou dog, for here I represent the King"</i>	8
<i>"Now, then, thou Tshaka dog!"</i>	16
<i>"Hush, man, not so loud. There may be ears to hear even in this desolate spot"</i>	48
<i>"... it be necessary for our purpose that thou be securely bound"</i>	80
<i>"... there was a flash, and then a thud as I caught the treacherous dog's well-aimed spear upon the fleshy part of my right forearm"</i>	112
<i>"... and flung him far out into the yawning space"</i>	144
<i>"Move not, speak not, lest I wither thee with my breath"</i>	176
<i>"The next day I was married to Nomusa"</i>	208
<i>" 'Then poison it shall be,' I said decisively"</i>	240
<i>"... he leapt with a yell of fury at the warrior"</i>	272
<i>"... for I leapt forward with a mighty spring"</i>	288

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE death of the Prince Imperial, under tragic circumstances, during the Zulu War of 1879, came as a terrible shock and grief to the nation.

Once again the Zulu spear had spoken—and this time England mourned!

This “speaking with a spear” was a mode of expression so common among the Zulus of those days, and so varied were the impressions its use was intended to convey, that it might almost have been termed a “language” in itself.

When the Zulu War broke out this “language” had been in constant use, not alone in war but in piping times of peace, for over fifty years.

It has no counterpart in history. This particular “tongue” was spoken fluently in Zululand, and it had the further distinction of being the creation of a single mind—the terrible Tshaka, king of the Zulus.

To those of my readers whose knowledge of Zulu history is perhaps confined to the murder of Retief and his party, the massacre of British troops at Isandhlwana, the death of the Prince Imperial, and those other occasions on which we have come into tragic conflict with the people, it is perhaps necessary for a better understanding of my tales, to give a rapid survey of the earlier history of these people, and of the character of their most famous king before we, the white people, came upon the scene.

Towards the latter end of the eighteenth century—a little more than a hundred years ago—

there dwelt, in what to-day is known as Zululand, various native tribes or clans, of which one was called the Mtetwa. The chief of this was one Dingiswayo (which means "The Wanderer")—a nickname given to him as a result of his wanderings in the Cape, where, it must be noted, he came into contact with European methods of military training, which at once arrested his attention.

On his return to Zululand, Dingiswayo was not long in putting the knowledge he had gained at the Cape to practical use.

He formed his warriors into regiments, drilled them and enforced strict discipline, and in due course gave ample proof of the advantages of his training.

One of the adjoining tribes was the Ama-Zulu (which means "The Heavens"), whose chief was Senzangakona. Of Senzangakona's sons three were destined to play, each in his time, a tragic part in the nation's destiny; they were named Dingana, Mhlangana and—Tshaka.

Tshaka sought for and obtained Dingiswayo's permission to join his army, and, imbued with the martial spirit of his leader, and being by nature brave, he soon rose to the rank of captain.

One day, while a battle was in progress, Tshaka gave information to the enemy which resulted in Dingiswayo's capture and death and his own elevation to the chieftainship, not only of his own tribe (Senzangakona being now dead) but of Dingiswayo's following as well.

The country which it thus fell to his lot to rule was insignificant in extent, sparsely peopled, and

surrounded on all sides by stronger foes. It was a beautiful country, abounding in numerous rivers, large forests and plains and valleys of the most fertile soil.

Tshaka's first act upon coming into power was to put to death all those who had openly supported Dingiswayo. He then repealed many old laws and made new ones, the object aimed at in each being the efficiency of his little army, which he drilled at first personally, and then by properly appointed captains.

He did away with the throwing-spear and introduced the shorter stabbing weapon in order to ensure his warriors coming to close grips with the enemy. Each warrior was allowed to carry one only of these weapons, and any returning from battle without it was forthwith put to death.

Thus the Zulu warriors had no alternative but to conquer or die, and it is small wonder that their natural fearlessness and bravery—already great—was increased an hundredfold by such stern measures as these.

He would not allow his warriors to marry without his express permission—generally given to a whole regiment at a time, and only after it had distinguished itself in battle.

Tshaka would brook no failure on the part of his army.

On one occasion a regiment returned from a fight beaten, its ranks decimated by the overwhelming force opposed to it.

The survivors were put to death on the spot.

When on fighting expeditions his army was

allowed to take food sufficient to last it to the scene of battle only, thereafter it had to rely entirely on what it had been able to seize from the enemy.

And thus it came about that in a remarkably short space of time he subdued every tribe within his reach, and how far that extended may be gathered from the fact that at his death (1828) he was absolute lord and master of close on 1,000,000 square miles of territory.

It should be noticed here that the warriors of the conquered tribes were incorporated in the Zulu army, thus swelling its numbers at each successive victory.

In civil administration he showed no mercy to wrongdoers; the language of the spear spoke as certainly in the Council Chamber as upon the field of battle. Tortures—some of them of the most exquisite nature—were the least punishments to which the guilty (and all too frequently the innocent) were subjected.

Of the quality of mercy he knew nothing save that single instance which suggested one of the tales included here.

History has handed down to us the names of such monsters as Nero, Attila, and others infamous for their cruelties, but Tshaka eclipsed them all. In the wholesale massacre of human beings—his helpless subjects—he stands on the very pinnacle of infamy: unassailable, pre-eminent!

But, however that may be, he raised a handful of people to the proud distinction of an all-conquering race, of perfect physique and fine moral character—fearless, brave and endowed in a

marked degree with every attribute that proclaims the manly man, and—above all—loyal to the king with a loyalty unparalleled in the annals of time itself.

Tragedy and romance? Yes! both in abundant wealth, but which of us with all our imagination can sound the bottomless depths of the one, or do more than touch the fringe of the other—as they really were—in the stirring days of Tshaka?

And now I have said enough, I hope, to pave the way for what follows.

AN AFRICAN ATTLA

THE KING'S DESIRE

GREETING!

It is I, Watala, son of Solwandhle, the Zulu, who speaks.

What I have to tell may, perchance, pass the time of those who, like me, find the days drag more heavily than in the years that are past; and there may be those who, still in their prime, may find something in what I say that bids them loiter—in spite of better things to do—upon the path along which I shall lead them.

To such—those who have both the will and the leisure to give me an ear—I address myself; but if, as doubtless it might easily be, there are none to give heed to the ramblings of an old man, I salute them respectfully as they pass on, content in having you, my father, as my sole listener.

And wherefore do I call you “my father” seeing that there is no tie of kinship between us?

The reason is not far to seek. It is not alone because of the esteem in which I hold you but because I have ever found in your race those qualities which a son may most expect in a parent—justice, confidence, firmness, an upholding of the weak, and, above all, abounding in that true friendship which surely differs little from that of a father for his son.

To you, then, I open out my heart as a child, confident of your patience and certain of your sympathy.

And thus do I begin:

In the days of Tshaka, my father, there were times when opportunities arose for men to prove their worth by feats of strength as well as by their brains.

Those who were skilful or crafty in the management of important matters of State with turbulent and unruly chiefs were often held in greater esteem than those who displayed bravery in open battle.

As messages had always to be delivered by word of mouth, much of the success of the negotiations depended upon a clear and steady brain, together with a good memory.

Any misrepresentation of the King's commands (or the replies to them) might often lead to bloodshed, even to the wiping out of a whole tribe, and much responsibility, therefore, rested upon the one chosen for the work.

I have known a man executed for what was a mere slip of the tongue in making his report, whilst I myself once took part in the massacre of a friendly tribe because an inaccurate report had been made by the King's messenger.

Such things were possible, my father, on account of the system under which we lived, and were not the result of any lack of discipline or the want of truthfulness in carrying out this important work; indeed, so heavily did Tshaka's hand fall upon those high and low, who negligently or improperly performed work of any kind entrusted to them, that, in course of time, truth, straightforwardness and honesty became the chief characteristics of our race.

One day, while I was gossiping idly with some of my comrades of the Amazembe regiment, one of the King's Councillors approached us, saying:

"Which is he who is named Watala?"

"Here am I," I said, with some surprise, for I knew not what the King's messenger could have with me.

"Haste thee to the Council Chamber, for the King would have speech with thee."

Now my heart very nigh stood still, for the King was never wont to have speech with young men such as I, unless it were to pronounce some awful judgment upon them. A look of sympathy had instantly come to my comrades' faces, and I felt that some evil thing was to happen to me this day.

"Why standest thou gaping there?" demanded the Councillor, "haste thee to the King, I say. Thou surely wilt not keep him waiting who waits for none on earth!"

"Pardon, *baba*,¹" I said, "I was but stricken dumb by the honour which the Great, Great One hath shown me by this summons," and bidding a hasty good-bye to my friends I ran with all my might to the royal enclosure some six hundred paces off.

I made my business known to the guard at the gate of the outer stockade who directed me to a small knot of men conversing in the shade of a tree.

"Hath the King sent for thee, young man, and is thy name Watala?" demanded one of the men, eyeing me sharply as he spoke.

"Even so, O Councillor," I replied.

¹ Father.

"Thou hast been slow in coming. Follow me," and without more ado he led me to what I knew must be the royal apartments, for as yet I had never seen them. They, too, were surrounded by a stockade two spears' length in height, the gate being guarded by the finest warriors in the land. To have entered with our weapons would have meant our instant execution, so leaving them at the gate we passed within. My heart was beating fiercely; I had never spoken to the King, though I had often seen him, and the prospect of meeting him face to face had terrified braver men than I.

In the royal enclosure there were some ten or twelve huts, all most beautifully built and much larger than those to which I, a commoner, was accustomed. Mfula led me to the largest of these, shouting the King's *izibongo*,¹ a practice which, though fast dying out, was very much in vogue in those days.

When within fifteen paces of the Council Chamber we halted abruptly, ceased our praising and with our right hands raised above our heads we gave the royal salute, "*Bayete, Nkosi, wena wa s'endhlu nkulu!*"² and then, instantly crouching to the ground, we waited for the royal summons to enter; my guide, as custom demanded, squatting four or five paces in front of me.

Presently the master of ceremonies emerged from the Chamber and shouted out some name, the owner of which instantly rose up, saluted, and then fell to his hands and knees and crawled up to and

¹ Praises.

² "Hail, thou mighty One, thou of the royal house!"

through the small doorway. There were perhaps twenty waiting audience with His Majesty—men of rank and standing. Each in turn was called to the royal presence. They soon reappeared, some, their business with the King completed, others with the sentence of death clearly stamped upon their faces, yet resolved to die like men—bravely, nay, almost cheerfully, for had not the King willed it so, and who were they to question the wisdom of the mighty, the all-powerful monarch Tshaka? While with others, it seemed, their lives had at least been spared, as they gravely yet quickly left the place to carry out some royal decree.

And I—what was I here for? I asked myself a hundred times, but search my conscience as I would, I could ascribe no reason for my summons until there came, like the sudden clap of thunder, a shout, "Watala, enter!"

My heart leapt to my mouth, but in a moment I had saluted and was crawling towards the doorway. I know not whether my feelings then were more of fear or admiration for this man whose very name—never uttered save in an awesome whisper—shook terror into the hearts of all.

In the semi-darkness—for my father knows how poorly lit our huts are even at this day—I could not, on entering, make out the faces before me, but when my eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, I found there were some ten or fifteen men grouped on either side of the King.

His Majesty was a tall, well-built man. He was at this time a young man, though I knew not his age, and even then he had begun to accumulate that

superfluous flesh which we Zulus so much admire in each other, and which adds so largely to our dignity. His complexion was blacker than any I had ever seen. His head-ring (*isicoco*, as we call it), even in the dim light, shone like highly polished ebony on his large though well-set head. His massive, hairy chest and muscular arms—all bare—betokened great physical health—the strength of the lion rather than the elephant.

His *mutsha*,¹ the only dress he wore, consisted in front of many strips of ox hide neatly cut and twisted so that the hair only would show, while at the back it was a single flap of the same material of a beautiful black and white pattern. As he was seated on a small block of carved ebony these coverings reached in graceful folds to the ground. But his eyes, my father, ah, yes, his eyes! They were small and deep-set and held a world of cunning in them not to be likened to anything I have ever seen to this day. They flashed with an uncanny brightness as he spoke; I could hardly bring myself to look him in the face as I addressed him—they held me spell-bound. In the darkness of the hut they seemed to change their colour, now green like those of a wild cat at night, now flaming coals of fire, now a terrifying blood-red—the red of the setting winter sun.

Once or twice he laughed as he spoke, clearly he was in a good mood, and I shuddered when I thought—as I could not help doing—what the flashing of his eyes would be like were he moved to anger.

¹ Loin covering.

Now I took in all this as, squatting near the doorway, I waited to be addressed.

"Yes, I think so, too," the King was saying, "but may such a youth be trusted with a matter so important? His speed, his strength, have already reached me by report—of them I am satisfied—but, Mazwi, are matters of State to be entrusted to one so young?" and as he spoke he glanced towards me, his eyes meeting mine, but only for an instant, for their brilliancy nearly took my breath away and forced me with a shiver as from the ague to cast mine to the ground.

It was clear they spoke of me, else why that glance at me, and was it not to my already far-famed speed and strength that His Majesty referred? I breathed more freely and my fear became less.

"He is the son of Solwandhle, my lord," Mazwi replied, "a man ever loyal to the throne—shrewd, upright and wise in all his counsels, and one who died rather than disobey thy royal commands, and his son, Watala here, though young, methinks hath his father's spirit. But, O King, speed in carrying out this matter is what be most desired, and therefore have I suggested this youth for the task. He is an antelope—a bird for speed, my lord."

Was I here to carry out some important matter of State? My heart beat anxiously as I waited, breathless, for the King's reply.

"Thou hast spoken well of the youth, Mazwi," the King replied, and then, pointing at me with the little toy spear (which he ever had in his hand or at his side), he said: "Young man, thou art to deliver

an important message to the Chief of the Amacwele tribe, who lives six days' journey hence, and, as we are pressed for time and thou art fleet of foot, I have chosen thee for the purpose."

He paused for a moment and then suddenly went on:

"Say, Watala, is thy tongue given to wagging?" and he eyed me sharply, cruelly, as he spoke.

"It doth wag only in praise of thee, O King," I replied, not knowing quite what to say, "but," I continued, with an emotion and confidence I deeply felt, "if it please Thy Majesty that it should wag no more, why, it would hurt me less to pluck it from my mouth than to allow it to give offence to the Great, Great One."

"Good! thy words convey the proper spirit, but mark thou, young man," and then, in sudden anger, he glared at me, his eyes flashing forth a luminous red, "if but a word of the message I shall give thee doth pass thy lips to ears for which it is not meant, then, O son of Solwandhle, the plucking of thy tongue shall be but the first and not the last of thy punishments. Dost thou mark, young man? Dost thou mark!" He hissed the unnecessary repetition with cruel emphasis, and then smiled as though he even wished that I would deserve such a fate.

"The King hath spoken!" I said, with a touch of that dignity which, even as a youth, I could so well assume.

"And the dog obeys! Well, Watala," he looked more kindly upon me now, "this is the message thou shalt deliver to Masimu, Chief of the Amacwele



"To thy proper place, thou dog, for here I represent the King." Page 20

people:—that Tshaka, the King, hath heard that Masimu would take to wife a maiden who, so report doth have it, is the most beautiful in the land. Tell him, the King must have this woman to wed himself; tell him the stronger dog doth ever snatch the dainty morsel from the weaker, and that with men, too, this is ever so; tell him that the girl must be here, at the Royal Kraal, before twenty days be past." His fingers were caressing, with snake-like movements, the blade of the keen-edged little weapon in his hands, the cruel smile which parted his lips was in strange but natural keeping with the crafty look in his eyes. "That is the message, Watala, thou hast got it safely—all—every syllable, Watala?"

"Every one, my lord," I replied.

"Good! Now answer me further; the wedding, they say, takes place two days from now. Canst thou reach the Amacwele Chief within that time?"

"The distance be far, O King," I answered, "but all things are possible to those that serve the King."

Those were my words, my father, but in my heart I felt that to cover what was a six days' journey in the space of two was beyond even my great powers of endurance and speed. But I had no time to think, for as I made this bold statement the King's face became instantly wreathed in a kindly smile as he said:

"Thy words do win my confidence, my boy, and therefore do I look to thee to achieve thy task. Reward shall surely follow thy success, whilst if thou dost fail"—his eyes leapt to flame again, his voice a rasping snarl—"if thou dost fail I will—"

But why speak of it, for thou wilt not fail—for all things are possible, yes, Watala—all things are possible to those who serve the King.”

I bowed my head in silence. What could I do or say?

“Now begone!” concluded His Majesty, “too much precious time do we waste.”

“O King,” I said, “what if the Chief refuse to give up this maid, what am I to do in such event?”

“Tell him,” the King answered, “that though it is thou that bear the message it is Tshaka who speaks. Say no more than that.”

“And by what token shall I prove to him that the words I deliver come indeed from the royal lips?”

“None, O Watala. None, for the purport of thy message, never fear, will be token enough of its having come me.”

“*Bayete!*” I answered, and crawling out of the Chamber, shouting the royal praises as I went, I soon reached my hut, when after a hasty meal, and snatching up my shield and spears, I started on my long and eventful journey. None throughout the breadth of Zululand could out-distance me in those days, my father, but I took no pride in this, for my every thought and effort were for the King, my master, and never did I employ that swinging, half-trotting, half-gliding motion to better purpose than I did then.

And as I went men I met would accost me saying, “Greeting, brother!” and then, noting the serious look upon my face, would draw aside and say, “The King’s Messenger! Delay him not,” and with one accord would fall to singing the King’s

praises which, loud at first, soon died away in the distance which I quickly put between us.

Now, I should tell my father that from the Royal Kraal to the Amacwele country was as far as from Maritzburg to Newcastle (160 miles). You should know also that Masimu ruled these people under, and not independently of, Tshaka, but even so I fell to wondering what manner of reception I should receive at his hands as the bearer of a message so unusual in its nature and so drastic in its effect.

Was it, I asked myself, merely a ruse on the King's part to test the loyalty of these people and their Chief? The King, too, was ever fond of displaying his power and often asserted it cruelly, wantonly, and when least expected. Could love—as you and I know it, my father—exist in a character so heartless as we knew the King's to be, and were not his ravings for a woman he had not even seen either a cloak to cover the deeper plottings of his mind, or but the passion of a moment?

If Masimu submitted quietly to the King's command His Majesty would doubtless return the bride to her affianced husband, with, perchance, some small gift in cattle, saying she was not as beautiful as he thought, or maybe that he had changed his mind, or make some other excuse which you and I, my father, would have found so difficult to frame, but which ever seemed to fall so easily and yet so justly from the royal lips.

These thoughts comforted me, and I quickened my pace, feeling that no evil might, after all, come from this thing.

When darkness fell I had difficulty in keeping to the seldom used path I was on. It is true two paths were open to me, the one westward of, and apparently to avoid, a long range of mountains, and the other which passed through a large and gloomy forest and direct across the mountain referred to. Of the two I chose the latter, because shorter.

The darkness now clothed me as with a garment—a darkness as of some demon world, and not that to which I was used at home. Up, up, I sped as my way led me to the summit of a hill. I paused, sat down and rested awhile; the most trying part of my journey was yet to come. Seated on a stone, the only sounds that broke the uncanny stillness round me were the nervous beating of my heart and my heavy breathing.

Now, no matter how much a man may strive to confine himself to the tale he has set out to tell, he will, if in any way connected with it, be led unduly to recount, in needless detail, his own achievements with great pleasure, doubtless to himself, but with much mighty nuisance to his listener.

It will, therefore, suffice to say that, although in that gloomy forest I was faced by many dangers from prowling beast and treacherous reptile, the sights and sounds of which wellnigh stopped the beating of my heart, I ever maintained the double speed of dread and fear—dread of these my natural enemies, and fear lest, in spite of my unmanly boasting, I should fail in my mission—although, I say, these things were there to sap my courage and my strength, I was yet able at noon of the second day to give a feeble shout of joy as,

reaching the summit of a hill, I looked down upon Masimu's kraal.

Covered with dust, footsore, aching in every limb and weary almost unto death, I ran, or rather reeled like a drunken man, to the plain below, where I fell in with men and women gaily dressed and singing, laughing and shouting with that joy and mirth which can surely be associated only with a wedding-day. Some looked with scorn upon my dust-begrimed and untidy person; others so far forgot themselves as to accost me, saying, "Go wash thyself, thou lout! Wouldst thou attend the wedding thus?"

But I would answer none, save with a fierce look from my haggard eyes. Some took the warning and went their way, but others only laughed the more to see my discomfiture.

At last I reached the gate, and with many others entered.

An unusually large cattle enclosure stood in the middle of the kraal and in it were drawn up two parties, the one of men and the other of women—a thousand in each. Just as I was about to enter this I saw a party of men approaching the entrance, and although I had never set eyes on Masimu I was yet able at once to single him out. When the party was but five paces from me I drew myself up and with that grave dignity for which I have ever been noted I gave the Chief the salute fitting to his rank. Even above the din he heard me and, looking in my direction and seeing the sorry figure I cut, he laughed aloud, not unkindly, and addressing one of his party said:

"See, now, here be one of our faithful dogs who hath hastened from afar to attend our happy wedding. Give him meat and drink, Mlenze, for he seems weary from his journey." Then turning to me, he said:

"How far hast thou travelled, young man?"

"Six days' journey, O Chief," I replied.

"Nay, now, thou must be mistaken; the Amacwele country doth not reach so far."

"I am not of thy tribe, my lord," I answered, and then stepping closer, speaking in a lower tone, "I have an important message to deliver to thee, O Chief of the Amacwele."

"Not yet, not yet," he laughed gaily. "Nothing thou art able to communicate shall stop my wedding. To the people!" he went on, turning to his followers, "To the people!"

"But," I began, a fearful sinking within me, and ere I could continue the party had disappeared within the enclosure.

I saw it was useless to argue then. I must cleanse me of my travel stains and show these dogs who and what I was—Watala of the Amazembe Regiment—a Messenger with tidings from the mighty, terrible Tshaka!

There was a stream but a hundred paces off, and in feverish haste I washed first my shield (the black and white one of my beloved regiment), then my other trappings and accoutrements, even to the black, waving ostrich plumes upon my head; and then I bathed myself and waited, resting upon the bank while my things were drying.

Loud shouts of mirth and revelry reached me,

gathering in volume each moment as the freely flowing beer began to take effect, and then at last my things being dry enough, I put them on and returned to the kraal.

Ah! What a different man I felt and looked! The black and white patches on my shield shone in brilliant contrast in the sun; the tufts of white oxtail fastened above my elbows and at my knees and ankles, which before had been in matted, muddy locks, now showed up clean and fresh, and emphasised the fine proportions of my muscular limbs; the plumes, blown this way and that in graceful curves by the breeze, set off and added to my natural height; and my spears, but lately dulled by rust and filth, flashed menacingly with every movement that I made. My father, it ill becomes an old and withered man to boast of his appearance as a youth and I will not therefore do so, but this much I will say—

Well, as I was saying, I felt and looked a different man, as stepping more lightly and with greater dignity and confidence than before, I approached the gate. As I reached it the words "Tshaka!" "Royal Messenger!" "Amazembe!" came to me in startled whispers, for now they recognised me as one from the Royal Kraal. Men fell aside, with marked respect, to let me pass, and a hush fell like magic upon the assembled throng, then presently as though they were ashamed of their temporary weakness and in defiance of what my presence there might portend, the shouts of revelry and song began again louder than before.

The three parties—the men on the right, the

women on the left, and Masimu with his Councillors in the centre—would not be cheated of their happiness and merry-making, for a Chief does not marry every day, and none knew better than I that if I were to have the audience with Masimu it must be now, for soon not even the mighty Tshaka himself would be able to curb their frenzied madness.

I took up my position in the front rank of men; and in spite of all their show of mirth I knew that the eyes of every one there was turned upon me, some in curiosity, a few in drunken familiarity, but most in genuine fear, and yet who was there in all that multitude who guessed the reason of my presence there?

All were standing save the Chief and the woman who was to be his—or Tshaka's bride. My eyes sought and found her, looking happy as only a bride can, seated on a reed mat two paces in front of the women. My father, I am not a poor judge of a maiden's charms and when I looked upon that girl I saw at once that the rumours which had reached the King of her beauty erred in one respect—they had given but a poor picture of this, the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

In the full blush of maidenhood, her radiant, smiling face and perfect form and shape compelled me—a warrior who should have had no time for these things—to look upon her more than once.

Her graceful rounded limbs; her fresh oval face; her full mouth now parted in a bright and happy smile dimpling her chin and cheeks and revealing a perfect set of regular ivory teeth; her slender, well-



"Now, then, thou Tshuka dog!" Page 38

formed arms and tapering fingers and, above all, her eyes, large, soft yet ever sparkling brightly, long lashed and bashful; all, I say, combined to make a vision of beauty which for days afterwards flitted before, nay, haunted me; and while I had come prepared to admire the looks of a more than usually pretty woman, I was not prepared for this!

My father, for the moment I stood spellbound.

With an effort I brought myself to the work in hand, but not before a feeling of pity touched me, and I almost wished that I had arrived too late.

Now all this time men had been rushing out from the ranks to "*giya*" (dance wildly while others spur them on to greater effort by shouting praises, etc.) in the open space before the Chief, and ever, as each man paused to gain his breath, a thousand throats would shout some phrase in punctuation. This, I knew, would go on for some time longer, but as the audience would become merrier and more unmanageable each moment, I decided to deliver my message forthwith, and in that instant I formed a plan how to gain the Chief's ear. As the last man staggered back exhausted to his place, I rushed like one possessed from my station, my eyes flashing fiercely, my shield and spears held before me as though attacking some unseen foe, and taking a mighty leap into the air I alighted with a thud some five paces before Masimu.

Applause, wild and enthusiastic, then suddenly shouts of warning greeted me. Men rushed forward their spears uplifted, but seeing that I meant no harm, retired again. A silence fell upon the

people as with expectant faces, and heads craned forward, they watched my every movement. Then when I had stepped ten paces backwards, my eyes firmly fixed upon the Chief, I stopped, and lifting my shield and spear high above my head, I said, addressing Masimu:

"Hail! Thou great and noble Chief, Chief of the Amacwele tribe, and to you," facing the men, "the brave and loyal Amacwele, Hail!"

"Hail!" roared the men in a shout that shook the earth, and Masimu nodded his head in acknowledgment of my salute.

"The sun doth shine this day," I went on, facing the Chief again, "upon a great and happy gathering—the gathering of the Amacwele to do honour to their Chief on this, his wedding-day."

"His wedding-day!" shouted both men and women.

"And happy is she who becomes the bride of so great a Chief as the Chief Masimu," and I looked towards the maiden, her eyes now cast bashfully on the mat upon which she sat.

"Happy the bride!" shrieked the women every bit as loudly as the men had done.

"But, O Chief," I said, warming to my task, "and ye, the valiant Amacwele, the greatest happiness as we all do know comes to those who loyally serve and obey the commands of the Great, Great One, our noble King—the mighty Tshaka!"

"The mighty Tshaka!" This time the shout was heard a day's journey off, as I afterwards learned.

In an instant the whole place was gripped in a deathly silence. Those who but a moment before

had been staring drunkenly, not understanding, before them, came to their senses now as if by magic; the ranks of men until now disordered, out of line, closed up, straightened, stiffened and stood to attention as if on parade before the King, Masimu himself not less erect than any of his warriors. The women grasped each other convulsively by the hands and arms as though to gain support against some overwhelming force; and the bride Somahle, no smile of happiness on her beautiful face now, looked in startled terror first at Masimu and then at me.

There was not, I felt, a man or woman before me who did not feel that his or her life was in danger at that moment. Drawing myself to my fullest height, and standing at that attention which was ever demanded of a Messenger when delivering the King's word, I continued:

"Ye see before ye Watala, of the Royal Amazembe Regiment, whom His Majesty hath entrusted with a message—a command—to the Amacwele Chief, to obey which, as ye have just agreed, will bring the greatest happiness. Therefore, O loyal Chief, hearken to the words of the Black One, for although I am the unworthy bearer of the message, it is Tshaka himself that speaks and he is not wont, as ye know full well, to repeat his words."

I paused and cleared my throat and then bending my eyes upon those of the anxious Chief before me, I went on:

"These are the words of the Great, Great One—'Greeting, my loyal subject Masimu, Chief of the Amacwele tribe! It hath come to my royal

notice that thou wouldst wed one who some affirm is the most beautiful woman in the land, and as it is but meet that the best in the land should belong to the private person of the King, thou art hereby commanded to send this woman to me that I may wed her in thy stead.' ”

A muffled groan, like that which goes up from those who witness some terrible accident, rose up from the people. The Chief stared vacantly before him without moving, save to clench his fists, while the maiden, more beautiful than ever in her despair, looked with a world of beseeching entreaty in her tear-filled eyes toward the bridegroom.

“The King bids me tell thee also that the stronger dog doth ever snatch the dainty morsel from the weaker, and that with men, too, it is ever so. And he did finally command me to deliver this fair maiden at the Royal Kraal before eighteen days be past. I have spoken, O Amacwele Chief.”

As I finished, a man more full of beer than the rest, rushed out and strove to kill me with his spear, but I saw him just in time and caught his weapon upon my shield. In an instant I closed with him and gripped him firmly by both wrists.

“Thou fool!” I said, as I shook him fiercely, as a dog might do a rat, “thank the spirits that I do not slay thee with my hands, for I would not dip my blade in such blood as thine. To thy proper place, thou dog, for here I represent the King. Begone!” and with a mighty heave, for I was angry, my father, I flung him six paces from me, where picking himself up he limped quickly enough back into the ranks again.

A murmur of approval greeted this incident, and I knew that I had not lost by it.

Masimu rose steadily to his feet.

"The message of the King is like a blow delivered in the dark. We feel the pain and know the direction from which it was given, but we cannot see or grapple with our assailant and must perforce bear our wound in silence. Of my loyalty to the Great Elephant none can doubt, but loyalty is not of the head or arms or legs but of the heart, and wherefore should my loyalty remain if my heart be plucked out as surely it must if the King would tear my yet unwedded bride from my side? But even so, if the King would take my bride, why, then he must, and——"

"Nay! Nay! my lord!" broke in the distracted maiden, rushing to him and flinging herself at his feet, clasping his knees. "Say not that—not that! Cast me from thee if thou wilt and I will take me to the fields and die of a broken heart; but give me not to the Black One!" and she fell in a heap, her head upon the ground, and sobbed aloud.

"Beautiful maiden," answered the Chief, gently lifting the poor girl to her feet, "do not let thy present grief obscure the great future which lies before thee as the wife of our mighty King, for who would not enjoy the ease and royal splendour which such a marriage must give in place of the poor comforts I can bestow? But think not," he went on quickly, "that my love for thee hath in an instant changed"; his eyes suddenly lit with fire, "indeed, so much the greater must it be since we, as lovers, must be torn asunder; and yet, my child,"

he took her tenderly by the hand, "I will ever love thee for what thou art to-day, and will think of thee with deep affection, even though thou art our Master's wife."

The girl was weeping bitterly as though her heart would break. I dared not look at her for fear my heart might melt and so, instead, I gazed steadily before me. It was not for me, Watala of the Amazembe Regiment, to show emotion at such a time and place as this.

"But wherefore act I thus?" continued Masimu.

"Listen, O my people, and I will tell ye. Loyalty to the King is, and ever has been, the moving spirit in the councils over which I preside. Oft have I taught ye that the King cometh first in all things, and all else afterwards. Ye have murmured against my words, and it hath been a difficult matter to lead ye on the proper path, but ye saw the wisdom of my words and to-day what tribe is there which is more loyal to the King?"

"None!" answered the Amacwele with one voice.

"And therefore do I put the yearnings of my heart from me and give her, who would but now have been my wife, as a wedding gift to him, the King, the dread Black Buffalo—the lord, my master. Do ye think it is nothing to me that the sunshine of my life should pass away by mine own act? Do not even the wild beasts stand at bay when any seek to snatch their loved ones from them? O, my men, little did I think to pay so great a price for my loyalty," and taking the maiden by the hand again he went on, "And now, my dearest girl, farewell—farewell—Masimu doth love

thee still and will do so till he breathes his last!"

"I will die!" cried the girl. "O my noble lord, slay me here that I may die in thy embrace, but let me not wed another, let me not—O let me not!"

"Nay, my child, shake not the resolution it hath been so hard to form," and turning to the men, his face drawn with pain, he said: "And now, my men, while I bid a long adieu to my bride—my unwedded bride, sing loud our glorious war-song in praise and honour of the King."

And there rose upon the afternoon breeze the mighty war-song of the Zulu nation, pealing forth now like angry claps of thunder, now dying away to a whisper, to rise again in sudden fury that made one almost start with fear.

The women sank quietly to the ground, their hands clasped before them, their heads bowed in sorrow.

I marvelled to see these things and knew not whether to be pleased or angered at the way in which this man had given up his bride to another—even though that other was the King himself; I felt myself looking upon him with scorn, and, although I was loyal enough in other directions, I vowed that in a matter such as this, I would be guided by my heart even though it were to taste the spear the next instant.

The music became louder and louder, quicker and quicker, and the warriors seemed to have forgotten the reason for their presence there that day, thinking only of the inspiring words and music, and I, too, was strangely moved and had a mind to take a part, but remembering the dignity

expected of me I stood motionless, my eyes straight before me until at last, with a victorious roar of triumph, the war-song ceased, and again Masimu spoke:

"The song hath done me good, O men of the Amacwele, but the sun doth set and as delay might cause my present courage to forsake me, I think it will be best for the maiden to commence her journey to the Royal Kraal forthwith. Nay, interrupt me not," he addressed the girl who was wringing her hands and made as though to speak, "the King's will must be done at whatever cost to you and me."

"Save me! Save me!" the poor girl pleaded, no longer to Masimu, but to the people. "My heart is here with my lord, and I shall surely die, as would ye if your hearts were plucked from your bodies; spare me! O spare me!"

"Child, I entreat thee once again, shake not my purpose—my loyalty to the King. I have told thee that I love thee, dear girl, as much, nay more, for thy sweet and gentle ways than thy beautiful face, and did any but the mighty Tshaka seek to dispossess me of thee—by my father! he would eat the dust. Wipe away thy tears, fair maiden, and take honour at the thought of being a royal wife."

But she—she only moaned in her intense agony, and I and all those others that saw her were moved to deep compassion.

"Let fifty of the finest warriors and two handmaidens step forth from the ranks and stand beside the King's Messenger, Watala here"; and straightway this was done. "Now prepare yourselves at

once to accompany the maiden and the Messenger to Royal Kraal. To the Great Elephant ye shall, through Watala, give this message: 'Masimu, son of Manzini, Chief of the Amacwele tribe, sendeth his humble and respectful greetings to the Great, Great One.' Tell the King that although the mighty lion hath snatched the dainty morsel from me, his dog, still I am not the cur which, at a distance, snaps and snarls at its misfortune and at the enjoyment by another of what was once its own; and that I am now, as ever, his most loyal and obedient servant. Relate to him that, although six days' journey from the Royal Kraal and his noble person, I turn to him thus and salute him with the royal salute '*Bayete! Nkosi, wena wa s'endhlu nkulu!*' Thus shall ye address the King on my behalf, and see that ye do not give him displeasure by word or action." Then turning to Somahle, still weeping at his feet, he said: "And now, my dear one, my bride and yet another's wife, farewell," and he lifted her slowly to her feet. "From henceforth I must be as nothing to thee. May a long and happy life be thine, full of honour, prosperity and those other gifts which none but the King can bestow," and then placing both his hands upon her graceful shoulders, and gazing, with a terribly painful look, into her eyes, "Farewell, sweet girl, for the last time, farewell, farewell!" then, quickly turning, he left the kraal in silence, his eyes upon the ground, followed as before by his Councillors.

In less time than a man might take to count fifty, the multitude had dispersed from the kraal and I

found myself alone with the fifty warriors, the two hand-maidens, and the girl Somahle.

"Thy sorrow will soon leave thee, child," I said addressing her, "and joy will take its place, for now art thou to wed the highest in the land, even the Great, Great One, Tshaka himself."

"Hast thou never seen a clay pot fall and be dashed to a thousand pieces, and hath one ever tried to mend the shattered vessel? Even so is my heart this day, therefore, speak not to me of joy, young man. Why, the King himself, with all his greatness, cannot piece together again my poor broken heart."

"Thou art a child, and knowest not what thou sayest," I replied, though I felt that the girl had but spoken the truth and that death alone would now bring peace to her troubled heart.

She made no answer, but fell to sobbing again, and then, looking away from us, she said:

"O Masimu, my lord, why dost thou cast me from thee? Is it naught that I am to wed one whom I have not seen—whose very name we women dare not utter? Send, O send some other to wed him in my stead; she might, nay, would be happy; but I, alas! what happiness can be left to me when thou art gone?" and she wept more bitterly even than before.

"Woman," I said somewhat sternly, "art thou not afraid to speak thus in my hearing? Dost thou not know that thy words are treason and that I may tell the King? Dost thou not fear Tshaka?"

"Fear the King? Ha, ha, ha! Am I then to fear and not to hate him who hath brought me to this misery and sorrow? Nay, young man, thou hast

sadly misjudged me. I do hate him, youth, not fear him, and my hate will bear its only fruit—revenge, young man—revenge!" She spat the words at me as though she were a snake.

In an instant I leapt at her, and gripping her savagely by the wrists, "Have done!" I said. "Silence! None but the mad would dare to breathe such treachery."

"Ha, ha, ha!" she laughed again, with an evil gleam in her eyes. "'Tis good! 'tis good! Perchance I may strike the same fear into his evil heart which so plainly sits upon thy brave and manly face. But, O Messenger, we will see, yes, we will see. Take me to him if thou wilt. Yes, take me!—take me! for indeed I am most anxious to meet this man—this King—this Black, Black One, whose blood groweth hot for one so humble as I!"

I stood horror-stricken at this wild outburst of passion. I knew not what to say and merely looked at her, and then, letting go her wrists, I pushed her roughly from me, and sat down, not a little disturbed at the turn matters had taken. But worse was to follow; for presently she began to sing and dance excitedly, weirdly, and I saw at once that her nerves were unstrung. Loudly, yet more loudly, she sang until at last people from without came and watched her as with wild gesticulations she gave weird music to these words:

"A bride! a bride! the loveliest in the land!
A King! a King! a terrible, bloody King!
Hath sought her for his hand!

"A feast! a dancel the wedded King and maid!
A curse! a thrust! a well-aimed, mighty thrust!
And so the debt is paid!"

“Ha!” she exclaimed, as she finished, “the music hath done me good. Sing, friends, sing,” she said, turning to those who, with pity on their faces, gazed sorrowfully upon this sad scene. “Sing with joy, with mirth and gladness, I tell ye, for soon now shall I be a royal bride. Ha, ha, ha! Sing! Will ye not sing? It would ill become me to be selfish, therefore I would have ye share my happiness. Sing! I say, sing!”—and then seeing that the onlookers began to disperse again, she sat down and fell to sobbing with a grief terrible to behold.

Weary and footsore though I was, I decided at once to begin the return journey lest Masimu might change his mind, and so, at the setting of the sun, we left and travelled till dark and slept at Malipa’s kraal.

It is not necessary to recount details of our journey, my father, except to say that each day the girl became more mad, and from morning to night, nay, even in the stillness of the night, she ever sang the same mad song as before.

On the evening of the fifteenth day—for the girl’s condition compelled us to travel very slowly—we found ourselves half a day’s journey from the Royal Kraal. Next morning I took the girl aside and thus addressed her:

“Woman, thou art now to see thy royal lord, and it doth behove thee much to conduct thyself with that propriety which befits a royal bride.”

“Yes,” she said, “Ha, ha, ha! The loveliest in the land. ’Tis well said.”

“Nay, now,” I implored her, “put aside this inappropriate jesting, for, mark well, thou art now to meet the greatest of all Kings.”

"A terrible bloody King hath sought her for his hand," she interrupted, singing a snatch of her song.

"Somahle," I said, "I beseech thee, calm thyself. For my sake—for thine own sake—for Masimu's sake."

She started violently at mention of Masimu's name.

"Ah," she said, "there thou hast me," and a smile as beautiful as might have melted the heart of any man wreathed her lovely face. "There thou hast me—for his sake, Watala, there is nothing that I would not do. See, I will be as quiet as Mazitulela, the tamest cow in all my father's herd, and, like her, will suffer thee to do anything with me—but only for his sake—his sake, Watala."

"Come now," I said, "thou art reasonable again, and all will go well with thee," and I was more pleased than I can say to note the great change that came so suddenly over her, and a hope sprang up within me that her madness had passed—a few days' freak, perhaps, and that now she would behave herself as all sane people should.

Now, as we started on the last stretch of our journey, we saw large numbers of people travelling swiftly in the same direction as ourselves—towards the Royal Kraal, and as one of these overtook us I said to him:

"Tell me, good sir, why thou and all these others travel with such haste to the Royal Kraal!"

The man looked at me in astonishment. "Hast thou not heard?" he asked in surprise. "Why, the King doth this day take to himself another wife. I

hasten to the wedding and so do all those yonder, so detain me not," and turning abruptly from me, he ran on, leaping wildly in the air and shouting the King's praises.

Men were then, as now, ever wont to lay aside their dignity when a wedding feast, especially a royal one, was afoot.

Now I marvelled that the news of our arrival had spread so quickly through the land, and that the King would wed Somahle at the very moment of her arrival.

When three hundred paces from the outer stockade of the Royal Kraal I commanded the party to halt while I went on to report my arrival to His Majesty.

On approaching the royal apartments I found many Councillors sitting about the entrance, and approaching one of these who, I knew, was of high rank, I saluted, and squatting on my haunches, waited, some five paces from him.

"Young man, speak on," said Nkomo the Councillor.

"Noble sir," I began, "I have faithfully carried out the King's commands and have come now to report myself, for the bride Somahle of the Amacwele tribe awaits the King's pleasure without."

The Councillor, with a look both of perplexity and annoyance, ordered me to remain where I was and disappeared into the royal enclosure, praising the King as he went. Presently he returned and bade me follow him to the Council Chamber, and no sooner had we reached the doorway than we were commanded to enter.

"Greeting, Watala," said His Majesty.

"And to thee, O great and mighty King, thy humblest warrior bids thee greeting," I answered with deep respect.

His eyes shone with the dull lustre of glowing coals and, for the moment that I was able to bring myself to look upon his face, I was surprised, I know not why, to find it wreathed in a broad grin which would have been a kindly one had other eyes than those been there to brighten it. I had long since learned from others that Tshaka was never known to smile without someone's death paying for this mark of royal favour, and I shuddered to think that some poor wretch was at that moment doomed to a bloody death. His Majesty saw me shudder.

"Thou shiverest, Watala—Why so? Art cold, man? Get thee nearer the fire and warm thyself, for it is not fitting that any basking in the sunshine of my royal presence should yet feel cold. Nearer the fire, Watala—nearer the fire."

The tone of his voice—I dared not look upon his face so soon again—seemed unreal and hollow, but without ado I did as I was told and moved nearer the hearth which, as my father knows, is always on the floor in the middle of the hut. But I was warm enough without fires just then.

Now the King was not alone. Nkomo and another Councillor were present and I noticed that both were gaily dressed, and that the King himself wore, in addition to his ordinary dress, a large cluster of black and white ostrich plumes, while he was seated upon a new and magnificent kaross

of leopard skins. By his side, as ever, lay the little toy spear, so toy-like in size and yet how keenly edged! The King picked up the little weapon and, caressing it as he spoke, said:

“Stand without, Nkomo, and thou too”—addressing the second Councillor—“for I would have a word in private with this youth.”

A moment later I was alone with the King and, truth to tell, it pleased me not to be caged up with the lion thus, but I soon learnt the reason.

“Watala,” he said, smiling as kindly upon me as his cruel eyes would allow, “report to me what thou hast done.”

And then, my father, I recounted in full detail all that I had done since eighteen days before. When I had finished the King’s eyes showed, for an instant only, an expression of gratitude, and then, recovering quickly from this weakness, the expression changed to one doubtless intended to be kind, but which showed every mark of deep treachery.

“Watala, thou hast achieved great distinction this day for which thou art even now given the rank of captain.”

“O great and noble King!” I interjected with fervent gratitude.

“But,” he went on, “I do not wish to wed this woman”—my heart gave a leap of joy—“indeed, I only sent thee on this journey to test thy strength,” and he looked at me from the corner of his eyes as though to see if I believed this cunning lie, “and now, Watala, tell me how it was that thou wert able to perform this long journey in so short a space of time?”

"My lord," I said, "there was the honour of serving thee."

"Well said—well said!"

"Then there was thy royal heart which clamoured for this maiden."

"Yes, yes—and then?"

"Then there was the maiden——"

"Enough of the maiden! What else?"

"And then, O King, there was ever present the feeling that anything is possible to those——"

"Yes, yes," with excitement.

"Possible to those that serve the King," I concluded.

"Once again—once again," commanded the King. And without showing the surprise I felt at being made to repeat a phrase I had myself coined, I spoke the words more slowly and with greater emphasis than before.

"Watala"—he was whispering now—it seemed like the hissing of a snake—"Watala, come nearer—nearer still! Good! Now listen." I could have touched His Majesty, he was so close.

"Watala, I loved not this—this—Somahle maiden. How could I since I have not seen her? She is, or was, you say, half mad, and how could a King wed such a one? Watala, she must die."

I started violently, for as yet I was not used to such things.

"Fear not," the King continued, "no blame shall rest on thee, though thou thyself shalt take her life."

"I?" I asked, with horror in my voice.

"Even thou."

"My lord!"

"Watala!"

"The King speaks——"

"And the dog obeys!" came the savage reply, and then, quickly curbing his temper, he bade me take a drink of beer from the clay pot at his side, which was indeed an honour, for none but the King himself might drink out of his special vessel.

Now I drank slowly, trying to collect my thoughts. How could I do such a thing? Must I be the instrument to deal out death to an innocent, beautiful girl, and in cold blood? No—never! It could not, would not be, not for a hundred Tshakas! I'd find some way out of my terrible position—tell her to kill herself—to get some other to do the deed—nay, even to escape, but I, Watala—this?—never—never! and having come to this decision I stopped sipping the beer, placed the vessel beside the King again and waited for him to speak. And he, still toying with his little spear, seemed to form a plan and then, bidding me move back to where I had been at first, shouted:

"Ho, there, Nkomo, come hither!"

In a moment the Councillor was before the King, quite unconscious of the tragedy in our minds.

"The Amacwele maiden for whom this youth was sent hath arrived. Fetch her, therefore, good Councillor, and bring her here alone, mind thee—alone."

My father, my heart sank within me as the Councillor left, for now it flashed upon me that the King would have me slay this maiden before his very eyes. Something clutched me terribly by the

heart. The coursing of my blood seemed to cease. My brain became a blank as I lived a life of torture waiting there—no word passing between us—for the poor maiden's arrival. At last, hearing sounds of Nkomo's return as he demanded an open path through the crowd without, my tongue loosed.

"My lord," I said, "wouldst thou not in thy Kingly mercy allow this mad woman to return to her people? To kill her here, and in thy presence, would surely bring evil spirits to thy couch."

"She must die here, in my presence, and by thy hand. I have commanded that she shall marry me, and Tshaka's commands are never, and never will be altered. But, alas! she can marry me only in death, for she is mad, and therefore she must die. And besides, I this day wed another, and the bride doth even now await me. Thou'lt do the deed easily enough, Watala, never fear, for as thou hast so truly said, 'all things are possible to those that serve me,' " and even at such a time he was able to chuckle at the torment which he knew his words must give me, and then, after a pause, he went on quickly, leaning towards me: "The raising of my little finger thus, will be the signal for the blow. Yonder is a weapon which shall suffice," and he pointed to a finely made spear standing against the side of the hut three paces off, "and when 'tis done, we'll say— But silence, they approach."

As the King stopped speaking the doorway darkened and there entered first Nkomo and then Somahle.

"Nkomo," said the King, not so much as looking at the maiden, "do thou keep guard over the gate

personally and allow none to enter until I give the word."

Nkomo retired and—we three were left together.

"Art thou named Somahle?" asked the King, a gleam of fierce light in his eyes.

"I am," replied the girl quietly, firmly, without fear.

My eyes were upon the King waiting for the signal.

"Thy face is good to look upon," continued Tshaka, "but strip thee of thy covering that I may see thy form, for my eyes, like spears, can less easily find their mark if there be obstacles in the way." Clearly the King would make it easier to stab the girl, and again I sought the fatal sign.

She did as she was bid, and her form, somehow doubly beautiful to me now, was exposed to view.

"Thy form," said the King, "is also good for eyes to see, and methinks thou art well fitted to join my household."

My eyes, fixed upon the King's right hand, saw the finely shaped and almost delicate fingers slowly—very slowly, forming the dreaded sign; a tumultuous surging filled my heart and brain. I clenched my fists in mortal grip, and a horrible fascination seized my quivering limbs as the hand began to move stealthily to the perpendicular position which was to be the supreme moment of my life and—the girl's last; but, the spirits be praised, the spell was broken by the girl herself.

"My lord," she said, the King's hand dropped unconsciously to his side, and I breathed more freely again, "thy pleasure at my face and form is an honour which an humble maiden such as I do

not deserve. These may be charms for the eye to see, but if Thy Majesty will but let me sing, I'd add the charm of sound to that of sight. Let me sing, lord! Let me sing!" she pleaded with a sudden depth of passion which I could not understand.

"Sing then," the King answered, "sing if thou wilt, for thou shalt not have the chance again."

"I thank thee, O gracious King," she said, and springing to her feet she began to sing and dance with such grace and charm as is born only of the greatest joy—or madness. But presently a sudden frenzy seemed to seize her, and leaping this way and that, and beating the air with wild gesticulations, she sang her mad song again.

I looked anxiously towards the King, but his hands hung limply at his sides. His flashing eyes and parted lips, together with the trembling of his head-dress, showed clearly that the scene moved him deeply.

I could see her now, from the corner of my eyes, approaching nearer and nearer to the King, and once again I sought the signal, but just then, she burst forth again with a wild shout of triumph—a very tempest of mad fury:

"A bridel a bridel the loveliest in the land!
A King! a King! a terrible, bloody King!
Hath sought her for his hand!"

I knew not what to do—whether to watch the King or the mad woman, for now it seemed His Majesty's life was in danger—

"A feast! a dance! the wedded King and maid!
A curse! a thrust! a well-aimed, mighty thrust!
And so the debt is paid!"

And then—Great Spirits of the Dead—gods of all the world! She leapt with a beast-like spring to Tshaka's side, and ere he or I could move an eyelid, had snatched the royal spear from him, and for a moment stood towering above the King of Zululand, he still fascinated by her maddened glare (as indeed I was too) and now completely at her mercy.

"Now!" she shrieked in a mad frenzy of hate, "marry Somahle if thou wilt, but for this moment thou shalt listen to what I say, for if either thou or that fool," pointing at me with the spear, "do but move a muscle, or utter but a single word, thou—thou bloody King of Zululand—shalt live no more!" and she held the keen-edged weapon—no warrior could have gripped it more firmly—pointing menacingly at the King's heart and but a hand's-breadth above his heaving, naked chest!

I dared not move or speak nor did the King, whose lion heart now failed him quite.

"Now, then, thou Tshaka dog!" she spat the insult at him, "a maiden whom they call Somahle doth hold thee in her palm, but once more shall I sing to thee and mark well my words and actions—yes, my actions too," and then, with an indescribable fury, she sang again the last verse of her song.

"A feast! a dancel!"—leaping wildly, "the wedded King and maid!"—pointing first at the King's, then at her own fair breast with the spear—"a curse!"—and then, before we could prevent her, she punctuated the words "a thrust! a well-aimed, mighty thrust!" with three violent stabs at her heart!

She fell to the floor in a quivering heap. The King and I both started to our feet together.

"Touch me not—touch me not," moaned the now dying girl. "For thee, Masimu, do I die thus. I could have killed this dog"—her voice became weak and faint—"but it might have gone—ill with thee—and so—for thy sake, Masimu—I die—for thee, my own—for thee—my beloved—for thee—ah!"

And thus, my father, she breathed her last.

"The mad fool!" exclaimed the King with much relief, and now his kingly self once more. "Nkomo! Nkomo!" he shouted, "come hither!"

"Didst thou call, my lord!" said Nkomo, appearing hastily in the doorway.

"Yes, quick man, quick! This mad woman hath slain herself before my very eyes. Let her be thrown to the jackals and this mess be cleaned up forthwith. And tarry, Nkomo, how go the preparations for the wedding? Are the people all assembled for the feast? Doth the bride await me?"

"All is in readiness, Thy Majesty," the Councillor replied, as he half dragged, half lifted the lifeless form of the once beautiful girl towards the door, and as he passed out with it the King turned to me, smiling pleasantly:

"Come, Watala, to the wedding, man! To the wedding!"

HOW I SAVED THE KING'S LIFE

OF the many plottings against the King's life, two only were serious, while the others—owing to some stupid blunder, or maybe to trusting a woman—never came to anything save, of course, the immediate execution of the plotters.

I shall now tell you, my father, of the plot which came most nearly to the ending of Tshaka's illustrious reign.

My father should know, then, that the King's hand was heavy upon evildoers and one did not, therefore, have far to seek before finding a man whose heart was—as we Zulus say—"black" towards the King.

Although treachery in any form towards His Majesty was very properly looked upon as constituting a menace to the welfare of the State, yet (it grieves me sorely to say so) there were many prepared to sacrifice their own worthless lives if they could but crush that—the most priceless in the land—of the lord, my master.

The King knew this and it was but natural that, though surpassing most men in bravery and courage, he yet feared a violent end—done to death, in the dark, perhaps, by some lurking villain's treacherous blade.

At the time of which my story deals, though a captain, I had not risen to that high rank which I afterwards attained, and the private councils and personal secrets of His Majesty were as little known to me as to others of my rank. There was, however, a burning zeal within me to serve the

King, and in my every thought and action I strove to prove my worth and loyalty.

When I look back on those exciting years of my life—when men rose up, ate, drank and slept ever in the atmosphere of death or danger, and when I compare them with the monotonous quiet of my latter-day life, a feeling of intense loneliness seizes me—a loneliness such as you, my father, would feel did you suddenly find yourself in a world which, though kindly disposed towards you, was, still, a different world from that you lived in when a youth—a world from which the very salt of life has been taken—a barren, hopeless world in which men live with a peaceful intent that even our women would have scorned in the stirring days of Tshaka!

Now, one day I fell sick, and knowing of a root which would cure me I set out in search of it. Remembering a place some distance from the Royal Kraal where it could be found, I turned my steps thitherwards.

The sun was on his downward course, so I stepped briskly forward, my thoughts, as ever, of the King—men did not think of much else in those days, my father.

His manner of ruling the people and his cruelty seemed to me then not misplaced, but rather a virtue in one so great, so powerful, so mighty as he. He was to me all that a King should be. His methods, indeed, were harsh and tended to break the spirit of the people, but were they not justified by the results which they achieved? Are not the Zulus of to-day the most feared and most respected tribe in the land?

At length I reached the place where the root grew, and providing myself with sufficient for my purpose, I turned my face towards the Royal Kraal once more.

Now, a desire came upon me to mount a small isolated hill and from its summit to gaze upon the beautiful country which surrounded it. I did not know then, but I know now, that some invisible force led me to that innocent-looking, grass-topped hill. Ah, my father, it is little incidents such as these that alter the destinies of nations! The spirits must surely have been at work that day, else what caused me to climb that isolated hill?

It was treeless because—so a legend had it—in years gone by a whole regiment had been massacred there by order of the King, and the blood which had flowed down the sides that day had scorched all things that grew there and only rank grass had sprung up since.

Up I bounded. The grass was long—above my head—and its rank smell seemed to be in keeping with the uncanny legend of the time. On reaching the top I saw a single boulder and, mounting it, I surveyed the surrounding country, so beautiful in the sunset and so rich in crops and cattle that, had a stranger stood there he would have thought, "Ah, here is a land where peace and quiet dwell—happy and contented must the people be," and, when I come to think of it, my father, although the lives of men were held as naught, and blood flowed freely as a flooded river in those days, the musings of this stranger would have nearly hit the truth, for we were a more contented people than we are to-day.

Presently, while still resting on my shield and spears, I heard a low hum of voices close to where I stood. Thinking at first that they came from the spirits of the massacred regiment, I flung myself headlong into the grass and lay there listening, trembling with fear. The sounds came clearer and I distinguished words here and there, and my fear gradually left me as I realised that the voices were human. "But what," I thought, "could men want on the top of this of all hills, and at such an hour? And why converse in undertones where none would be likely to overhear?"

Nervous now of I knew not what, I crept stealthily closer to the voices, and soon I was able to hear every word. First anger, then horror possessed me as the full significance of the conversation struck me as with a blow, for this is what I heard:

"Yes, Maviyo, it is true, but what if His Majesty doth suspect us of foul play? Thinkest thou even though we got him safely outside the royal hut there would not be others to question us? A bundle of grass, carried by Councillors at night, would cause suspicion."

"Nay, Mfula, we are Councillors and therefore none may question us save the King."

"I like not the business, Maviyo, for successfully to carry out our plan we must needs lie to His Majesty, and Tshaka doth seldom err in detecting a lie in the making, and then—ah, I dare not think of what would happen then."

"Thou child! Thou woman's heart! Dost thou think the prize—the very throne itself—can be

gained merely for the asking? It requires courage, man—a lion's heart, and who dare say that we do not possess both?"

"Nay, think not that I flinch in this matter. I agree with thee, Maviyo, the King must die but—"

I started violently, and in doing so one spear blade struck against the other.

"What was that?" one of them exclaimed in startled surprise. For as long as a man might count twenty there was a breathless silence, broken only by the mournful "whooping" of the breeze-blown grass.

"Perchance it was one of the spirits of the dead, for many do tarry hereabouts."

"'Tis certain I heard something as of the clashing of two spear blades," replied Maviyo.

"Even so," said the other, "they do but fight their battles again in their spirit world; have no fear, I say," and he chuckled reassuringly at his explanation.

"Well, as I was saying," continued Mfula, "the King must die, and by our spears shall he be sent to that death which so many have tasted at his hands; but, when I think what a mischance in our plans would mean, I cannot but weigh the matter most carefully. Take but one false step, and we, too, will swell the number of Tshaka's dead. 'Twill avail us nothing then to say 'had we but done this or that all would have gone well.'"

"Thou sayest right, but dwell not so much upon what might be our bloody end. Look you," suddenly, "here be a nation which, were the King but dead safely at our hands, would follow us to a man.

Thousands are loyal to Tshaka, the King, because he is King, the man, but who would be loyal to Tshaka, the corpse? Moreover, my brother," his voice became more excited now, "none can warn the King of his danger, for our plot is known only to you and me—us alone. We were wise indeed to let no other share our secret."

"Hush, man, not so loud. There may be ears to hear even in this desolate spot."

"Never fear, the legend of this hill keeps all a safe distance from it, hence our meeting here."

"Thou art right, but the sun sets, and if it be our purpose to do the deed to-night, we must needs return to the Royal Kraal at once. Once more, then, recount the plan; we must be well agreed in all the details for, remember, we dare not breathe this matter elsewhere than upon this spot."

To-night! To-night! Did they mean to slay my beloved King this very night! I gripped my spears and trembled fearfully at the thought.

"Wisdom is in thy words, Mfula. This, then, is the plan: When His Majesty hath gone to rest and none is with him, thou and I shall rush unceremoniously into the bed-chamber, quietly but excitedly calling upon him to arise, telling him we have come to save his life from assassins, and that his only chance of safety is to fly with us forthwith. To give more colour to our tale, we'll insist he be smuggled out of the Royal Kraal in one of the bundles of grass lately placed near by to thatch the Council Chamber. Once safely concealed within the bundle, and as he undoubtedly trusts us, 'twill

be an easy matter to bear our burden to this spot, and then——”

“And then—what then?” asked Mfula with suppressed excitement.

“Why, then we’ll slay the dog and carry the body to the Mpisi regiment which, being the most disaffected, will hail our deed with acclamation, and since you and I have ever exerted our influence in this regiment’s favour, the men will, in their own interests, proclaim us regents in Tshaka’s stead and, as thou knowest, others will soon follow where the Mpisi leads.”

“But what of the lion’s cubs—Dingana, Mhlangana and others?¹ They will surely assert their stronger claims to the throne—what of them?”

“Well, as I have already said, Dingana and Mhlangana are quartered three days’ journey hence; then, again, all know Dingana’s lust for blood is greater than Tshaka’s own, therefore, my good Mfula, no sooner have we rid the country of this Tshaka tyrant than we must take steps to remove the other two—a matter simple enough when once the mighty lion is out of the way.”

“The plan is good,” agreed Mfula, “I will follow closely on thy heels and even if we perish, ’tis worth——”

“Perish! Have done with thy woman’s talk, man!”

“Death alone I fear not, Maviyo, but if it be accompanied by some new and unspeakable torture—the art of which the King hath learnt so well—I become a very woman in my

¹ Tshaka’s brothers.

fear, and, after all, *iqina l'eqa embizeni*,¹ you know."

"The venison will not jump out of the pot when we have once got it there, never fear, my friend. But come, the sun be nearly set and the time approaches when, according to our custom, we must bid the King good night and——"

"And good-bye," added Mfula. "Come, art thou ready?"

"Even as thou, come."

I heard the dogs move off, but for a moment my anger at their black treachery rooted me to the spot, and then, realising that there was no time to be lost—for did they not purpose assassinating my noble master forthwith?—a thrill of joy and pride filled me as, in a flash, I realised that it had fallen to me—Watala of the Amazembe regiment—to save the royal life.

Now, I had not yet been able to see the conspirators, but I crept cautiously back to the boulder and from its top I could see the villains' heads as they went down the hill. Yes, there was no mistaking the nodding plumes of rank which they wore by virtue of the office they were now so traitorously abusing.

An instant later I sped with all my might down the opposite side of the hill and then, reaching the plain, I flew—it was nearer to flying than running, my father—with a desperate speed to my master's aid, while my heart, beating wildly against my ribs, seemed to shout, "Save the King,

¹ Lit.: "the venison jumps out of the pot," "there's many a slip," etc.

Watala! Save the King!" On, on, I rushed, like some antelope possessed, and ere the two base plotters could well have accomplished half their journey, I was panting at the gate of the Royal Kraal, yet singing the royal praises as well as my heaving lungs would permit.

"I, Watala, of the Amazembe regiment," I began, addressing the guard at the entrance, "do crave audience with the Great, Great One."

"Enter, then, and deliver thy message by a Councillor," said the guard.

Leaving my weapons behind me—failing which would have brought about my instant death—I passed the gateway still chanting the *izibongo*.

"What wouldst thou of the Lion in his den when the sun be set?" demanded the Councillor seated at the inner gate, and saluting with the dignity I could so well assume, I answered:

"The burden of my words is of so great import that they are only for the King's ear, O Councillor."

At this Ndhlela—for such was his name—rose and disappeared within the narrow gate which separated the royal huts of state, and returning a few moments later said:

"His Majesty liketh not interruptions at such an hour, and commands me bid thee be present at the Council Chamber to-morrow at noon."

"It is the duty of the dog to obey his master's voice," I said, "but the Royal Elephant's life is in danger, and therefore——"

"What! young man, what sayest thou? The King's life in danger! Speak, speak quick, and deliver thy message to me!"



"Hush, man, not so loud. There may be ears to hear even in this desolate spot." Page 45

Now I had no intention of giving my news to any but the King himself. Might not this Councillor, for aught I knew, be mixed up in the plot? No, clearly, I should not divulge my secret to this man, and so I replied:

"Nay, O Councillor, my words are for the King's ear alone, and now that thou knowest the matter is a weighty one, I beseech thee to gain my admission to His Majesty forthwith."

"Young man, my loyalty to the King demands that I should warn him of the danger in which thou sayest he stands, but I shall not forget thy unwillingness to trust me with thy message, so beware."

I minded not this threat—there were other things to think of just then—nor was there time to dwell upon it for the Councillor returned almost immediately and commanded me to follow him.

Now, although I had, as my father knows, been in the royal presence before, my heart thumped nervously against my ribs as, following on Ndhlela's heels, I found myself face to face with the man whom few loved, many hated, and all genuinely feared.

A log fire was burning brightly in the hearth, casting its uncertain light in flickering splashes along the polished floor and dark walls of the hut. The King, preparatory to retiring, was seated on his sleeping-mat, his toy spear lying within easy reach of his right hand. A long crane feather—the emblem of a sovereign—lay carefully placed by the side of his carved wooden pillow. At the end of the hut opposite the door—the *emsamu* as we

Zulus call it—many articles were stored, such as rolls of mats, karosses and various utensils and weapons proper to a Zulu King. These things I noticed during my conversation with His Majesty, which, after a moment's pause, he began thus:

"Thou art Watala, a captain of the Amazembe regiment—I remember thee, young man. Well," he went on, eyeing me sharply, "thou hast forced this interview at a time when few may enter here. The purport of thy visit must be a serious one. Proceed, I listen."

"O King," I began, "my words are for thine ear alone."

"Remain without, Ndhlela," commanded Tshaka, "the interview shall not be long, I warrant thee." Ndhlela left the hut. "Now," he said, turning to me, "speak."

Without more ado I drew closer to the King and in short, quick sentences and still pantingly, told him all. As I finished he picked up his little spear and toyed with it as was his wont.

I dared not at first look to see what effect my words had had upon him, but when he spoke, and savagely gripped the little weapon, I knew that a terrible anger moved him, and taking courage I looked boldly into the royal face and saw that his eyes flashed like the lightning that kills. But none, my father, were ever known to look for long into Tshaka's face, and almost immediately my eyes were compelled, by I know not what, to seek the ground before me. I trembled to think that words of mine had been the cause of such terrible fury.

"Would these dogs—these sneaking cur whelps

—seek to slay me in cold blood?" he hissed in shaking rage.

"Even as I have said, my lord," I replied.

"And would they, in their bloody work, so defile the bush that gave them shelter?"¹

"Such men, O King, stoop to anything," I answered.

"And would they carry me—Tshaka—the King of Zululand—off in a bundle of grass and slay me like a rat?"

"Such is their vile purpose, O mighty Elephant."

"And think you, Watala, they would have succeeded in their design?"

I felt, for I dared not look into the royal face, the terrible, cunning smile which accompanied the question.

"I cannot think, O King, that such a childish plan would have lured Thy Majesty to his death, but, my Master, it was not for me to let thee run the risk—to jeopardise the happiness and welfare of the nation—by not telling thee what I heard."

"Well spoken, young man. But silence, I must think awhile."

"Think quickly, O King, I beseech thee, for the time is at hand."

But for some time the Black One sat there in silence while my heart still throbbed violently, my eyes fixed upon the floor.

"Watala, come closer—give me thy hand, Watala."

¹ The King here refers to a well-known Zulu proverb with a somewhat similar meaning to the English expression "fouling one's own nest."

With ill-concealed astonishment I held out my right hand and the King of Zululand took it—yes, my father, Tshaka himself held this hand in his own—a warm, soft and clammy grasp—and said:

“This day, Watala, thou hast saved the life of Tshaka, for the very simplicity of the plot would have ensured its success.”

“Make no mention of my humble part in this matter, O King, I——”

“Nay, now, I must do so, young man, but interrupt me not.” And then, after a slight pause, “Watala”—he was bending over me now, I felt his hot breath against my cheek—“Watala, thou hast indeed saved my life, but it can only be at the cost of thine own.”

I gave a violent start; “My lord!” I said.

“Watala!” The warning note sent a cold thrill through me—a cow lowed weirdly in the distance—the momentary silence seemed a lifetime—I felt that my last day had come. Half dazed, I heard the King speaking again:

“Behind yonder mats I shall conceal myself when the two traitors come. Thou shalt be sleeping here on my mat, and look thou impersonate me well. Speak to them in whispers only lest they recognise thy voice or know it is not mine. ’Twill be dark as death in here and none will know thee but as the living King. Suffer thyself to be carried hence in the grass, and when they have left, I’ll see to it that thine own regiment, the Amazembe, will surround the murderers, and then, when thou art slain, we’ll catch them as in a trap with thy still

warm corpse as full evidence of their guilt. A good plan, Watala, a good plan. What think you, Watala?"

"My lord, my life is at thy service; it is for thee to use it as thou wilt, O King, but to a young man life is sweet and——"

"What!" he said, anger seizing him, his eyes like coals of fire, "dost thou seek to save thine own skin when the King's be in danger? Thou dost forget thyself, fellow."

"My lord, then die I must," and the cow lowed mournfully again.

"Ah! Now thou speakest more like a man. Indeed, thou art a worthy youth, Watala," and he smiled—a friendly smile, my father, for now that I was to die I found courage to look him steadily in the face.

"It seems to me," His Majesty went on, "they purpose killing me by thrusting their spears at me through the straw. Didst thou gather this?"

"Yes, O King, for they would not dare look upon thy living face."

"Methinks thou are right"; and then, after a pause, "I'll grant thee a boon: if they release thee from the bundle alive thou mayest—if thou canst—make good thine escape, but strike no blow, for my purpose is to take the traitors alive."

But ere I could express my gratitude the royal salute sounded without. The Councillors had come to bid the King good night—a privilege which none but they might enjoy.

"Hide, man! quick!" said the King. "Quick, quick, behind yonder mats!" and in his excitement

he caught me roughly by the arm and pushed me to the back of the hut, where concealed, yet able to see, I watched the Councillors enter. Ndhlela was one of the party and I wondered how the King would account to him for my absence.

"That Watala youth," he said, addressing Ndhlela at once, "brought some tale concerning disaffection among the Amazansi tribe—dost thou know aught of this?"

"Nay, O King, 'tis news to me," replied Ndhlela with surprise.

"And thou, Maviyo, hath this rumour reached thee?" His Majesty asked the traitor.

"Nay, O Great One, I should have warned thee else."

"Good," said Tshaka, "I guessed it was but an idle tale."

"Your Majesty will excuse the question, but didst thou send the man Watala hence?" Ndhlela inquired.

"What!" exclaimed the King, with well-feigned anger, "thou didst not see him—thou, the special guard of the royal apartments! What manner of bodyguard art thou?"

"O noble master," began Ndhlela, trembling with fear, "if the young man returned through the gate without my noticing him I must be bewitched."

"Enough!" the King commanded, "the matter will be inquired into in the Council Chamber tomorrow." And then, shortly after, the King brought the interview to a close, saying, "My eyelids droop with sleep, so leave me now to rest;

good night, my worthy Councillors, and may the spirits watch over ye."

One by one they left the hut; the King yawned, and rising slowly went to the door and made it fast for the night.

"Young man, come forth," he whispered, and the next instant I was seated before Tshaka once more.

"Now here is my royal spear," he began, thrusting the far-famed weapon into my hand, "here the crane feather which proclaims my royal rank, and yonder my favourite kaross. Take them all however great thy haste—insist upon it for on details such as these will the success of our plan much depend."

Success! forsooth! A successful plan for my death! and I a party to it! But I said nothing save "Yes, my lord," or "Nay, Thy Majesty," as occasion demanded.

"Methinks, Watala, with that plume upon thy head, the toy spear in thy hand and the kaross upon thy shoulders, thou wouldst well pass for Tshaka—on a dark night—for thou art well built, youth."

"At thy bidding, O King," I replied, "I could be the very Tshaka himself save only for his greatness and wisdom."

Without further speech and after handing me the other parts of the Royal dress, His Majesty retired to the back of the hut as arranged. And I, my father, I could only lie awake and think, and think as all must do when so near to death. The flickering flames died down in the hearth until only

a red glow remained, and as I lay there waiting, my wide open eyes gazing up into the blackness above me, I could hear the King's fitful breathing like some restless beast anxious to seize its prey.

About the hour of midnight there came a sudden hasty knocking at the door. They were come! Rising quickly, I sought the King and finding him safely hidden, I turned to the door, saying in a sleepy voice, as nearly like the King's as I could make it:

"How now, what unceremonious knocking is this?"

"Quick! O King, open the door! It is Maviyo that speaks," came the answer in low excited tones.

"And if it be Maviyo, hath he not yet learned to address me with more respect? Explain thyself, lest I have thee whipped."

"O King, I entreat thee, open at once! Thy life is in danger! Open, King, quick, before it is too late!" replied the traitor in all too plausible tones.

"What sayest thou—my life in danger!" and I went quickly and undid the fastening of the door. "Come in, man," I whispered hurriedly, "and tell me where the danger lies."

Maviyo entered stealthily—Mfula at his heels.

"Who follows thee?" I asked in a terrified whisper.

"Nay, fear not, O King, 'tis I, Mfula, who, with Maviyo, have come to save thee from thy deadly peril."

"Speak quick, then—what trouble doth portend?"

"Thy Majesty," Maviyo replied excitedly—

playing his part as well as I was doing mine—"the men of the Mpisi regiment have risen and do purpose falling upon the Royal Kraal before dawn."

"Here? The Royal Kraal?" I asked astonished. "Impossible!"

"'Tis nevertheless true, my lord."

"Then indeed I am undone," I said with fear in my voice, which I did not feel but which I knew the King would have shown in such circumstances. "What have ye and my other trusted Councillors been doing?" I went on, angrily addressing the two dark forms before me. "Why did ye not guard me from such a fate? Curse ye for negligent fools. And I—the Tshaka of the Zulus, have come to this—hunted from the Royal Kraal—slinking off as a beaten whelp at night. No—it cannot be. Here, listen! Rally my loyal regiments round me now at once!" I sprang towards the door. "Do ye hear, ye dogs? Now—now at once, quick! We'll show these Mpisi murderers how a lion fights even if they outnumber us ten to one!" and as they did not move, I went on: "Do ye not hear—summon my loyal regiments, I say!"

"My lord," said Maviyo, "by instant flight alone canst thou escape with thy life. The people show a turbulent, dangerous spirit; their long smouldering discontent hath burst suddenly into flame, and, alas, the flower of thy army—thy most trusted regiments, are three days' journey hence and can avail us nothing."

"Even so, thou imbecile!" I said, "there are still the Amazembe warriors" (my own beloved

regiment, my father). "They—the valiant Amazembe—would die hard, every man of them, to save the King."

"Alas! O mighty King, the Amazembe dogs have turned against thee with the others and——"

"Thou liest, thou dog, a black lie!" I hissed with genuine anger now.

"It is true, too true, Thy Majesty," Mfula replied. "But waste no further time, O King. Wilt thou come with us and save thyself, or wilt thou remain and die a bloody death? Come! King, come!"

"All would recognise me, even in the darkness of the night," I said.

"As for that, O King," quickly answered Maviyo, "there are bundles of thatching straw without and in one of these we will carry thee safely hence. We have provided for that, O noble Elephant."

"O, ye thoughtful men," I replied. "It is well that I have thee to turn to in my time of need. Come—conceal me quick, and bear me hence. Quick—quick as ye can, fetch the grass. I'll be ready to fly before ye can return," and I chuckled grimly to myself at the way I was playing the part of the King of Zululand.

As they left, I rushed to where the King was hid, and, in the darkness, saluted him. "*Bayetel!*" I whispered, "Farewell, O Great and Mighty One. Once again I salute thee, O son of Senzangakona."

"Good, Watala," said His Majesty. "But mark thee, young man, thou dost not shout if they prod thee while in the bundle. They must not know till thou art dead that 'tis thou, not Tshaka, they have

slain." Before I could assure His Majesty that his wishes would be carried out, there was a rustling of grass at the door, and a bundle, the thickness of three men's bodies, was thrust through and rolled close to where I stood. A stray straw fell across the hearth and, catching fire, lit up the scene, but the two men, intent only on undoing the straw, did not look up and so lost the only chance they had of detecting the trap the King had laid for them.

"Here, thou, Maviyo," I whispered, "do thou carry the royal plume, my leopard kaross I'll wrap round me. There—now guide me—where be the straw? Ah! here it is," and so saying I laid myself full length upon it. Instantly the two villains covered me up, giving me scarcely room to breathe, and quickly bound the bundle with ropes of grass.

"Not so tight, ye dogs," I said. "Think ye I have already ceased to be the King? Beware, ye dogs—beware!"

"Pardon, O Black One," Maviyo whispered, "but it be necessary for our purpose that thou be securely bound"—he did not guess I knew the double meaning of his words.

Now, two things was I most grateful for—first, the royal kaross wrapped twice round my body would stop most spears (a prod from a spear when bound like this would have been an uncomfortable death, my father); and secondly, the little royal spear was gripped tightly in my hand. This, though not so useful as the longer weapon to which I was accustomed, was, still, a comfort. They pulled the now bulky bundle cautiously through the door, and

then, without a word—without a sound—they lifted me to their shoulders and moved quickly forward. On reaching the first gate Ndhlela stopped them.

"Fear not, 'tis we, Maviyo and Mfula," explained the former.

"I did not recognise ye with your burden. What carry ye?"

"But a bundle of thatch which the King did command us to bring to him," replied Maviyo.

"I saw ye fetch it and wondered what the Great One could want with it, but pass, O Councillors, it is not for such as I to question ye." Now, some two hundred paces off was the outer gate and I knew that, once past that, the Councillors' task would be simple enough, but there was that yet to happen which nearly brought about the discovery of the plot and—a lesser matter—my death, my father.

As we approached this outer gate the captain of the guard stopped us saying:

"Who be ye?"

"Maviyo and Mfula the Councillors," replied Maviyo as before.

"Councillors, bearing a bundle of straw at night—it is——"

"Let us pass, we have no time to loiter here," said Maviyo.

"Nay, O Councillors," said the Captain, "it is my duty to question all those who pass this way at night, therefore do I respectfully request ye to place that bundle upon the ground that I may examine it."

"Delay us not, I say," said Maviyo, "we be carrying out the King's commands."

"Ye shall not pass this gate till I am convinced of the genuineness of your story," replied the Captain firmly.

"What!" hissed Maviyo, his anger rising quickly (or was it fear?). "Dost thou dare impede His Majesty's Councillors in the execution of their duties? Put down these spears, I say, and let us pass."

"Nay," the Captain answered more firmly still. "'Twas only to-day the King himself bade me keep closer watch on all who pass this gate at night, and as he did not in his wisdom exclude Councillors from my watch, it is not for me to place such construction upon his words. Come, Maviyo, such as thou and Mfula here should help me in my task. Compel me not to use force where words should suffice."

"Let us pass," repeated Maviyo, now beside himself with anger, but for reply the Captain ordered the guard to seize the bundle, and the next instant I felt it gripped by many hands and cast to the ground. "Now, ye traitors—ye are fairly caught," I thought, and I felt relieved that the plot had gone no further.

Now, my head was at the thicker end of the bundle and as it is upon this end that bundles of straw (and of wheat of the white people, my father) are ever made to stand, my head was pointing downwards and my feet to the star-lit sky above. I felt ridiculous enough at first, but it was no laughing matter, my father, as I will tell you.

"Guard these two men," I heard the Captain say as he moved off.

The blood, rushing at once to my head, I tried instinctively to clap my hands to my temples, but I could not for they were fast pinned to my sides. Faintly I heard the Councillors by bribes and threats urge the guards to let them pass, but they might as well have addressed the dead for all the answer they got. And I? My brain was on fire. With every great and unnatural heart throb my agony increased. I resolved to shout, but I closed my lips and set my teeth instead, for would not His Majesty's plan have miscarried had I made my presence known, and who was I to bring the royal wishes to naught? My eyes seemed to be bulging from their sockets and like to burst and make an opening for this unnatural flow of blood; the veins upon my neck were as knotted ropes of hide, and ever the blood seemed to rise in my throat, my chest, my lungs, and round my very heart, and like a drowning man I began to gasp and choke and then—in supreme torment—ah! my senses left me.

When I recovered I was being carried swiftly forward, still bound in the straw, but my head was higher now than my feet, and I knew that I was being borne up a hill—the grass-topped hill!

I quickly found and clutched the trusty little spear—it had fallen from my grasp—and held it tightly, madly. Up, up, we went, every step nearer to my death. The horror of my helplessness and the end which seemed so near gripped me wickedly by the heart. "Watala, thou must not die yet—Watala, dost hear?—not yet"—the unspoken words

formed themselves upon my lips, now closed in grim determination. Could I, indeed, escape? The laboured breathing of those who bore me gave me courage, for no man can fight well when out of breath; but, I say, this gave me courage, and the next instant, my mind made up, I was quickly but cautiously ripping open the kaross, and with each cut of the keen blade my arms became freer. My heart was leaping with excitement, and scarcely thinking what I did, I thrust my hand through the grass and found the cords that held it together. One—two—three—I severed them each at a stroke, and the unbound grass fell in large armfuls to the ground and over the two who carried me.

“Why—how now!” exclaimed Maviyo angrily—too angrily for one addressing Tshaka. “How cometh the grass to fall off thee, Thy Majesty?”

“I know not, thou dog,” I replied, “but thou dost forget thyself to address me in such a tone. Place me upon the ground,” I went on quickly, still feigning the King’s voice, and, the fools, ever responsive to the royal commands, laid me, a little too roughly perhaps, on the side of the hill.

In an instant I drew myself out of the grass—no snake ever shed its skin more cleverly, my father—and before the two villains could well guess what had happened, I had bounded away with a speed which, assisted by the darkness, soon placed me beyond their reach. And as I flew down the hill I yet had time to laugh quietly at their discomfiture.

“Had the King,” I asked myself as I ran, “done

as he had said, and ordered the Amazembe regiment to surround the hill?"

And down, down, I rushed like a hunted antelope. "Had there been time enough to do so? Perhaps not." I cursed myself for bringing matters so soon to a head. "Why had I not waited, even a few moments longer?" I was now nearing the bottom when a voice, which in an instant I recognised as that of a captain of my beloved regiment, rang out.

"Ho there! Who art thou?"

"'Tis I, Watala, of thy regiment, O Captain," I replied, advancing quickly towards the figure looming darkly ten paces before me.

"What dost thou here?" he asked in astonished surprise.

"I am here on the King's business, as indeed, I know thou art too," I answered, and then, the fading moon shining upon the little weapon in my hand, the Captain gave a start.

"Be that the Royal spear in thy hand, Watala?"

"Even so, O Captain, but," I went on quickly, "do the Amazembe now completely surround the hill?"

"Yes—but what knowest thou of this matter, Watala?"

"Nay, now ask me not," I replied, "the King's business may not be talked of. But, O Captain, I do not see the men—the Amazembe——"

"They do but wait my signal to advance—fifty paces behind."

"Haul!" I exclaimed, "the King is indeed a man of action."

A moment later the Captain passed the word to ascend and slowly and silently, shoulder to shoulder, the living circle mounted the hill.

Half-way to the top we caught them, huddled together in the grass, and securely binding them we brought them to the Royal Kraal. The sun was rising as we entered the outer gate, and a silence fell upon us all, for we knew that these two, so high in rank, had done something to displease the King, else why arrest them thus? Ah, my father, although none but I knew the cause of their disgrace, all felt that the Councillors' end was near.

We halted on the parade ground and awaited the coming of the King, but we had not long to wait, for, presently, there was a general stiffening in the ranks as the whisper went round "The Black One approaches."

Yes, there he came—a King indeed—the greatest of all time, and as he paused ten paces off we gave, with one tumultuous roar, the royal salute, "*Bayete!*" and a moment later the Amazansi regiment, which had been waiting two spears' throw away, joined our ranks, and as they did so they, too, shouted "*Bayete!*"

For a few moments the King's eyes flashed imperiously upon us and then he spoke, his voice trembling with emotion:

"Ye have given me the royal salute, and yet am I indeed a King? Ye fools! Ye children!" he snarled with rage. "I am no King, nor yet even a man, but a mere dog—a thing to be tied up and carried away in a bundle of thatching grass and

murdered in cold blood by my two most trusted Councillors!"

Angry mutterings greeted the King's words as men began to realise, now for the first time, something of what had been afoot.

"Is such an end worthy of a King—your King—the King of Zululand?" he asked, with heavy emphasis, but no one spoke a word; each of the two thousand men stood in rigid awe, my father, and the rustling of the plumes upon the warriors' heads seemed to accentuate the silence which none dared break. Clearly the King was beside himself with fury.

"Answer me, ye dogs!" he went on, rigid with passion. "Why stand ye gaping there? Should such have been Tshaka's end?"

"Nay, O King!" we all roared at once, and the earth shook and the hills echoed again with the horror-stricken denial.

"Ha!" His Majesty jerked out. "And yet, such would have been my end but for the loyalty of a trusty captain who, to save my life, hath already died the death intended for me."

I gave a sudden movement of fear—I had forgotten! Did His Majesty then think that I had indeed been slain in his stead? In my nervousness the little weapon in my hand struck against the spear blade of the warrior next to me and the King, hearing the sound, turned instantly in my direction, his face ablaze with wrath.

"Let the clumsy dog stand forth that made that unseemly noise," he commanded, and as I flung myself at his feet, still grasping the little spear, it

flashed to my mind that men had, before now, died for clumsiness on parade.

"What—how now!" exclaimed the King. "Arise, thou dog, and face thy doom like a man—not grovelling on the ground."

Taunted by the words I rose slowly and with dignity to my feet and stood facing His Majesty, pointing the little weapon at my heart in token of my loyalty, and he, recognising first the weapon and then myself, became at once a changed man. The fury in his face of a moment before vanished, and his features became wreathed in a smile more friendly and more kindly than it had ever worn before—at least, so I was told afterwards by those who knew.

"'Tis the Watala youth himself! By my mother, it is!" and then, addressing me more directly, "Art thou not he who, but now, might have tasted death so that Tshaka might live?"

"I am, O Mighty One," I answered, and then, lest too much store might be laid by what I had done, I added quickly, "But, Noble Majesty, every man before thee here would do as much and more an hundred times so it be no danger cometh to our beloved King." But the King was not looking at me now—his eyes were bent on the sea of faces before him.

"Know ye all," he said, "that this day Watala here, of the Amazembe regiment, hath saved Tshaka's life, and that but for him, and him alone, and at the greatest peril to himself—indeed, I told ye but now I thought him slain—I should ere this have breathed my last. Know ye, I say, that

this Watala hath brought the plot against my life to naught and——” “*Bayete!*” two thousand throats at once interrupted in spontaneous gratitude——“and instead of mourning over my grave this day ye are to rejoice, not alone because I do yet live, but because this same Watala, whom henceforth we shall name ‘The Deliverer,’ is risen now from the rank of captain to that of Councillor.”

“*Bayete!*” roared the multitude again at this special mark of favour.

“Sing, men, sing—sing,” His Majesty shouted, “the war-song of the Amazembe in honour of this valiant youth!” and then, where all had so lately been still as death, there rose on the morning breeze the chanting of the war-song of my own far-famed regiment, accompanied by the mighty tramp and thud of four thousand feet.

Stricken dumb, overwhelmed—nay, my very senses numbed—I could do naught but stare foolishly at the ground before me, but with a thrill of surging joy within me such as I had never experienced before. Ah, my father, that was the proudest day of my life!

At last, with a triumphant roar, the song ceased and all was still again—still as before.

“Come hither, Watala, ‘The Deliverer’—stand next to me and guard my person with the little royal spear.”

Half dazed, and yet not unmindful of the dignity now required of my newly exalted rank, I stationed myself a little to the left of, and just behind, the King, and I had barely done so when the tragedy of the day went on again. Thus it is

that joy and sorrow ever go hand in hand, my father.

"Bring the traitors forth," Tshaka commanded, and Maviyo and Mfula—the dogs—were thrust before him. They showed no sign of fear; they were prepared to meet their death like men; resigned and calm they stood before their terrible judge, their heads bent upon their chests.

"What have ye to say, ye doubly treacherous men? Have I not ever treated ye with kindness—trusted ye and showered wealth and honour on ye? Wherefore, then, do ye thus turn upon me and seek to slay me like a jackal in the night? Have ye forgotten that the tree that gives us shelter may not be defiled, and do ye dare to cut that tree down at its very roots? What have ye to say, ye dogs?"

"For my part," replied Maviyo, "I have naught to say, but, O King, it was I and not Mfula here who designed upon thy life and——"

"Nay, O Black One," interrupted Mfula, "Maviyo doth but excuse me for friendship's sake. I, with him, am equally guilty of this mad folly."

"Are ye then great friends?" demanded His Majesty.

"None can be greater, O King," began Mfula. "From our youth have we ever lived together; side by side we have fought and shared each other's joys; his sorrows are mine and mine are his; death to him also killeth me, and when we die we shall, it seems, fill a common grave."

"Enough!" said the King. "Ye both admit your guilt and ye shall both die," and the lion glared with righteous anger at the wretches, then paused,

as though to form a plan, and next moment, his resolution made, he commanded the regiments to form themselves into one great circle, the doomed men in the centre.

Like magic the ring was made, but I moved not from beside the King.

“Loose them of their bonds.” In a moment it was done in a silence that each instant became more oppressive.

“Give them each a spear—the short stabbing-spear,” came the King’s voice, and when this was done, “Now, ye two so great in friendship with each other, and yet so treacherously inclined towards your King, ye are to die, the one by the other’s hand, or each by his own. Be quick, lest I change my mind and put ye to the torture of the stake!”¹

But the two men who at first had tightly gripped their spears in anticipation of some struggle close at hand, now held them loosely, their arms hanging limply at their sides, and their eyes staring vacantly before them.

“Strike, Mfula,” said Maviyo presently, “plunge thy spear quick and deep into me here,” pointing to his left breast. “’Tis I who have brought thee to this thing, friend.”

“Nay, my brother,” replied Mfula, his face grey and strained. “I cannot do it. Do thou slay me first, and then thyself—thou wert ever the braver.”

“Why stand ye there and do not as I bid?”

¹ A form of torture too gruesome and too terrible in its effect to give in detail here. Without a doubt it was the most feared of all the King’s cruel forms of punishment.

broke in the King, his lips now parted in a cruel smile.

"Slay us, O Mighty Elephant," Maviyo implored, "for we cannot do this killing ourselves; our blood be cold within us—our muscles refuse to move."

"And yet," sneered the King, "ye would have slain me in cold blood. Do as I have commanded," he went on savagely, taking a step forward. "Here, captain of the Amazansi, see that two stakes be sharpened forthwith, and if these two dogs be not dead by thy return, then the stake shall it be and no mercy shall we show. Quick! quick! The stakes!"

"Come, brother!" Mfula pleaded again.

"Nay, Mfula, do thou strike the first blow!"

"My friend—my lifelong friend, I cannot! Prod me once below the heart"—he shuddered—"and I will then have less compunction in giving thee a thrust—in friendship's cause, Maviyo, 'twill not be done in anger, friend—remember that."

"Here come the stakes! Strike, man! Strike quick before it be too late!" And just then there was a gap in the ring of warriors and the captain appeared, a sharpened stake in each hand.

"Seize them! seize them! The curs!" His Majesty shouted, "and put them to stake." But Mfula, holding his spear well down close to the blade with both hands, gave himself a mighty upward thrust through the heart and, with a groan, fell to the ground, dead. Those who had been commanded to seize the doomed men paused—irresolute—ten paces off. Maviyo turned and faced the

King, his face livid with horror at his friend's death and with fear at his own approaching end. I detected an evil look in his eyes and instinctively moved closer to the King. It was well that I did, for the next moment there was a flash, and then a thud as I caught the treacherous dog's well-aimed spear upon the fleshy part of my right forearm, which I had thrust—none too soon—in front of His Majesty, else Tshaka would have breathed his last that day, my father.

“Kill him! kill him! The torture! the torture!” two thousand voices yelled at once, but the King, trembling at his narrow escape, said calmly, if a little shakily:

“Silence! ’Twill not be stake now—I will devise some other means. Take him, guard, and keep him safe—ye cannot keep him safe enough—till I have formed my plan.”

But as they laid hold roughly of Maviyo he sank slowly to the ground in a heap, and those who held him—thinking he was limp from fear—half dragged, half carried him along a few paces. But his black heart had ceased to beat, my father—he was dead.

Slowly, and not without causing great pain, the King himself plucked the spear from my arm, and in further token of his gratitude, and with a kindly smile, made me a present of it, and from that day to this I have ever carried it with me, a cold and lifeless, but none the less a good witness of my story, my father.

HOW I WON MY WIFE

You have remarked, my father, that in those tales which I have told you I have not yet made mention of being married, and that it would be passing strange that a man of my position, fine appearance and manly bearing, should not take to a wife at least one of the many women who must have been willing—nay, eager, to call me husband.

Women, though as necessary to our domestic happiness as with you, the white people, are but seldom taken into the confidences of their men folk; and therefore they rarely played any part in the adventures of a Zulu warrior.

If, however, my tales do not weary you, I will now tell you one in which a woman did play some part.

I should mention first that, having become Councillor, it was to be expected that my dignity, loyalty and natural abilities speedily gained for me the confidence and respect of the King. Indeed, I soon rose to be second only to His Majesty both in power and importance; but promotion, however much it may be merited, is ever the envy of those who have been passed over, and in my upward flight there were at least one or two who, left behind, bore me ill will and who would have been glad even to see me breathe my last.

At the time of which I speak, those who really envied me on this account could have been counted upon the fingers of one hand, and, as I shall tell you, their jealousy and hatred developed into the blackest treachery.

Now, my promotion was due at first to a straightforward desire by the King to reward me for my zeal and loyalty. Then, as I became more influential, it was because he, in some sense, partly feared me. It was the first sign I noticed of his loss of personal courage.

Now, when I had climbed but half-way up the tree of rank and fame I met, for the first time, a beautiful girl named Nomusa. She was her father's only child, and her mother had long since died. It was about this time that His Majesty was in two minds as to whether to like or fear me more, and it seemed that fear would gain the day. Fear of those of high rank was not unnatural under the conditions under which we lived. The King—often unjustly, as in my case—looked with disfavour upon any marked increase in power and popularity of his Councillors, and more than once "gave them a rest"—the longest rest of all.

But I had fallen in love with Nomusa, and I shame not to admit that loyalty to the King was not so often the burden of my thoughts as were the beautiful face and loving words of Sitole's daughter. Love and youth ever go hand in hand, but close upon their heels there follows foolishness, and I, Watala, made no exception to the rule, for I clung to all three—love, youth, and foolishness, during those days of tender happiness.

I still, indeed, performed my yet new duties as Councillor, but my thoughts would ever wander to the girl I loved, and the King more than once detected my absent-mindedness, and put it down to some dark plotting in my mind against him; and

this, my father, nearly brought about my death.

At length I made bold to ask the King if I could marry the maid, for it was the law of the land that none could marry without the King's express permission.

It was in the Council Chamber that I touched upon the subject, but the two Councillors, Kotama and Mafolo, both of whom were evilly disposed towards me, raised obstacles—but what are obstacles to the call of the heart, my father?

"How so," said the King in surprise when I made my request, "thou art still a young man, and thoughts of marriage should not enter thy mind yet awhile. Hast thou forgotten, too, that although it is my pleasure to make exceptions, the general rule is that permission be not given to individuals but to whole regiments at a time, and as yet it is not my will to give that permission to thy regiment. What sayest thou, Watala?"

"My lord," I replied, "my heart doth yearn for the maid and I could not but make my request. 'Tis for thee, O King, to express thy wish and it shall be carried out in this as in all matters."

"Hast thou done aught to earn this mark of royal favour, Watala?" and then, before I could answer, the King went on, "What thinkest thou, Mafolo—should we make an exception?"

"The King knoweth best," replied Mafolo, "but if my word be of any weight, I would say grant not this boon until Watala hath won his wife as we have won ours. Kotama, here, and I faced many a bloody battle and passed through countless dangers before we were allowed to wed, and wherefore

should Watala who, save for a little early training in the field, hath ever basked here in thy royal sunshine—wherefore, I say, should he be granted this boon?"

I did not so much as look at Mafolo who clearly wished to hurt my heart since he dared not attack my person.

"Reply to that," said the King, turning sharply towards me.

"The Councillor is easily answered," I began. "The saying is well known that *indlovu idhla aba sondezeli*,¹ and if, as Mafolo hath said, I have ever basked in the sunshine of the presence of the Royal Elephant, even so must I ever have been nearest the greatest danger of all. 'Tis an easy matter, O Mafolo, to fight in battle and to magnify the dangers of the field, but, for all that, where the greatest honour is there doth the greatest danger lie, and who can say that the greatest honour is on the battle-field and not at Tshaka's side? Nay, O Councillor, all men fear Tshaka, but 'tis only cowards that fear battle."

"Enough," said the King, who ever liked to hear that men feared him, "I'll think the matter over and do thou, Watala, be prepared two days hence to receive my final commands."

As I left the great Chamber I sought Mafolo's face, and I did not like the look there, but I soon forgot about the incident for I was in love and had forgotten even the King himself when, a few moments later, I was in the presence of her I loved.

¹ He who is nearest the elephant is the most easily crushed to death.

My anxiety to bring matters to a head was great, but to Nomusa and her father I said nothing and so, two days later, I walked with feverish haste to hear the King's decision. He might, I knew, bid me take command of my regiment again and by distinguishing myself in the field thus give me a chance of winning my bride as others had done, but I cared not so long as I married Nomusa.

I entered the Chamber and found all the Councillors assembled there.

"I have summoned a special meeting of the Council," His Majesty began, "to advise me on the matter of thy taking a bride, Watala, and though the granting of the boon is in my hands alone yet, for this once, and in honour of thy rank, I will leave the matter entirely in the hands of the Council. Art thou satisfied, O son of Solwandhle?" As the King spoke he smiled, and at that smile my heart beat more quickly for it ever portended danger near at hand.

"As ever, O King," I replied, "thou art just; to the Council, guided by thy royal wisdom, I plead permission to marry this girl."

"Good," continued Tshaka. "Now as thou knowest Mafolo did oppose thy request two days since, and he will therefore say what he hath to say before the whole Council," and then Mafolo spoke the same words that he had spoken before and concluded by saying, "But, O Councillors, His Majesty hath left the matter to us to decide and 'tis our duty to uphold the laws of the land and therefore do I call upon one and all of ye to give judgment against Watala."

The Councillors moved uneasily as Mafolo stopped, for even those who envied my promotion did not wish to attack me in this way.

"Thou speakest well, Mafolo," said the King at once, then turning to the others, "What doth the rest of the Council say?"

Now it was clear from this what the King wished, and I knew that whatever talk might follow the decision would be against me.

"I agree with Mafolo," said Kotama, and his eyes sought the ground, but none other spoke a word—they dared not oppose the King, nor did I blame those who were my friends for their silence.

"Now," said the King—and the readiness with which he spoke told me that he had a well-formed plan in mind—"there be only one matter left to decide—in what manner is Watala to win his bride? He is one of my trusted Councillors (I smiled inwardly at the empty flattery) and therefore I cannot spare him from the Royal Kraal; so he cannot win her by deeds in battle. Tell me, O Councillors, how shall he win his wife?"

Mafolo replied in an instant—he too, had a ready formed plan.

"'Tis valour and strength," he said, "that hath ever been required of those who would be allowed to marry, and since, as His Majesty doth wisely hold, Watala cannot be spared from the Royal Kraal" (I smiled again—outwardly this time) "he would sooner, and with more dignity, win his bride here."

"And how should he do it?" softly interposed the King.

"Well," said Mafolo, warming to his well-learned task, "as we in battle have often faced foes three times our number, let Watala, singlehanded, do battle with three warriors and by slaying them win his bride."

"A good plan," interjected Kotama.

"What sayest thou, Watala?" the King asked me.

"My lord," I replied quietly, "if the warriors be such as this man Mafolo, 'twill be a pleasure to meet six such, but if they be of the same heart and sinew to be found in the Amazembe, my own regiment, then three will be more than a match for me, O King."

"Parry that thrust, lest I make Watala prove his words," said the King, but Mafolo was known by all to have a hasty temper and he was apt, as such men are, to say upon the moment that which he would afterwards regret, and therefore none was surprised when he answered with heat, in short jerky sentences:

"This man, O King, is a fool. A single man of my regiment, the Amatambo, is more than a match for any two of his. If it be thy will, O Great One, I'll prove my words. When I suggested putting three men against him I meant common warriors not such as are to be found in the Amatambo."

"'Twas my mistake, O King," I said. "I thought he meant men such as he."

"Silence, both!" commanded the King. "This is no place for petty squabbles. Mafolo is right—my warriors are often outnumbered three to one and the test he hath suggested is a good one, therefore, Watala, shalt thou alone face three men. The

manner and place of the contest will be told thee at noon to-morrow. Now get ye gone—all of ye."

The next day at noon I was again in the presence of the King and all the Councillors in the Council Chamber as before.

"My decision is this," began the King at once: "To win thy bride thou shalt fling three men, one after the other, down the precipice which can be seen from the door of this Chamber. If thou dost fail, thou shalt thyself be hurled to thy death. Two of these men I have myself selected; they are men who but now would be dead but whom I have saved from the hands of the executioners with the promise that if either throws thee over his life will be spared. Mafolo, here, would have me choose all three but it is only fair that thou shouldst choose the third. Choose, therefore, Watala, who shall be the third?"

"Any man in thy Kingdom, O King?" I asked.

"Even as thou dost wish," replied His Majesty. Mafolo moved uneasily.

"I will choose him who sits yonder—Mafolo the Councillor," I answered, and at that instant the villain was stricken with a sudden fear which turned his cheeks a yellowish grey, and caused the sweat to form in beads upon his forehead.

"Good," said the King, and I wondered at the alacrity with which he had met my proposal—"Let five regiments be assembled at the top of the precipice five days hence." And saluting we one by one left the Chamber.

I made known to Nomusa what was afoot and she, poor girl, was broken-hearted, and so, indeed,



"... it be necessary for our purpose that thou be securely bound." Page 59

was I; but tears and gloomy thoughts would do no good I told her, and soon we became more cheerful and faced the position bravely as all should at times such as these. But anger towards the King for putting me to such a test as this soon cast all other feelings from me, for although I knew that none was stronger than I, and that I would doubtless come safely through the ordeal, the King, I felt, had not the same confidence in my powers as I had myself, and that this so-called test was but a ruse to get rid of me. Clearly the King feared me and wished to send me to that long, long rest, and purposed doing it in this manner.

At length the eventful day arrived, and bidding Nomusa good-bye and keep a brave heart, I left the Royal Kraal and reached the appointed place at noon.

Now the drop from the top to the bottom of the precipice was unbroken save for some small shrubs and a tree here and there which found a precarious foothold in the fissures of the rock. Away down below were strewn a thousand boulders and fragments of broken stone. I shivered as with cold and left the place, and walked to where the five regiments had taken up their stand. As I passed down the ranks men addressed me cheerfully, saying: "Thou'lt not fail, Watala," "'Tis child's play to thee, O son of Solwandhle," but suddenly I paused for there, standing erect—every unit as fine a specimen of manhood as you could wish to see—were the men of my own, the Amazembe regiment. I can see them there in the fire-place before me, my father, every man of them, smiling at me—the smile of confidence and courage which they wore

even in the hottest time of battle, nay, even in death, with a spear-blade through their hearts. Suddenly these warriors, each one of them a hero, burst out with the regimental war-song which I had myself composed. I stopped and gravely cast my eyes to the ground, and as the music rose and fell a strange tightness seized me in the throat, and—why, I know not—I was at that moment the proudest man in Zululand.

Some words were necessary to acknowledge this tribute of respect, so I drew myself up and thus addressed the men:

“Men of the Amazembe, my heart is too full to say much, yet, were it my last breath, I would thank you. I fight to-day not only for a wife but for the honour of our regiment, for know ye the dog Mafolo hath said in public to the King that one man of his regiment is more than a match for any two of ours. If I do not make this braggart eat his words by sending him to his death I charge ye solemnly not to let him rest until he hath done so, and if perchance I am flung to my death, I adjure ye, as ever, be strong and brave in battle; live only to serve the King, for therein the greatest service—the greatest happiness doth lie. I have spoken,” and bowing my head I walked on slowly to the spot allotted to the King and Councillors.

Presently the King arrived, attended closely by his Councillors, and some three hundred paces behind there followed the two men who had been condemned to death, but who were now to be given a chance to save their lives—at the expense of mine.

As the King reached the appointed place he paused and then said: "Let the Councillor Watala stand forth."

Instantly I stepped before His Majesty, saluting as I did so.

"And Mafolo the Councillor and the other two," again commanded the King, and when that was done he went on addressing the warriors: "Know ye all that Watala here doth seek to win a bride, and that he hath my kingly word that if he can but cast these three men over the precipice yonder he may marry any one he wills. As for ye," he continued pointing to the three men who were to be my foes, "ye know what rewards await ye if ye do hurl Watala to his death. Get ye therefore to the sport, for the sun be sinking fast."

"Which shall try his strength with me first, O King?" I asked.

"Rank must surely take precedence," said the King, "and the Councillor will doubtless wish to have his claims first considered."

"Nay, Thy Majesty," quickly put in Mafolo, "let the two condemned men try first—I will not urge my prior claim."

"Thou cur!" I could not help the sneering insult, "let it be so, and even though thou dost grapple with me under a coward's conditions, I warrant me thy woman's heart will fail thee still. Come," I said, turning to the other two, "which of ye cometh first?"

"I," both answered together.

"Nay, one at a time," I said, but as they could not agree the King made them draw lots, and

immediately the successful one stepped forward to grapple with me.

Now, the edge of the precipice was some fifty paces off and the King ordered the regiments to form a semi-circle, the two ends of which should reach the dizzy edge while the centre should be but thirty paces from it. This done, a spear was stuck into the ground about ten paces from the fearsome fall to mark the starting-place of our struggle. The sun was sinking fast when the King gave the signal.

"Begin!" he said.

I leapt at my man like an infuriated lion, and so unprepared was he for what I did, that he had no chance from the first. I gripped him first by one wrist and as he attempted to free himself I gripped the other one also, and before he had time to recover from his surprise I was almost running with him to the fatal brink. As I got to it I put out all my strength, lifted him bodily, swung him twice round my head, and flung him far out into the yawning space. I recovered my balance and as I watched the helpless wretch rush to his death, he gave one long yell. Three moments later there was a distant thud which told us that he would at least breathe no more.

A murmur of surprise and awe rose up from the regiments. It was all done so quickly, my father, that I, too, was surprised. So far my strength had not been taxed much, but still I was panting, and so, reserving myself for what was yet to come, I walked slowly towards the spear in the ground.

"Begin!" again commanded Tshaka, and again I

attacked, but I could not grip this man as I had done the other, for he was prepared and, besides, a stronger man. But even so we were presently locked in deadly embrace. Though evenly matched for wrestling I was clearly the stronger. I tried to throw him—indeed, I did twice, but I could not free myself from his desperate grip. Never were two men hugged more tightly together than we were that day—less than five paces from the yawning abyss. Our breathing came in short and painful gasps—the breathing of men who, though not fearing death, do not wish to die. It was a grim struggle, my father, and the pent up excitement of the warriors round us seemed to fill the air we breathed as they pressed forward eagerly until they themselves, it seemed, would unwittingly push us over. And the King, unable to restrain the impulse of the moment, crept unconsciously nearer to us, urging first the one and then the other to do his best.

“’Tis good sport, Mafolo, is it not?” he said, “thou’lt not have much trouble with Watala. See, even now his strength doth fail.” The words struck me as a blow. Die by the hands of Mafolo? Never! And with one great effort I freed myself from my enemy’s hold. For a moment we stood glaring at each other, and then, turning quickly I ran as though to flee. A shout of horrified surprise rent the air, and the man, thinking I was really afraid of him, rushed foolishly after me, with a triumphant shout. The fool! He was not over careful and, before he could well stop himself, I was upon my hands and knees and he fell heavily

over me. Like a flash I was up, and seizing him by both ankles, I jerked him quickly to the edge of the cliff and rolled him over as easily as one dislodges a stone upon the side of a hill.

I have ever blamed myself for the manner in which I sent the man to his death, my father, and although he was my mortal foe, still, it hath always been my pride to take no mean advantage over my enemy. Ah, well, I did it, and there is an end of the matter.

Once more a surprised shout came from the warriors, and once more I walked slowly back to the spear regaining my breath as I went. The sun was set as I took up my stand once more, ready for the next and last of my foes—the dog Mafolo. He was not over eager to meet me for he was in earnest conversation with the King, and presently I saw that His Majesty was put out for his voice was raised in anger.

“Thou cur,” he was saying, “I’ll not listen to thy craven pleadings, and ’twill please me much to see thee hurled to thy death, for thou art no longer worthy to live. Come, begin!”

It was just at that time when objects begin to become indistinct, and I knew that if the struggle was long, it would be difficult to keep the precipice in view. I had no stomach for such fighting, but the King had spoken and so, having recovered my breath, I bade Mafolo prepare.

Now up to that moment he had been wearing a kaross, but now he flung the covering off and rushed at me.

My father, as we closed, horror, then dismay,

seized me, as I found that the villain was smeared from head to foot with fat, and that while he could get a good grip of me I could not do the same with him. In an instant he had me firmly by the middle and held me with the madness of a frenzied cur, and before I had well realised it we were struggling but three paces from the fatal edge. The King and Councillors—nay, every man assembled there—followed us with craned heads and straining eyes until they were within a spear's length of us. I knew that if I was caught unawares the dog would slip from my grasp and before I could recover would push me to that frightful crushing death. The thought of Nomusa came to me at that moment, it put new resolve into me and I redoubled my energies.

In the quickly falling darkness the warriors were crowding round us—I could hear their breathing coming almost as frantically as our own—once I saw the King's face and its look of gloating delight was horrible to behold. It was that look that whipped new life into me: "What! Are we so near death as that?" the words formed themselves between my clenched teeth as I saw, but a pace before me, the yawning space. In one supreme effort I put forth all my strength and half carried, half pushed the Councillor back six paces from the edge, and then, loosing my hold, I gripped him firmly, madly, as in the fangs of some murderous cat, by the windpipe—there, the spirits be praised, my fingers *did* have a firm hold—clutching it, with a world of despair, till the nails of my fingers met. Ah, that was a terrible grip indeed, my father,

such a grip as none may experience and live to tell the tale. He made no sound. The muscles and sinews in my right arm stood out in unnatural knots, never relaxing an instant as I choked the life out of the doomed Councillor who, clutching convulsively at first, presently became limp, save for one spasmodic jerk and then hung loosely in my iron grip. My father, Mafolo was dead. The darkness favoured me, and before the people had noticed what had happened I had dragged the corpse to the edge making it appear as much as possible that we still fought. The men pressed closer still, led by the King, when presently, to the right there came a piercing yell as one, more excited than the rest, had stepped too far and fallen into the black abyss below.

“Hurl him now—now thou hast him at thy mercy!” “Slay the traitor!” the men were shouting, unable to control their feelings, and then, lifting the dead man, I heaved him with all my might into the blackness at my feet, and as I did so—No! Great Spirits of the Dead! There came a violent tug at my waist, and—ah! By the Spirits! I had fallen over too!

As we disappeared over the edge five thousand throats gave one tumultuous yell. That much I know, for the rest—darkness.



When I came to my senses again the moon had risen, and I could see clearly where I was and what had happened. In flinging Mafolo over the cliff an

iron bracelet, which he wore upon his wrist, became entangled in the hide thong which bound my loin covering on, and thus Mafolo dragged me after him. Our fall had been broken by a tree in the branches of which I found myself when I recovered consciousness.

First I freed myself of the dead body, which fell with a distant thud upon the rocks below, and then, bruised and not a little hurt, I slid down to the ledge of rock upon which the tree grew.

Now, it is not surprising that there, in the moonlight, my thoughts should have become weird and unreal. They turned to the King and the test he had put me to, and it seemed that he was not over anxious that I should come out of the trial victorious. 'Twas true he knew that none could match me in feats of strength, but would he be pleased to see me alive and well again? Of a surety, no! 'Twas true, too, that Mafolo had, in particular, influenced the King against me, but he—well—he was sleeping peacefully enough now and would not cross my path again.

I liked not the look of things, for ponder as I would upon the events of the last few days I came to the conclusion that the King wished me dead, and I had escaped one death to meet it in some other and perhaps more fearful form before many days were past. Anger burned within me at the thought, and I resolved that I should yet find a way not only to keep my skin whole but to convince His Majesty both of my loyalty and worth to him.

It is at such moments as these, my father, that

the mind works quickly and, aided by that pale, grey light which is ever a help to meditation, I formed a plan, and no sooner had I done so than I was startled to hear my name called softly from below.

"Watala, Watala, where art thou, loved one?" and I knew at once that it was Nomusa herself. My heart gave a wild leap, for now would I have someone to assist me in my design.

"O Watala," she went on, "let mine eyes see thee, though dead, but once again," and she fell to sobbing bitterly, and I saw her searching the rocks for my body—but I could stand no more.

"Fear not, sweet girl," I said. "Watala is not dead. Look up the cliff to thy right. See—I wave my hand."

Half-frightened, half-wondering, the girl looked up and seeing me shouted for very joy. In a few words I bade her run to the Royal Kraal for a rope, and returning quickly with it she threw it to me, and a moment later I, by this means, descended to the ground where after holding the girl to my heart for a while I said:

"Now, my loved one, my life is not out of danger yet, but I have a plan by which the King may hold me higher in worth. Quick, child, follow me," and skirting the bottom of the cliff we passed all three of the men I had slain, looking ghastly in the moonlight.

"Now, haste thee, my girl, to thy father's hut, prepare a good fire and have ready for me two broad-bladed spears. Wake thy father and tell him I shall be with you presently. When I come be not

surprised for you will not know me, act quickly and let none see or overhear you speak of this."

"But what——?"

"Nay, girl," I interrupted, "ask no questions. All will go well. Now go and trust thy Watala," and kissing her, I pushed her gently from me and she was soon lost to sight amongst the boulders.

I quickly retraced my steps to where one of the slain warriors lay and taking off my *mutsha* (loin covering), head-dress, oxtails and other ornaments I exchanged them for those he had worn, which I concealed in the long grass hard by. Working with feverish haste I made myself a *mutsha* of leaves and grass, leaving my legs and arms bare. This done, I went to a mountain stream close at hand whose banks were composed of an almost snow white clay and with it I smeared my body, arms, legs, nay, even my head and face, until at last I was whiter even than you are, my father. I know not how I looked, but it might well have been that the bravest man in Zululand would have fled at sight of me that night. A few moments later I struck the path Nomusa had taken up the mountain-side, and reaching the top, ran silently down to the Royal Kraal.

Can you picture me, my father, gliding stealthily along in the moonlight, as ghostlike a vision as ever trod the earth?

Now it was an advantage that Sitole's hut was but ten paces from the main entrance and so, not daring to pass the guard at the gate, I leapt lightly over the stockade and a moment later scratched

at Sitole's door as I had told Nomusa I should do. Nomusa, though somewhat prepared for my disguise, sank with a low moan to the ground.

"Fear not," I said, quickly closing the door behind me; "'tis I, Watala."

In quick whispered sentences I laid bare my plan, and although Sitole shook his head gravely at my words, I paid no heed, for I had taken the matter in hand and would see it through.

A bright fire was burning in the hearth; the two spears were ready and in a moment I had thrust them into the glowing coals, and as I made clear the final details of my plan the finely-polished metal became first red, then white with heat and it was time to complete what I purposed doing.

Taking up one of the heated weapons, I bade Nomusa be ready to hand me the other when I should call for it, and crawling quickly out of the door—closing it immediately behind me—I stalked, as like a ghost as mortal man could do, towards the royal apartments.

Save for the guard at the outer gate and that at the smaller gate which I now approached, the whole Royal Kraal was asleep, and I was also grateful that the night was warm, and thus the weapon in my hand had hardly cooled at all when, still gliding weirdly along, I reached the inner gate where—the spirits still watching over me—only one of the guard was awake.

I laugh now, my father, indeed, I nearly laughed then, when the guard caught sight of me for, without a sound, he fell, terrified by my ghost-like appearance, flat upon his face.

"Move not, speak not," I said in deep, hollow tones, "lest I wither thee with my breath," and I touched him on the naked shoulder with the blade to show him what I meant. Though his flesh sizzled he made no sound—he dared not move or speak. I stepped quickly across his prostrate body and the next instant was at the King's door which, the night being warm, was partly open. In a flash I was within the hut and snatching some thatch from the wall I applied it to the still glowing embers in the hearth and flooded the place with light.

In an instant the King was awake, and the look of terror in his face as he beheld my white body—doubly weird in the flickering light, will live with me to my grave, my father; but there was no time to be lost and thus I acted my ghostly part.

"Come thou, Tshaka, 'tis I, King of the Spirit World—a greater King than thou. Follow me, O Black One. Quick! quick! lest I wither thee with my breath" (I liked that phrase, my father).

"Depart, Evil One—I am not the King," said His Majesty—his body shaking in pitiful fear, his eyes starting from his head.

"Come!" I commanded again. "See, I touch thee and thou'lt follow quickly enough," and as I spoke I touched the royal leg with the spear which was still quite hot enough to hurt most painfully.

"I come, I come," said the King, rising weakly to his feet.

"Nay, no marks of royalty shalt thou bear," I said as he made to put on his kaross, "for now it is I who am King. Come, go before, I follow close." And in less time than it takes to tell I, Watala,

had the King of Zululand shuffling heavily before me. The guard had half risen from the ground, but at sight of me he quickly fell upon his face again.

"To the outer gate," I commanded, and the King, not daring to look behind, shuffled quickly on. Presently we reached Sitole's hut, and in an instant I had called for the second spear which Nomusa had ready for me.

As we approached the outer gate the guards saw us both.

"See," said one of them, "there is one of the evil spirits of which I was telling thee a short time since. Make room, brothers, and let the Evil One and his victim pass."

For a moment the King half paused as though he would appeal to the guard, but I touched him with the freshly-heated weapon and he almost leapt through the gate.

To the mountain path which leads to the bottom of the cliff and on, on, the mighty Tshaka trotted as gaily as any hound might do in front of his master.

Down, down, we went in a silence broken only by the King's unusual gasps for breath, and when at last we reached the bottom I bade him skirt the cliff and then, His Majesty wellnigh exhausted, we came suddenly upon the warrior dressed up in my things.

"Stop! Who be that?" I asked with stern emphasis, pointing to the now stiff body at our feet.

"'Tis Watala," unhesitatingly replied Tshaka.

"What doth he here?" I asked in my accusing ghostlike voice.

"He was killed in fair fight, O King," he answered.

"What," I said, the King stepping back at the anger in my voice, "be it fair fight to match one against three? Hearken, O Tshaka, even as thou didst plan to have him killed, nay, murdered, so shalt thou now plan to give him life, else thou shalt die here—a terrible bloody death. On thy knees, thou dog! Quick! quick! lest I scorch thy black heart out with my breath."

The King sank upon his knees, facing me.

"Nay, kneel not to me," I said, "but to that great man whom thou hast done to death. Kneel over him, I say, and speak these words thrice in his ear, say, 'Arise, Watala—live again, O son of Solwandhle, never more shall I seek to slay thee.'"

And then the King, with horror in every line of his body, spoke those words thrice into the dead warrior's ears.

"Now," I said, when he had finished, "stoop down well over his mouth, thy lips upon his, and breathe three times—three long, life-giving breaths into his mouth."

"Nay, not that—not that," croaked the King, for none dreaded touching the dead more than he.

"Thou shalt do even as I have commanded," I said with stern and ghostlike severity, and twice he tried, but could not bring himself to it. "Fail once again," I said, "and thou shalt die even upon his body here," and I took a step forward, my spear held threateningly above his back.

There was nothing else for it, my father, and

at last he did what I had ordered him to do. "Now," I went on; "thy task is done, and thy most trusted Councillor will come to life at the rising of the sun. Haste thee, therefore, back to the Royal Kraal, and if thou art not there by the time I count two hundred slowly, I shall fall upon thee from above, and then— Begone! Begone!" and the King lumbered off. As he did so I started counting, "One, two three."

When his retreating footsteps had died away I dressed the dead warrior in his own equipment again, and having washed every particle of the white clay from my body, I dressed myself, and sitting on a boulder, waited for the dawn to come. When at last the sun began to show his face I walked slowly up the mountain path and on to the Royal Kraal.

All marvelled at my "coming back to life," but the King's word had gone forth that no one was to question me on that matter.

And His Majesty? Well—he would not see me that day, saying that he had had a bad night, but the next day I was summoned to his presence.

"Watala," he said, "it doth me good to see thee here, and to know that although thou hadst a mighty fall, thou didst not perish. Since thou hast come out of the ordeal I set thee, with both honour and safety, thou hast indeed won thy bride. Nay, more than that, O Son of Solwandhle, for the Spirits have told me that thy life is valuable to me, the King. Here, Mpofana," he went on suddenly, and a moment later the Councillor entered—he who had charge of the royal herds—"let one

hundred beasts be chosen from my white herd—the best, mark thou—and hand them over to Watala here,” and as Mpfofana left to carry out the King’s command, His Majesty shouted after him, “and do thou, Mpfofana, give orders to the captains of ten regiments to assemble with their warriors at the dancing place to-morrow, for I would have them attend Watala’s wedding, and especially do I wish the Amazembe to be present—give them the place of honour at the wedding feast, Mpfofana.”

“*Bayete!*” answered Mpfofana from without.

The next day, my father, I was married to Nomusa, with great feastings—a magnificent wedding, and the only incident to mar that happy day was Sitole’s drunkenness; for before the ceremony was half-way through he was found lying, a drunken, senseless heap, under a thorn-tree.

I forgave him, however, for his condition was doubtless due to the great joy he felt at having me for a son-in-law, my father.

THE KING SEEKS TO HAVE ME "REMOVED"

My father must not think that, having once become a Councillor, I lived a life of ease and luxury.

It is true I did not go out on fighting expeditions, and that the high rank I held rendered it less likely that I should be "smelt out" or incur those other risks which so often had to be faced by the commoner people, but still, as we Zulus say, "the elephant crushes those nearest him," and being in such close and constant attendance upon His Majesty I was ever near at hand to receive the full force of his displeasure.

Now, the practice of "smelling out" to which I have just referred was one which was often adopted by the King when it was his desire to "remove" people (not, indeed, that he was ever at a loss for an excuse to send men to their death) with some semblance of trial—some show of justice.

It was his custom on these occasions to make the ceremony as impressive as possible by assembling the regiments in full war dress and by calling upon some witchdoctor to exercise his supernatural powers in searching the hearts of those present and smelling out the ones who were ill-disposed to the throne.

Those smelt out were doomed.

It was a convenient method of ridding the country of evildoers, and men came in time to place implicit faith in the wisdom and justice of the Witchdoctor's findings. "For," they said, "he cannot lie—his are supernatural powers; he knows all—he is right—he is always right; kill them—

kill the evildoers, tear them in pieces, for the Great One, the Witchdoctor, hath found them guilty."

But those who were in close touch with the King knew that in some cases, at least, witchcraft and the workings of some supernatural power were not alone responsible for the bloody deaths to which the victims were sent. But we held our peace. Who were we to question the King's wisdom in such matters, and, if we did so, would we not taste the executioner's spear before the sun had set? And so, I say, we held our peace.

Now at this time I had noticed that the King had not of late shown me so much favour as of old. This was the more alarming since I had come to be very closely attached to His Majesty and he, I thought, to me. Many a time did he consult me alone on weighty matters of State; it was I who was always entrusted with important negotiations with neighbouring tribes; it was I who ever sat next to His Majesty at the Council meetings, and whenever he was ill, it was "Bring 'The Deliverer' to me, ye dogs. Can ye not see that I am ill? And wherefore is not Watala at my side?" And so, I say, I was not a little perturbed when, in those matters great and small in which my services had ever been requisitioned first, another gave counsel to His Majesty in my stead.

Now, he who had thus supplanted me was the Councillor Mvaga—a designing, crafty man, my father, of whom I had already warned the King.

From the first I felt that it was this man who had poisoned the King's mind against me, and I was,

therefore, not unprepared for the events which I am about to relate; but even so, it never came to mind that this evil man would go so far as to have designs upon my life, but alas! he had, as I shall tell you, my father.

Know, then, that it was part of my duty in those days to partake of all food and drink intended for the King's consumption—a very necessary precaution against the poisoning of His Majesty—and although Mvaga had supplanted me in most offices, I still retained that of official Taster of the royal food.

One day my wife complained to me of much damage done by mice to our food and clothing. She had often complained before, but on this occasion she insisted that something be done to rid us of the vermin. There were two ways of achieving this—either by burning our hut down and building another afresh, or by setting poison. Of the two, the first would occasion much inconvenience, while the other was a highly dangerous course to adopt, not, indeed, lest we ourselves might be poisoned, but because the mere possession of poison by any one in the Royal Kraal was punishable with instant death.

"Poison, my husband, is the quickest, surest way; use it, therefore, I beseech thee without further delay," urged my wife.

"Woman," I said, "dost thou not know the law?"

"I do," she replied, "but the law is made to prevent evil doing, and thou, my lord, could not be guilty of such; besides," she pleaded, plausibly enough, "only a little is required and that will be consumed by the mice."

We were seated outside our hut under the shade of a tree.

"Then poison it shall be," I said decisively.

Now, as I said this, Mvaga the Councillor chanced to be passing within earshot and heard me. I did not know it at the time, I only learnt it after, as I shall tell you, my father.

"Poison it shall be," I repeated, "but before using it I shall, as in duty bound, get the King's permission."

At noon that very day I received an urgent summons to attend the King.

"Greeting, Watala," he said, when I had seated myself and found to my surprise that a number of Councillors were present.

"Greeting to thee, O Royal Elephant," I replied.

"Dost know aught of poison?" asked His Majesty suddenly, his keen eyes fixed searchingly upon me.

"Why, Thy Majesty—yes—no, surely——" I stopped confused, for instinctively I felt that some plot was afoot.

"Yes—no?" the King asked, his eyebrows raised. "But which, Watala—which?"

"Thy Majesty," I replied, "I, like all men, do know something of poison."

"Ha!" exclaimed the King, "and poison it shall be"—I gave a start—"and poison it shall be," repeated the King with measured emphasis. "And for whom shall this poison be, Watala? What man hast thou decided shall die a poisoned death?"

"Nay, O King," I began, but with an angry gesture he interrupted me.

"Thy conversation with thy wife, as thou canst

tell, hath been overheard. Answer me, O Councillor, what hast thou to say? What canst thou—the Taster of the royal food—find to do with poison?”

“It is true, O Great One, that a short time since I spoke to my wife of poison for ridding us of mice in our hut, and——”

“Nay,” interrupted Mvaga, “thou saidst that thou wert tired of the tyrant King, and wouldst rid the people of him, and thou didst conclude by saying, ‘poison it shall be—poison it shall be’—twice.”

“Thou liest!—a black and treacherous lie!” I exclaimed, shaking with anger, my fingers twitching to get at his throat.

“Silence!” commanded the King. “Thou dost admit having said the words ‘Poison it shall be,’ and one who hath special access to the royal food should not use such words. Mvaga here doth swear that thou didst use my name in this connection and thou dost as vehemently protest thy innocence. Enough! Matters such as this can best be settled by the Witchdoctor’s skill, and by him shall judgment be pronounced,” and a moment later we all left the Chamber.

Was this some plot to which the King was privy to connect me in some way with designs upon his life? I did not like the look of things, for my father must remember that I was in bad odour just then, and that—well, that so often led to short quick journeys to the place of killing that, innocent though I was, I felt strangely nervous and disquieted.

Next day the King’s word went forth that there

would be a smelling out at noon, "for the purpose"—so the command went—"of removing from our midst all those who are ill-disposed to the throne."

At the time appointed twenty thousand men assembled on the parade ground, and as we Councillors took our stand close beside the King, the regiments packed in horn formation in front of us, a tension seemed to fill the air like that at the coming of a thunder storm. The warriors—fine specimens of man every one—looked steadily, unflinchingly before them, their teeth set, their bodies motionless, upright, rigid, every line depicting grim determination to face the ordeal before them as became men; for, be it remembered, this was an ordeal for each and every man of that multitude. Death himself, in the person of the Witchdoctor, would be hovering very near them that day; and who, in all that vast concourse, could swear that he would live to see to-morrow's sun?

And I? I felt that my hour had come. Innocent? Yes, but who was I to complain if my master sought to remove me? Had I not fallen into disfavour, and what further use was there for me in the land? Better far to fill an early grave than live a fallen and disgraced man.

He who took the principal part in the ceremony was Zozo, the Witchdoctor—a man whose evil countenance bespoke him for what he was—a loathsome villain whose dark deeds were never mentioned save in awesome whispers.

At the time of which I speak he was about eighty years of age, a tall man once, but now bent double with age and a life of infamy; he assumed

a half-cringing, half-stealthy gait, like the progress of a sick baboon. He had but one eye, while in the socket where the other had been he wore a large white pebble which gave the appearance of an eye bulging from its socket. On his head he wore the bleached skull of a large baboon whose cruel fangs projected weirdly and menacingly. Round his neck was strung a necklace of small bones, claws and teeth, both human and animal. Save for one fang of abnormal length projecting from under his upper lip, he was toothless, his mouth naturally cruel, being made more so by this unnatural growth. As a loin covering he wore many baboon and cat tails, and also goats' horns and small wooden ornaments which clattered noisily with every movement. His hands, ever smeared with the vile concoctions he brewed, were noticeable for their skinny and claw-like fingers.

The sight of this misshapen monster filled one with intense loathing which was increased an hundredfold when he was seen at his smelling-out work, with his high pitched grating voice punctuating, as it were, the death of each victim with a terrible, terrifying emphasis upon the one word "BLOOD!"

I can hear him jerking out that death sentence now—"BLOOD!" "BLOOD!" "BLOOD!"—I shall never forget it, my father.

In his right hand he carried a well-dressed oxtail which, we all knew, would be dipped into the steaming contents of a large clay pot hard by, and then dashed into the face of each victim as he selected him.

Before Zozo made his appearance the King addressed the men, saying that as it seemed a plot was afoot to poison him, "and as," he went on, "methinks there be others too, who are disloyal to me, I have commanded our good friend Zozo here to smell the villains out and send them to their doom."

The still silence of death greeted these words while the King glared savagely round at the steadfast faces before him. "Come forward, O mighty Doctor, thou terror of the evildoer, and do thy work."

With a bound more like that of some wild beast and with an activity incredible in one so old and misshapen, Zozo leapt, from the bowels of the earth, it seemed, high into the air, landing on his hands and knees in front of the King.

"O Mighty One," he began, in his high pitched, screeching voice, as he rose first upon his knees, then to his feet, "O Mighty King, O Great, Great Elephant, that ever trampleth upon those who are a menace to thy Kingdom! O thou Dread Buffalo that doth rigidly gore to death the law breakers in the land! O Father of a mighty nation! O thou noble judge from whom only wisdom and justice can flow! O thou Tshaka, whom the very spirits call King, hearken, O lord!" He paused for a moment, his one eye closed—the stone eye glaring unnaturally—his lean arms and claw-like hands outstretched as though he held communion with the unseen world. All eyes—the eyes of fearful men were transfixed, fascinated, on the man; none dared move, indeed, they could not had they tried, for they were spellbound.

"I shall tear them, I shall rend them—these offenders against the lord, my master!—I shall burn them, I shall torture them, I shall maim them—these disturbers of the royal pleasure! I shall pluck their black hearts from their living bodies—I shall haunt them and kill them! Kill them! Yea, with a thousand deaths shall I slay them!"

He was in a frenzy now, gesticulating wildly, madly, and suddenly his eye opened, and flashed round with a look of indescribable hatred at the helpless regiments, while his toothless mouth began to foam like that of some wounded reptile. Presently he started to dance in his own mad way—stealthy, gliding, snake-like movements, in strange contrast to his ordinary shuffling gait. Backwards and forwards, this side and that he swayed and then—yes—the smelling out had begun, for he was moving now only in one direction—towards the front rank of the nearest regiment. Slower and slower he approached—as a leopard might stalk its prey—the swaying motion unconsciously abandoned in his eager zeal to wound and kill—creeping ever nearer and nearer. The chests of those whom he would pass first were heaving like that of a man ill of fever; he was opposite the first man, but passed him and the next, and the next and then—with a swiftness I can liken to nothing except that of an angry snake—he leapt with a yell of fury at the warrior, striking him, at the same instant, a blinding blow in the face with the oxtail, shrieking as he did so the one word "BLOOD!"

"Ah!" came a muffled murmur from twenty thousand throats.

"Take him away!" roared the King, and disarming the poor fellow, the warriors on either hand led him to the waiting guard.

Again and again the fiend made his terrible leap and each time the victims were taken away to await the King's signal for their destruction, until, at last, a score or so had been smelt out.

I was just wondering when my turn would come—for I felt it must—when, almost before I knew it, the Doctor leapt to my side and struck me as he had the others, yelling, as before, "BLOOD!"

"What!" exclaimed the King with well-feigned surprise, "art thou, Watala, guilty too! Ha! the loyalty of my people must indeed require looking into if such as thou art turned against me. Take him away, executioners, he too shall die."

I dropped my arms to my side—my shield and spears fell noisily to the ground—and gave the royal salute, and as they led me away I knew that none had ever been so loyal as I. When I reached the other doomed men my hands were bound and with them I waited and watched the tragedy of the day go on, barely two hundred paces away.

Towards sunset, when the victims numbered about two score, we were sent for and halted before the King, who thus addressed us:

"Now, ye dogs, what have ye to say before the executioners begin their work?"

Now, being senior in rank, it fell to me to be spokesman for us all.

"My lord and master," I said, "and all of ye who do yet breathe the breath of life, hearken to the words of a dying man. 'Tis hard to believe that

these young men, noble specimens of the flower of the Zulu army, are guilty of, and must die the death for, the blackest of all crimes—treachery towards the King—aye, and such a King! As for me, why, I have naught to say save that my life-long zeal will bear witness for me better than any words from my dying lips. King—King,” I went on, with an emotion which nearly choked me, and looking him earnestly in the face, “let me but assure thee with my last breath that even now, with the executioner’s blade ready to strike, I swerve not even to a hair-breadth from my loyalty to thee—the greatest of all earthly Kings. My master, I go to my death with honour and courage. Farewell, O King—farewell”; and lifting my bound hands above my head I gave the royal salute, “*Bayete!*”—and forced by some sudden impulse, and like a mighty clap of thunder, the assembled regiments saluted too—the condemned men as loudly as any.

“What treason is this, O King?” broke in Zozo. “This man here doth proclaim himself innocent, since he saith he goeth to his death with honour. Torture, not an easy death, is for such a one, and will alone appease the Spirits now.”

“What hast thou to say to that, Watala?” demanded the King.

“A thousand tortures will not make me guilty of treason to the King,” I said.

“Enough,” interrupted His Majesty. “Here, Mvaga, see the prisoners be properly guarded until I have made up my mind as to the manner of their death.”

I knew not what to make of this, for we were

doomed to die that day, and the sun was even now fast disappearing over the hills. Did it mean that the King would devise some special torture for us? I set my teeth but held my peace.

Now it was the custom to make condemned men sleep outside, not in huts, and so that night, securely bound and with a strong guard over us, we slept in the cattle kraal, but the next day a special prison was built for us, consisting of a high stockade of poles driven close together into the ground.

Waiting for death is a rôle which carried with it but little distinction, my father, and therefore it liked me not; and when ten days passed without word of the King's pleasure, I began to feel weak, and less than a man.

It was on the night of this tenth day, at the time of the new moon, I remember, that, feeling my end was very near, my eyelids refused to close, and I lay there in the darkness thinking, ever thinking, not so much of my approaching end as of the exciting adventures of my eventful life. . . . It was the longest night of my life, but at length, shortly before dawn, nature prevailed; my eyelids closed—I fell asleep.

Now at that very instant, it seemed, someone touched me, and, still half-asleep, I moved away thinking one of my fellow-prisoners had rolled against me. I had barely done this when I heard my name whispered, cautiously, twice: "Watala! Watala!" I was upon my elbow in a flash, my head turned to catch the sound again, my pulses throbbing with a hope of—I knew not what.

"Speak no word, Watala," came the muffled

voice again close to and immediately behind me on the other side of the stockade. "Speak no word. It is I, Mapita, who hath come to save thee."

"Mapita? Mapita?" I murmured. "Why, that must be the woman who but three weeks since I helped to marry the man she loved."

Stealthily, and with a hope surging within me which I dared not define, I turned my head slowly round, and there, between the chinks of my prison and against the dawning sky, I saw the dark but unmistakable outline of a woman's form. Her face was pressed close to the poles, and I, too, moved closer still until my ear was but a hand-breadth from her mouth.

"Listen well, Watala," the girl whispered, "for the light of day will soon betray my presence here. I am, thou knowest, in attendance on the Queen-Mother, and whilst His Majesty did converse with her ten days since I learnt that thou wert among those to die; I heard, too, that the King sought some new method by which to have thee and thy comrades slain. It was his purpose, he said, to discuss the matter with Mvaga, and therefore I contrived secretly to overhear the plottings of these two——"

"How, child—how?" I asked. "How couldst thou, a woman, overhear the secret conversation of the mighty Tshaka?"

"No matter how—of that I shall tell thee some other day."

"Too late, Mapita," I answered. "There will be no 'other' days for me now."

"Silence, Watala; hear all I have to say. For

nine days past an army of men hath been digging a tunnel through a hill and have now come through to the other side. In this tunnel there have been dug three pits, so deep, indeed, that one may count six before a pebble dropped from the top can reach the bottom. I have counted, so I know. Now, the King, who thinks that none of ye will know of these holes, will command ye to pass through the place, promising to spare the lives of any who may come through it alive. Ye are to enter at dead of night and reach the other end—if ye can—before the sun rises. It is very dark within, Watala, for I have been there to learn the dangers that face thee, and——”

“Brave child!” I could not help ejaculating; but she stopped me.

“Nay, now, thou must listen most intently.”

Just then my blood ran cold within me, for in the stillness of the dawn there came a strong man’s voice: “O King, I have a wife and child. King—King—must I die?” The girl huddled closer up to the stockade. “He doth but talk in his sleep,” I whispered, to reassure her. “Go on, child—go on.”

“Mark thou well, then, Watala, the position of these pits. The first is one hundred and eighty-six paces from the entrance—I have measured it a score of time when I carried my husband’s food to him, for he was one of those engaged upon the work——”

“Thou thoughtful girl.”

“Twenty-three and a half paces from the edge of the first thou wilt find the second, and from this, with only three paces between them—mark

well the narrowness of it, Watala—is the third hole. All these are as wide as the tunnel itself and can only be negotiated by leaping them. You will have to leap four paces to cover the first, twice that distance for the second, and, like the first, four paces for the last. Now that thou knowest where thy danger lies thou hast a chance to come through the place in safety, and then, O Watala, fly from the country, for the King will never forgive thee for thwarting him in his plan.”

“Vain child,” I said to myself, “to think that I could leap eight paces in the dark and then alight within those narrow limits between the last two holes”; but aloud I said:

“My child, thou hast my deepest gratitude for thus attempting to save my life at the risk of thine own.”

“Nay, now thou canst best thank me by coming through the place in safety,” she replied.

“The dawn breaks; begone, thou noble woman,” I said, as I held and pressed the little hand that had been thrust between the poles to grasp mine in farewell.

“Farewell, thou who hast been the cause of my greatest happiness; farewell, O Watala, and may the Spirits guard thee,” and the next moment she was gone as silently as she came.

My brain was awlirl. A hundred questions thrust themselves upon me all at once. Had the King, then, decided upon this method to send us to our death? Why? It was a terrible enough ending, but was there not some other horror awaiting us in the tunnel of which the girl knew nothing?



"... there was a flush, and then a thud as I caught the treacherous dog's well-aimed spear upon the fleshy part of my right forearm." Page 72

How had so large a tunnel been dug in the short space of ten days? Could I make those tremendous leaps? And if I did make them successfully—yes, if I did—what then? My heart was beating with new life now. Would the King receive me back as Councillor again, or would he devise some other and less merciful manner of "removing" me? Hope and fear alternated within me—the first to be dashed away as soon as formed at the thought of this nameless death from which it seemed there was no hope of escape.

The sun rose, and with it the King's command to prepare for death that day; and, in truth, as the sun was about to set, we were paraded once again before His Majesty, with Mvaga in close attendance.

"On the day when ye were found guilty," the King began, "Watala here pleaded innocence of the crime of disloyalty. With words that touched my tender heart he besought me not so much as think him guilty, but to let him die with his name still untarnished by the infamy for which he stands condemned. But wherefore could this be? Hath not the Doctor found him guilty? And who am I to say that the Spirits have erred? But even so, I shall, in my Kingly mercy, give him and these others a chance to prove their innocence. Know, then," he went on, addressing us directly, "that there is a tunnel through yonder hill"—he pointed with his little spear to a hill on which, as a youth, I had often herded the royal cattle—"which hath been made by the Amazansi regiment. To-night, at the time when Spirits most do walk the earth, ye,

with Watala at your head, shall enter this tunnel, one behind the other, and shall alone walk through it; and any coming through to the other end shall, by so doing, prove themselves guiltless and their lives shall be spared. Any found in the tunnel at the first sign of dawn will be put to death there. And wherefore do I do this? Hearken and I will tell ye. I verily believe that the Spirits which dwell in such-like places will seize and tear to pieces all those who are guilty, leaving the innocent unscathed. This is my justice," he concluded, his eyes blinking round at the assembled multitude.

"Justice!—the King's justice! What greater justice is there than the King's?" answered the people.

"Art thou satisfied, O Watala?" the King asked, looking at me for the first time.

Now, it may seem passing strange to you, my father, that the people were so credulous as to believe this "tearing-to-pieces-by-Spirits" tale as propounded by the King, but it is a fact, difficult, perhaps, of explanation, but frequently proved in those dark days, that the masses would believe any story, however fantastic, that might be told them—especially by one in authority, and particularly when it had to do with the Spirit world—that unseen world of which, even at this enlightened day, we all know so little, my father. For my own part, although I believe that the Spirits of the dead hover around us, I never was one of those to pay much heed to the weird tales one often heard as to their material powers; and so, when His Majesty asked me if I was satisfied with his ruling, I answered unhesitatingly:

"I have ever been satisfied with the wisdom of thy judgments, O King."

"Dost thou still swear to thine innocence?"

"My lord," I replied, "I am as innocent as thou thyself."

"Therefore wilt thou safely come through the place, for, as I have said, the Spirits will not harm the innocent."

I was never more near feeling contempt for the King than I was at that moment, but I replied:

"And if I do pass through with safety, and thus prove my innocence, wilt thou, O Noble One, still call me Councillor?" I asked.

"Surely so—and I give thee my royal word upon it," Tshaka replied.

"Then, my lord, the sun of Watala's day is not yet set, and I shall still live to serve thee with loyalty."

"Now," went on the King, addressing the guard, "hand the prisoners over to the Amazansi regiment. The captain shall thrust them into the tunnel at midnight, the regiment to remain guarding the entrance until sunrise to-morrow."

As we silently moved off, I gave not so much as a glance at the King, who, I felt, was watching me closely as one does a friend he will never see again, and with head erect—never more so—I passed within five paces of him.

"Stay, Watala," the King commanded; and I halted, turned round and faced His Majesty.

"Hast thou no word of farewell?" he asked; but I made no answer. "Hast thou no gratitude for the chance I have given thee?" Still I held my peace.

"Watala," he went on, "thou once didst save my life, and I at least did thank thee—wilt thou not thank me for attempting to save thine? It be not given to me to influence the Spirits in this matter, else would I have done even that for thy sake."

"Wherefore should I bid thee farewell, O King, since, being innocent, I shall surely live to greet thee to-morrow? My last farewell will be spoken with the more sincerity and greater reason when the danger to my life is more real than it is to-day," I answered, looking His Majesty straight in the face.

"Then get thee to thy doom," he snarled out angrily, his temporary anxiety for my safety deserting him, "for surely wilt thou die this night."

"My Lord and King," I replied, as calmly as it has ever been my wont to speak, "my death shall not be caused by the Spirits, for I shall breathe my last an innocent man."

For an instant the King looked the guilt he felt, but quickly recovering himself, he said:

"Silence—begone!" and turning upon my heel, I joined my fellow-prisoners.

Now, notwithstanding the confidence which a knowledge of the dangers before me gave, my heart thumped somewhat wildly as, late that night, we approached, in oppressive silence, the mouth of the opening in the hill.

"Halt!" ordered the captain; "the King hath commanded that ye be unbound and thus be given every chance to contend against the Spirits. Come, Watala, thou art to lead the way." A moment later

my hands were free and I was thrust roughly into the darkness of the tunnel. Now I knew that a panic might seize those behind me, who, in their fear, might rush me to my death, therefore I moved quickly forward, feeling my way along the side of the wall and carefully—most carefully—counting the paces as I went. When I had reached "one hundred" I fell upon my hands and knees and crept cautiously forward to the first hole which, if Mapita were to be relied upon, must now be close in front. And then—yes—suddenly I felt the precipitous edge, and as I did so I dislodged a pebble which fell down, down, down with a diminishing clatter as it bounded from wall to wall until it ceased with a tiny splash far, far below.

"Shallow water!" I exclaimed involuntarily, as I realised the unspeakable horror of death in such a place. But presently voices, uncannily exaggerated, reached me from the rear. I sprang to my feet and hurriedly retreated, measuring twenty paces as accurately as I could.

"Watala! Watala! where art thou?" A terrible fear had already seized the men.

"Here am I," I said; "but beware! there is danger ahead. Be calm and I will tell ye how to escape from this place."

In twos and threes they came groping along until, feeling my perspiring body, they were assured that it was really I that had spoken. In a few words I told them all that I myself knew; then, hoping to give them courage, I said:

"Line up along the wall and give me space—move not; I shall myself be the first to make the

leap." And again I carefully measured the distance to the hole, and then, setting my teeth and with a speed born of fear and desperation, I flew straight at the pit, counting my paces until, "fourteen, fifteen, sixteen"—I leapt as I had never done before nor have I since. It seemed a lifetime as I hung there in the air, but a moment later I landed with a dull thud on the opposite side full upon my feet. It was nervous and exciting work, my father, and I was shaking in every limb, the sweat pouring from my body. But presently one of the men called out:

"Watala, hath all gone well with thee? Speak, man—speak!"

"'Tis well," I answered; "but the leap is great. Have a care!"

Then one after the other they made the spring—some in painful silence, others with wild battle-cries, and one—yes, one—with that laugh—once heard, never forgotten—the wild laugh of a man bereft of reason. But alas! only eight cleared the span; the others had gone to their thudding death—a terrible end, my father.

And we, the remaining nine, awed to silence by this unseen tragedy and panting with nameless fear, gripped each other in a huddled mass as we pictured all too vividly the ghastly death we had left behind and that which awaited us more surely before.

I did what I could to infuse courage—which I sadly lacked—into my comrades, and after making light of the next leap of eight paces—think of it, my father, *eight* paces!—and again warning them of the narrowness on the ledge of the opposite side, I said:

"Come, I will, as before, lead the way," and bidding my comrades a hasty farewell—lest by prolonging it I might unnerve myself and them—I again measured the distance, and then, my hands clenched, my eyes tight shut and every muscle strained, running like the very wind, I held my breath and—leapt. Would I leap too far or too short?—'twere equally fatal to do either—was the thought which, while still in the air, rushed to my mind; but at that instant I felt a stunning blow on my forehead, and I knew no more.

When I came to my senses I found myself sprawled upon the narrow ledge, a throbbing pain in my head, my face covered with blood which still oozed from a gash in my forehead. This it seemed had been caused by coming into contact with the roof of the tunnel. I called out feebly to my comrades, but all was still as death, for none but I had successfully made the leap.

Intensely weary and weak from the loss of blood, the dim light of dawn—now showing faintly through the end of the tunnel nearest me—warned me that I must make the final leap at once, and fearing lest the guard might soon be searching for any who might still be alive in the place, I prepared to make the last leap.

Now, as only three paces separated these two holes, this last spring would be no running matter. Had I been a younger man a standing jump of this kind would have had no difficulties for me, but I was getting on, and the life of a Councillor did not better fit me for such a feat. It is true I had successfully negotiated the first two pits, but those were

running leaps, and did not demand the cat-like spring which now confronted me.

Twice I nerved myself, but paused each time, irresolute, fearful. Four paces is a mighty leap to make from a standing position, my father. Just then the sound of voices came to me from behind. Glancing quickly over my shoulder I saw the dark forms of two men cautiously approaching the first hole. No time was to be lost, and swiftly calculating the distance and summoning all my courage, I took the leap—a magnificent leap, my father.

As I touched the ground on the other side there was a shout, and the next instant a spear struck me fairly in the fleshy part of my outstretched arm. I turned and faced the two men.

"Ha!" said Mvaga, for he was one of the two, "'tis thou, then, Watala, thou cat."

"'Tis even I," I answered, as I pulled the weapon from my arm and flung it contemptuously down the hole.

"Thou art not through the tunnel yet, thou dog," he hissed; and quick as a flash he hurled another spear which missed me by less than a hand-breadth. I waited for no more, and, turning, ran swiftly to the exit and into the outer world once more.

Few were stirring at such an early hour, and long before the King had risen I had washed and dressed my wounds, and was sitting outside the royal enclosure waiting for an audience with His Majesty.

Men came and looked upon me with awe and wonder as upon one risen from the dead. None,

indeed, came too close or spoke a word—nay, even the kraal dogs were suspicious of me as, with outstretched necks and bristling hair upon their backs, they sniffed and snarled at a distance, then slunk away, their tails between their legs. I took little heed of these things—my thoughts were in other channels just then—but in spite of my indifference, my attention was presently attracted by a woman more slow to pass than others had been. I looked at her and, lo! it was Mapita. Our eyes met, and in that fleeting glance I saw that hers were full of tears. "Noble woman," I said to myself as she disappeared immediately behind a hut.

You may suppose it was not long before the King heard of my escape—indeed, I was soon commanded to his presence.

Surprise, then guilt, was in Tshaka's face as—while I seated myself near the door (the place proper for those of the lowest rank)—his eyes met mine for an instant, while the next his whole face was wreathed in a kindly smile. These rapid changes of expression were a remarkable characteristic of the man, my father.

"See, Watala, thou hast come through the tunnel in safety. Did I not proclaim thy innocence?"

"Thou didst say the innocent would come safely through the place, my lord," I answered.

"Say, Watala, didst thou not see the Spirits?" he asked, with a cunning smile.

"Nay, O King; they are visible to the guilty only."

"'Tis even so," His Majesty replied. "But tell me, O Watala, how didst thou fare?"

"'Tis soon told, O Great One. I led the way as thou didst command, without fear of any Spirits—indeed, the only danger in the place was three pits which, in the darkness, were somewhat awkward to span, but, being innocent, I was able to give all my attention to this task, and, O King, I am here."

Just then the *izibongo* were sounded without, and Mvaga entered.

"See, Mvaga," the King said, "Watala here must, by our royal decree, be innocent of the treason with which we charged him."

"O Great One," replied Mvaga, his shifty eyes shiftier still, "Watala lies to thee to save his life. As in duty bound, I entered the tunnel with Mamba to see that thy orders had been obeyed, and he and I can bear witness to having seen the dog retrace his steps and pass the guard, which was asleep at the entrance. He is a cur, a coward, O King, that would not face the dangers of the tunnel as the others did. And where are they?"

"The guard asleep!" exclaimed the King, with rising anger.

"Even so, O Great Elephant," the lying Councillor replied.

"Then shall they die this day," the King added savagely.

Then, turning to me: "And thou, thou dog's cur, what hast thou to say?"

"O Noble King, I do not know whether the guard was awake or asleep, for I have not seen it since I entered the tunnel, but from my knowledge of the Amazansi, I cannot believe that they would

so disregard thy commands. As to this man's story concerning me, he lies. What wound is this, Mvaga?" I said, turning to him, pointing to my injured arm. "Didst thou not hurl thy spear at me as I leapt the last hole?"

"Produce the spear that caused thy wound in supporting evidence of thy word, O Watala," said the King.

"Yes, O King, he lies. Make him produce the spear. The spear, Watala—the spear! Where is the spear?"

"Alas! O King," I said, "it is at the bottom of the hole where I flung it."

"Then, by my mother, thou shalt fetch it from there," said Mvaga.

"Silence!" commanded the King. "Who art thou to deliver judgment when I be present?"

I held my peace, but the King bade me leave the Chamber, and as I did so my heart sank within me. I had passed through the dangers of the tunnel, but what others were still before me?

Three days passed before the King sent for me again, and surprise grew to wonder when I found that I was to have audience with him alone. As I entered the Chamber His Majesty was toying, as usual, with the little royal spear. I waited in silence for him to speak.

"Watala," he began, "dost thou know the woman Mapita?"

"I do, my lord," I answered, a sudden numbness seizing me as I felt that somehow His Majesty had got word of the girl's secret visit and timely warning to me.

"When didst thou last see her?"

"I cannot remember, O King," I lied, my heart in my mouth.

"Search thy memory, Watala, for much doth hang upon thy answer."

"Four weeks, I think it was, O Great One," I lied again.

"Under what circumstances, and what conversation passed between ye?"

It seemed that he knew all, and was but playing with me as a cat with a mouse.

"I last saw her at her newly wedded husband's kraal, and the only conversation between us was concerning her gratitude to thee for allowing her to wed Velapi."

"Ah! that doth account for it," he said, half to himself, as though piecing certain facts together. He paused for a moment, and although, outwardly, I was calmness itself, a world of anxiety was within.

"Hearken, Watala," he went on suddenly. "I have that to say which methinks will please thee. Come nearer, Watala—nearer still, for none but thou must hear my words." I drew closer, and could have touched him as he went on:

"Six moons ago, if I remember rightly, Mvaga first warned me of what he termed thy treachery towards the throne, and——"

"He lied, my lord," I could not help ejaculating.

"As time went on, his words took hold of me and I resolved to have thee removed, and but waited a favourable opportunity to do so. I told Mvaga of my purpose, and he—he waited too, until—there came the incident of the poison."

"And didst thou believe that I, Watala, would seek to bring thee, my noble master, to a violent death?" I asked with sorrowful surprise.

"I tell thee, my suspicions had been aroused—but I knew not what to think, and things looked black for thee. But listen, and interrupt me not. As thou knowest I am an Interpreter of Dreams,¹ and well it is so for thee that I am, for this is what I dreamt on the very night ye were sent into the tunnel. I saw myself attacked by five venomous snakes, each darting at me, their beady eyes searching with cruel hatred for a place to strike; and lo, as they closed in upon me and were about to fasten their poisonous fangs to my trembling, helpless body, thou, Watala, camest between us, and in a moment hadst severed their heads with thy spear and thus saved me, but only at the cost of thine own life, for, as thou didst rush to catch me as I fell in a swoon, thou didst tread with thy naked foot upon one of the dead heads, which fastened its fangs upon thy instep, and in a moment, it seemed, thou didst die in fearful agony at my feet. I woke with a start from that horrible dream to find my mother—the Spirits protect her!—at my side waiting to tell me that I had sent thee to thy death without cause. The woman Mapita, she said, had told the Queen-Mother that she had only just learnt of the true reason of thy death—the poison incident. She (Mapita), it appears, while threading beads in the windshelter of thine own

¹ Tshaka posed as a Dream Doctor, and convinced himself, as well as his people, that he had occult powers in this direction.

hut, had also overheard thy conversation with thy wife. Now this girl Mapita not only bears out the truth of thy story, but also swears that thou didst purpose getting my permission to use the poison."

"Which is the truth, my lord," I interrupted.

"But thou didst not tell me this, Watala. Well, it matters not. Now this report, coming immediately upon my dream, did enable me to interpret it in only one way—thou wert loyal to me unto death and I had sent thee to thy doom through listening to the lying dog Mvaga. Now, Watala, what hast thou to say?"

"O King," I answered, much moved at the turn events were taking, "like a faithful dog I am unable to express my gratitude in words, and in mute and humble respect would ask thee to gauge it upon my face."

For a few moments there was silence while he slowly—very slowly—picked up the little spear at his side, fingering the keen edge with his thumb, what time his brows formed a dangerous frown; then, with startling suddenness, his left hand shot out and gripped me tightly by the shoulder, while with his right he thrust into my hand the far-famed weapon.

"Take it, Watala. Thou thyself shalt slay the treacherous dog."

"Doth Thy Majesty in truth mean this?" I asked, my hand closing convulsively upon the little haft, a mingled tumult of surprise, pride and emotion almost choking me.

"Never hath Tshaka been in greater earnest," he replied.

"King! King! O King!" I began, then stopped, for words had failed me quite.

"Enough," said His Majesty, and for a brief moment his face lost its cruel expression, but only for a moment, for suddenly it changed again to one of savage determination.

"Now I have told Mvaga that thou art again to pass through the tunnel at night, and I have commanded him to conceal himself in the place and to hurl thee to thy death down one of the holes, but such faith have I in thy powers that it will be Watala and not Mvaga that will come out of the tunnel alive."

"But, Thy Majesty——" I began.

"Nay, now," he interrupted, "I know what thou wouldst say, but as Mvaga must be got rid of with as little fuss as possible, it must be done even as I have said—by thee. In this way all trace of Mvaga will disappear—down one of the holes for ever, for none but he knows that he will be waiting for you in the tunnel."

"Then, my lord, the man is as good as dead."

"To-morrow night, then, Watala, do thou report here, and the Amazansi regiment shall escort thee as before. Is all other clear to thee, Watala?"

"As the midday sun, O King," I replied.

"Then get thee gone, lest by staying here suspicion be aroused"; and saluting the King, I moved towards the door, when His Majesty called me back.

"Methinks it would be better not to take the little spear after all, Watala. Thou couldst not conceal it on thy person, and if seen in thy possession

it would proclaim me privy to this matter; but in final token, if such you need of my good will, I give instead this clasp of friendship," and for an instant his hand lay within my own. I am a man of clean habits, my father, but six days elapsed before I again washed that hand.

That night I slept soundly enough, but when I woke up next morning I became over-anxious, and for this reason. Although the King had told me that Mvaga was to enter the tunnel, the treacherous villain would, I was certain, disregard this order. How could I, weaponless, hope to overcome a man armed with a stabbing spear? Of all the plans that came to me to overcome this difficulty, one only seemed to offer a chance of success, and having made up my mind upon it, I started off from the Royal Kraal at a brisk pace for a certain spot which I reached at midday, and—yes—the Spirits be praised, I found what I had come for.

It was a certain leafless creeper which throws out thorns as long as a man's middle finger, very sharp and tough and which cause a painful wound. It grows only upon the ground, the thorns being uppermost. This is what I had come for, and having soon collected sufficient for my purpose I quickly retraced my steps and made my way unseen to the tunnel. Groping along it, for it was nearly dark, I found a depression in the wall, and there concealed my bundle, and shortly after was back at the Royal Kraal again. The sun had set, and I reported straightway to the King. On entering the Council Chamber I found the full Council assembled.

"As I did tell thee yesterday," the King said, "thou art again to go through the tunnel, since there is some doubt that thou didst come through the place in accordance with my commands. Here, thou Manzini, summon the captain of the Amazansi."

A moment later the captain entered.

"Thy regiment shall escort Watala to the tunnel as before. I am told that thou and thy men didst sleep at thy post before, and that Watala here escaped by stepping over your slumbering warriors. For that ye deserve death—instant death—but of your punishment ye shall learn later. To-night ye shall guard the entrance standing—standing, mark thou—shoulder to shoulder, filling up the entrance to the tunnel, and none of ye shall move from there till ye have been given my command to do so. Hast thou heard, O captain?"

"I have heard, O King," the captain replied.

"Then summon thy regiment and get to thy task."

Now the moon was shining faintly in the west, when, in the dead of night, I was escorted for the second time to the tunnel, and as we reached the entrance I was pushed roughly into the yawning blackness, the whole regiment lining up immediately behind me.

My father, you can better imagine than I can describe my feelings as I groped my way along to meet my mortal enemy. The blackness clothed me as with a garment, and all was still as death. Quick as my excitement would allow—it was excitement, not fear, my father—I sought for and found my

thorny creeper, and a moment later I was binding it in feverish haste round my body, arms and legs—nay, even round my neck and head. What a wondrous sight I must have been as I stepped forward to grapple with my lurking foe! My heart was beating violently—with excitement, not fear, my father—my hands clutched convulsively, aimlessly, at the darkness before, behind, below, but no living thing did they meet as I moved slowly and steadily on, carefully counting my paces. Presently I sank noiselessly to my hands and knees, creeping stealthily, slowly on, my heart beating with a wildness I had never known before.

But hark! What was that?—tap—tap—tap—clatter—clat—clat—splash! A pebble falling down the hole! I had not dislodged it, for I had not yet reached the first pit. It must have been the Mvaga dog himself! So he was waiting for me at the hole, was he? I shrank back, still keeping upon my hands and knees, but as all was still and quiet again I stood up and waited for the villain to attack me where I was.

Now I must have stood thus for as long as a man might take to count a hundred. The man's delay was unnerving me. Perhaps he had not heard my approach. Well, there would be no further delay on that account; but just as I was about to cough or speak to let the dog know that I was there a sudden fear seized me—it was not excitement now, my father, but an unspeakable fear, for this is what I heard:

“The dog be late in coming, Mamba. What

hath happened, thinkest thou?" whispered Mvaga's well-known voice.

"Nay, I know not," replied Mamba.

"Think you the King hath found out that we lied concerning this Watala dog and his leaping of the holes?"

"Not so," the other replied; "moreover, the King hath set his mind on sending him to his death. He will be here soon enough, never fear, O Mvaga."

By now anger had taken the place of fear—anger at the Councillor's treachery in bringing another to assist him, and in my wrath at this black villainy I resolved to meet them—both of them—boldly, courageously, and the quicker the better. Without more ado, I coughed twice, loudly, and the next instant retreated ten paces—and waited. Just then I heard the tap, tap, clatter and a splash as more pebbles were dislodged, and I knew that the snakes were coming. Yes, they were approaching now, for I could faintly hear their footsteps. I stretched my arms out rigidly in front of me, my heart throbbing slowly now with dull thuds as, with bated breath, my nerves and muscles alert and ready, I counted the moments that lay between Death and me—or them. Their stealthy tread told me that they approached me, one on either side of the tunnel. Oh, that I could only see the murderers! I strained my eyes into the blackness they could not penetrate; I swept my arms slowly round me, hoping to surprise them first and not they me, and as I did so I could almost feel them creeping closer and closer. I could hear their

breathing now, but they could not hear mine, for, breathless, motionless, I awaited them. They could not be more than two paces away now, for a pebble had been kicked forward and struck me on the foot, and then, a moment later—ah!—

“Thou dog!” I yelled in pain, as the outstretched fingers of one of them were thrust into my wide-open eyes.

“We have thee, now, thou lying villain,” hissed Mvaga, “and no more shalt thou——” But he got no further than just that, for I leapt forward with a mighty spring, my arms fully extended, and I caught him and gripped him with all my strength, and hugged him mightily to me with the almost superhuman power I then possessed.

The strangled yell that came from the traitor’s throat often rings in my ears even to this day, my father—indeed, it is said to haunt the tunnel still.

In an instant the second murderer was at me, but he, too, felt the stinging thorns, and leapt aside as much from astonished fear as from pain.

“Mamba—the spears—the——” But I gripped the harder, and he could not finish.

So they had brought spears with them, had they! And I hugged my victim ever more tightly in my mad embrace. A moment later there came another yell, and then a distant booming splash as Mamba—miscalculating the distance to where they had left their spears—went too far, stumbled into the first pit, and so went headlong to his death.

“Now, Mvaga, dost thou, too, die the same death,” I hissed between my clenched teeth, and

I began to drag his limp body to the hole; but he had stopped struggling now, and whether it was from fright or because one of the wicked thorns had pierced his black heart I have never been able to learn; it is the truth that he lay there dead in my arms. A moment later I spurned the lifeless form down the pit after his companion—the treacherous villain!

I unwound the creeper from my body, and flung all trace of it down the hole, and waited for the dawn to come; and when at last the first rays of light enabled me to see, it was an easy matter to leap the holes in safety.

Two days later the King himself explained the absence of Mvaga and Mamba to the Council (in which I was at once reinstated) by saying that he had sent them on a long journey, and with that remark the business of the Council proceeded.

"Where is Mhlola, the captain of the Amazansi regiment?" asked the King. And as none knew, inquiry was made, and it was found that he and his warriors were still standing—shoulder to shoulder—at the entrance to the tunnel; for had not the King commanded them to do so until it should please him to call them away? They had had neither food nor drink during that time, and it is a wonder that they survived, but they did, for the Zulus were men in those days, and no question was there ever after that as to the loyalty and obedience of the Amazansi.

Ah! my father, those were the days when law and order prevailed, and that reminds me of the tale of the Queen-Mother Nandi's death; but I

shall take a pinch of snuff before beginning the next tale, my father.

You ask me how it was possible for men, with none but rude implements, to dig so large a tunnel in so short a space of time? The question is well put, my father, and it may be answered in this wise. In the days of Tshaka there was no such thing as failure in carrying out the King's commands. An order once given, however difficult or impossible to carry out, had to be obeyed, if those to whom it had been given wished to live. I verily believe that had His Majesty ordered the removal of the hill itself, the feat would have been accomplished. Doubtless spears, hoes, hands, sledges and oxen were utilised in feverish haste. But whatever means were employed, the task was carried out even as I have said, for all things—yes, my father, everything—even such a feat as this, was possible to those that served the King.

MABOZO THE EXECUTIONER

LOOKING at me now, an old man, you would never think that I once was stout and heavily built; and yet there was a time, after I became Chief Councillor, that my weight was very great and the measurement round my middle exceeded that of the King himself. A stout man, especially one of high rank, commanded with us then, as, indeed, he does to-day, more respect than one of slighter build; a man's very corpulence and slowness of movement adds a dignity to his person which he would not otherwise possess. Now dignity was a quality I always possessed—my worst enemies did not deny it me—but as I took daily note of my increasing size I could not but look upon and feel with regret the superfluous fat and flesh which were gradually concealing from view the magnificent bone and muscle which nature had given me.

Knowing the power my natural dignity gave me, I was not loth to dispense with that which I had acquired by good living, and one evening, whilst basking in the setting sun—a habit I still indulge in—the feeling of regret to which I have referred took so firm a hold of me that I made up my mind once and for all to have done with the unwieldy, fat, slow of gait, short-winded and sluggish man I then was, and to become once more the strong, active, iron-muscled Watala of old. I yearned for my old self, my father, and I resolved somehow or other to reduce my bulky proportions at once. It was but two days after I had made this resolution that,

soon after finishing my evening meal, I was summoned to attend the King, and I was soon half-walking, half-shuffling on my way to the royal apartments.

"Greeting, Watala, 'The Deliverer,'" said the King as I entered and sat heavily down opposite him.

"Greeting to thee, O Mighty Elephant," I replied, not without feeling pride at having been addressed as "The Deliverer," for although I had, as my father knows, fully earned the title by having saved the King's life, still, it was only on rare occasions His Majesty chose to address me thus.

A fire glowed brightly in the hearth, and as the King and I were alone I looked forward to a long and confidential chat, for of late he had often summoned me for that purpose. There was, on these occasions, a plentiful supply of *utshwala*—the best brew in the land, and it was but natural that I—in the physical condition I then was—derived at least half of the pleasure of these visits from the warm glow and drowsy feeling which the thick, rich liquor sent through my veins.

It was upon one such occasion that His Majesty and I drank so much that we both fell asleep, only to be awakened in the night by the King himself, yelling with agony, holding with both his royal hands on to his royal big toe, which, in his drunken carelessness, he had accidentally thrust into the fire in the hearth.

I make no joke of this occurrence, my father; I merely mention it in passing to show how deeply the King drank at that period of his most illustrious reign.

Two black and highly polished *amakamba* containing beer stood upon the floor conveniently to the King's hand. Balanced against the smaller one was the straw skimmer soon to be used to remove the froth from the liquor.

The King, his body bare, save for his *mutsha* and one or two ornaments at his neck, was seated, his legs crossed before him, on a fine leopard skin kaross, under which had been placed two sleeping mats, to make the royal couch the softer. The smoke from the fire rose in a steady column, forming, with that accumulated above, a ghostly tree, as it were, of the vapour, the red coals of fire its roots.

The floor of genuine *isiduli* (ant-heap) was so highly polished with bullock's blood that it reflected objects as distinctly as in a clear stream, and at night, with only the fire burning, its beauty was greater than by day, as it cast forth many weird shadows and flashes of light from its glossy surface. It was a beautiful floor, my father, and was ever as spotlessly clean as the constant labours of ten hand-maidens could keep it.

On the right, towards the *emsamu* or back of the hut, stood three or four large elephants' tusks, their tapering ends reaching to the smoky ceiling. To the left, carefully arranged upon the wall, were a number of beautiful head-dresses, some of ostrich plumes, others of well-dressed otter skin, and the rest of the most beautiful-coloured feathers then known in the land. By itself, in the place of honour, hung the royal crane feather, graceful in its sweeping curve and yet how terrible in its significance of the King! It was the emblem of supreme rank, of

unlimited power—the power of life and death, of inflicting unspeakable torture or dispensing the greatest joys.

In the foreground, at the King's feet, lay the little royal spear, its haft nearest the King, while the gleaming keen-edged blade pointed ominously towards where I sat.

I waited in silence for my master to speak again, but before doing so he carefully skimmed the liquor in the smaller pot, and then, raising the vessel slowly to his lips, drank a deep draught. "Ah! 'tis good! Drink, Watala," he exclaimed as he handed me the beer—it was an honour, rarely bestowed, to drink out of the King's own vessel—and drawing in my breath, I, too, drank long and deep, and with a sigh which expressed both thanks and satisfaction I placed the now half-empty pot close to the King as before.

"Methinks there be much quiet in the land," began His Majesty.

"Yes, sire; peace and prosperity are everywhere," I replied.

"I like not this 'peace and prosperity' of which thou speakest, Watala," he said, suddenly fixing his keen eyes searchingly upon me, "for it is then men's muscles become soft—the cares of domestic life hold full sway, and in their unseemly scramble after empty pleasures men lose their manliness and forget, indeed, that war and conquest should be their only aim in life. All this, Watala, betokens the early downfall of even the mightiest nation."

"As ever, O King, thy words are full of wisdom," I replied.

"Tell me, Watala, are there any tribes left within reach of my *impis* which yet remain to be subdued?"

"None that I know of, O King," I answered, "save a straggling remnant here and there which, at mention of thy mighty name alone, would surrender, like beaten curs, to thy all-conquering power."

"Xe!" clicked the King in evident disgust, "it doth turn my stomach to think there be men on earth who would surrender even to my might without striking a blow," and he spat contemptuously into the hearth.

"'Tis my way of feeling too, my lord," I answered, "but——"

"I tell thee, Watala," Tshaka interrupted impatiently, "the whole army—my mighty *impis*—are rotting in their idleness, but," savagely picking up his little spear, "by my mother, by all the spirits in the world, it shall never be while I do live—never shall some alien nation taunt the Zulu with his downfall—the outcome of indulging too freely in idle pleasures at the very height of our fame and power!"

His Majesty was working himself up into a passion. I looked meaningly towards the pot of beer; another draught might soothe him. But I may as well have saved myself the trouble, for he went on:

"They, the mightiest, the bravest regiments ever known, would fall to decay, would they?" he held his spear as though to strike. "Never—never—never! Watala, dost thou hear me, man—never!"

Why, look at thyself. Where be the muscles of thy manhood now? Gone! What dost thou with that woman's fat upon thy chest, thine arms, thy legs? Thy very hands be soft and smooth as a babe's." He was glaring angrily at me, his eyes flashing red, his lips parted in contempt and rage. "Was it by such as thou that we won our hard-earned fame? Thou dog! thou fatted pig!" He hissed the insult at me, leaning towards me as he spoke. "See here, O corpulent Councillor," he went on, "this child's play—this madness in the land—must cease. Already do I see the enemy's hosts attacking my drunken, fat-encumbered warriors. I see them slain over their very beer-pots—their sleek and ponderous bodies a goodly mark for the foreign spear—nay, an obstacle to their ignominious flight." He was panting now in angry gasps, and his fists tight clenched, his teeth showing like some wild beast at bay; then, suddenly letting fall the little spear, his hands went to his sides as he burst into a wild laugh. "Ha! ha! ha! What a picture! What a sight for the once mighty and terrible Tshaka to behold!"

I did not move—I could not for very shame, for the King had spoken the truth, and I waited in silence for him to speak again.

"Hark thee, Watala," he went on in that tone of sudden calmness which all feared more than his outbursts of passion. "Let there be summoned to the Royal Kraal every regiment in the land. See that each captain bringeth sufficient cattle to feed his warriors, and allot the various stations of the regiments thyself. In ten days' time report to me

that all this has been done. Dost hear, Watala?"

"Every word, my lord," I replied.

"Then look thou dost obey. And the women, Watala," he continued suddenly after a pause, "how do they fare in this time of peace and plenty? Answer me that, Watala."

"In times of peace, O King," I answered, "and in times of war, be the season ever so prosperous or ever so lean, the women have their burdens just the same."

"Ha! I thought thou wouldst defend them—'twas ever so with thee; but 'twill avail naught, for my ire is up. Hark thee, again, Watala. 'Tis on the strength, the loyalty, the courage and the wisdom of the warrior that the nation depends. And who, thinkest thou, wields a greater influence for good or evil upon our future warrior than his mother? By my life, 'tis the wives and mothers we must look to, for on them doth the moulding of our future warriors much depend. 'Tis from the mother that the babe doth first suck his strength; as a herder of goats he will oft creep secretly from his boyish duties and for all too long will drink in at his mother's side the wisdom or folly she expounds to her listeners; 'tis from her who bare him that he first learneth of courage—that courage which even children are often called upon to show; and 'tis from the hands of his mother that the untried warrior receives his unused spear and shield and sallies forth to battle, the last words of his tender-hearted parent still ringing in his ears. Ah! what were those words? What were they, Watala? Were they of courage,

hope or victory, of loyalty to the nation's cause?—or were they the promptings of a mother's heart, who feared to lose maybe her only son, and counselleth him to keep in the rear—avoid close contact with the foe—nay, even bids him fly if death do stare him too darkly in the face? I tell thee, Watala, more doth depend on the mothers in the land than thou dost think." He paused to regain his breath, and then he went on: "Not only all the warriors, but every woman shalt thou summon to be here ten days hence. Be up betimes and let my words be known. I do not wish to see thee, Watala, until the regiments are assembled."

"*Bayete!*" I answered, and left the Chamber.

Now the King's words had stirred me strangely. On my way home my steps were light and quick—I did not shuffle now. I held my spear more firmly, my left hand running nervously, caressingly over the blade, noting with disgust the bluntness of the once keen edge. My blood, so long quiet within me, now sped furiously, madly through every vein in answer to the newly awakened beating of my heart. My eyes, but lately bleared with drink and uncertain in their gaze, now looked steadily forward, noting objects in the darkness which but recently they had missed. No drink-bred film now dimmed my sight, for I could see things as they really were, and my excited brain called up a picture of what our mighty nation would come to if we did not bestir ourselves—the King's *impis* beaten, slain, scattered, disgraced—the King himself murdered by some alien hand, and I

myself, far-famed for my loyalty, strength and courage, done to death—in my very hut perchance, and ere my nerveless, drink-sodden limbs could move to strike a blow in defence of my beloved King and country.

I increased my pace, and almost ran to my hut, where, to my wife's surprise, instead of falling heavily on to my sleeping-mat, I raked up the dying embers in the hearth, fed the fire, and sat before it thinking and planning far into the night.

There be no need to recount how, in carrying out the King's commands, I summoned the whole nation to the Royal Kraal, except to say that on the tenth day there had assembled the mightiest concourse of people the world has ever seen.

Now, worn out both in body and mind, I flung myself upon my sleeping-mat that night, hoping to get a full night's rest; but I could not have been asleep very long when I woke up with a start, for someone had shaken me roughly by the shoulder.

"Speak low, Watala; 'tis I, Mbambeni," said a voice which I recognised as that of my nephew—a fine youth, my father—the son of my elder brother.

"What canst thou with me at such a time, young man?" I asked, with some annoyance.

"Nay, uncle," he replied, "bear with me; 'tis a matter of life and death that I have, at great risk, come to see thee about."

"Thy life in danger? How so?" I asked, and stooping over the hearth I blew the embers into flame.

"'Tis not my life, but that of a woman which is in danger—a terrible danger, O uncle," he said.

"A woman?" I exclaimed in surprise. "How so, Mbambeni? What woman?"

"Nopila, the daughter of Gangile, O uncle."

"She of the royal household?" I asked.

"Even so, O uncle; but speak not so loud."

"Why," I said, lowering my voice, "'twas only but a moon or two ago that I myself sent for her, and she is now of the King's four hundred concubines. Thou art mistaken, Mbambeni. Nopila is safer in the King's household than either you or I are out of it."

"Nevertheless she is to be slain to-morrow, by the King's command—butchered, murdered—and I, her husband, powerless to aid her. O uncle, save her—save her, I beseech thee!"

"Explain thyself, young man. Thou Nopila's husband? Thy senses must surely have left thee!" I said, a sudden fear seizing me.

"Alas! my noble uncle, 'tis only too true," answered the youth. "But listen, I will tell thee all, then thou wilt know—then wilt thou understand. Six moons ago the King gave permission to my—the Basenhla—regiment to marry, and well canst thou imagine my joy when we were told we could marry into the Zimbuzi regiment of girls—the regiment in which Nopila was. Now she was a beautiful girl, loved by many, but her heart was mine alone. Of her many suitors one was the man Mabozo, he who was but lately appointed Chief Executioner to the King. Now when this man saw that Nopila loved him not—nay, loathed him, for he is a black-hearted evil-looking man, my uncle—when he saw this he swore a terrible oath and



“ . . . and flung him far out into the yawning space.” Page 84

vowed to avenge himself upon us both. Three moons afterwards he was appointed executioner by the King, but I knew it not then, though I do now, that the vile wretch had sought the bloody office as a means the more easily to carry out his threat, and well hath he laid his plans, for 'tis he who will slay Nopila to-morrow"—his voice shook unsteadily here—"and—and I will not be near to help her or—or—to see that he doth his killing work with mercy and dispatch."

"But wherefore is this girl to be slain, my nephew?" I asked. "Thou hast not——"

"Nay, uncle, interrupt me not. The first step in Mabozo's plan was to secure the executioner's office, which, as few do offer for it, he got for the asking. He next did plot to get Nopila to the Royal Kraal, and he did this by telling the King of her great beauty, which done, the King commanded her to be set aside forthwith as a concubine, and, incidentally, as a better mark for Mabozo's treachery. 'Twas not long before Mabozo got the poor girl into his power, for she showed signs of being with child, and that, as thou knowest, means death if the woman be of the royal household."

"What!" I said, with horror and surprise, "one of the King's concubines with child? Then she will surely die the death."

I should tell you, my father, that the King had great dread of a male child being born to him, for, he said, sons would only grow up and seek to slay him and rule in his stead. As soon as any of his concubines became with child she was killed forthwith. 'Twas a terrible custom, but characteristic

of the King. In such matters he was ever merciless.

"If, as thou sayest," I went on, "Nopila be with child, she must die, and there the matter doth end. My heart doth bleed for thee, my boy, though I cannot understand why thou didst not kill thy love when the maiden joined the royal harem—a life-long prison."

"Stop, uncle—stop!" he said, drawing closer to me and whispering in my ear. "Nopila hath not yet even so much as seen the King, and the child she was soon to bear would have called me, not the King, father."

"Haul!" I exclaimed in horrified amazement. "What manner of folly is this? Explain thyself!"

"Uncle," he said, "Nopila was—is—my wedded wife. I married her six moons ago, two days after the royal permission had been given. Her father and mother alone knew of this, and they, alas! were away from home, and I too, was absent with my regiment when the King's order came for her to attend the Royal Kraal. She, poor girl, fearing lest to disobey the royal command would bring trouble on us all, held her peace, meaning to crave an interview with the King; but she put off doing this until too late, and Mabozo, learning of her plight, went straightway and reported the matter to the King, whereupon His Majesty, in fearful anger, ordered her execution before the assembled multitudes to-morrow. All this she herself told me but a short time since, having crept to where my regiment is quartered—her only opportunity of speaking to me, since I only arrived to-day after a three months' absence with the Amatuli."

"Too late, my nephew—too late!" was all I could say.

"I have come, therefore, O uncle, to ask thee to see the King and explain how the matter doth stand. Say, O uncle, that thou wilt interview His Majesty, and we will yet be able to stay the executioner's hand." The youth looked me earnestly in the face. I yearned to help him. My loyalty forbade me uttering what I felt about this thing, but inwardly a restless anger raged not only at my helplessness, but at this cruel, nameless custom which rendered me so. I stirred the fire impatiently, savagely.

"'Tis useless," I said at last. "The King would not believe me, and would be all the more resolved to do the girl to death. I tell thee, youth——"

"Then, by my father, Nopila shall not die alone," he exclaimed in sudden anger. "Others, too, will die, O uncle. The cruel blade shall not reach her dear bosom save over my dead body, and if I can but slay Mabozo, the treacherous, murderous dog, before he can touch the girl, I shall die the more happily."

"I have naught to say to what thou hast darkly hinted at," I replied, "for the blood of youth ever courses wildly, and the heart—a lover's heart—was never yet over-careful in its promptings, but I do adjure thee, youth, do no rash thing. If thou dost purpose slaying this man Mabozo—and I hope thou wilt give him a mighty thrust for me—see to it thou dost also slay thyself the instant after, for no torture will be too great for thee if Tshaka doth hold thee in his hands after thou hast slain his

Chief Executioner." And once again I stirred the fire, distressed beyond words at the sadness of it all.

"Uncle—my kind, good uncle—she is my wife, my six moons' bride. Can I leave her thus—forsaken, nay, despised, at the last—she who is so soon to bear me my first child? Never! But I must not keep thee longer from thy rest. Farewell, O Watala—farewell"—he took both my hands in his own—"for the last time farewell," and with infinite pain in his manly eyes he gazed into my face for a long moment, and then, letting go my hands—upon which a single tear had fallen—he left the hut.

My eyes, too, were full of tears—I could barely see the youth's retreating figure. Angry at my temporary weakness, I dashed away the moisture with the back of my hand and flung myself upon my mat once more, and with my head upon my wooden pillow, my wide-open eyes fixed to the ceiling, I tried and tried again to find some loop-hole for escape. But all was black—black as the ceiling above me. The fire died out, and with it my last hopes vanished, and overwrought in mind and sick at heart I exclaimed aloud: "The King's command must be obeyed—Nopila must die."

"'Tis passing strange, O Chief Councillor," said a voice from the darkness on the other side of the hearth, "that thou shouldst have mentioned the name of one Nopila, for 'tis concerning her that I have, even at this hour, come to see thee."

In an instant I was sitting up.

"Who art thou?" I demanded, peering into the darkness beyond the hearth.

"'Tis Mabozo, the executioner, who speaks," replied the man.

My heart gave a guilty leap of fear. Had this man overheard us? I did not fear Mabozo, my father, but I feared the treacherous use he could make of our conversation—if he had overheard it.

"What dost thou here, at such an hour, and how comest thou to enter my bed-chamber unannounced? Where be thy manners, thou executioner dog?"

"Nay, now, Watala——"

"How darest thou address me by name!" I interrupted angrily, "Do not 'Watala' me, thou unclean wretch! Chief Councillor be my title to such as thou. Come, thy business with me must be short, for I like thee not. Speak! What dost thou want with me?"

"Let not thy tongue run away with thee, Watala," he answered impudently, "for I have overheard thy conversation with thy nephew Mbambeni. If, for instance, His Majesty were to learn—— But I need not explain; thou dost understand."

I was in the act of kindling the fire when he said this, but I paused involuntarily at the unspoken threat in his words; then, quickly blowing the embers into flame, I said:

"Thou treacherous dog! how darest thou to hint at compromising me with the King! Much am I minded to——"

"Withhold thy idle threats, Watala. There be no time now to waste in words. I do not purpose making use of what I have overheard. There be another matter which I have come to discuss with

thee. Some other time will serve to warn the King of thy midnight plottings."

"What!" I exclaimed, glancing towards my spears at the back of the hut.

"Move not," he said quickly, "for if thou dost I shall give thee no further chance. I have thee completely in my power, O Son of Solwandhle," he added, as he placed more wood upon the fire.

"A mere dog's bark," I sneered. "What would thy word against mine count for with the King?" and I made again as though to reach my spear.

"There be others who heard thy treasonable utterings, O Watala. Dost thou not see them sitting there by the door?"

Now, in the semi-darkness I had not noticed these men, but looking more intently towards the door I could just make out the forms of two men. Mabozo was watching me closely.

"I care not," I said. "Fifty such as ye can do me no harm with the King."

"Well, then, we will leave the subject, and come to the purpose of my visit here, which concerns the woman Nopila—the woman whose name formed the burden of thy conversation with thy nephew."

"Speak on; I am listening," I said, wondering what the villain could have to say to me on the subject.

"Well, then, it was only two days ago that I learnt of Nopila's condition, and seeking to feed the revenge which I vowed to have upon this youth and maid, I reported the matter to the King. Nopila contrived—as I knew she would—to let her husband know of her danger, but ere she could

do so I put these two men to watch, and it was they who shadowed Mbambeni to thy chamber here, and ere he had well woken thee from thy slumbers, we all three were without and heard thy every word. My purpose in following the youth here was to learn his plans, and, O Councillor, I have learnt them. Even while I listened I formed a plan by which the girl's life may yet be saved, and thou alone canst bring it to a successful issue."

"How now, thou dog?" I exclaimed. "Darest thou seek to make the King's commands miscarry?" It was the old instinct, my father—to stand by the King at all costs—that forced the words from me.

"Not so fast, Watala—not so fast," replied Mabozo. "The girl's life can be saved, but upon one condition only."

"What is the condition, man?" I asked, eager to learn of any chance by which she might be spared her tragic fate.

"That she doth marry me," answered the executioner, calmly looking at me with his snake-like eyes, a cruel smile upon his lips.

"Marry thee!" I exclaimed—"thee! thee!" and I spat with disgust into the hearth. "Thou art mad! Dost thou think——"

"Once again, O Councillor, not so fast. Listen. The King doth not know Nopila even by sight, and 'twill be to thee that he will look to have the girl brought before him, and when he doth give the word thou shalt then bring forth some other girl, whom thou thyself shalt select, and her shall I execute, the real Nopila escaping—to—to be my bride. Within a month the King will, I know,

excuse me from my bloody work, to settle down to a life of domestic happiness—for I do love the girl, O Councillor. A good plan, O Watala. What say you?"

"Villain!" I said, unable to control the impulse of the moment, "wouldst thou have an innocent girl slain, so that thou canst marry Nopila, my nephew's lawful wedded wife?"

"Such is what I propose," and the executioner grinned cruelly, and folding his big arms across his hairy chest went on: "Failing that—well, surely thou canst foretell the rest—her bosom laid bare to my short stabbing blade. Ah! that will be the time—ask her then to choose. Have no fear, Watala; she'll marry me soon enough."

"What of Mbambeni?" I asked, more to gain time than aught else, for the villain's words had set me thinking, and I felt that we might in some way make use of him in saving the girl's life.

"Mbambeni," he hissed—"the dog! His tongue will be tied, for he will know that one word from me to the King would bring about the girl's as well as his own immediate death. Nay, O Councillor, I have no fear of Mbambeni."

Could I bring myself to do this thing—have some poor girl slain, in cold blood, to save Nopila's life? Would Mbambeni have it so, and at such a price, that his wife should marry Maboza, the evil-looking, treacherous executioner? No, impossible! For my own part, I would not lend myself to such black infamy, and neither, I was sure, would the youth or maid; and so I said:

"Look thou here: thou hast demanded that of

me which I would not do for all my nephews—nay, for a score of Nopilas. Get thee hence! be-gone all of ye! and say what ye like to the King." I was upon my feet now. "Lie as ye never lied before! There be the door—get ye out—quick! quick! Out with ye! Do ye hear?" and I took a step forward, quivering with anger, and stood above Mabozo, who, though armed, but seeing the shaking rage I was in, cowered before me like the cur he was, half-crawled, half-rolled hurriedly towards the door, and then, thinking he could escape more easily, stopped.

"O Councillor——" he began. But before he could go on I had leapt at him.

"Get thee out!" I said, now beside myself with fury. "By my mother, if thou dost not betake thyself from my presence, I'll kill thee with my very hands! Out with thee, thou cursed man-slayer!" and I made to grip him by the throat, but before I could get at him, he and the other two had scrambled through the doorway and I was alone.

I closed the door, and once more flinging myself upon my mat I lay there quivering in my wrath. At length the fire died out, and utterly worn out I fell at last into a troubled sleep.

I was up with the dawn, bathed my feverish body, and by the time the sun was risen I was back again at my hut.

Now I had barely despatched messengers to every regiment of men and women, exhorting them to look to their weapons, their bearing, their marching—nay, even their saluting and a hundred other details—when a captain, breathless from

running, brought the King's command for me to attend him in the Council Chamber.

I had not seen Tshaka for ten days, and although I thought to find him excited and perhaps a little preoccupied, I was startled and shocked to find him as he was.

The Council Chamber had always been well furnished with mats and karosses and various other articles proper to its importance and the King's rank, and so, when I entered and found the place quite bare and without so much as a mat to sit upon, I felt fearful of what this absence of comfort in the royal apartment might portend. The King was sitting on his haunches, each arm hanging limply across his kness. His eyes, round which large hollows had formed, were peering intently into the cold ashes of a dead fire in the hearth before him. His cheek-bones stood out prominently like those of a man pinched with hunger, and his lips, purple as with cold, were set firmly together. The sharp-pointed toy spear had been stuck—savagely, it seemed—into the polished clay floor at his right, while on his left lay the bleached and grinning skull of a human being. The royal crane feather upon his head was crumpled as though he had slept with it on.

I noticed these things in fearful silence, waiting for the King to speak; but I might as well not have been there, for he took no notice of me, but continued gazing into the hearth, his eyes fixed and almost glassy in their stare, as though he were entranced and beheld some vision.

Presently his right hand went slowly down into

the grey ashes, deeper and deeper until hidden; then, slowly withdrawing it, he half-sighed, half-spoke aloud:

"Ah, thou blood—thou beautiful, soft, warm red blood," and then he thrust his other hand into the ashen powder, and began moving both of them through it—now stirring it, now caressing it, now patting it, then sprinkling it all over his arms, legs and feet as though he washed himself. In great handfuls he took it up, sprinkling it all round him, mumbling faintly to himself words which I could not understand. At length his eyes fell upon the grinning skull, and picking it up, he held it with both hands close to his face as he said: "Ah! I had forgotten thee, my friend. Thou art Death himself; no torments trouble thee. Why, thou art grinning even now. Happy art thou, O Death—I do love thee for thy mirth. But, Death, thou art cold!—oh, so cold and hard! Why dost thou not have blood—red, warm blood like those that live? 'Tis blood that I want, my laughing friend—blood, blood—BLOOD!"

He did not raise his voice, but spoke in low monotonous tones.

"Yes," he went on, still gazing intently into the empty sockets, "'tis blood and that alone that will quench my burning thirst, and 'tis thou, thou mirthful Death, that canst give me my fill. Come, Death—give it me—give me BLOOD!"

He was holding the skull out at arm's length now, on a level with his face, but his eyes were closed.

"Come, Death, sweet Death, give me blood! Come! come! come!"

Suddenly his arms and body became rigid, his breathing short and in laboured gasps; the crane feather upon his head began to tremble, his face to turn a pale ashen grey, and the painful throbbing of his heart showed plainly and weirdly in the swollen veins in his neck. He seemed to be passing through a moment of supreme agony, but just then he woke from his trance and suddenly beheld the hideous skull in his hands, and with one wild yell of mortal fear and dread he flung it from him and fell to the floor a quivering heap, ghastly to behold.

In an instant four or five Councillors rushed in, and it was not without some difficulty that I convinced them that His Majesty had merely fainted. But at last he came to himself, and a moment later addressed me as though nothing had happened:

"The time hath come that I should inspect the regiments, both men and women. Give the command that they form up in proper order upon the plain below, the women separate from the men."

Saluting the King, I left the Chamber, and was heartily glad to be out in the open once more. I gave out the royal command through a hundred captains, and like magic the regiments—a vast multitude of men and women—formed up some five hundred paces below the Royal Kraal.

Pent-up excitement was in the air, and I knew that a hundred thousand hearts beat with quickened throbs as the word went forth: "The King will now address the nation."

Ten paces from the foremost rank he halted, and motioning to me, as Chief Councillor, to stand

beside him, he slowly surveyed first the men and then the women for as long as one might take to count a hundred.

I, too, looked towards the men, and in doing so my eye fell upon Mbambeni standing in the front line of his regiment. Instinctively I sought Mabozo among the group of executioners—who always stood apart from their fellow-men at such gatherings—and saw him there towering head and shoulders above the others. Then I eagerly sought Nopila, but before I could find her the King had begun to speak.

“Men say that we—the Zulus—are the mightiest of all nations. 'Tis true, since there be none within reach of our spears whom we could not slay if we would. But 'tis not of our past might that I wish to speak. Our present sloth and aimless living—which be an unspeakable danger to the nation—is that concerning which ye have been assembled here. Harken, ye dogs! There was a time when ye lived for naught but war and a bloody death. The grip upon thy spears was firm and ye were ever ready for instant battle. The scent of warm blood is what thy nostrils craved for; thine eyes were ever watching for some grim foe; blood, fire and smoke was what thy parched lips longed to taste; thine ears strained anxiously for the alien war-cry, and thy bodies twitched fretfully if ye lacked for the feel of the enemy's mad embrace or cold spear-thrust. Thy every sense, I say, clamoured for blood and death. But now—now”—he paused and looked savagely round him and, as it were, through the multitude before him

—"but now, what have ye come to—a nation of beer-drinkers—slothful seekers after empty pleasure—enjoyers of domestic life—mere hunters of game, not of men. Hau! the very name of Zulu doth taint the breath that utters it! This is what ye have come to, ye dogs! ye fatted pigs! Ye—the nation—not long since but a handful of men, and yet by my power and zeal raised from poverty and weakness to wealth and strength. Where, think ye, the folly of thy ways must end? Answer me that, O corpulent warriors, ye that be warriors in naught but name. And ye women," he went on, his words snapping out angrily and his mouth foaming, "what do ye but seduce men from the field of battle to your sleek and shining sides? Look at ye now! Have ye not thought more of your appearance than of the welfare of the nation?"

Once more he faced the men, pausing to gain his breath.

"The fault lies with ye, for instead of maintaining your hearts in courage and your bodies in strength by manly exercise, which in times of of peace are doubly imperative, ye have given way to the temptations of the flesh. All this, I say, shall cease from this day forward. By my mother, it shall cease! Ho there! All the captains of the regiments stand forth," and he had hardly given the order before the captains had leapt before him.

"Each of ye shall pick one man from his regiment famous for his skill with the throwing-spear, and while we do test them, two men from each regiment shall go to yonder kloof and catch one of the lions we know to be there, and bring it to

me here alive, and thereafter the whole army, regiment by regiment, shall march backwards and forwards—one thousand paces and a thousand back—for two days without food or drink. These, then, will be the first three tests which ye shall undergo. Begin; pick ye each the most skilful spearman, and bid him stand before me.”

A few moments later the chosen men were paraded before the King, who ordered a large black shield to be placed in an upright position seventy paces off in the space between the men and the women.

“Each one of ye shall have but one throw at yonder shield, and if there be any that miss, they shall themselves stand where the shield now is, and be a mark for those who have not failed. Now, ye dogs, begin!”

“Sire,” said the captain highest in rank, “we have also chosen the men who are to capture the lion.”

“Let them depart, then, forthwith upon their errand,” commanded the King. “But, mark thou, the lion is to be brought here alive, and that before the sun be set. Come,” he said, turning to the Councillors; “let us witness how far our warriors have forgotten their spear-skill. Begin, ye idle loiterers—begin!” and with an impatient gesture he shook his little spear at the group of chosen men.

Baba, son of Ludiya, was the first to throw his spear, but whether from nervousness, or want of practice, or both, he missed the mark, the weapon falling a good hand-breadth to the left. A murmur

of disappointment rose up, while to the extreme right a woman shrieked.

"What woman be that who thus forgets herself in our presence?" thundered the King.

Now I knew it was this same Baba's wife, and so I replied:

"'Tis the wife of him who hath failed to hit the mark, O King."

"Yet why doth she shriek?" demanded Tshaka, his eyebrows raised.

"'Tis because her husband must now himself become a mark for the spears of those who do not miss, and so meet his death," I replied.

"It is what I have said—we have come to such folly even as this, when women cannot bear to lose their husbands. Watala, the nation doth indeed decay. But see!—there doth another nerve himself and set his eye for the aim."

This time the spear was well thrown, for it struck the shield well in the middle. And then, one after the other, they made their aim; but five of the number missed the mark and stood aside, with Baba, waiting to be a living target for those who had aimed true.

"Come now," said the King, "let these six men stand where the shield is, in a row, five paces separating each, and let those that were successful be divided into six equal parties, one for each victim. Those that are to hurl the spears shall do so six at a time, each man aiming at his respective mark until the six be all slain. Now begin, and beware, and beware. The mark being larger, greater accuracy shall I expect of ye. Begin."

"Oh, fare thee well, my beloved husband—fare thee well," moaned a woman from the ranks.

Six of the chosen men took up their stations amid a terrible silence. Every eye was turned upon the spearmen and the doomed men, who, with the courage and bravery that hath ever distinguished the Zulu nation, faced their unwilling executioners with heads and bodies erect as upon parade, their eyes looking steadfastly before them, their arms, with hands firmly gripped (the only sign of anguish), straight and rigid at their sides, as though fastened there. They were brave men, my father; and when, a moment later, four of the six lay speared to death, I marvelled not only at the bravery they had shown, but at their absolute and fearless loyalty to their iron-hearted King.

"Ha!" exclaimed the King, "two of ye have missed your marks. Have a care, ye dogs! Trifle not with me thus. Have a care, I say; one more chance shall I give ye."

But as the two prepared to take their aim there came a loud shout, and the next moment the warriors sent for the purpose stood before the King carrying a full-grown lion upon their shoulders. Though bound, it was alive, as the King had commanded it should be.

"O Great and Mighty Elephant," said the captain of the expedition, "whose power subdueth the beasts of the forest as well as men, behold the lion which thou didst command us to capture alive," and the next instant the savage but helpless beast was placed at the King's feet.

"Enough!" said the King; "keep it close at hand

till our present business be complete," and they dragged the beast away, and leaving it two paces to my left, entered the ranks again, and the King turning to the two men again, said:

"Now aim well and truly," and a moment later the two hurled their weapons, and together the two blades struck the naked chests at which they aimed, and the last of the six fell dead. Now, the King was just about to speak again when the tragedy of Nopila's plight—which had been uppermost in my mind all day—was brought with startling suddenness before the assembled throng, for at that moment Mbambeni, disregarding all rules of etiquette, leapt from the ranks and stood before the King.

"Who be this youth, Watala?" asked His Majesty.

"My nephew, Sire," I replied.

"Speak, young man; the burden of thy words must be urgent to approach me thus."

"O Great King!" began Mbambeni, with respectful and impressive earnestness, "thou hast commanded that my wife Nopila should die the death since, as thou dost believe, she is to bear a child to thee," and he went on and told the King of Maboza's plot just as I had related it to him that morning, my father.

No sooner had he begun his tale than I looked upon him as a dead man, for the King—seldom merciful—was in no mood just then to deal with this, of all matters, with anything but a heavy hand, and so I was prepared for what followed.

The full import of the youth's words did not at

first strike the King; indeed, he had for a time, at least, forgotten all about Nopila, but suddenly, as he recalled the circumstances of the poor woman's plight to mind, his face became at once a living fury—the fingers of his right hand clutched in characteristic fashion the haft of his little spear, while those of his left dug their nails deeply into the palm; the agitated movement of his nostrils betokened the passion that surged within him, and for a moment he could not speak.

“What!” he burst forth at last, “darest thou say that this woman is thy wife, and wouldst thou, thou dog's whelp, plead for her life—and she a concubine of the Royal House! Seize him, executioners—seize him, and guard him closely till I can deal with him as he deserves.”

Mabozo, a smile of triumph upon his repulsive face, stepped forward quickly, and with two others seized and bound the youth, then thrust him roughly to the guard.

I know not which I felt just then—sorrow or anger—sorrow at the untimely end of the youth and the woman Nopila, or anger with Mbambeni for having brought matters so clumsily to a head. Now, indeed, I thought, was I powerless to help either the one or the other; but whether it was Mabozo's evil look of gloating hate or the sight of the heavy tears which streamed slowly and silently down Nopila's face (for she had been brought forward while the youth pleaded his case) I know not, but all at once my heart gave a leap of maddened anger—an anger the more terrible because it was directed against the King, who purposed doing

to death these two young people, both innocent of any crime. I have ever been a man of action, my father, and powerless as I was to help these two, my brain yet worked quickly, nervously, frantically as I sought with lightning speed a plan to save their lives. The King was speaking to those who had captured the lion, but I paid no attention either to him or the angry snarls and struggles of the beast, nor was I aware of the heart-broken moans of Nopila, who, now that her husband was condemned to die with her, could no longer control her feelings. All these things I heard of afterwards. "They must not die—they must not die—they must not—they must not!" were the only thoughts and words that throbbed in my heart and brain. Every moment was bringing their end nearer—the King would soon give the command, and then—"Quick—quick, Watala! Do something—thou, The Deliverer—something—anything! Quick, quick! Ah, Watala, let them not die thus!"

My heart seemed to be shrieking the words at me; my brain was on fire and was like to lose its power of reasoning in the unequal struggle in which it was engaged—a struggle against overwhelming odds—nay, against the King himself. In my agony of despair I turned, and my eyes fell in a vacant stare upon the growling lion but two spear-lengths away. The unusual sight brought me to my senses, and then—ah, my father—then there came a plan, surging like a whirlwind through my brain, and at that instant my heart gave one mighty throb such as one can experience but once in a lifetime.

And now I found myself listening to the King, who was saying:

"Yes, 'tis well that ye were able to bring the lion alive, but come—the sun doth set. Ho there, Mabozo! Bring forth the woman and the youth."

And the next moment Nopila stood before the King, and then Mbambeni was thrust beside her. For a moment the eyes of the youth and the maid met, but in that glance there was no sign of fear—only a world of love.

The King was about to give the order. All eyes were bent upon the unhappy two; they could not but yield to the fascination of seeing how these two young people would meet their doom. Again the King began to speak, but my thoughts were elsewhere.

Slowly, stealthily, almost imperceptibly, I moved towards the bound-up lion. I heard its savage growl, to which none paid attention now; I felt its heated breath upon my naked feet, and then I halted, my eyes not upon the lion, but riveted upon the villain Mabozo, who was preparing now to do his killing work.

"Which wilt thou slay first?" demanded the King.

"Nay, Thy Majesty," replied the executioner, "'twould not be fitting to slay a woman in thy presence. Let me take the girl to the place of killing, sire; the sight be not one for the royal eyes to look upon."

"O mighty King!" said Mbambeni, "I have told thee that this dog doth seek to make Nopila his wife. If thou dost allow him to take her to yonder

place, he will not slay her, but will spirit her away and marry her at some other time and place."

"I do not trust thee overmuch, Mabozo," said the King, "therefore the two shall be slain here, even as I have commanded. Come, let it be done forthwith. Why waste we time parleying thus?"

"The King hath spoken," replied Mabozo with submission.

I took another step backwards, and the lion, bound as he was, was yet able to claw me severely on the foot. See, my father, here be the faint marks still. I made no sound, and none saw the incident, for, as before, all eyes were fixed upon the doomed two.

"Come, ye carrion—stand farther apart and prepare for death," I heard Mabozo say.

Those who had but lately pressed forward now shrank back. The youth held Nopila's hand for a moment in silent farewell—he could not, being bound, embrace her—and thus the two parted, five paces between them. The King's face showed that even he was moved by the scene. The fingers of his left hand nervously rolled and unrolled a corner of his kaross, while those of his right drummed fitfully upon the haft of the little spear. An oppressive silence settled with unnerving effect upon the tragedy, for that which had never been heard of before was now to be enacted—a woman executed before the very eyes of the King and people.

Now Mabozo was stalking round his victims seeking for a favourable spot to thrust his blade, but just then the King's voice spoke again.

"Let her hold up her arms," said he; "thou'lt be better able then to find thy mark."

"Dost hear what the King saith?" said Mabozo, addressing Nopila.

A woman close by shrieked and fell in a swoon to the ground, others sank down silently, their knees giving way beneath them, while a third laughed hideously from overwrought anguish.

Nopila could not at first lift her arms, but at last, with sudden courage, she jerked them swiftly upwards, clasping her hands tightly above her head, only to let them fall a moment later helplessly to her side again.

"Come," said Mabozo; "keep the King waiting no longer."

All these things I saw as in a dream—some horrible nightmare—but as Mabozo's final order reached me I turned and faced the lion, and stooping down, I—like a flash—cut loose with my spear the thongs which bound it. For a moment the beast lay there, still. Would it never move? A world of fear and horror seized me as I thought perchance it would or could not do so; but it was only for a moment, for the next instant the beast, realising that it was really free, sprang with a mighty roar into the air, and then, in a cloud of dust, bounded madly, furiously, snarling and growling as it went, straight for the only open space—where Mabozo and the two prisoners stood. The confusion that followed that roar and the sight of the monarch of the forest dealing gaping wounds and death to all within its reach are matters beyond my powers of description, my

father. And besides, I had at that moment only one purpose in my mind, and so, following closely in the maddened brute's tracks, my spear raised as though to slay it, I reached Nopila and Mbambeni—as terrified as the rest—and seizing them by the arms was able—above the tumult and confusion, the roars and screams—to make them hear these words: "Fly now, ye children; this is thy only chance—fly—quick—quick!" and the two were soon lost to my view in the terrified crowd, which, not even excepting those who guarded the King, was in the veriest confusion in which I had ever seen the Zulu people.

Quickly as I could I made my way to where the lion—now studded with many spears—still dealt death to those within his reach, and as I came up I saw Maboze creeping stealthily towards it from behind. His body was in a direct line between the lion and me, and with as little compunction as I would have slain an antelope, I hurled my spear with all the force of pent-up anger straight at his massive back. It struck him full between the shoulders, and, with hardly a groan, he fell upon the very lion itself, which, turning quickly, struck him a savage blow. But it was wasted energy, my father; the executioner was already dead. A moment later the lion, too, lay dead at our feet.

"Haul!" exclaimed one of the Councillors. "Why did ye not kill the beast sooner, ye dogs?"

"We could not hurl our spears for fear of missing the brute and slaying one of the King's warriors instead—indeed, Maboze himself is done to death by some such stray weapon."

And I? I held my peace.

The little lad who now wheels the four-wheeled box with thy children in is the grandson of Nopila and Mbambeni, my father, for they escaped safely to Natal here, and lived for many years in happiness because, try as he would, the King was never able to trace them—or the man who released the lion.

You smile, my father? Ah well! I must needs smile too.

THE "LITTLE BUFFALO"

"Quick! quick! Watala! Open; 'tis I, Maweel!"

Had I heard aright, or was I dreaming? I rubbed my eyes, for I had been asleep—it was the dead of night.

"Quick! O uncle, I beseech thee, open, I say!"

"Why—how now," I said, quickly raising myself upon my elbow. "Why this rude awakening at such a time?"

"The guard is close upon my heels and will slay me even at thy door! Haste thee! O uncle, haste thee!"

The call was urgent, and who could have resisted it, my father, especially when made by one's own flesh and blood? "The guard pursuing my nephew!" What did this not convey? I leapt to the door, and had barely unfastened it when Maweel rushed in and past me to the back of the hut. By now I was almost as agitated as he, and having hastily closed and fastened the door, I turned to him. But for the faint glow from the dying embers in the hearth, the hut was in darkness. I listened for a moment. No, my wife was still asleep—her steady breathing on the opposite side of the hut told me that—but the laboured gasps which came from the *emsamu* were like those of a hound distressed by the chase.

"Come," I said; "explain what is afoot."

"My good uncle," he replied, in panting jerks, his hot breath upon my naked chest—for he had come at once to my side—"I fear the guard recognised me as I leapt the stockade. They gave

chase, but I have escaped their spears for a moment—only for a moment."

"Leapt the stockade? Why—and—which stockade, man?" I asked.

"The stockade surrounding the royal apartments," he said in a voice which showed that he realised the seriousness of his offence.

"What!" I said, as I felt for and gripped him angrily by the arm, "hast thou dared trespass within the royal enclosure and at this hour of the night?"

"O uncle——" he began.

"Thou art as good as dead," I interrupted; "prepare to die, for thou knowest full well that none may set foot unbidden within that place and yet escape the executioner. 'Tis the greatest of all crimes. Answer me," I went on: "how camest thou within the precincts of the royal harem?"

"'Twas in some sort a wager, O uncle, and——"

"A wager? Art thou, then, an *isilima*, a half-witted fool, to wager with thy life?"

"Not so loud, O uncle." He, too, was clutching me by the arm now. "Listen; I will tell thee."

"Boy," I said, "thou hast told me all there is to tell. All else matters not," I added, a note of sadness in my voice.

"Alas! the shattered clay pot can never be mended, and it—my life—has been dashed to the ground by my mad folly; but, O uncle, my presence there was with innocent intent, and——"

"Innocent intent!" I said as I flung him roughly from me. "How canst thou plead innocence when all know that any man found there, whatever be

his purpose, is punished with instant—nay, a tortured—death?”

“Even so, my uncle, but——”

“Mawele,” I said, more kindly now, for I felt that the youth would soon pay the penalty of his folly, “thy hour hath come. Face thy doom like a man, for ’tis all that is left thee in this world. Thou hast ever been loyal and brave, and see to it, for the honour of thy name, that thy sun doth set in a glory of fearless courage and not in the dark clouds of a shameful, shameless fear.”

“But, uncle,” the youth answered, “I would have thee know the true purpose of my visit to the harem.”

Although he could not see, I shrugged my shoulders.

“Tell me, then,” I said, “but let thy tale be short.”

“Three days ago,” he began, “six young men of the Amazansi regiment, being somewhat full of beer, had heated words. We took up sides, three on each (I on one of them), having decided to fight the matter out with sticks, but—mark thou this—on this condition: that those who lost would have to enter the enclosure of the royal harem, and, in token of having accomplished this dangerous feat, to return with a piece of reed plucked from one of the wind-screens which stand before each of the royal huts. The purpose of this condition was that those that lost the fight should, as further punishment, incur the risk of the bloody death which awaits any caught trespassing within the sacred enclosure. The fight took place—we lost.

Feel here; the middle finger of my right hand is broken"—I felt the injured limb—"and this gaping wound upon my forehead completes the tale. Well, we drew lots to decide who should enter the enclosure first. It fell to Swazi, and the spirits protected him, for he accomplished his task, duly producing his piece of reed to us this morning. I had to go second, and here I am, without the reed, and my life forfeit."

"O foolish youths!" was all I could say, though, had I been a youth, the adventure would have been one after my own heart. "But tell me," I went on, "how camest thou to think that the guard recognised thee? the moon is young, and 'twould be difficult to identify anyone in such a light."

"They shouted as I leapt the stockade, 'Have at him!' A spear whistled past me. I landed on my feet and flew like the wind, dodging between the huts. They gave chase, pressing me close, but gradually I gained upon them, and as they finally lost sight of me I heard one shout, 'We shall know thee again, young rat, never fear; thou escapest us now, but we shall find and recognise thee and——' Their words died out. I ran, clinging to the shadows of the huts until, seeing yours, and mine still being a long way off, I decided to seek the shelter of thy roof and—here I am."

"They did not mention thy name?" I asked.

"No, nor that of my regiment."

"Good!" I said. "Thou mayest yet escape."

"Thanks to thee I am safe for the moment, O uncle, but I fear I cannot reach my own hut without detection, for all sentries have by now

been given the alarm, and if my absence from my own hut be found out—as indeed it must—my guilt will be clearly proved, and then——”

“’Tis true, Mawele,” I said. “I fear thy time hath come, but thou hadst best take what chance there is to reach thy quarters unseen.”

“O uncle,” he replied, “I too, feel that my hour is near. I have brought this thing upon myself and must pay the penalty. If die I must, then it shall be as a man, even as thou hast commanded; if so it be I do not see another sunset, do thou, my good uncle, carry my fond farewell to my mother” —he placed both hands pleadingly upon my shoulders—“and give her this necklet in memory of me”—he pressed the rope of beads into my hands; “and to thee, my uncle, I will bequeath my most treasured possession——”

“Nay, now,” I said, “think not of me, but——”

“Good uncle,” he went on, not heeding me, “to thee I owe great and lasting gratitude. Am I not in the finest regiment—the Amazansi—through thy kindly interest in me, and was it not thou thyself who——”

“Enough,” I said; “give me what thou wilt—some little token—and I’ll keep it in honour and memory of thy name.”

Thereupon the youth thrust into my hand a bracelet of solid polished brass. We valued such things then, my father; we value them to-day. They were rarely met with and much prized by their owners. See, I have worn it from that day to this. I suffered him to bend the metal toy firmly round my wrist, and as he did so a lump rose in

my throat, my eyes became moist, and my lips trembled. It was a sad moment, my father, this farewell to my kinsman, but it would have ill become me to have shown emotion even at such a time, and so, rousing myself once more to the danger the lad was in, I said:

"Go, quick, while it is yet dark. To thy hut, Mawele, and may the spirits guide thee there in safety."

But it was too late. Ah, my father, my heart leapt to my throat and wellnigh choked me. I held my breath. Mawele, rigid with fear, seized me frantically by the arm, for at that instant there was a loud knocking at the door.

"Quick, youth, hide! Quick!" I pushed him to the *emsamu*, the back of the hut.

"Where?"

"Here! anywhere! Behind these mats! Nay, thrust thyself even into the thatch of the wall—conceal thyself as best thou can."

The knocking became louder.

"Open, O Chief Councillor," demanded a voice without.

"Who thus awakens me from my slumbers?" I asked aloud.

"'Tis we, the guard, O Watala," the same voice answered.

I sought to parley with them to give the youth time.

"And what may the guard want with me at dead of night?"

"Open, again I say, O Chief Councillor; our errand can brook no delay. Open quick; we search for a criminal."

"A criminal?" I asked in well-feigned surprise, "and in my hut? What foolishness is this?"

"In the King's name, open, O Watala. Thou wilt surely assist, not impede, us in our unpleasant duty."

Without more ado I opened the door, and two men armed with spears entered hurriedly. One carried a burning piece of wood and the other a handful of thatch, with which they instantly kindled a fire in the hearth.

"Come," I said; "explain yourselves."

"A young man, whom we can identify, was within the royal enclosure on evil bent. We attempted to arrest him, but he escaped and fled in this direction. We have searched for him in all the huts between here and where we last saw him. Sentinels are posted at each hut searched, and we will in this way examine every hut until we find our man."

"As he is not here," I said, "ye may depart as quickly as ye came. I wish to sleep."

I have ever been a fine dissimulator, my father, and so, with but half the effort it would have demanded of an ordinary man in the dangerous position I was in, I yawned long and deeply, stretching my arms out at full length before the fire, to the very life as a sleepy man would do.

"Ha!" suddenly exclaimed one of the men, looking at me fixedly as one who sees a ghost.

"What is it?" I asked, fearing lest the youth had left some tell-tale evidence of his presence, a spear-length away.

"Ha!—*isimangaliso!*—incredible!" the man ex-



"Move not, speak not, lest I wither thee with my breath." Page 93

claimed again, and then to my astonishment and relief he rose and said: "Come, brother; our search is ended," and without so much as a "good night" to me, the two left the hut.

I chuckled to myself at having got rid of them so easily, and so relieved was I at their departure that I did not attach due importance to their want of respect in not bidding me, the Chief Councillor, good night. The real import of their action did not strike me then, but at another time it struck me as with a blow, as I shall tell you, my father.

I rose and once more closed the door. I waited a few moments—the guard must get out of ear-shot—and then—

"Mawele," I whispered, "come forth and run for it, man; 'tis thy only chance."

There was no answer.

"My nephew, come forth."

Again no answer. I groped my way to the back of the hut, and running my hand over the wall found the boy's hiding-place. He was not there. I thrust my hand deeper into the thatch and then right through the wall. I gave a sigh of relief as I discovered that he had not only concealed himself, but had actually made good his escape by forcing his way through the wall.

"Good!" I muttered; "the spirits guard thee, Mawele."

He was a fine youth, my father—my favourite nephew, and a good, useful and manly life lay before him. But I? What could I do to help him out of this trouble? And so my thoughts carried me until at last, not without some uneasiness at what

the morrow would bring, I lay upon my mat once more and soon fell asleep.

On waking I told my wife what had happened, but all she gave for answer was to hold our little son—as fine a little fellow as you could wish to see, my father—closer to her breast as though to shield him from some blow—such a blow as threatened Mawele. This little three years' growth of mischief—an only son—indeed, at that time our only child—was the one bright spark in our lives. Sturdily built, his face ever full of merriment and laughter, the outward evidence of a happy disposition, he could not but win the hearts of all. There was something, too, in the way he would pull my beard and rough-handle my *isicoco*¹ that endeared the little fellow more and more to me every day.

He would clamber all over me, regardless of who was present, and more than once my dignity had to suffer at his hands. He was a loving, trusting little man, my father, and I am minded to think that it was due more to his lovable little ways than to the fact that he was my—Watala's—son, that he was, without doubt, the most popular child in the Royal Kraal.

But I *ndanda*—wander—too far from my tale.

I had barely finished my morning meal next day when the King's body servant entered my hut.

"Greeting, Mbopo," I said. "The King hath slept well, I hope?"

"His Majesty hath slept as a King should," replied Mbopo. He paused, and then: "His

¹ Head-ring.

Majesty would have audience with thee at once, Watala."

The abruptness of the man's tone somewhat startled me, but I did not show it.

"None may keep the Great, Great One waiting," I said. "Lead thou the way; I follow," and so saying I flung on one or two ornaments fitting to my rank, and bidding my wife good-bye, and patting the Little Buffalo (for so we had named our child) on the head, I left for the Council Chamber.

But it was not to the Council Chamber that Mbopo led me, but to a large thorn-tree behind the royal apartments, in the shade of which it was His Majesty's custom to try the more important cases. I knew of no cases to be heard that day, and was still wondering what was afoot when I reached the royal group, and saluting the King, I made my way to my usual place of honour at his side.

"Stop!" commanded Tshaka. "Thou art a prisoner, Watala. Seat thee five paces before me while I proclaim the charge."

Instinctively I flung both arms up before me, as though to ward off some blow. I stood thus for as long as a man might count ten.

"I—Watala—Chief Councillor to the King, guilty of some crime!" I exclaimed, my horrified amazement increasing with each word. "Never, O Great and Mighty One, should I——"

"Silence!" commanded His Majesty, "and be seated."

I did as I was bid, looking anxiously yet fearlessly into the King's face. Clearly the lion was very angry. His fingers twitched; his eyes blazed

with fearful wrath; his nostrils worked as those of a winded horse; his heaving chest—nay, every line of his body—betokened suppressed rage.

In addition to a number of other responsible men, the full Council was assembled—a gathering of perhaps fifty all told.

“Hearken, O Councillors, and thou, Watala,” the King began. “The royal apartments yonder”—he indicated them with his little spear—“are sacred to my use and to the four hundred handmaidens who dwell therein.” My heart sank as I guessed, now for the first time, the reason for my summons; but I guessed only half the truth as you will learn, my father. “No law is better known than that which forbids, under pain of tortured death, any to set foot within that enclosure without my express and personal permission. I charge thee, Watala, with having entered those sacred precincts at dead of night last night without the permission aforesaid. Answer me: dost thou admit thy guilt?” He trembled with anger and flung the question at me as savagely as ever spear was hurled in battle.

“I have never been within the forbidden enclosure except with thy permission, O King,” I answered with the calmness born of innocence, what time my heart beat with strangely nervous throbs.

“Here, Nyokana, and thou, Mlenze, stand forth,” ordered His Majesty.

These two men of the guard—the same who had visited my hut but a short time since—stepped briskly up before the King.

"Unfold thy tale, and let Watala, the Councillor, hear it."

"O King," Nyokana began, "about the hour of midnight, while Mlenze and I kept guard at the royal gate, we heard a noise as of the snapping of a twig. Alert in an instant, we listened. For so long as a man might count one hundred we heard no further sound, and then there suddenly came a thud as of a man dropping from a height to the ground. Instinctively we crouched close to the stockade, and, creeping on our hands and knees, quickly approached the spot from which the sound had come. We had barely gone ten paces, when there, as close as Thy Majesty is to us, we saw a dark figure moving stealthily towards the wind-screen of one of the huts within the enclosure. Just then the moon came out from behind a cloud, revealing most distinctly some bright ornament upon the intruder's arm. It was at that moment that the villain must have seen us, for he fled, dodging among the huts. In a trice he was at the stockade, over which he vaulted, and as he did so we, both of us, O King, again saw the bright ornament shining upon his wrist. We gave chase, but lost him, but so sure were we of identifying him by that unusual and therefore tell-tale ornament that we straightway searched hut by hut until we got to that of Watala here, and—see! O King! he hath the ornament upon his wrist even now!"

"Ha!" exclaimed His Majesty, "the innocent-looking bauble is indeed damning evidence of thy guilt. Speak, Watala! what hast thou to say?"

he added, pointing at me accusingly with his gleaming little spear.

"My lord," I said, "I am guiltless."

"Here, Mbopo, do thou fetch Watala's wife. I would have her hear our sentence," and as the messenger left, silence fell upon us all, the King included. A cock crowed noisily in the morning sun; the strains of some love-song sung by maidens fetching water floated weirdly up from a valley below, and ever the incriminating bracelet shone with cruel brilliancy upon my wrist. It seemed to burn my flesh, to impede the mad pulsing of my blood—nay, to compel all present to stare upon its polished surface with scornful and accusing eyes. Of a truth, I would willingly have severed my arm to rid me of this ill-omened gift. But I was helpless—self-convicted—a man good as dead—a mere common criminal unworthy even of the executioner's steel. At least, so all would think, and yet—how easy to secure my acquittal by denouncing the real culprit? Yes, I would do so. Could I lose my wife, my child—the Little Buffalo—and both of them me? No, I would not; I could not sacrifice my life thus. Mawele must pay the penalty of his folly. Yes! But of a crime, no! I would be justified in— But my thoughts were interrupted here by the arrival of my wife, carrying on her back the Little Buffalo. My heart swelled as I saw him, his big round eyes, wide open, dancing with that joyful happiness all his own.

"Be seated, woman," said Tshaka, and as she obeyed she swung the Little Buffalo from her back and placed him sitting on the ground beside

her. For a moment my eyes met her anxious questioning look, and then:

"Woman, thy husband, Watala here, and lately our Chief Councillor, hath been found guilty of the most serious crime known in our kingdom. He must die!"

For an instant my heart stood still—my blood ran cold—I became a stone. I listened no more to what the King was saying. Could I bring myself to disclose Mawele's guilt and thus proclaim my innocence? I must do so now, at once, else die a traitor's death. "Nay, Watala, be a man!" My heart thumped the words against my ribs. Should I have my nephew sent for and make him confess his guilt himself? "Nay, not so," my heart spoke again; and then, "What about thy wife, Watala—and thy son—yes, what of the Little Buffalo, Watala?" My eyes were now upon that little image of myself—my little, little boy—my sunshine—my Little Buffalo. I could stand it no longer. The King had stopped speaking. I would reveal the culprit's name.

"My lord," I began, "I can tell thee——" I stopped, for my lips had closed firmly with a snap.

"And what canst thou tell us, O Watala?" asked the King. He was smiling now, that cruel, treacherous smile.

"I can tell thee—O—Great—One——"

The fatal words refused to come. They stuck half-way in my parched, aching throat. I coughed; I licked my lips with my burning tongue. I tried again to speak, then stopped, and looked towards my wife and him—the boy—ah! my Little Buffalo.

"O King," I began again, "the man who did this thing——" Would the words that could save my life ever come? I clenched my hands, driving the nails deep into the flesh—my whole body became rigid as with some supreme effort. I tried again to moisten my lips, but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and thus, battling with myself—nay, against myself—I stood looking steadfastly straight before me, all eyes upon me save those of my wife, who was now weeping bitterly.

Just then the Little Buffalo rose unsteadily to his feet and trotted in his manly little way towards the King, then stopped, irresolute, two paces from His Majesty as the King himself stood up finally to pronounce my doom.

"Thy hesitation and the bracelet are full proof of thy guilt, Watala. Before the sun be set thou shalt taste the death; but, as thou hast been Chief Councillor, yet more because thou wert a comrade-in-arms with me before I was King, I will grant thee one wish before thou diest. 'Tis unusual, but in my kingly mercy I shall grant thee that boon. Speak, Watala, and name the wish."

I rose with dignity to my feet, and although the world was swimming before my eyes, I drew myself to my full height (I was a taller man than I am to-day, my father), and saluted—"Bayete!"—my right arm uplifted above my head.

"Once more, O King, I swear that I am innocent of this thing, but since thou, O Great and Noble Judge, hath found me guilty, why, die I must." The words had come at last. "Nay, not that—not that." I added quickly: "I know the man who——"

I checked myself just in time, and then, as calmly as I speak to you now, my father, "I have ever served thee loyally, and if thou, O Mighty Black One, can even think Watala guilty of such a crime, 'twould be better that I should die at once than live with such a cloud above me. The King, in his mercy, hath granted me, his unworthy dog, a boon. I thank thee, O Mighty One, for thy clemency."

"Yes, Watala, and what is the boon?" interrupted His Majesty.

"This, O King," I said without hesitation: "that thou wilt remove that kaross from off thy shoulders that I may feast these eyes of mine for one brief moment on the naked form of my beloved King."

"Hau!" exclaimed the King with some impatience. "Be that all?"

The Little Buffalo, now more courageous than before, ran boldly forward, and ere any could stop him had seized the King's leg, hugging it as he so often did mine, and looking with childish mischief up into the royal face.

"Well, Thy Majesty, since thou dost ask the question," I went on, "there be one other matter—a mere trifle—which I feel the King might grant me before I sleep." My wife's sobs were louder now; my lips began to tremble.

"Say on, Watala. What be that?"

The Little Buffalo still clung to the King's knee.

"Just this, O Royal Elephant: I have a little son—the Little Buffalo, we call him—a tiny toddler so high" (I indicated the height of my knee). "Let me but hold him to my heart for a brief space, thus, thus, and thus" (I showed him what I meant).

"Yes, then, O King of Zululand, shall I die in peace."

I was looking the King pleadingly in the face, and I minded not who could see the single tear that coursed slowly down my cheek. For a moment our eyes met, and then his—the eyes of the mighty, terrible, all-powerful Tshaka—fell before my glance, and at that instant he caught his breath suddenly as one in pain, and placing his right hand upon the Little Buffalo's head, and gazing steadily into the child's upturned face, he said just these words, as though addressing the child:

"Let the man go; he is free."

My wife swooned. The Little Buffalo rushed to her and flung his baby arms round her neck, and I—why, all I said was: "*Bayete! Bayete! Bayete!*" three times, my father.

Two years later news came to me that Mawele had been killed in battle, and I straightway told the King of the part the youth had played in this matter. When I had finished, I was surprised to see the King smiling.

"I knew it," said he—"I knew it, Watala."

"How so, Thy Majesty?" I asked in surprise.

"Why," he went on, "the youth confessed to me himself, since, he said, he feared harm might still come to thee from his folly, and—look thou, Watala."

"Yes, my lord."

"Thinkest thou that Mawele died in battle?"

"Even so, O King," I replied.

"Nay, O worthy Councillor, it was not so. Thy nephew died of a poison, Watala, which I did make

him swallow in my presence here. He died in agony two days' journey hence—not on the field of battle, O Son of Solwandhle."

"*Bayete!*" I answered—the King, no doubt, thinking the salute was intended for him; but it was not, for at the moment I learnt of the real cause of my nephew's death my eyes fell to the bracelet upon my wrist—the King completely out of mind—and the salute was to him, Mawele, who had so clearly earned it.

And that is why I have ever kept this toy upon my wrist, even to this day, my father.

THE BABOON KINGDOM

I HAVE been through many strange adventures, as my father well knows, but the strangest of them all I have yet to tell.

Strangest? Most horrible! should I rather say, for it is horror that, even at this distance of time, causes an involuntary shudder as I picture, all too vividly, what befell me on that occasion.

You must know, then, that shortly after I had taken my leave of His Majesty one night, I was walking towards my hut when, without any warning, I received a blow upon the head. I fell to the ground, but did not lose consciousness. Four or five pairs of hands seized me as I fell, and a few moments later had securely bound me, fastening at the same time a goatskin over my head.

Death and murder were so lightly thought of in those troublous days that had I shouted for assistance I should have been slain where I lay. But it was for another reason that I held my tongue—it would have been beneath the dignity of a man of my strength and bravery to cry out for help. I lay still, therefore, and feigned unconsciousness while they lifted me to their shoulders and carried me silently and swiftly to the outer gate, for a small hole in the goatskin enabled me to note the direction.

What could be the reason for this murderous attack upon me? I asked myself a score of times. It was some plot which, when it became known, would shake the kingdom, for was it not I, Watala,

Chief Councillor, upon whom hands had thus been roughly laid, and who was there in the breadth of the land that could fill my place if any harm should come to me?

We were through the gate now, and, still peeping through the hole, I made out the head of one of those who bore me, and in him I presently recognised Kuzwayo, for surely none but he had that scar upon the cheek—a wound I had myself inflicted but six short moons ago.

I well remember the occasion; it was on such a night as this that I had been waylaid in much the same manner some distance from the Royal Kraal. Of my four assailants then, I had quickly slain two—one fled, while the fourth—this same man Kuzwayo—had engaged me single-handed. As we fought I wounded him in the cheek—an horizontal gash—and a moment later had pinned him to the ground with my spear and left him there for dead. "Fool," I now thought, "not to have made more certain of his death." Yes—clearly—revenge was Kuzwayo's motive for the attack to-night. But what excuse had I given to my other capturers for this black villainy?

Now it would avail me nothing to know the reasons for their treachery; sufficient was it to know that I was in the hands, and completely at the mercy, of one at least who bore me deep hate, as much for the ghastly disfigurement of his face as for the terrible spear-thrust I had given him six moons ago. I was unarmed—a short stick, my only weapon, having fallen from my grasp at the first attack.

Presently we struck a path—seldom used—that led to the country of the Amacwele, six days' journey off. It passed, I knew, through mountainous country, gloomy and desolate, and said to be haunted by evil spirits.

Those who bore me spoke no word. On, on, ever on, they pressed, pausing now and again only for those who shouldered my body to change places with those who carried my legs, in a wearisome silence, broken only by the heavy, laboured breathing as the task they had set themselves began to take toll of wind and muscle.

And I? I lay as before, inert, limp, seemingly lifeless, while my brain leapt to frenzied action, this way and that, like a wounded antelope surrounded by its merciless pursuers.

And so the night wore on until, just at dawn, they stopped, and words were spoken for the first time.

"Yonder," said Kuzwayo, "the top of that high mountain, is our destination."

"'Tis good news, brother," replied one, whom I recognised for the first time as Mabasa, of the Amandhlebe regiment.

"The Councillor is a goodly weight," said a third voice. "'Tis a pity you struck so hard, Kuzwayo, else, ere this, we could have made the dog walk before us."

"Nay," replied Kuzwayo, "I take no risks with the dog Watala, for had my blow been less severe he might have called for aid, and as thou knowest well many would have come to his rescue."

"Yes, but not before my spear had sent him to his death," said Mabasa. "The dog!" he went on,

"'twas he who advised the King not to allow my regiment to marry—curse him for a meddling fool! Were it not that we have a better death for him I'd plunge my spear into his worthless body here and now."

"And so would I," put in a fourth voice; "but I, too, have a score to pay, as Kuzwayo knoweth—a score that can only be wiped out by the horrible death we have in store for him."

My heart beat fearfully, for it seemed they meant to put me to some torture.

"Why not slay him here?" asked the third voice. "'Twill save us the trouble of carrying him up the mountain. We could torture him here and save the weary climb."

"There is sense in what thou sayest," replied Kuzwayo. "I had, indeed, planned a special death for him, but I have no stomach for further of this carrying business. What sayest thou, Mabasa?"

"For my part," the other answered, "I care not much where we do the deed, so long as he be tortured."

I was thinking quickly—one does at such moments, my father. A mountain-side, it seemed, would offer better chances of escape than where we were at that moment. Clearly I should encourage the climbing of the mountain, and I must therefore relieve them of my weight. I moved slightly, groaning mournfully as I did so.

"See, the dog regains consciousness!" exclaimed Mabasa.

"Remove the skin from his head, for it matters not whom and what he sees now," said Kuzwayo.

At that the covering was torn away, but I pretended still to be coming to my senses, and so did not open my eyes at once, but with much groaning and rolling from side to side made them believe that I was in pain, and then—I opened my eyes.

“Where am I?” I groaned, with a dazed and vacant stare. “My hands and legs refuse to move—I am numbed with cold,” and groaned again.

“Thou’lt be colder yet, thou dog!” said Kuzwayo. “Lie still and make no further moanings here.”

I sat up and appeared to notice for the first time that I was bound.

“What is this, ye dogs?” I asked in genuine anger. “I, Chief Councillor, roughly bound up thus! Release me at once, I say.” Now I had seen the other two men for the first time, and with shame and horror I recognised in one of them a warrior of my own trusted regiment, the Amazembe.

“Death alone shall release thee now, Watala,” replied Kuzwayo, “for it is our purpose to pay thee with a lingering death for the injuries which, as Chief Councillor, thou hast done to us. Each one of us here hath a deep and heavy wrong to avenge.”

“What!” I exclaimed, “how dare ye seek to put me to death for carrying out my duty to the King?”

“If it be thy duty to disgrace regiments of far-famed warriors in public; if it be thy duty to make the laws of marriage—already severe—a heavier burden, as Mabasa here can witness; if it be thy duty to seize the cattle of law-abiding people—if,

to do all these things, I say, be thy duty, O Son of Solwandhle, then, by Tshaka, those duties shall cease this day!"

"Traitorous, treacherous villain!" I replied savagely. "Dost thou thus speak of Watala, Chief Councillor to the King? But I shall not waste my breath save to tell thee that whatever I have done to hurt thee or these others hath been in the service and with the full consent of our Great and Noble King, and if there be any regret in me at this moment it is that your punishments were not heavier—as, indeed, they might well have been. Why, has it not been I who have often prevailed upon His Majesty to punish with a lighter hand? Fie upon thee, to do to death a man—— But, I say, I waste my breath. Get ye to your villainy. I am ready—do thy worst."

"Watala speaketh truth," said Sogedhle. "I have no mind to go further in this matter. When thou didst first approach me, Kuzwayo, my heart was full of anger, but, as I told thee yesterday, when in cooler frame of mind, I liked not the plot, and, indeed, it was only by threats of injury that thou hadst my promise to accompany thee hither. I made no further promise than just that, and therefore will I now return to the Royal Kraal."

Thus it was that he repented of the part he had played in this plot against my life, and as he finished speaking he made as though to go, when Kuzwayo sprang at him and stabbed him savagely in the back, and the warrior fell to the ground—dead.

"Base villain!—thrice accursed dog!" I shouted,

unable to control my horror at the foul murder of one of my own men.

"Silence!" commanded Kuzwayo, and the next instant struck me a blinding blow in the face with the flat of his spear-blade, and the blood which had been upon it mingled with that which now trickled down my face; but I gave no thought to it, for all sense of feeling had been driven from me by the scene I had just witnessed.

"Wouldst thou turn traitor thus, thou dog," exclaimed the murderer, as he wiped the dripping blade upon the still-quivering form and spurned it with his feet.

"Come," he continued; "let us proceed. Unloose this dog's legs, keep his arms bound, and drive him on before."

"Forward, now, my good Watala," he went on, with insolent familiarity, "and look thou travel quickly."

Should I make an attempt to escape now? The thought flashed to my mind but as quickly died, for, weaponless, my hands bound, I should surely be slain before I had gone ten paces. Would it not be better for me to die thus than by some long torture? But a small voice bade me have courage and wait, and I walked silently forward, ever on the look-out for some opening which might give me an advantage.

Now the path grew rougher as we began to ascend what I knew was one of the highest mountains in that part of the King's dominions, and which, the other sides being precipitous, could be scaled only by the path on which we were. Large boulders

had frequently to be climbed, but up, up we went, higher and higher, until at last, near midday, we reached a rocky platform, at one end of which was a cave, its dark entrance gloomy and forbidding even in the light of day.

"This is the spot," said Kuzwayo, and he bade us halt.

"A fearsome place indeed," said Mabasa, looking nervously round, and glancing more than once in the direction of the cave. "How came thou to learn of this evil, ghostly place?"

"From a madman," answered Kuzwayo, "whom I met one day by chance not far from where I slew that dog just now. Listen—I will tell the tale while we rest awhile. I gathered from his mad talk (though it was sane enough when upon his favourite topic) that he lived up here with a troop of baboons. He was an old man, had been here many years, and called himself Chief of the Baboon Kingdom. He assured me that he would soon be too old to manage the affairs of his four-footed subjects, and that he was even then looking for some stray passer-by whom he might persuade to rule in his stead, but all, he said, had refused his offer. I had a mind to come and see this place for myself, but something sinister in his face made me hesitate, seeing which he bade me be not afraid, saying that if I went with him the baboons would not harm me, 'but,' the old man continued, 'if thou didst go alone they would either tear thee to pieces or keep thee prisoner for the rest of thy life.'

"Do they indeed attack men thus?" I asked him, now strangely fascinated by his tale.

"'Yes,' he said, 'unless thou art under my care or they know thou art a friend.'

"'Are they up there now?' I asked.

"'Nay,' he said, 'by day they scour the plains for food, and 'tis only at sunset that they return.'

"'Dost thou then prefer the company of baboons to that of thy fellow men?' I asked again.

"He glared at me suddenly, the terrible light of madness leaping to his eyes, and began making grimaces and chattering wildly, for all the world like his baboon folk, then sprang with ape-like agility four paces to the right, and giving two short sharp barks, he cantered off with that motion peculiar to the baboon. I watched him ascend, with incredible speed, this hill by the very path by which we have come, until at last he disappeared upon the spot on which we are now resting."

"Hau!" exclaimed Mabasa, as much moved by the uncanny story as I and, indeed, the others had been. "Why didst thou not tell us of this before? for I should surely never have accompanied thee here."

"Nor I," said the other, who, with Mabasa, had grabbed his spears.

"Out upon ye for a pair of cowards," said Kuzwayo. "Have I not told ye that the baboons do absent their cave during the day, and even did they attack us, are not we, three warriors, well-armed, more than a match for the brutes?"

"Even so," went on Mabasa, his fears a little abated, "I like not thy madman's story, and still less this spot—this baboon dwelling. Why—see,"

he continued, his eyes arrested by some object near the entrance to the cave, "there is a human skull, and, by my mother, those other white objects to the right are surely a man's bones. Come, Kuzwayo, let us deal with this pig forthwith, and get us hence as quickly as may be. Say, therefore, what are the full details of thy plan."

"These," said Kuzwayo: "We will bind this Watala dog to one of those trees near the mouth of the cave. That is my plan—the baboons will do the rest."

Both warriors started in surprise, but I had already guessed that some such villainy was in store.

"And will they, indeed, tear him to pieces?"

"Limb by limb, even as a monkey doth a locust—out of curiosity. The death may be quicker than the dog deserves, and yet, being bound, he will not be able to raise their anger, and they, ape-like, will sport and play with him for a day or two, perchance, but that they will kill him, and that his death will be a horrible one—well——" He shrugged his shoulders and pointed again to the ghastly white relics.

"An awful death!" agreed Mabasa, "and one which will, in part, atone for his keeping Maluna and me apart."

"Come," said Kuzwayo; "the sun is setting; we'll bind him to the tree and leave him to his doom at once."

And thus did they plan my awful end! I could face an ordinary death as fearlessly as any man, but this? A sudden horror seized me, and it was only by prodding me with their spears that they

at last got me to the tree. They had barely finished binding me when there came, from far above us, the well-known baboon bark, "*No-ho-ha!*" in short and angry utterances, that told us all too clearly of the brutes' wild fury at discovering us in their sacred haunt.

Now the ledge or platform before the cave was some fifteen paces wide by twenty in length, and, as I have already said, there was no other way to the plains below but along the path by which we had just come. This ledge was bounded on two sides by a precipice, while at the back rose the almost perpendicular face of the mountain which held the cave. When, therefore, the brutes gave their angry challenge, Kuzwayo and the other two could only escape by the one way, and no sooner had they made me fast than, snatching up their spears and shields, they fled terrified towards this path. They had often heard the baboon bark before and paid but little heed to it, but now, in this mountain fastness, with those deep-throated barks—half-menacing, half-triumphant—of their almost human foes, growing nearer and more hideous, and with the madman's story still ringing in their ears, things somehow seemed different, and a panic of mingled fear and horror seized them, the like of which they could never have felt before. Kuzwayo's boast that they were more than a match for the baboons carried no weight now as they fled to gain the path. But they were too late, my father!

In tens, twenties, nay, hundreds, the savage dog-faced, human-shaped brutes were swarming among

the rocks on every side, many sliding down the face of the mountain above us, while quite two hundred blocked the path in one compact mass.

What power have I, my father, to describe that strange but awful scene? It is indeed beyond human language to do so, yet I will give you some idea of what I saw.

A multitude of the black-faced brutes—half-dog, half-man—was before us, perched on every boulder, every tree and shrub. Their dark grey shaggy coats, muscular arms and bodies, fangs laid bare, and burning yellow eyes, formed a semi-circular mass of living rage and hate horrible to behold. The repulsive beasts barked furiously ten, twenty, fifty at a time, while others grinned horribly, moving their retracted lips quickly up and down in the manner peculiar to such animals, ever revealing in exaggerated contrast to their black muzzles two rows of cruel fangs which threatened a mangled death to any who might fall within their reach. The bristly hair upon their backs stood erect like that of some infuriated hound; their eyes, the upper lids set far back—normally brown—now glared a fiery yellow of deadly hate; their tails stretched rigidly out; their arms—you could not call them fore-legs—planted firmly before them and every now and then jerked angrily up and down as the brutes half-rose, human-like, upon their legs, impatient, it seemed, to get at the three doomed men. Each pair of all that sea of eyes bore also an indescribable look of unsatisfied and deep revenge, fixed in merciless, nay, gloating, anticipation upon the

three wretches who, horror-struck and speechless, saw—and seeing, grasped to the full—the terrible fate before them.

Now Kuzwayo, losing his head, or thinking, maybe, to scare the brutes, hurled his spear at the one nearest him; he missed it, but he could not fail to strike another in that closely-packed mass, and with a dull thud the weapon found its mark fairly in the chest of a large brute just behind, the blade projecting a hand-breadth between its shoulders.

With one accord the barking stopped, and in the momentary silence I heard the wounded brute give a choking cough, and then, in mortal agony and rage, and urged on by the sudden and more infuriated barking of its fellows, it made a frantic maddened leap at Kuzwayo, the spear still bedded in its body, and ere the man could utter a word it was upon him, clinging to his chest, its fangs buried deeply in the traitor's throat, while its powerful arms thrust back his head as though to break the neck.

The other two stepped back, but Kuzwayo, not knowing what he did, reeled, stumbling this way and that, and, unable to see his way, fell headlong over the precipice, the baboon still clinging to him.

The baboons gave one long scream, and I, forgetful even of my own great peril, shouted with pent-up horror, while the two men—a nameless fear starting from their eyes—waited for their end, their heaving chests, and the spears grasped in limp and nerveless fingers, betokening the absence of all

strength or will to fight. Indeed, they offered no resistance when, a moment later, the maddened brutes fell upon them and tore them to a thousand pieces, which, in their uncontrolled fury, they dashed against the stones until nothing of them was left.

Thus the truthfulness of the Zulu proverb, "*u zidhlise ngobake*," was amply proven, for they had suffered that calamity which they had intended for another.

And was my own body to be dashed to the bloody nothingness which was all that remained of those two? I set my teeth, closed my eyes, an unspeakable dread numbing my every sense. I could have counted twenty; still nothing happened. A peculiar silence followed—in restful contrast to the recent din. What might this mean? I opened my eyes again, but as quickly shut them when I saw that the brutes had crept up to within five paces of me, surrounding me on every side. My heart was beating wildly, my brain awhirl, for my agony of suspense could not have been more complete. I opened my eyes again and stared vacantly before me—the helpless, hopeless stare of one bereft of reason.

They made no sounds, though their lips and eyelids were moving quickly up and down in their monkey fashion. They were not so angry now as before, since the hair upon their backs had flattened down and the savage glare had left their eyes. I struggled to get loose, but as I did so they assumed again their signs of anger, and so, rather than rouse their fury to no purpose, I desisted, my

eyes still fixed, nay, fascinated, upon their hideous grinning faces. What was their purpose? Why did they not treat me as they had done the other two? Was it, perchance, my helplessness that made them pause? But still they grinned at me—grinning, grinning, grinning all the time, until my own lips began to twitch, and, yes, I too grinned, as baboon-like as any there.

Suddenly the largest one stood up, gave two short barks, at which the rest ceased baring their cruel fangs.

“’Tis coming now,” I thought.

Slowly, stealthily, almost imperceptibly, the thing approached, and when but half a pace away it stopped, the hair upon its back rising slowly, its eyes fixed upon mine, and I—I still grinned—that senseless, expressionless grin sometimes to be found on dead men’s faces. Presently its muscles stiffened, its body trembled, and the next instant it leapt straight at my throat. A yell of horror escaped me, but the thing had sprung back again, leaving me unhurt. I had not time to marvel at this, for again it leapt at me and again I shouted, but this time it seized one of the thongs that bound me about the chest and with incredible strength wrenched it from my body. My arms and chest were free—I could have myself loosed the remaining thongs. But see! It was approaching again! And once more it sprang, at my legs and feet this time, and with one or two violent tugs burst the bonds that bound me there as well.

Amazed, fearful of what was to come, and yet grateful for my freedom, I sank to the ground; but

as I did so, with a tumult of barking, the whole troop, it seemed, rushed upon me, and the next instant I was being half-dragged, half-pushed, half-carried hurriedly into the cave.

Coming from the glare without I could not at once make out my surroundings, but I noted that the floor was smooth and that the roof must be high, since I did not have to stoop.

As they urged me on the brutes chattered excitedly before, behind and beside me, while from the front there came short barks as from the leader, to warn us that all was well.

We had gone about two hundred paces when, to my amazement, I saw, perhaps twenty paces in front, a fire glowing red in the darkness. The chattering ceased, the hands that held me still clutching me firmly. The passage here opened out into a large circular space about thirty paces across, the roof a little higher than a tall man.

As I glanced nervously over my shoulder, the glow from the fire enabled me to make out the forms of about two hundred baboons crouching in a compact mass behind me. Their eyes were not fixed upon me as I had expected, but upon some object which, following their gaze, I saw was huddled up beside the fire. Instinctively I felt that this object must be the madman of whom Kuzwayo had spoken, and instantly my eyes, too, were fixed upon it.

A sickly odour pervaded the place. I longed to be out in the open air, and yet, in spite of the fear I was in, a growing fascination seized me to learn more of the motionless figure by the fire.

I had been standing thus for a few moments when the stillness was rudely broken by a piercing shriek, and the next instant there rose from beside the huddled form a creature, the sight of which made me start with new fear and wonder. It was a large baboon, creamy white in colour, hairless, and with eyes of a sickly pink shade, which glared weirdly at me in the semi-darkness as the brute rose upon its hind legs.

It was this uncanny, loathsome beast that had shrieked. The form by the fire moved slightly as if disturbed in sleep; then the brute, shrieking again, leapt madly round the form, striking its naked chest angrily, and then cantered swiftly and in baboon fashion three times round the semi-circle formed by the other baboons—I in the centre—and finally returned to the fire again.

The mysterious form began to move again, then half-rose, rubbing its eyes as one does on waking from sleep. Instantly the white baboon crouched behind it. My eyes still riveted on it, I nerved myself for some fresh horror, but, just then, the fire broke into flame and, to my great surprise—though I had half-expected it—I saw the form was none other than that of a Zulu.

Old, grey-headed, emaciated and almost bent double, he might, in a dimmer light, have been mistaken for a baboon, but his hair, the colour of his skin and his dress were now, in the fire-light, unmistakable.

He stood up and looking slowly round to where I stood, and then, seeing me, leapt with surprising agility into the air, giving, as he did so, a loud peal

of laughter—the never-to-be-forgotten laughter of a madman.

Clearly it was the man of whom Kuzwayo had spoken, and his story had been no idle tale told, as I had thought, to strike fear into me.

He stood there trembling, his deep-sunk eyes, sparkling all too brightly for one so old, fixed upon me. The white baboon had also risen and was clinging to the old man's knees, its pink eyes gazing earnestly up into the old and quivering face above it. "Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed again, and away back from whence we had come there answered the bark of a solitary, and perhaps the sentinel, baboon, "*No-ho-ha!*"

"He, he, he, he!" and unloosing the arms of the White Thing at his feet, he darted forward to within two paces of me and paused a moment, peering up into my face, and then rushed back to the fire again.

At this all the baboons commenced chattering wildly again, but the next instant the White Thing leapt among them, and seizing the nearest, bit it savagely on the tail. Like magic the chattering ceased; but I had no time to marvel at this for the madman had begun to speak.

"Greeting, O greeting to thee, O son of Zulu," he piped in a thin, high-pitched voice. "Greeting, again I say. Thou art indeed welcome to the Baboon Kingdom. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!—yes, the Baboon Kingdom. Ha, ha, ha, ha!" He paused and with his wizened, claw-like hand he brushed away the spittle which dribbled from the corners of his toothless mouth. "We be the Baboon King-

dom here, O Zulu, and I—I be the King of the Baboons—yes, ha, ha, ha! King of the Baboons, I say. A mighty kingdom—he, he, he, he!—a mightier kingdom indeed than that of the bloody Tshaka.” I started involuntarily. “Ha!” he went on, “thou dost start, but ’tis even as I say. Thy King doth hold his throne by cruelty—I can prove it so. Yes, I, the King of the Baboons, can prove it. But I—I hold my throne by right and not by threats of injury to my subjects, and all here do want me for their King, and ’tis they, every one of them, I say, that elected me for their monarch,” and again he passed his bony hand across his dribbling mouth. “A mighty kingdom we have—ha, ha, ha, ha! We live in the depths of the mountain where none can reach us—nay, did the whole army of Zululand attack us here the warriors would be slain by us, one by one, as they reached the narrow ledge without. Ji—ji—ji—ji—jiiiii!” he finished, in imitation of the Zulu battle-cry. “Is it not so, ye black-faced grinning ones?” he said, suddenly facing the sea of black and dog-like faces before him; and immediately there came a deafening shout, “*No-ho-ha!*” And before I had time to reason whether they understood his words or no, he went on: “We have held this place, O Zulu, for more years than man can tell, and we shall hold it to the end of all time. Ha, ha, ha, ha!—a goodly phrase—the end of all time.”

He paused and clenched his withered hands, while the white hair upon his wrinkled chest rose and fell with his agitated breathing. The baboons all round crouched down, their faces to the ground,

in fear, it seemed, and even ceased grinning while the White Thing also threw itself upon its face behind its master, its arms, legs and tail stretched out flat, rigid—motionless.

“But what,” he began, his voice louder and stronger than before, “dost thou seek in this our sacred haunt? Answer me that, I say,” and suddenly he leapt baboon-like two paces nearer to me. “What dost thou seek where none but we may tread?” His face was ablaze with wrath; his fleshless knees shook together; his wrinkled lips, parted, with the spittle—all unheeded now—trickling from them on to his hairy, bony chest. I was afraid to speak.

“Answer me!” he shrieked, his madness clearly taking greater hold, and from the blackness behind me a baboon screamed involuntarily with a terror which I myself felt just then; indeed, it was this sudden cry that loosed my tongue.

“O great King of the Baboon Kingdom,” I began, half-crouching before the angry man, “I be here even at thine own request, for I have heard that in thy declining years thou didst wish for some valiant man to help thee rule thy kingdom, and lo! here am I.”

I had barely finished when he rushed to my side, and seizing me by the arm, dragged me to the fire and bade me be seated beside it, and the next instant broke out into a long wild laugh of mingled madness and triumph. “Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!”

For as long as a man might take to count twenty he eyed me with intense cunning and hatred.

“Come hither, my son,” he said, picking up a

long staff, "and follow me"; and, scarce knowing what I did, I followed the crooked figure as it hobbled along in front of me. Turning to the left, he led me for about twenty paces and then suddenly stopped before the wall of the cave.

"Come, Sacred One," he said, addressing the White Thing, which had also followed us, "lead the way, for my eyes are dim and thou knowest the path better than I," and the next instant the Thing had disappeared into the face of the rock, it seemed.

"Hau!" I exclaimed in amazement.

"Silence!" commanded Gxagxa, "and follow me, but see to it thou keep thy head well down, for this passage is low and dark," and he, too, disappeared before my very eyes. Dumbstruck at first, the thought rushed to my mind that I might now flee from this gloomy place. I turned but made no other movement, for twenty pairs of yellow eyes glared ominously at me in the darkness and at my very feet—the brutes were there successfully to bar any attempt to escape. I moved closer to the wall, and as I did so I heard a voice calling away in the depths of the earth.

"O son of Zulu," it said, "where art thou? Keep me not waiting, or it will go ill with thee"; and as I turned instinctively towards the voice I for the first time dimly made out a dark hole in the wall a little to my right.

"Better follow the madman," said I to myself, "than be torn to pieces here," and groping my way through the opening I found myself in a roughly-hewn passage.



"The next day I was married to Nomusa." Page 97

It was quite dark, and after I had moved a few steps forward, bruising myself against projecting rocks, Gxagxa spoke again, but now quite close at hand.

"Art thou there, O son of Zulu?" he said.

"I follow thee," I replied, "but travel not over-quickly, O King, lest I miss thee again."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" he laughed. "Hold the end of my staff—there! Now will I lead thee more safely and more quickly—yes, more quickly and more safely—ha, ha, ha, ha!—more safely."

And he chuckled madly—horribly.

The sweat streamed down my face and body—the sweat (I am not ashamed to admit it) of deadly fear, for there was I, in the bowels of the earth—a ghastly death behind and terrible, unknown horrors before me. Are you surprised, my father, that my courage deserted me completely, entirely, and—as it seemed—for ever? I was not Watala at that moment, but some stalking, terror-stricken image that housed no other sense of feeling but that of an overwhelming dread; and are you surprised, too, when I tell you that, distraught beyond endurance, I, too, laughed long and loud—the madman's senseless mirth—"ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!—ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!—he, he, he, he, he, OH!"

"Come," said Gxagxa, as I gripped the staff, "and have a care thou dost not let go, for there be one or two holes of untold depth in front, and methinks thou wouldst not like to fall to thy death down one of them," and again he chuckled weirdly to himself.

Now and again the White Thing would give a

muffled bark in front as if to guide us. On, on we went, until after about three hundred paces the Thing in front suddenly gave a peculiar warning bark.

"He, he, he! Hearest thou the warning of the Sacred One?" asked the madman.

"Yes," I replied. "Thinkest thou there be danger before us?"

"Not for me, O Zulu, but," he added hastily, "I would not vouch for thy safety, thou dog! But here, I will show thee. Pick up a stone and cast it about two paces to thy right."

I did so, but did not hear it fall.

"Ha!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "What dost——"

"Hark!" interrupted Gxagxa. "Listen!"

And lo! just then there came a distant "plash" away—far down below our feet!

"A hole!" I gasped, as I pictured the awful depth.

"'Tis indeed a hole," replied the madman, "or rather 'tis a grave, for when thou dost die thou wilt be buried there."

"I?" I asked in fearful surprise.

"Even so," the madman chuckled.

"How came the hole to be made?" I asked, hoping thus to change the subject.

"Thou dost not fear death?" he asked suddenly, ignoring my question.

"Not I," I said, my heart beating wildly.

"'Tis well," he went on, "for I have brought thee here to die, and thou'lt be dead soon, now, O son of Zulu," and, before I could answer, the villain

had wrenched the staff from my hands and glided noiselessly away. Horror-struck, I dared not move either forward or backward. The madman gave three shrieks, and a moment later there came the answering barks of the baboons we had left behind, and before a man might have counted ten I heard, though could not see, the brutes packing up closely behind me.

Presently there was a faint odour of burning, and a moment later I saw a spark of fire, then others, and then a flame burst suddenly into light, and lo! there stood the madman lighting two torches which he had taken from a shelf hewn out of the rock behind him. He handed these to the White Thing, and as they caught alight, I could see everything as plainly as in the light of day. Between the madman and myself there yawned a great black hole, its edge three paces from where I stood. Round its outer edge there ran a narrow ledge over which Gxagxa must have passed to reach the other side. Beyond him I could make out another passage similar to the one we had just come along. He—the madman—was standing on a rough platform hewn out of the rock, his face more horrible in the stronger light, a look of triumphant madness flashing from his wicked eyes.

“Thou dost look full of fear, O Zulu, but fear not—’twill soon be over. Listen—I have a tale to tell thee. Many years ago there lived a youth and maid who loved each other dearly, but the laws of the land forbade them to marry except with the royal consent. The maid said to the youth: ‘My loved one, what shall we do if the King doth com-

mand me to marry some other man but thee?' The youth replied: 'I'll marry none but thee, sweet girl, for even if the King doth command otherwise 'twill not alter my resolve.'

"They said no more, but they knew not that their words had been overheard. In course of time their respective regiments were given permission to marry, and their happiness knew no bounds when they found that the royal permission enabled them to wed each other, which they did a few days later, and there was no happier twain in Zululand. A year passed, and a little girl was born to the happy two; but on that day there came a regiment from the Royal Kraal with orders first to torture the man and then, before his very eyes, to slay his wife and child and every other inmate of his kraal. The bloody deed was done, and they left the man bound up, to die a slow and painful death. But 'twas not to be, for he escaped, and behold—I am that man! Yes," he went on, his wizened body quivering with rage, "I am that man; but I fled to the Baboon Kingdom here, where I have been King ever since, and now, O son of Zulu, I live for naught but revenge upon yours—the Zulu race. See—the hole at thy feet holds the bones of many of thy fellows whom I have enticed to my kingdom. Their spirits hover round us, but thou dost not see them. Ah! I do—yes, I do—I see them all round me now!" and he waved his claw-like hand in a circle round him, "a look of earnest entreaty upon their ghostly faces; but they are imprisoned here, O son of Zulu, for ever, for I would torture them even as they have tortured me.

He, he, he, he, he!" and he laughed his mad laugh, while the baboons behind me barked angrily and the White Thing sank noiselessly to the ground, face downwards, still holding the torches aloft. "Yes," he went on, "the Tshaka dog doth seek to torture men's bodies, but—ah! I live to torture men's spirits. A man's body can be tortured but once, but his spirit may be tortured for ever. Yes, yes, O son of Zulu, for ever—he, he, hee! But see," he continued, "I be more merciful than Tshaka. This path," pointing to the passage behind him, "doth lead to a secret chamber which none but I and the Sacred One at my feet can open. 'Tis for thee to chose which death thou'lt have. Answer me, O son of Zulu—wilt thou starve to death within the chamber, or wilt thou hurl thyself to thy doom down the hole before thee?"

"Dost thou, then, not want me to be King here when thou art gone?" I asked, hoping to gain time. And yet what use was time to me then?

"What!" shrieked Gxagxa. "Why—I am King here, and when I die the whole of the Baboon Kingdom will die also. I have arranged for that, O Zulu—yes, I have arranged for that, have no fear. It hath been an idle tale that I have spread, saying that I want a King to rule in my stead—a ruse by which I have enticed many to their deaths—a ruse by which even thou thyself hast been entrapped."

"Nay," I said, "I was brought here by force, not by my own will."

"'Tis better so, for then thy punishment will fall the heavier upon thee, and 'tis punishment,

followed by torture of the spirit, that I crave for. Answer me, O son of Zulu, which is it to be—the hole or the chamber? He, he, he, he, heecccc!”

His eyes blinked at me cruelly, while with his skinny hand he brushed the spittle from his mouth.

As he finished I took a sudden step towards the hole—for we Zulus prefer a quick death to a slow one, my father—but the forbidding blackness stopped me in my purpose. I turned and faced the black grinning faces behind me, but the death that awaited me there was more awful still, and so, facing the madman again, I said:

“The chamber! the chamber!—I will die in the chamber!”

“Tis well,” replied the madman. “But come quickly, lest the baboons behind thee cannot control their patience longer and do hurl thee to the other death whether thou wilt or no.”

In an instant I was across the narrow ledge, and stood beside the madman. As I did so he went on:

“The Sacred One will lead the way, thou wilt follow, and I shall come last.”

As he spoke the White Thing hobbled in front, and I followed with the madman close upon my heels. Now the passage took a sudden turn, and when we had gone about thirty paces, the White Thing halted suddenly before what appeared to be a blank wall.

“Lie flat upon thy face, O son of Zulu,” commanded Gxagxa.

Resistance was useless, and I did as I was told, but in less than a man might count ten he said:

“Arise and behold the Death Chamber.”

I got up, and there—straight before us—was an opening in the face of the wall disclosing a small circular chamber perhaps three paces in diameter.

“This, O son of Zulu, is thy last resting-place. Thirty days hence I shall come to release thy spirit and torture it as I do those others of which I have told you. Farewell, O Zulu, till thirty days be passed. He, he, he, heeee!—till thirty days be passed!” and he motioned to the White Thing, which still holding the torches above its head, made room for me to pass within.

The madman was only three paces from me. Was he not within my power now? I could at least kill him and perhaps the Thing as well. Like a flash I leapt at him, but quicker than any cat he darted aside, and the same instant the White Thing stepped between us, shaking with fury, its eyes fixed with intense hate upon me, the burning torches thrust almost into my face. Neither the man nor the hideous Thing made a sound. I was beaten—completely beaten, my father—and what could I do but follow the direction of the madman’s stiffly stretched out bony finger? And, compelled by a force unseen—not understood—I stepped into the chamber!

As I entered, the slab of rock which served as a door began to descend. I fell upon my hands and knees, hoping to see between the falling door and the ground how its opening was affected. The madman’s legs were but half a pace beyond the descending rock. A sudden frenzy seized me. I thrust out my arm and gripped him by the ankle,

and in a flash I had him in the chamber with me. "If I die, so shalt thou, thou villain!" I hissed between my teeth; but at that moment the swaying rock slid noiselessly up again. There was no time to think. I dashed the madman's brains out against the wall and turned to grapple with the White Thing, when, to my horror—yes, the rock was descending again. Before it could reach the ground I had scrambled out, and with a mighty oath rushed at the uncanny Thing. Just then the door fell with a thud behind me. But the Thing dared not face me, and with a wild shriek and hurling both torches at me, it fled along the passage, I in hot pursuit. But suddenly all was dark—I could not see a pace before me. I paused an instant, my heart beating frantically. It would be safer to defend myself on the narrow ledge. Yes, yes!—the ledge! I leapt forward, and then fell upon my hands and knees groping wildly for the yawning hole. Just then there came a tumult of excited barking. The brutes would be upon me in a moment. Yes, I could hear them—I knew that shuffling approach—they were coming. Too late!—I was too late! My heart rushed to my mouth. I gave myself up for lost, but at that moment I reached the edge of the hole and in my frantic nervousness slid half over the side. My hand clutched out wildly and found a projection on the inside of the hole. I held on to it with the grip of a drowning man, my body half over the awesome pit. Ah! one of the brutes had stumbled across me and barked triumphantly to its fellows, gripping me at the same time by one of my ankles.

With a shout of agonised terror I jerked my leg free, and in so doing lost my balance and slipped completely over the edge, still clinging to the friendly projection.

Peering wildly upwards, all I could make out was a score of cruel eyes glowing red—not yellow now—a fearsome sight.

But ah! what was that my foot touched? Another projection. I tested it quickly with my weight, still holding on as before, and my heart gave a leap of joy when I found that it would bear me safely. But just then—Great Spirits of my father—the ledge on which I stood gave way and fell, crashing down, down, down into the blackness below and left me clinging desperately to my rock, swaying dangerously to and fro in mid air, as completely helpless as it is possible for man to be! That, my father, was the supreme moment of agony in all my life. The barks and shrieks above me were now deafening, and I had just decided that I could stand the torment no longer and would let go when my knee bumped against another projection. I thrust my foot out and felt it. I tested my weight upon it—more carefully this time. It was firm and safe. Disengaging one hand, I felt below my chest and found another and—yes—another just above my knees. Next moment I had descended half a spear's length, and then—surely the spirits were guarding me—I found another ledge lower down, and another—and another, and so, step by step, I climbed down, down, until suddenly I felt an increasing upward rush of air. Surely this betokened some opening from without.

A surging thrill of hope and courage seized me. Down, down I descended until at last the air was beating directly against my naked chest. The opening must be hereabouts, I felt. Again I thrust my foot out towards the wall, and—yes, I felt a ledge extending into the face of the rock. The next instant I was upon it, and carefully groping my way, I found that this was no less than another passage similar to those above. Along this I crept upon my hands and knees, and had not gone more than twenty paces when, with a shout of joy, I saw shining—not fifty paces in front—the pale and unmistakable light of the moon. Without more ado I sprang to my feet and ran to the friendly light, and the next moment I was outside—yes, outside, with the cool night air striking fresh upon my feverish body!

And then I ran, my father, and I did not stop until, almost exhausted, I reached the Royal Kraal.

The sun was rising as I reached the outer gate. I rubbed my eyes as one does after some horrible dream. Had I, indeed, been dreaming, or had I, Watala, really passed through these things? And as I noted for the first time where the rocks had torn my flesh I realised that indeed it was no dream.

Two days later the King—doubting my story—ordered a regiment to examine the cave. Everything was found as I had said, even to the White Baboon, for ghastly relics of its body were found strewn about beside the pit, where it had no doubt been done to death by the others as punishment for the death of their King.

And Gxagxa—the King of the Baboon Kingdom? They never found his body, for none could enter the secret chamber.

It was thought that the ladder—for it was nothing less down which I had descended—had been put there by the madman and his baboons; but since the advent of the white man, I have been told that the scene of my adventure was an old mine worked by those who held the country before the Zulus, and this, it seems to me, is a correct conclusion.

But mine or no mine, it makes no difference to my tale, and although His Majesty laughed heartily at my account of the adventure, there were incidents in it which—as I stated at the outset—stamped it for ever on my mind as more horrible than strange, my father.

THE KING'S JEST

Now, you have heard, my father, of those laws of the King which regulated marriage, but of the severity with which they often fell upon the youth and maid who loved each other not much is known save by those who had to suffer, and they, alas! had to bear their grief in silence.

It was the King's pleasure in those days to divide the people into regiments—regiments of men and regiments of women—and no man could marry without the King's express permission, and then only into some regiment of girls which had likewise been given permission to marry.

This authority was usually given to whole regiments at a time—seldom to individuals.

It was, in many ways, an excellent law, my father, for it was but natural that the King could stir young men to great deeds in war, the hunting field and other manly exercises—which he often did—by withholding his permission until such deeds had been fully accomplished. Regiments which were weak or had otherwise incurred the royal displeasure were not allowed to marry till the men were old, and some, indeed, not at all.

Although the King's word in all matters was law, and men were ever wont to put his slightest wish before all else in life, there were times when we felt hardship in obeying it, and in no case was this hardship greater than in the law of marriage. Instances were not wanting in which the achings of overburdened hearts refused to be guided by the

wiser counsels of the mind, and, for one brief spell with their loved ones, men had cast all thought of the King and this irksome law to the winds, only to be punished for their folly in Tshaka's own particular and cruel way.

With us, and no doubt it is with you—the white people—my father, trouble generally has its origin either in a pot of beer or in matters of love. The tale which I am now going to tell you concerns a man and maid whose love for each other was, alas! their undoing.

The man's name was Mlandu, a warrior of the Mbizo regiment, while the maid was called Nomafu—my only daughter. They were playmates in their youth, these two, and their friendship grew in time to be the strong love of mature age—a deeper love than is generally found among our people. One day I overheard them talking in a mealie garden.

“Nomafu, I love thee,” the youth was saying, “and I think thou lovest me too. Tell me, girl, wilt thou marry me when my regiment has received the royal permission to do so?”

“It is true that I love thee dearly,” replied my daughter, looking bashfully at the ground before her, “and that I shall wed none but thee.”

I could see them through the green stalks of the maize—I see them now—the boy, his arms folded across his manly chest, that love look within his eyes that cannot be described in words, and I knew that here indeed my daughter had found a worthy lover. They said no more, but as though to seal their plighted troth each gave the other a bead

necklet from their necks, which both wore to their dying day, as I shall tell you, my father.

After this the two did not see much of each other, for the Mbizo regiment was often away on fighting expeditions, but I felt that their love for each other grew deeper and deeper.

Now, some three or four years passed in this way, and during the whole time the Mbizo regiment never once sustained defeat and had, moreover, secured much territory and large herds to the King; and although some thought that permission might now be given to the regiment to marry, none would have been surprised had the King's consent been withheld for some years longer—'twas ever like Tshaka thus to make his power felt.

It was with great joy, therefore, that I heard one day about this time that the King would allow the regiment to marry, and although it was not announced from which regiment of girls the men would be allowed to choose their brides, I had reason to feel that the Matshoba regiment, to which my daughter belonged, would gain the honour. Can my father realise how anxiously the hearts of one thousand men and one thousand maidens must have throbbed that night—the hearts of the Mbizo men and those of the women who loved them, but who, alas! were scattered among maybe twenty different regiments, only one of which would be allowed to marry into the Mbizo.

A Council meeting was held next day to decide which regiment of girls the Mbizo would be allowed to marry. I did what I could to influence

the Council in favour of my daughter's—the Matshoba—regiment; but what was one voice among so many, even though it was the voice of Watala, Chief Councillor to the King?

“The girls of the Matshoba regiment,” they said, “are still quite young and can afford to wait—nay, O King, the Malinda regiment, many in which have reached thirty years, should win Thy Majesty's favour and now be given in marriage.”

Thus it was, my father, that the men of the Mbizo regiment had either to marry women of the Malinda regiment or not at all. When I told Nomafu she took it much to heart—more even than I, her father, could tell at the time, but I know it now—yes, now I know. She trembled greatly at the King's word, staring at me vacantly for as long as a man might take to count twenty, and then fell in a heap to the ground without so much as a murmur.

I have seen men in the frenzy of battle, I have looked upon them in the last throes of a bloody death, and I have more than once beheld the evil light of madness, but I have never seen a man with such a look of deadly hate, such a look of pain, such an utter hopelessness in his face as Mlandu had when I met him that same afternoon of the day on which I broke the news to my daughter. He did not seem to recognise me at first, but suddenly he appeared to remember, and then spoke thickly, as a drunken man.

“Thou art Nomafu's father—thou wert to have been mine, but now—ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!” and he laughed as the hyena does when seeking blood—a wicked laugh, my father.

Though much moved, I said nothing. Words, I knew were useless, and he went on:

"The King is mad—I am mad—thou art mad, and we all are mad! By my mother, Watala, I tell thee——"

"Silence!" I exclaimed. "Wouldst thou have us both slain for treason?"

"Nay," he replied, "not for treason, but for love. Mark thou, Watala—for love—we will die for our love," and turning, he left me abruptly.

I went home, a bitter feeling in my heart at the way things had fallen out, but not without hope that in the end all would come right, and that this young couple would—as many had before them—find others whom they might marry without breaking the King's laws. I was but half-asleep that night when I heard a stealthy knocking at the door, and, on asking who it was, the answer came:

"Sh! 'tis I, Mlandu! Haste thee and open!"

Feeling that something serious was afoot, I let the young man in, and as he entered he began at once:

"Thy daughter and I love each other too dearly to obey even the King's order. We leave this country of Zululand for Natal to-night, when all be asleep. We trust thee with this secret, Watala; keep it."

"Out on thee for a pair of fools!" I said, unable to control my anger (and yet I loved them both). "Ye will be caught before ye have gone half a day's journey hence, and that means death—death, mark you—death," I added with emphasis.

"To stay here also means death," answered the youth—"a long lingering death which, because it

gnaws at the heart, is the worst death of all, while, if we fly, we may perchance reach safety, and, if we fail—why, the death will be quick, and this we are both prepared to face.”

I reasoned with him; I pleaded, I cursed; all in vain. From the first I saw 'twas useless, and in the end found myself on my way, as in a dream, to bid my child farewell. On reaching her hut I was surprised to find her radiant and happy.

“My dear father,” she said, throwing herself into my arms, “chide me not for this; it is my heart that speaks, and I must obey it.”

I will not weary you, my father, with what took place at that last painful interview with my daughter. Tears came more than once to my eyes, even as you see them now, and in the end I watched them walk hand in hand out into the starlit night, and when they had left it seemed that the stars had gone with them. A dark and gloomy foreboding seized me, and I stumbled more than once feebly as a blind man before I reached my hut once more.

I flung myself on my mat—not to sleep, but to ponder over that which I, Chief Councillor to the King, had been privy to. I knew, as all did, that disobedience of the King's orders meant swift and certain death, and I knew that I, whose duty it was to enforce the laws, deserved no better fate, for had I not allowed these two to set at naught the most important law in the land? But it was not so much of myself that I thought as of these two young people—the one my only daughter, the other by every law save the King's her affianced husband.

Now the news of their disappearance was not, as

I anticipated, long in coming to the King's ears, and I was forthwith summoned to his presence.

"Greeting, Watala," he said, his look and my conscience telling me that I was to have an anxious time. "Thy daughter Nomafu is missing, and so, too, is the young man Mlandu, of the Mbizo regiment, which was yesterday given my kingly permission to marry. To what regiment of girls doth thy daughter belong, Watala?"

"She is one of the Matshoba girls, O King," I replied.

"How comes it then that she should disappear with a man who may marry only into the Malinda regiment? Answer me that, Watala!"

"I know not, Thy Majesty, how this thing hath come to pass, but I know full well that these two have loved each other from their youth, and that they have perchance been blinded by their passion into doing that which older men would fear to do."

"Whither have they gone, Watala?"

"Nay, I know not, O Elephant," I lied.

"Thou liest!" savagely hissed the King in sudden anger. "Doth a man's only daughter leave her father without bidding him farewell? Trifle not with me, O Watala! Thou art my tried and trusted Councillor, and I, the King, have given thee much honour and wealth. Answer me truly, and all will go well with thee, but deceive me"—he paused, his eyes a terrible blaze of rage—"deceive me, I say, and thou shalt taste worse than death."

"My lord the King doth me too much honour to think that I would dare to lie to him," I said, with a calmness I did not feel.

"Man!" the King burst out, "dost thou not see that I have heard of thy midnight interview with thy daughter?"

I moved not a muscle.

"That, O King," I replied, "was to tell my child of thy commands concerning the marrying of the Mbizo regiment."

"Thou liest again—I know it," roared the King, "but it seems that other means must be used to loose thy tongue. Ho! there! Guard!"

Two of the King's bodyguard entered hastily, each armed with a spear.

"Seize Watala there—seize him and bind him hand and foot," commanded the King.

In an instant my hands were tied behind my back, and my legs were bound together so tightly that I could not move them.

"Now," said the King, "the truth, the truth—speak!"

"I have spoken," I said, and I felt that my last hour had come.

"Cut off both his ears," commanded the King, and then their bloody work began. First the one, and then the other of my ears was cut off with the spears. My father sees, when I lift these lappets of leopard-skin, that to-day I am earless.

"Speak!" said the King again.

I set my teeth, and again I replied: "I have spoken."

Then, my father, at the King's bidding, my nose was slit, even as you see it now, and the blood ran down in a warm stream on to my neck and chest, and I began to feel that more of this torture

would soon put an end to my sufferings for ever.

"Speak, thou dog!" hissed Tshaka.

My courage was wellnigh spent, but with an effort I once more, and loud enough for the King to hear, said: "I have spoken."

Again the men were urged to do their gruesome work, and I was tied by my feet to the roof of the hut with my head hanging but three hands'-breadth above a smouldering fire, which they now raked up. The heat and smoke began to suffocate me; the blood poured from my nose and raw wounds where my ears had been, and made the smoke the greater and more sickening.

Oh, my father, the agony of that torture! The blood rushing out through those unnatural openings, spitting and hissing as it dripped upon the fire, and, above all, the heat and suffocation from that foul smoke well-nigh killed me, and was I to be blamed for yelling in my agony: "I will speak! Let me speak! let me speak!"

They cut my thongs and placed me face to face once more with the King, and he said: "Speak!"

My charred lips refused to move, my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and then, the King still glaring at me with hatred in his bloodshot eyes, darkness came over me and I knew no more.

All that night I lay unconscious, for it was at the hour of dawn that I woke, writhing with the pain of my now stiffened wounds.

I was in a strange hut, guarded by the two warriors who had executed the King's orders the day before.

"What is the King's will?" I asked them.

"That thou wilt hear from him," one answered.

"Hath aught been heard of my daughter? Tell me, my men, for the love of those born to ye." For answer one of them said:

"We have been bidden, under pain of death, to have no conversation with thee. Be silent; thou shalt learn all in the King's good time."

Thus was I forced to bear in silence the anxiety concerning my daughter's welfare and the pain from my wounds, and I know not which was the greater torment. Food and drink were brought to me, but I desired neither. In spite of my supreme torture of body and mind, I desired naught but knowledge of my child's safety.

It was at the hour of noon that I heard the royal salute, "*Bayete!*" given without, and I knew that the King was coming once again, and perchance again to put me to the torture, and I wondered how much more I could stand without becoming a coward, and whether I could not now tell the truth since, if all had gone well with the young couple, they would now be beyond pursuit, when a shadow filled the doorway, and the King entered the hut with two men.

"Greeting, Watala," he began, with a smile upon his face. "Thou hast no doubt passed a peaceful night with these two men to watch over thee and keep the evil spirits from thy couch."

"Yes, O King," I rattled from my parched and burning throat; "save for stupid buzzings in the head, I have had as peaceful a night as all loyal subjects of Thy Majesty can expect."

"Tis well. But, my friend, I, too, watched over

thee, and from what thou saidst in thy sleep, it seemed to me thou wert troubled most unduly for the welfare of thy daughter and the dog Mlandu. Was it not so, Watala?"

"I know nothing of it, O King," I replied.

"Then I will tell thee," said Tshaka. And then, my father, the King told me how, in my unconsciousness, I had poured forth my love for my child and my anxiety as to how she and her lover fared, and when he concluded by saying, "Yes, and thou didst tell us, with thy usual truthfulness, of how thou didst bid thy daughter good-bye, what road they had taken, that they were to travel only by night, and how and where they were to hide by day," I sprang to my feet and cried:

"'Tis false! I did not say where they would hide!"

"So thou knewest, at least, that they *were* to hide? Come now, Watala, be not a child—tell me all."

And then, my father, thinking to mislead the King, I purposely lied to him as to the route which Nomafu had taken, endeavouring the while to make the story appear a truthful one; and when I had finished, the King said:

"This information hath been very slow in coming, Watala, and 'tis a pity that thou even now darest to lie to me."

"I swear——" I began.

"Silence!" commanded the King, and with a wave of his hand he motioned his men to seize me, and they bound my hands behind my back and led me, stumbling, from the hut.

There are times, my father, when a man loses all fear, and things were so black for me just then, and the pain in my head so great, that I minded not what they did with me. Would that I had been put to instant death, for my greatest torture was still to come!

Now, some thousand paces off the bushy veldt began, and it was in this direction that I was led. As we went, I noticed that large numbers of men were travelling in the same direction as ourselves—all converging to a low-lying hill some distance off, which, from the great mass of people already assembled there, I rightly took to be our destination. I came to the conclusion that this large concourse of people had been summoned by the King to witness my—a traitor's—death, and I remember too, that a mad joy seized me as I felt I should have the opportunity of showing the nation how a man should die with bravery and fortitude, and in a manner befitting my rank.

Had I not too—the Spirits be praised!—been able to stay my tongue, first under torture, and now at the cost of my life itself, from uttering so much as a word which might lead to my daughter's arrest and certain death?

When we were about to mount the hill, a messenger from the King ordered us to halt and await His Majesty's arrival. I sat down and, as in a dream, recalled visions of my past life. How, as a young man, I had served as a warrior to the benefit of my country and to mine own honour; how, in due course, I was allowed to marry; and how by my good fortune I was able to wed the woman I loved

—how I rose by rapid promotion to the highest rank; and then, my father, I thought of recent events and how at the last I was to give my life—was it not an old and worthless life now?—to secure the safety and happiness of my child.

“What matters it, then,” I reasoned, “so long as my child lives—and she doth live!—of course she doth!” and I laughed aloud with joy at the thought and in spite of all my wounds.

“Silence!” said my guard. “The King approaches.”

This was indeed the case, for he was only a spear’s-throw away, and yet in my ecstasy I had not noticed him.

Yes, there he came, majestically, as a King should, and even then I had thoughts of admiration for him. He was attended by a dozen of his Councillors, and behind him, some little distance back, there followed a small party of men; and as the King passed opposite us, there rose from twenty thousand throats the royal salute—“*Bay-ete!*”—and then—dead silence. The King moved slowly up the hill, and the party of men behind the Councillors drew opposite us, and as they passed us a murmur arose, and I looked at the party to ascertain the cause, and then—No! Impossible! It cannot be! Yes, it is so! Great Spirits of the world have mercy on me! It is my daughter!—my beloved Nomafu!—and her lover Mlandu!

My father, I fell to the ground like a stone, for it was indeed my child, her wrist tied to Mlandu’s, and a guard on either side of them, escorting them to—yes, to their death!

For a moment I was stunned, but only for a moment, and then with one great effort I burst the thongs that bound me, and sprang as an angry lion, and as swiftly, straight toward the King.

I was but a few paces from him before the crowd realised that I was free, and would have reached my prey had not one of the guard turned round, and, seeing my purpose, closed with me (for he had no time to use his spear), shouting: "Have a care, O King!" But he got no further, for, mad though I already was, I was doubly so at being frustrated in my plan, and with a mighty grip I had him by the throat and shook him as a dog might do a rat. He relaxed his hold and fell to the ground, and with his own spear I pinned him to the earth.

All this, my father, took less time than it does to tell; but before I could disengage the spear I was overpowered and bound more firmly than before.

The King appeared to be pleased with my maddened rage, and so nothing was done to me just then, and I was ordered to fall into the procession some twenty or thirty paces behind my child and her lover, my hands bound behind me as before.

I cannot tell you, my father, what my feelings were as we wended our way to the scene of what I now felt was to be not only my own miserable death, but that of the young couple besides. I had no fear at my own end, but what of these two, on what should have been their wedding-day? When we reached the summit of the hill, the King thus addressed the throng:

"Ye all know the law of marriage, and that ye must respect it. There stand before ye two dogs

who have dared to break that law, and, lest others should be tempted to follow their example, ye have assembled to witness their punishment—the fate of those who oppose my will—the will of Tshaka. Here, guard, bring hither the three prisoners—Watala, Mlandu and the girl Nomafu.”

Up till now I had been kept apart from my daughter, but in carrying out the King’s command, I found myself next to her, and, though bound, we yet managed to press each other’s hands.

“Have courage, my daughter,” I whispered. “‘Tis certain death, but ’twill be quick and thou’lt feel nothing.” Alas! I did not know then what was coming.

“I am not afraid, my father,” she replied, and at that moment we halted before the King.

“Watala, Mlandu, and thou, Nomafu,” the King began, in a silence like that which prevails at dawn, “ye have broken the law of the land—my law—and therefore ye shall be punished in such a manner as befits your crime,” and, turning to the thousands of men now drawn up in regiments close together in the sweltering afternoon’s sun, he said:

“Ye are all to watch the punishment to the end, and none may move from his allotted place until he is given my word of command to do so.”

“*Bayete!*” thundered forth the multitude.

And now, my father, my courage began to forsake me, for the King’s words could leave us in no doubt but that our deaths were to be of a lingering nature. I feared not for myself, nor for Mlandu—who was, as I, a man—but for Nomafu, my

daughter, the sunshine of my life! My father will excuse these tears, for I am but an old and weak man.

They took us then, us three, to a small isolated clump of trees, such a clump as my father must often have seen growing on top of and round a certain kind of ant-heap. I saw that two trees growing there had been newly stripped of their lower branches, but I did not realise at the time the reason of this.

We were made to stand about twenty paces from the ant-heap, and here they stripped my daughter and Mlandu of all but their loin coverings and bound their hands close to their sides and their legs and feet together, care being taken to leave long ends of the thongs hanging to their sides. It seemed to me that these two were to be bound to the two trees I have referred to. "But," I asked myself, "if this be so, why bind them here, and not at once to the trees themselves? And why bind them to trees at all, since such is contrary to the King's custom, whose victims, though unarmed, are always allowed to meet their deaths with free use of their limbs?"

By this time the regiments had been properly marshalled so that all could see each other—and the limbless trees. The foremost rank of men was not more than five spear-lengths away, but, my father, though upwards of twenty thousand men had assembled, a silence reigned—a silence as of death. And once again the King spoke:

"Ye two, ye dogs, are now to meet your deaths by a means which hath been devised by my learned

doctor, Mbulali, and which, if it doth but kill as he saith it must, will provide me with a useful weapon with which to protect the country from evildoers in the future, while if it doth fail, have we not other and surer means of satisfying the law? The death which ye are to die is an original one—*ye are to be eaten alive by ants!*”

At first, my father, none seemed to understand. “It would take a month,” some said. “Ants will not eat human flesh,” said others. “The ants will first gnaw the thongs and let the prisoners free,” said Madevu, the executioner. But I myself, I knew not what to think; but happen what would, my child and her lover were to be tortured—of that no doubt existed—and I threw myself upon my face and implored the King to let me die with them, but he only said:

“Silence, thou fool! Thy punishment is coming.”

Two girls then came up carrying on their heads clay vessels, which they set down before the men who guarded my child. The doctor, Mbulali, stepped forth, and with his own hands smeared the prisoners over with a fluid which the pots contained, and which I afterwards found to be the juice of a certain berry, the taste of which maddens all ants and causes them to burrow deep into the thing smeared.

The smearing took some time, for the doctor allowed none but himself to do the work—indeed, he seemed jealous of the part he played.

All this time I had my eyes upon my daughter, and hers more than once met mine, but no tears

did I see there; indeed, she was as calm as any man could have been so near to death. Mlandu, too—brave man—did but look with contempt upon the doctor at his work, and faced the end, as all men should, without any sign of fear. "Adieu, my father," said Nomafu. "Grieve not for me, for I go to a happier life than this. May I," she continued, addressing the King, "feel my father's embrace once before I go?"

"No," replied the King; "get thee to thy doom. Bind them to the trees, Mbulali. Waste no further time, for I am anxious to put thy punishment to the test and see for myself the wisdom of thy plan."

They took them to the ant-heap, and bound them to the two trees, each facing the other, and the reason why they had been previously bound, and why long ends of thong had been left hanging to their sides, now became plain, for the men, as they made their victims fast, jumped and moved about excitedly, and every now and then one would make an exclamation as of pain. *The ants had already begun their work.* It did not take long to bind my poor girl to the tree; indeed, both she and Mlandu had been left, securely fastened, to their fate in less time than a man might take to count fifty.

While this was being done, a stout rope of plaited hide was passed round my waist and fastened at my back, while another some three spear-lengths long was joined to this, the other end of it being firmly fixed to a stout stake which had been specially driven into the ground for this purpose. Although my hands were still fast behind my back, my feet were not bound, and I was able

to walk about freely, but only within the radius which my rope allowed. It now flashed upon me that my punishment was to watch my child die—a horrible tortured death, without any power to help her. I groaned aloud, being sensible for a moment of my own position; but what of the sufferings of those who were to die, the two on the ant-heap? Would the ants really eat them atom by atom, or would they, as some said, scorn human flesh, and even gnaw their bonds asunder, and then!—if they were quick—and liberated me? Yes, surely it might be possible to—and if the darkness had come on—we could——

“O—o—ooh!”

My blood ran cold. It was my child's voice, and full of pain. Bound as I was, I made a leap in her direction, instinctively to help her, but the shortness of the rope pulled me up with a mighty jerk which nearly broke my back, and felled me to the ground. In an instant I was on my feet, and in my madness I leapt again, and then knew no more.

It could not have been long that I lay unconscious, for when I came to my senses the sun had not yet set.

Although my wounds had started to bleed again, and the warm blood trickled down my neck and face, my first thoughts were of my child, and half-dazed I sought the ant-heap. What I saw there, my father, it is hardly fitting that I should tell, and I will not tell you more than that the ants, maddened by the juice of the hateful berries, attacked their victims most viciously; so much, indeed, and so numerous were they, that only the outline of

my child's and Mlandu's bodies could be seen, no flesh at all being visible. From Mlandu no sound came, save now and again a choking cough, as though he wished to but would not tell us of his torment. We of the Zulu nation can stand much pain without a murmur, my father.

All this while the King was looking on with great satisfaction and with evident pleasure at the success of Mbulali's plan.

"I owe thee much," said he, addressing the doctor, "and thy wisdom this day will benefit thee much." He paused for a moment while he eyed the victims closely, and then went on: "But think thou, Mbulali, they feel much pain?"

"Hath the King never been stung by this devil ant?" asked Mbulali in reply. "The pain from a single one of such is great, yet what must it be if a thousand—nay, thousands—sting and bite and gnaw thee all at once? And with their victims bound and that magic ointment goading the insects to destruction, each one becomes a torment in himself; nor does he choose his ground, but bites and burrows where he finds himself—in the eyes, the ears, the heart, and, in time, even into the brain, O Mighty One. Fear not, O King; their pain is exquisite."

"But why make they so little sound?" asked the King.

But I heard not what he replied. I could listen no more. My brain was on fire—I knew not where I was—I felt myself going mad. I made another leap, and was again brought to earth by the shortness of my rope. I sat upon the ground and

tried to think, but could not. "O King!" I started, "O Merciful King!" but I reeled and fell, and, like a mad dog, snapped and tore at the ground with my teeth.

"My father! My father!" shrieked my child, "Kill me! Kill me! I can stand no more! My father! dost thou hear me? Only kill me—for mercy's sake, kill me! Kill me!"

But I, what power had I even to kill myself? Indeed, I would gladly have done so then, so great was my grief and anguish at my child's inestimable torture. I could not even stop from my ears the crying of my child for the help which I longed to, but could not give. The look of horror in the twenty thousand faces all around us showed that all realised only too well what Nomafu's sufferings must be. "Would it be possible," I thought, in my unhinged state of mind, "to move these men to pity and get some of them to come to my daughter's aid?" But I banished the thought, for none knew better than I that each man of all that multitude would sooner undergo this same torture than loose one single pair of those terrible nippers from my daughter's body.

"Mercy!" shrieked my child again. "O King! O great and noble King! mercy! mercy! MERCY!"

"This ant torture, Mbulali, is rare sport indeed," said the King. "I would not have missed it for much"; and he chuckled with delight.

Horrible as it was, I could not help but look, with the madness of despair, upon my child in her terrible plight. Mlandu, strong and brave as ever he had been in bloody battle, still bore his tor-



“ ‘Then poison it shall be,’ I said decisively.” Page 101

ment without sign of pain, save that dreadful choking cough. And so the tragedy wore on. And this, my father, was my daughter's wedding-day!

The sun began to set, and it seemed to me that Nomafu did not cry so often as before, nor did she longer plead for mercy. As I looked upon her, my heart going out to her in overwhelming love, she turned her head in my direction, and said:

"Father, my dear father, Nomafu dies. Grieve not, for 'tis better so; they, the ants, unlike the King, have mercy on me and haste to end my torment." And then silence fell upon her, and as I glanced upon my child, at the regiments beyond and all around her, the tears for the first time rushed to my eyes, and I wept like a child.

Forty thousand eyes, now starting from their sockets, stared and stared at the horror of this thing, but the King and the evil Mbulali merely laughed and talked about their gruesome work.

"Father! father!" quickly spoke my child, "I am going, I am going. I feel no further pain. Good-bye, my father—good-bye, adieu, and thou, Mlandu, my brave and faithful lover, good-bye—we will meet again—in—— Ah!——"

And her head fell upon her breast, the leaves on the tree-top quivered, and she died. (My father will excuse these tears.)

I gazed upon that form, so dear to me, now dead—my only daughter—I swooned and fell, and then—peace!

* * * *

While I lay thus the sun set, the moon came out and shone upon that ghastly scene, and it was not

until then that the King rose and commanded the regiments to disperse. This they did without a sound, for all were stricken dumb with fear and horror by what they had just witnessed, and all felt that the King might perchance wish to make more experiments; and in those days, my father, no man ever knew when his turn might come to provide sport for the King. On that silent march back to the Royal Kraal men gripped their spears and shields tightly and plotted darkly against the King's life. Some there were who, ever brave in war, now trembled violently with fear and could hardly walk; and some—those who had been stationed nearest the victims, could do naught but stare fixedly before them at the ghastly scene which, though left behind, still filled their eyes; and every now and then one more wrought upon than others would involuntarily cry out, "O—o—oooh!" even as my poor daughter had done, to which some others would reply with a stifled cough, just as Mlandu himself had coughed when in his greatest torment.

It was all a horrible dream, my father, and none of those twenty thousand men who may be alive to-day have, I trow, forgotten it. But, as the bright fires of the Royal Kraal came into sight, and the homes of all were near at hand, fear no longer gripped the men, and at a signal from one of the captains a mighty war-song burst forth in praise of the King, accompanied by the stamp and thud of forty thousand feet and the rise and swell of the music—now joined in by thousands of the men and women who had been left behind—shook the

very earth, and courage was once again restored, and once again each man felt with pride that he was a member of a mighty nation ruled by the mightiest King.

Of all this I was told afterwards, for I was then lying, bound and unconscious, in the presence of the dead. After regaining consciousness I endeavoured to but could not sleep, yet my eyes were closed in a kind of half-sleep; but I lived, unconsciously, as it were, the last terrible hours of my life over and over again. I grappled with the King, I thought, and tore him limb from limb;—I burst my bonds and ran to my daughter's aid and freed her and Mlandu from their torment;—I heard myself talking, cursing, shouting;—but my dreams would take me no further, and again and again I saw the vision of my helpless and tortured child—and so the night wore on. And then I think I slept for a while, but not for long, for when I woke it was barely dawn. I sat up and gazed around, but knew not at first where I was. As I turned my head searching for some familiar scene which might bring me to clearer reasoning, I saw two white forms, but could not tell what they were. Were they spirits come to torture me afresh? I asked myself, or were they the ghostlike visions of my unsettled mind? I strained my eyes to see what these unearthly forms might be. They neither moved nor spoke, but, as it seemed, merely looked upon me and my vain efforts with scorn. My brain was reeling again. I felt my senses were leaving me once more and that these evil spirits would torment me in my helplessness.

"Speak!" I whispered faintly, and it seemed that an echo answered me. "Speak!" it seemed to say. I could stand it no longer. I sprang to my feet, and in the agony of my fear yelled aloud.

"Speak! ye evil spirits—speak! I am bound and can do ye no harm. Speak!—only speak! and tell me who ye are."

"Silence!" said a deep voice, albeit kindly, behind me. "The dead do not speak."

I quickly turned my head in the direction from whence the voice had come, and in the dawning light I saw the forms of two men stretched upon the ground two or three paces from me.

"What doest thou here?" I said, "and what be those two ghostlike forms yonder?" One of the men sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"We are the King's guard," he said, "placed over thee, though we are to release thee at the rising of the sun."

And then, my father, my memory returned like a flash.

I knew now, with a terrible consciousness of the truth, where I was, and the gruesome tragedy of the day before came vividly to my mind again, and instinctively I turned my eyes once more to the two white forms. I looked hard—very hard—and long, and everything unfolded itself awfully, slowly, to my aching brain.

The two white forms were all that remained of my fond child and Mlandu—their skeletons alone were all that was left for these poor old eyes to see. I sank upon my knees, my hands still fast behind my back, and gazed and gazed again in the silence

of the dawn upon the bones of what was once my own flesh and blood. It all seemed a horrible dream, and yet the twittering of the birds, now awakened by the freshness of the morn, flying from tree to tree and settling even on the top-most branches of the one to whose trunk my child's bones were bound, told me all was only too true.

The sun began to show his face, and I was able to see more clearly how well the ants had done their work. No atom of flesh had they left upon those snow-white bones—indeed, had I not been a witness to the tragedy of the day before, I should not have been able to tell which had been Nomafu and which Mlandu. But stay! Yes, the necklets hanging to their fleshless necks yet remained, and by these relics of their love, so sadly ended, did I identify them.

Ah! my father, what was my sorrow then—the fresh breeze blowing upon my maimed and burning forehead!

"Sleep on, my child," I whispered. "The sun of thy sweet life be set, but I, Watala, thy father, still live, and while I breathe, revenge shall be my food until I, too, have trod the road of sleep!"

"The sun be risen, Watala," said one of the guards, "and in accordance with the King's command, we must loose thy bonds and set thee free to travel whither thou wilt."

And so they cut the thongs and let me go. So stiff was I, I could hardly walk—indeed, I only half-walked, half-crawled to my child's bones, and then, staggering to my feet, I grasped her cold and bony hand and raised it to my lips, and

with a clatter I let it fall to her lifeless side again.

"Farewell, my child—farewell!" I said, as though she could hear me still. "Though dead, thy father loves thee as of old, and will not rest until this fiendish work hath been avenged. Sleep on, sweet child—sleep on, sleep on," and I turned away with a mighty lump in my throat and a sick and heavy heart.

My mind was now full of naught but revenge. Upon whom should my hand fall, and in what manner? To whom could I turn to aid me? Aid? Bah! What aid did I, Watala—man that I was—require? Surely it was meet that I, and I alone, should avenge my child's awful death. So I reasoned, and as I did so my blood became hot again within me. But how was this thing to be done? I stood still and thought awhile, as a man might do when reckoning up the number of his cattle, and then, a moment later, my plan was made—my resolution formed. I glanced quickly at my two late guards, now conversing in hushed tones some little distance away, and then—I ran—all stiffness and wounds banished from body and mind alike—as man never ran in his life before, straight for the Royal Kraal. I took no beaten track;—a straight line from where I stood was good enough, and shorter too. Thorn-bushes, stones and holes I cleared at single bounds in my maddened rush, for now, in truth, was I really mad. The time I took to reach the Royal Kraal was less than my father would believe, but then I was mad, I say, and mad people often accomplish what is impossible to the sane. At the Royal Kraal most

were still asleep, though here and there smoke was slowly rising from huts where the inmates were earlier risers than the rest. But none saw me come, and in a flash I was at Mbulali's hut and had burst open the door and seized my prey, fast asleep as he was, and pulled him by the legs outside the hut. He hardly woke even then, for, as I afterwards learned, he had had a heavy night of feasting and debauchery with the King. I took him by the neck and legs and flung him across my shoulders, and was off again to whence I had come, as fast as the weight of my living burden would allow.

To my great strength in those days the doctor's weight seemed as but that of a child, and away I sped in my madness, leaping, as before, over all that stood in my way. Mbulali made one or two attempts to shout, but I gripped his throat and bade him be silent, which, from very fear, he was. On, on, I ran, back to the scene of my daughter's death, with that one purpose only in my mind—revenge!

I was fortunate in not meeting the returning guards.

The low-lying hill came again in sight; my pace increased. I simply flew, my father. But my human load began to tell upon me, and my panting gasps rent the morning air and drove birds, beasts and reptiles from my path, and they too seemed seized with madness.

I reached the hill-top and cast my burden to the ground.

"Lie there, thou dog!" I hissed, "and if thou darest move a limb I'll wrench it from thy vile body!" And so I would, my father, had he disobeyed me.

Quick—ever quick—I rushed to the tree which held my darling's bones, and with feverish haste I unloosed the cruel thongs and piled her sacred remains, with utmost reverence, in a little heap.

"Come here, thou foul villain!" I yelled, "and taste my daughter's death and tell me if thou thinkest the torture good."

For very fear and horror he could not stir, so I carried him to the limbless tree and bound him to it—naked, as he had done my daughter. Some little distance off the two clay pots still stood, and from each I got a little of the maddening juice with which I smeared the doctor's trembling body, and then with a stick I raked up the ant-heap, till at last the little murderers appeared, and smelling and tasting the liquid, straightway attacked their victim.

Hard by I found a spear, and with it dug a grave in which I buried the bones of Nomafu and her lover side by side.

I sat down again and wept, and heeded not the doctor's yells for mercy, and with grim joy I saw that his end would not be long in coming. And now, the sun being well up, I thought passers-by might be attracted by his shrieks and come to his aid, and although he was already half-consumed, I did not wish to run the risk of giving him this last chance of life, and so, seizing the spear, I thrust it through his black heart and left it there. He gave one groan, trembled as my daughter had done, and then died.

The dog!

I left the King's Kraal that day, maimed, broken in body and spirit. I, Watala, Chief Councillor to

the King, turned my steps south to this colony of Natal.

The news of my downfall spread like magic throughout the land, and although none dared sympathise with me openly for fear lest the King might hear, all whom I met respectfully made room for me to pass.

They spoke no word, but their very silence told me as no speech could have done that their hearts were with me. But with head erect and looking neither to the right nor to the left I stumbled on my way, each step taking me farther away from all I held most dear—my wife, my child, my King, my country, my beloved people—all!

Ah! my father, what was my misery then!

At last, on the fourth day, I reached a high tableland, a precipice at my feet. I paused, and looking back I saw as far as the eye could reach in every direction the beautiful kingdom of the Zulus.

Far, far in the distance I could just make out the hills that surrounded the Royal Kraal, and drawing myself to my full height and stiffening as if upon parade, I exclaimed:

“Farewell, O King!—for the last time, farewell!
—*Bayete!*”

At that moment, my father, I felt broken-hearted and had a mind to leap into the abyss at my feet, but I refrained, and thus it is that I have lived to tell these tales.

And so, my father, ends the narrative of one of the many sad incidents resulting from the old Zulu law of marriage, but it was nevertheless a good law—an excellent law, my father.

THE BREAKING OF THE STORM

My father will have noticed as I told my last tale that I was, at times, guilty of unseemly emotion. It has ever been thus with me when recounting my daughter's cruel end.

As a race we Zulus are emotionless; our faces, our speech, and very often our gestures belie the surging forces within us; and while it is not for me to find the reasons for our outward show of indifference under even the most trying circumstances, it seems that this remarkable characteristic of my people is not due to any natural desire to mislead, but rather to the system under which we lived—a system which demanded from the nation no less than the individual unbounded courage, bravery and fearlessness, and which punished with terrible swiftness any show of fear or cowardice.

It is but the plain truth that the gleaming spear was ever pointing at our naked chests, ready at an instant to plunge into our bodies, very often for some trivial offence, and just as frequently for no offence at all.

Yes, my father, Tshaka's rule more than that of those who preceded or followed it killed all emotion, and thus it is that I feel constrained to ask you to forget the tears you saw coursing down these wrinkled cheeks a short time since, and that you will not hold me in less esteem for the weakness they betokened. But, my father, while it is doubtless unbecoming and unusual for a Zulu to give way to his feelings in matters that concern him

personally, it is both fit and proper that in relating those events that most nearly affected the King full play should be given to them, and if, in this, my last tale—which, alas! so closely concerns the King—you detect an angry flashing of the eye, a savage gesture, or maybe an unnatural raising of the voice, be lenient in the judgment you pass upon me, for I have that to tell which will quicken your own heart-beats, not in fear or excitement, but in righteous anger at the wicked infamy of what I shall unfold.

Why, see! my fingers begin to twitch, my chest to heave and my lips to tremble at the black treachery that must be told—so black, indeed, that in the mere telling of it I seem like to stamp myself a traitor like those of whom I have to speak.

But—like a woman—I start my tale at the end; bear with me, my father; be patient. I shall tell you all from the beginning.

After the terrible fate which befell my daughter you will remember that maimed, broken in heart and body, I left Zululand, travelling south for this fair country of Natal.

My downfall had spread like magic throughout the land. As I travelled I met men that I knew and many others that knew me, but not I them; and while none dared sympathise with me openly lest the King might get to hear, there was no mistaking the look of sympathy which the eyes of all clearly showed they felt for me as I stumbled on my way.

I did not want for food or shelter; indeed, both were given to me freely—nay, willingly—and I felt with increasing pride that although I was a fallen

man I was not disgraced; indeed, the people, it seemed, still held me even in fond esteem.

At length, on the fourth day after I had crossed the Tugela River, I reached the kraal of one Nondaba, himself a Zulu who had fled from Tshaka's wrath some years before, and who had made his home upon the Umkomanzi River, less than half a day's journey from the sea.

There is no need to tell how I came to shelter under Nondaba's roof, nor to describe how, my wounds quickly healing, I soon became the strong Watala of old.

It is true that the wound caused by my daughter's cruel end would often throb with that dull pain that knows no cure, but otherwise, what with my calm and peaceful surroundings and the seaside climate, I soon felt, and no doubt looked, as well as I ever did in Zululand.

But withal, it was a listless, aimless life, and my father will not be surprised when I tell him that I spent days together sitting in the shade of some tree gazing silently and gloomily out towards the sea.

And thus, with much time to ponder over things, it was but natural that I should live again the many exciting incidents of my life, and, small comfort though it was, pride often filled me at the thought that I had emerged from them all with credit to myself and not a little honour to the King, my master.

But as day succeeded day and month followed month, the empty slothfulness of my life unsettled me. I became restless and short-tempered, and like

an entrapped lion I chafed with angry impatience at the invisible bonds that bound me to such an existence—this ignominious ending to my splendid career—me, Watala, Chief Councillor to the King!

Now, it must not be supposed that at this time (I am speaking of about a year after I had left the Royal Kraal) I was anxious to get back to the service of the King—the tortured death of my child was too fresh in my memory for that—but, still, there was an ever-burning desire within me—I know not quite how to express it—to breathe again the air of Zululand, and to see its hills and valleys, and to sense again those other joys of sight and sound which ever appeal to one away from home, and more than ever to men who, like me, are compelled for ever to tread some alien soil.

For ever! The very thought struck me as with a blow! Was I then doomed thus to spend the rest of my days! Surely not! And yet what other prospect lay before me? Clearly I could not go back to the Royal Kraal, not alone because the King had discarded me like some worn-out garment, but because he was the slayer of my child. I could forgive the injuries he had done to me; I was His Majesty's servant—his dog—to use as he would; but this murder—this ant torture of my daughter— My teeth closed with a snap, and my blood grew hot, and I gazed with angry and unseeing eyes before me.

Now it has ever been to my honour (one of many which I may fairly claim) that I am able to see matters from both sides—my own and that of those who differ from me—and thus it was that I

found myself one day weighing in the balance what the King had done to me and my child Nomafu. She had broken the law, and death was the recognised penalty for all law-breakers. Had I not myself applauded the King for this? Why, therefore, should I now complain if that same penalty fell upon me, or, worse still, upon her, my only daughter?

And thus I reasoned, my father, but even so I felt that while I could forgive her death I could never forgive or forget the manner of her dying.

It is true that I had sent the inventor of her wicked torture—Mbulali, the dog!—to his doom, but somehow I did not feel appeased.

It was one day while I was in this frame of mind that Nondaba came upon me. I was seated under a thorn-tree gazing moodily, as usual, out towards the sea. It was the hour of noon. "I like not these long musings by thyself, Watala," he said. "No good can come of deep thinking alone. Come, therefore, on a journey south with me. I have a friend who lives three days hence; he would be glad to see us and we him."

"Nay, my good brother, a journey south would take me farther away from Zululand," I answered, looking longingly towards the north.

"Come!" he said. "Zululand should mean nothing to thee now. Forget it, man, as I have done. A long and contented life awaits thee here; live it, therefore, in peace with me."

"My real friend, I thank thee," I answered, "but there will be no lasting peace or content for me so long as I do not breathe the air of my

beloved country. Like some beaten dog I lie here, grateful indeed for the kindly shelter you have given me, but my eyes are ever like to look and my heart to beat with increasing longings towards the home of my fathers."

"But, my brother——"

He got no further, for at that moment there rushed into our presence (we had not seen him coming) a Zulu warrior from the Royal Kraal itself. He was panting fearfully, as though he had run long and fast, as, indeed, a glance at his appearance told us he had done.

"Greeting, young man," I said. "This is Nondaba's kraal; pay thy respects to him," indicating my friend.

"Sire," he began in panting jerks, and addressing himself to Nondaba, but looking more at me than at him, "my name is Sofihla. I am a captain of the Royal Amazembe regiment. I bear an urgent message from the Royal Elephant to Watala here, Chief Councillor to the King."

We had been seated, but at the young man's words I leapt to my feet, and casting aside all dignity, I rushed to him and gripped him by the shoulder, looking searchingly into his face.

"Speak, captain, thy message from the King! What is it?"

Has my father ever been in black despair and at its blackest moment had its cause removed in a flash? Well, so it was with me then. Here was a warrior—a captain of my own beloved regiment—come to me in terrified haste with a message from the King—a message addressed to me not as

Watala the disgraced, but as Watala, Chief Councillor to the King!

I knew not what his message might convey; I cared not—indeed, it might, for aught I minded, hold evil tidings. It mattered not, for at that moment I felt unbounded joy, a wonderful relief. I did not pause to consider how these sentiments, coupled with the excited beatings of my heart, came about; it was sufficient to know that they were there. The King had sent a special message to me! Yes, it was important and urgent, too—the young warrior's travel stains and his fitful gasps betokened both.

"I left the Royal Kraal at the rising of yesterday's sun with this message from His Majesty——" he began.

(I should tell you, my father, that there was more than one royal kraal, and that the King resided at each just as his fancy moved him. The one at which he was at that time quartered was called Dukuza, where the English town of Stanger now stands, about two days' journey from Nondaba's kraal.)

"These are the King's words: 'Greeting, late Chief Councillor! When thou, O Watala, didst leave the Royal Kraal a year ago, I thought at first to have thee pursued and put to death for thus deserting our person and also because thou hadst slain our doctor, the inventor of the ant torture; but thou hadst already been punished for another offence, and I was not unmindful, too, that thou hadst once saved the royal life, and so I let thee go in peace. But, O Son of Solwandhle, I missed more and more thy sound counsels in those many matters

on which it had been my wont to consult thee, and to this day none hath filled thy place. But this is not all, Watala. Those in close attendance upon me, the Councillors and my brothers, begin to adopt an unruly attitude, and, just as the hills will multiply the echo of a single voice, so do the regiments, in foolish emulation, give wider scope to the treasonable mutterings of their betters.

“Did but this snake—this treason reptile—show his head, a weapon would be found at once to remove it from my path; but in its crafty stealth it barely shows its tail—sure promise of its poisonous fangs and wicked evidence of its power to strike to death.

“My courage doth not fail me, though well it might at such a time, but, O Watala, my heart doth yearn for one that I can in full measure trust—a friendly staff by whose aid I may reach each stepping-stone until this treacherous river be safely crossed.

“The river rises, O Son of Solwandhle—already the stepping-stones begin to disappear; a crossing must be made at once before the clouds burst to angrier storm and a mightier flood doth sweep us to our doom. See, Watala! the lightning flashes with a terrible brilliance, the tempest gathers force, and both proclaim the certain clashing of the heavens and the pent-up fury of a nameless wrath. Therefore, Watala, come, I say, before the storm doth break. Come! That is the message, O Chief Councillor. I have spoken.”

Dumbstruck, amazed, I stood rooted to the spot for as long as a man might take to count twenty,

and then, without so much as a word to either Nondaba or the captain, I flew—for in truth I hardly touched the ground—to my hut, rushed in, snatched up a single spear, darted out again, and, with a speed born of unspeakable fear, I ran past the two men along the main path leading to the north—to the Royal Kraal of Dukuza.

It was the time of spring; the day was cool, and so things being in my favour it is not surprising that, for a man of my remarkable powers of running, I had more than half-covered my journey before the sun had set.

My father already knows of my fame as a runner, but of my many fine achievements in this respect, my journey to Dukuza that day was, I believe, the most wonderful. I take no credit for it—it was in the King's service—yet none but I could have been capable of so fine a feat.

It was at the time when things just begin to become visible against the dawning sky that I reached the outer stockade of the Royal Kraal, for I had travelled throughout the night.

Now had I returned at any other time, and my mind unoccupied by the fearful forebodings with which the captain's words had filled me (for I doubted not that the King's life was in real danger), my feelings as I approached the watchful guard would have been other than they were; but here was I, in obedient answer to the King's urgent call. I had no thought just then but to render His Majesty such service as lay within my humble power; it was a thought that excluded all else, and whether it be to my dishonour or not,

it is the plain truth that at that moment I had even forgotten my daughter's death and the part the King had played in it.

"Halt! Who art thou?" challenged the guard when I was still ten paces from the outer gate.

"It is I, Watala, Son of Solwandhle," I answered.

"We know of thy coming. Enter; all is well."

Now it seemed strange to me that common warriors such as these should know of my coming. Could the King have told them? It was not like him, and yet—

"Enter, O Watala," the guard repeated; and without betraying the suspicion I felt, I passed boldly through the gate. No sooner had I done so than a man whose face I could not make out in the dim light said:

"Follow me; I will lead thee to the King."

I was not prepared for this. I had felt, somehow, that I would have to seek audience with His Majesty secretly—not in this public manner. Was there some plot afoot? Had the King merely played upon my loyalty to lure me into his hands again, and to my death? Was the tale about the danger to his person just a ruse to gain some other end? I gripped my spear more tightly, and resolved, if need arose, to defend myself against all treachery—against the King himself, if indeed he had thus trapped me to my doom.

We had gone a hundred paces when my guide stopped suddenly before a hut larger than any we had yet passed and bade me follow him within. There was mystery in all this. The hut, I knew, could not be the King's private chamber—it was

unprotected and close to those of the common warriors. I halted, irresolute, fearful of some unseen, unknown danger, my spear upraised.

"Fear not, O Watala," said a voice behind me. "Enter; all is well."

I turned quickly and faced the speaker, and as I did so surprise, anger, and cold fear gripped me, each in turn, for in the now quickly dawning light I saw that he who thus addressed me was no other than Dingana, the King's brother—an unscrupulous, treacherous and cruel man, my father, who, even before I had left the Royal Kraal a year before, had shown signs of discontent at the King's rule, and whom the King feared more than any other in the land.

All this rushed to my mind on the instant, but as ever, I kept my head, and with an outward calm that concealed the tumult within, I said:

"Pardon, Your Royal Highness, I did not know that I was in the presence of one of the Royal House," and with that fine dignity for which I was famous, I raised my hand in royal salute, at the same time flinging away, as etiquette demanded, the spear I carried.

Behind him were three men, fully armed.

"Greeting, Son of Solwandhle! Once again I say, all is well; enter," and he pointed, somewhat sternly, to the door of the hut; and without more ado I entered, closely followed by him and those who attended him.

Even at that early hour a fire was burning cheerfully in the hearth, and I saw at once that, save for us five, no others were present.

"Thou wert ever loyal to Tshaka," Dingana began at once. "Such loyalty as thine should earn better reward than that which hath been meted out to thee, Watala."

"Nay, sire," I replied; "loyalty to the throne seeks no reward. I am content to live without show of favour so long as I can serve the King both with my lips and spear and, if there be good purpose to gain, with my mangled corpse itself."

"With thy corpse, Watala?"

"It is the most I have to give, and I would give no less," I replied.

"I do not believe thee, O Son of Solwandhle," and the undisguised cunningness of the smile that played upon his cruel lips gave me warning—what clearer warning could I have?—of the danger in which I stood.

"When thou dost ascend the throne, O Royal One, then wilt thou know Watala's loyalty," I answered, looking up at the ceiling with that show of innocence that conveys so much.

I knew the man I was dealing with, my father. I knew as though he himself had told me that my presence with him in that hut meant but one thing—my death, unless— My mind was working quickly. If I would save myself there was but only one course to follow, and that was to hint darkly, but without mistake, at Tshaka's downfall and his (Dingana's) ascent to the throne in his stead.

There was no need to tell me that the traitor had learnt somehow of the King's message to me, and I felt that if I could but convince him that, although I had come in answer to that summons, I

would not view with disfavour—nay, would welcome—his rule, he might be moved to use me as a tool to further his evil plans. And what better tool could he find than I—I who might rightly harbour deep revenge against the King—I who, in spite of my disgrace, had been honoured by the royal summons, and who, by that very token, must surely enjoy His Majesty's deepest confidence? Yes, if Dingana could but win me to his side, no man could serve his purpose better.

Watala, alive and his ally, would be more useful to him than Watala, erstwhile Chief Councillor, done to death where I at that moment sat.

And so, my father, I played my part—the part of traitor to my King; and he, Dingana—the dog!—swallowed the bait. It was his treachery against mine—his directed against the King and mine towards his own black heart.

And thus it was that in that early morning Dingana and I hatched our plot—the plot whereby I should gain the King's closest confidence and by this and other means learn who were still loyal to the throne and who might, with tactful handling, be won over to the traitor's side.

All this and more—of which there is no need to tell—I was to learn by virtue of my master's confidence in me, and communicate it by stealth—nay, in blackest treachery—along the path of a nameless treason, to him who would make full and deadly use of it to the King's undoing.

I marvelled then—and I marvel still more to-day—that Dingana could have expected such a thing of me.

But, my father, there is no accounting for the working of a jealous and ambitious man's mind, and much less so when murder sways the heart as it did that day in the breast of this most unnatural brother.

The latter part of the conversation was between ourselves, the others having been dismissed.

"We are agreed, therefore, my good friend," Dingana concluded, "that thou wilt do as I have said. Ever keep before thee the revenge which is thy due—thy daughter's right; 'twill sharpen thy wits, increase thy caution and command success. And in this way—I give thee my royal word, Watala—thou wilt surely build up again thy broken fortunes, rising again to that high rank from which he, my royal brother, dashed thee to the dust a year ago."

"Say no more, my lord. I——"

"Nay, Watala, interrupt me not. Watala!"

"Yes, my lord."

"When I am King——" He paused, smiling at me with a treachery I had never before beheld in any man's face. I shuddered.

"When I am King—what then, Watala?"

"Nay, O Great One, who am I to foretell the fame of what would happen then?"

"Quite so; but if the visions thou canst frame were multiplied an hundredfold they would not compass by one-tenth the might and power that I should wield!"

"The Royal One hath spoken," I replied. What else could I say?

"Enough! The King expects thee early. Get

thee to him and report to me two days from now what thou hast been able to learn." And saluting the dog with my gravest and most respectful manner, I left the hut.

The sun was now high up, so I made my way to the royal apartments, which, as ever, stood upon the highest point on which the Royal Kraal was built.

I will not tire you, my father, with the emotions that filled me as I walked slowly forward to have audience with my master. My father well knows that I am not a man to be easily confused, but as I left the hut I knew as little what to say to or how to act towards the King as a man overcome by drink. It is true that my loyalty to His Majesty had not wavered for an instant; it would take more than the wile and cunning of a Dingana to do that. Upon that point at least I was clear. But how to extricate the King from the many dangers which my meeting with his treacherous brother showed only too clearly were now closing in upon him from every side presented a multitude of difficulties which, I say, left me more confused than I had ever been before.

But confused or not, and be the difficulties what they may, it was urgent that I should see His Majesty at once; and so, on reaching the small gate which gave access to the royal enclosure, I bade the guard advise His Majesty forthwith that I, Watala, craved audience with him. A few moments later a captain returned saying that the King would see me at once; and thus it was, my father, that I found myself face to face with the King again.

There is no accounting for the great changes that sometimes take place in the feelings of men towards each other. By every token known to man the King and I should have been at mortal enmity, and yet, as I gave the royal salute, and His Majesty acknowledged it with a friendly nod, none could have guessed that only a few short moons before I had suffered unspeakable torture at his hands. And what more natural feelings should that have engendered than deep and lasting hatred between us?

But I had no thought of these things at that moment, my father; the King's safety, and that alone, was uppermost in my mind.

Nevertheless, this friendly—nay, warm—greeting between the torturer and him, the living evidence of his handiwork, has often struck me as passing strange; for my own part I was, just then, at least, content to forget the past in the pressing need of the present, nor have I ever regretted doing so.

It was the rule that none might address the King until first spoken to, but on this occasion it was I who spoke first. "I have come, O King, in answer to thy summons. Speak, my master, and tell me what is in thy heart?"

"Come, Watala; thou art not so ill-featured as I had expected," His Majesty began, quite ignoring my words. "The wounds we inflicted upon thee have healed well, and, by my mother, I like thee better without thy ears," and he indicated the place where they had been with a flourish of his little spear. "Their absence gives thee distinction—places thee alone among men," he went on, "as indeed

thou art, Watala." He leaned suddenly towards me, the little weapon falling from his grasp, his hands tightly clenched at his sides, his eyes flashing in startling brilliance and his chest working with deep emotion.

"My lord," I said, "tell me, I beseech thee, the purpose of my summons."

"Thou already hast that, Watala; the message that I sent thee leaves naught untold. There is treason in the air, Watala—bloody treason! I feel it; I can smell it—nay, I know it! Just as the swallow flying low skims the ground, just as the wind in fitful gusts doth change its quarter, and just as there comes a sudden lull—the stopping of the heart-beats of the elements—just as all these proclaim in certain language the breaking of the storm, so do I know, O Son of Solwandhle, that there is that which shall burst upon me that will shake the earth—and cause my death!"

Though his words were spoken in an undertone, they lost none of the mighty anger that lay behind them; it was like the hissing of an angry snake when pinned to the ground.

"From what quarter doth Thy Majesty expect the storm to come?"

"From the east—the most unnatural quarter, Watala."

"From the east?" I asked, not understanding.

"From the east, Watala."

"How so, Your Majesty?"

"East from where we sit are Dingana's quarters, and he, my father's son, yet so little brother to me, doth plot my end—an unnatural brother, Watala

—the unnatural quarter from whence the clouds will break.”

“Say but the word, my master, and he shall breathe his last this day!” I exclaimed, half-rising to my feet, and snatching up unconsciously in my anger the little spear, my heart thumping against my ribs, for in truth I would have gladly slain the traitor, even though the next instant I should taste death myself.

“Nay, Watala. Were the crushing of this single snake all that stood between me and my safety, I might grant thee thy request; but he hath found a mate, and between the two they have hatched a brood which in its turn hath brought forth other broods, until I dare not stir by night or day lest by stumbling upon one I rouse to anger the whole nest of them.”

“Alas, my lord, that thou shouldst have called me to thy side so late. But my King, my master, O Royal Elephant, there must, there shall be, some way to rid thee of these many dangers. Are there none in the Royal Kraal upon whose loyalty thou canst depend?”

“Of the eight regiments quartered here, one only is loyal still—loyal to a man.”

“And that, surely, is the Amazembe, O King?”

“Thou art right, Watala. Thine own old regiment is faithful still—indeed, that alone hath kept the flame of my life burning. But the flame begins to flicker, Watala, and it needs but the smallest puff of wind to put it out.”

“Never! O King,” I answered, leaping to my feet. “Never! Give me but the right and some

fitting rank, and in spite of every danger that besets thee, thou, the King, shalt triumph still," and respectfully I placed the little weapon at his feet once more.

"Too late, Watala! Too late!"

"Say not so, Your Majesty—say not so. But wherefore," I asked suddenly, "didst thou summon me here if not to make that use of me at which I have hinted?"

"Watala, I summoned thee here for one purpose only. I felt that of all my subjects none are more loyal than thou, and, like some benighted traveller lost in a forest and surrounded on all sides by fearsome dangers, I did yearn to have at my side the companionship, the comfort, of some trusty friend. And thou art come, thou well-trying and faithful friend, and now I can the more calmly meet my end, since thou wilt be near to speed me kindly on my bloody journey—to stop, perchance, with affectionate skill, my gaping wounds, and, at the last, to close my eyes, whose last vision shall have been thine own manly face wreathed, I know full well, in tender sympathy. Watala! Watala!" A scared and haunted look now filled his face. "I cannot—I cannot—dare not look my last upon the evil and distorted face, the bloodshot eyes of my assassin, and——"

"King! King!" I broke in, unable to listen further to such words. "Speak not thus! My noble master, think not alone of thine own priceless life, but of the nation thou dost rule, for if thou dost perish it must perish too. O Royal One, dost thou not yet know the measure of thy worth!

Hearken, and I shall tell thee. To many is given the power to see the sun, the trees, the hills, for they are there for all to see; others, and they are many too, have wits enough to tell the good that rain doth unto the fields, to mark the growing crops, and at the harvest to sense the reason for the abundant yield; and still others there are, but they are few, who, by gift of heart and brain can foretell in some degree the fruits, both good and bad, which may be reaped from the works of men. But in me, O Mighty One, O greatest King of all! in these eyes of mine there dwells the power more than in any other of thy loyal subjects to vision in thy noble self a something of the deeper man within thee—something of grander import—a blinding flash of thy majesty and power! I tell thee, Royal Lord, a world of admiration burns within me, not alone for thee as man and King, but for thee as the Guiding Guardian Spirit of the Zulu people. All fear thee for thy might, but I—I serve and honour thee for that lion heart of thine, thy boundless wisdom, thy untold worth to our beloved land, to thy loyal people and to me more than them all! O Thou Maker of a nation! O thou Moulder of manly men! See! to the nation thou art King in body only, but to me thou art King in spirit too, and therefore, my King, my two-fold King, put aside all gloomy thoughts, stand up erect, firm, thy kingly self once more, ready by right to command, not by force to obey. If thou wilt assume this proper and expected attitude even for a short space, I will, within that time, so stir the nation in thy behalf

that such traitors as do not meet a traitor's end shall, I warrant thee, discard their seditious rôle for one more fitting to the Zulu spirit—loyalty to the King!”

I had never before made so long a speech to the King, and as I finished I cast my eyes almost shamefully to the ground, yet feeling deeply stirred by the words I had spoken, for I meant them, every one, my father.

For a few moments there was silence, then His Majesty spoke:

“Watala, even as the persistent yelping of the cur may stir the lion to action, so have thy words moved me. Leave me now. I must think awhile, and alone.”

His Majesty that same afternoon summoned me again to his presence, when, as soon as I had seated myself on the opposite side of the glowing hearth, he said:

“I have not over much confidence in what thou dost purpose doing—this stirring up of the people in my behalf; but doth the assassin's victim hesitate to defend himself—to ward off the blow that will send him to a bloody death? And so, Watala, I will accept thy offer. Move, then, among the people freely, cautiously, Watala, but before thou do leave me here, arrange by some ruse—thy wit will tell thee how—to change the guard—see that those in close attendance upon me are men loyal to my person. Watala,” he went on suddenly, leaning across the hearth and seizing me by the shoulder—“Watala, so suspicious am I of all these days that I feel that even the guard placed to hold

the approach to this very hut may have among their number spies—nay, traitors—the very assassins themselves whose spears—upraised in outward show of my protection—are but held aloft to descend with murderous thrust upon my defenceless body.”

“My lord,” I said, “thou art overwrought in this. But have no fear, for thou hast rightly said Watala’s wit shall find a way to rid thee not alone of dangers close at hand, but of those which, though farther off, are serious menace to thy safety. Leave all to me, my master. Place thy full weight upon me, and I, conscious of my burden’s worth, shall try each stepping-stone with redoubled care and test each current of this dangerous stream until, with my precious load, I reach the bank in safety.”

And it was in this way, my father, that I became involved in the most perilous undertaking of my life.

It will serve no purpose to give in detail how I set about my task, but this much must be said. The double part I had to play was foreign to my nature, and whether it was because of its newness to me or because so much depended upon its proper playing, it is but the plain truth when I say that, while I had confidence in myself thus to serve the King, I was not prepared for the complete success which attended my efforts.

It must be remembered that Dingana had found out (how I never learnt) that I had been summoned by the King. It is true that he had waylaid me and that I had made it appear that I would support—nay, give him active assistance against my master—and that as far as I could see,

he had fallen completely into the trap I had laid; but none knew better than I that there were other traps besides the one I had set, and that if I would keep clear of them it behoved me to exercise great caution day and night and to have my wits about me ever alert, watchful for the slightest sign of the miscarriage of my plan. It was a trying, nervous time, my father.

And what was my plan? Just this: first to get myself reinstated in some high rank. This the King did at once. At first he would have made me Chief Councillor again, but this would have tied me too closely to His Majesty, and I therefore persuaded him to appoint me Keeper of the Royal Herds. Next it was necessary to find out who were disloyal to the King. This, my father might suppose, was difficult, and so it would have been but for the woman Mapita, who, my father will remember, had come so opportunely to my aid on another occasion. From the first I took her into my confidence, and my trust was not misplaced. I could, no doubt, myself have got all the information she gathered, but it would have taken longer, and time was important. Through her I learnt more in a few days than I could have found out in a month without her assistance.

How she did it I know not. Who can follow the scheming and plotting of a woman's mind? We see the results that they bring forth, and sense from them the uncanny gifts that nature gives them, and there the matter ends; we get no farther, not because we would not, but because we cannot. And so it was with me, my father.



"... he leapt with a yell of fury at the warrior." Page 106

Beyond this I had no fixed plan—that would come soon enough; and it did come, sooner than I expected, as I shall tell you, my father.

Now although the King had told me that seven of the eight regiments stationed at the Royal Kraal were disaffected, I soon found that this was not the case. It is true that a captain here and there and a few of the older warriors in these regiments were ill-disposed towards His Majesty, but each day I got fresh evidence that while their disaffection was treasonable enough, it was not as yet such as to move them to show open force against the throne. But even so, a smouldering fire is always dangerous, and it is best to stamp it out at once, and it was to this end that I worked. But I knew that this stamping out of fire is often attended with danger—a spark or two scattered here and there, which, unnoticed, bursts into flame, to do more harm perhaps than the source from which it came.

It was my purpose, therefore, to collect into one place all those traitors—those dangerous sparks—on pretence that the King would address them on some important matter, and then as they (there were about two hundred of them) assembled at the place of meeting, the thousand warriors of the Amazembe regiment would quietly surround them, and, when all was ready, put them to death without more ado. To summon the others—Dingana and his brother Mhlangana and those in close attendance upon them—at the same time and place might arouse suspicion, but they could be dealt with easily enough by other means.

The plan was simple enough; it was but necess-

ary to know whom to summon to the meeting—to make no foolish slip which might lead to the detection of my purpose. And what, save success, could one expect of me in such a rôle, my father?

I had many interviews with Dingana and his equally traitorous brother Mhlangana, at which I told them how, by craft and skill, I was learning all they wished to know; the fear His Majesty was in; his faith in me (I chuckled cunningly here); of those whom he feared and those whom he trusted.

“And what is his purpose since now, as thou sayest, he knoweth whence the danger lies?” asked Dingana one day.

“Come closer, O sons of a royal father, for I dare give ye this news in whispers only.” They had been seated four paces from me, but as I spoke they moved to where I sat, one on either side of me, their faces full of eager anticipation at the thought that they were now to learn that which would enable them to fix the day—nay, the very moment—for the King’s assassination. “His Majesty’s purpose is to fly from the Royal Kraal,” I said, and I never told a lie so well, my father.

“Never!” exclaimed Mhlangana in surprise.

“By day or night?” asked Dingana more calmly.

“By day,” I answered. “But let me tell ye all, then will ye understand and know better how to act,” I whispered, glancing furtively towards the door. I was acting my part with magnificent skill, my father.

“Quick, Watala! speak!”

“To-morrow at noon,” I went on, “the King will summon three or four captains and a few tried

warriors from each regiment and shall tell them to accompany him upon a hunting expedition which it is his purpose to make the following day. It is with this bodyguard and upon this pretence that he will leave, or try to leave, the Royal Kraal in the light of day."

"And then—what then, Watala?"

It was Dingana who spoke, breathless excitement in his voice. I chuckled inwardly as I went on, still whispering, still glancing fearfully towards the door.

"And then, my lords, His Majesty, once out of the Royal Kraal, will rally to his side all those who are loyal to him; and as we know that the disaffection of the people has not yet spread beyond the confines of the Royal Kraal, it doth mean that the great mass of the people without it will raise their spears in his, the King's, defence."

"Brother! let us slay the dog at once—this very night. I will do the deed myself. We must not let him leave this place, for if he doth our doom is sealed."

"Nay," replied Dingana, "we must entice him to his death by stealth, by cunning. Thou and I could not force the guard at the gate—it hath been a double guard of late, formed from the loyal Amazembe. As yet those who support our cause number a bare two hundred, and by the time we had summoned them, the King's own spies would have scented the danger, and a call to arms would in an instant bring a thousand spears against our two hundred. It must be done by stealth, by cunning, my brother; there is no other way."

"But how?" asked Mhlangana.

"Watala here, our trusty friend, will do it."

"I?" I exclaimed, with more horror in my voice than perhaps I should have shown.

"Even thou, Watala. Thou hast told us that His Majesty hath commanded thee—so great is his confidence in thee—to sleep each night across the doorway of his bed-chamber. Is it not so, Watala?"

"It is, my lord, but——"

"And thou, to-night—it must be to-night—when all is still and the King asleep, shalt prolong that sleep—a painless, merciful death—a fitting death for a King, Watala. The King's own little spear will serve thy purpose well enough. Is it agreed, O Son of Solwandhle?" He looked me cunningly, searchingly in the face, and the lustrous shining of the murderer's eyes fixed themselves menacingly upon me, and for a moment I was speechless.

Was ever a man placed as I was then? But it was not for nothing that my name became famous throughout the land. My feats of strength, my powers of endurance, my skill in debate, my unswerving loyalty to the King—all these had made my fame, and rightly so; but, though few knew it, it had been more surely won by the silent though lightning working of my brain. That, my father, had saved me on countless occasions, and it was that that saved me now.

"My lords," I said, "it is for ye to say how the deed shall be done; but since I am privy to it, and as it is my life that is most nearly in danger, ye may perchance allow me to suggest a plan which, it seems to me, would not only rid us of the King,

but bring in its train but little danger to ourselves."

"I care not what the plan is so long as Tshaka breathes his last before he hath time to strike at us," said Dingana.

"'Tis simple enough," I said. "It is this: The men who are to be summoned to form the King's bodyguard on his hunting expedition *shall be those who are loyal to ye*—men who would rejoice to see the King dead at their feet. Leave it to me, therefore, to summon the royal bodyguard, and I promise ye that none but these shall accompany His Majesty hence. Their journey will be short—half a day will see its end, and then——"

"Thou hast it, Watala!—thou hast it! I see thy purpose!" the two traitors broke in together.

"And then," I went on calmly, quietly—indeed, we might have been discussing some friendly matter over a pot of beer—"and then the warriors—the bodyguard—will return without the King and without their spears, for each one of them—the whole two hundred blades—shall remain in Tshaka's body, grim evidence of the nation's wish."

As I finished, the two could do naught but gaze at each other in amazement, but presently Dingana spoke.

"Watala," he said, in undisguised emotion, "thou art a wizard! A plan so simple and yet of such sure effect could come only from such a brain as thine!"

I bowed my head in silence, more to hide my deep loathing of the man than to acknowledge this mark of royal favour.

"But," asked Mhlangana, when at last he had found his voice, "will not His Majesty recognise in the bodyguard men who wish him ill?"

"Nay," I said. "Why, hath it not been my daily duty in furtherance of our plans so to mislead the King that to-day he counts as friends those who are in truth his bitterest enemies, while upon his friends he looks askance and thinks them foes? Have I not, too, sought with some success to drown the thunder of the coming storm, to explain away this rumour and to encourage that—nay, to assure him of my own loyalty when, as now, I plot against his life? Why, my royal masters, he is in truth blind and deaf to all save that which we would have him see and hear. I have, as ye have said, done my task with wizard's skill, and the setting of to-morrow's sun shall mark the close of an eventful day—a bloody day—and, never fear, as Tshaka hath lived, so shall he die—by the spear!"

"Then is it thy purpose that neither Mhlangana nor I should take a part in this matter? I had set my heart upon taking some active part in the killing, Watala."

"Nay, Your Royal Highness, even I shall take no part; 'twill be better so. The King's death must appear to be the people's will and not the thrust of family feud."

"Thou art right, Watala."

"But, my lord, lest by mistake I include in the bodyguard some who are loyal to the King—a dangerous mistake to make—wilt not thou and thy royal brother call these men together and bid them attend His Majesty soon after dawn to-morrow at

the royal apartments? Ye know them all—all those who support thy worthy cause—and a word from thee will ensure their presence at the appointed time and place. Not knowing the part I play in this, and seeing me in daily attendance upon the King, they might perchance mistrust me and even disobey my commands."

"How many didst thou say the King required?" asked Dingana.

"Not less than two hundred—those were His Majesty's commands," I replied.

"Can we muster so many?" he asked, turning to his brother.

"Not quite, I think."

"Summon every one, my lord," I pleaded anxiously, "though it would be better to have too few than to include any who are not thy supporters."

"Have no fear, Watala; we shall summon the men ourselves and we shall see that every supporter of our cause is ready at the royal enclosure at the rising of the sun."

"To-morrow, then, my lords, at the rising of the sun, I shall be ready to receive the men. Before His Majesty leaves he will no doubt dispose of his private matters at his little kraal, as is his custom, and it would be well if ye attended him there as ye sometimes do. The King is over-suspicious just now, and no cause must be given to increase his doubts."

"Thou art right, Watala. We shall be at the little kraal. These private matters do not take long, and His Majesty's hunting will not be much delayed," and he smiled the smile which ever

made his face more unsightly than by nature it was meant to be. And I—why, I smiled too—inwardly, my father, and having arranged all other details for the morrow to their satisfaction—and to my own—I left them.

Now I should explain that His Majesty had two sets of apartments at Dukuza—those that were within the main stockade, though separated from them by a smaller one, of its own, and those which were in an entirely different and private kraal about fifty paces beyond the lower gate of the main stockade. It was his custom to repair to this private residence almost daily and there to dispose of matters which concerned him personally. It was my purpose that the two hundred traitors should assemble at the royal apartments within and at the highest point of the main enclosure, and that as the Amazembe quietly surrounded them the King should proceed to his little kraal without the main stockade. My plan for dealing with the rest of the traitors—the dogs Dingana and Mhlangana—will become clear from the audience I had with the King that night, and of which I shall now tell you, my father.

I had, of course, told His Majesty day by day how most of my plans fared, but I had so far kept from him the double part I was playing; this was because I feared he might spoil my plans by some rash act, caused either by fear or anger, and thus hasten the danger which threatened him. I had no stomach for this kind of thing. But all was in readiness now to strike the blow that would free him for ever from the plottings of his unnatural

brother, and, because of the part which the King himself was to play on the morrow, I could no longer keep from him any detail upon which his life—and mine—depended. In my anxiety to recount my plan, I reached the royal bed-chamber earlier than usual—indeed, Mbopo, his body-servant, had not yet finished preparing the King's couch.

"Greeting, Watala," said His Majesty. "Thou art early, or is it that our faithful dog Mbopo is slow or late in his attendance upon me?"

"Nay, Thy Majesty, I am tired, and would retire to rest as soon as thou hast dismissed Mbopo, so be it Thy Majesty hath no commands for me."

A few moments later Mbopo, his duties done, left us. I heard his "good night" to the guard without, then all was quiet, for the King was gloomily silent, while I, with so much to tell, held myself in check lest a sudden breaking of the news might unnecessarily disturb him. Presently I got up and shut the door, making it fast, and returning to the hearth I raked up the embers, added a stick or two of wood, and when the fire was well alight I began:

"Thy Majesty, the time hath come! When tomorrow's sun shall set all traitors to the throne will have met the doom that is the traitor's lot!"

The King flashed his eyes across at me, a look of wonderful hope in them; but the next instant his expression changed to one of extreme weariness—the weariness born of daily fear of death.

"Nay, Watala," he said; "do not trifle with me in this matter."

"Nay, lord," I said, "it would ill become me to jest with the King on such a subject. My master, it shall be as I have said. All is in readiness. My plans are safely laid. By this time to-morrow the King of Zululand shall be freed of all menace to his throne and person."

For a few moments he merely looked at me with growing awe and wonder, his eyes opening wider and wider as he grasped the full meaning of what I had said; and then, leaning forward slowly, his face in the full light of the flickering flames in the hearth at his feet, the finely tapered fingers of his up-turned hands stretched out, as it were, in mute appeal, while his eyes for the first and last time in his life assumed the unmistakable look of genuine gratitude, he said:

"Watala!—Watala!—Watala!" He whispered the name three times in a voice strange, unreal, unlike his own; he moved further forward—surely his hands were in the flames—the smell of singed hair reached me.

"Have a care, King!" I said, pointing anxiously to his hands; but he took no heed.

"Watala," he said, "what is it that thou sayest? Art thou a second time to save my life? Speak, man! What do thy words portend? Speak! speak! I see it in thine eyes, thy face, thy manner—all tell me more clearly than thy words that thou hast weighty news! Speak! Tell me!"

And then, my father, I told him all, leaving nothing out, even as I have told you; and as I unfolded each detail of my plan, so simple in the carrying out, so effective in its purpose, His

Majesty moved farther away from me, as though to view more clearly the picture that I drew.

"But, Watala, I cannot grasp it all—not yet. To thee it is familiar; this double part thou hast played confuses me. Explain, man—explain! Is every detail planned? There can be no hitch, Watala?" he asked suddenly, nervously, feverishly.

"My King, depend upon me; I have seen to everything. Were it that my life alone were in danger, there might be some reason to doubt my zeal—my care—in safeguarding it; but add to that the welfare of the nation, the safety of my King, and thou hast in that single aim sure promise of what I say."

"But tell me, Watala"—he had in his eagerness come round to where I sat and was close beside me, one foot placed unconsciously upon mine, his two hands closing and unclosing nervously upon what was once a straw skimmer, but which was now crushed beyond all recognition—"tell me, Watala, how are we to rid ourselves of my father's sons, Dingana and Mhlangana? 'Tis not sufficient to lop this tree of its branches only; the trunk itself must go—nay, the roots, too, Watala; we must strike down deep at the roots, O Son of Solwandhle."

For an answer I got up and went to the back of the hut, and returning with my sleeping-mat I unrolled it, and in doing so revealed two well-made thongs of oxhide.

"Behold, O King, the silent answer to thy question! No witch-doctor's potion, no over-strong beer hath ever lulled them—the two that thou hast named—to sweet unconsciousness as these two

thongs shall do!" and I held them up, the one of white, the other of black hide, in the firelight for the King to see.

"Hide them!—hide them!" he said quickly, moving back a pace, the crushed skimmer falling from his hands as they jerked up nervously to his neck. "I almost feel them here! 'Twill be a wicked death, Watala, but, by my mother, a more merciful one than they deserve! But, my friend," he went on, moving nearer again as I concealed the thongs in the mat, "how wilt thou get their necks into the noose? Thou has not told me. What is thy plan in this?"

"To-morrow morning, O Great One, when the two hundred traitors are assembled here—awaiting thy departure for the hunting field—the Amazembe warriors, quietly surrounding them, thou wilt proceed as usual to thy private kraal without the main stockade, there to deal as usual with such matters as require thy attention. Dingana and Mhlangana will also be there, unattended save by twenty men, also from the Amazembe, whom I have specially selected for the part. I shall not at first be with thee, for I shall be required here to give the signal for the attack; but that same signal shall serve for the twenty warriors in hidden attendance upon Thy Majesty to seize the two treacherous brothers and hold them until I come, and with these hands shall I make them atone for the greatest crime ever heard of in this land—the treason against the King by his own flesh and blood—and with these thongs!"

And thus it was, my father, that the King and I

talked well into the night until, at last, well-taught in every detail, His Majesty said:

"Everything is clear as day, Watala. I shall play my part even as thou hast said, and may the spirits watch over us both." He got up and went to the other side of the hearth and seated himself, picked up his little spear, and began to toy with it now agitatedly, now calmly, thinking, no doubt, deeply, as well he might.

In the silence I too was thinking deeply and anxiously of what the morrow would bring forth. I did not fear any miscarriage of my plan. I had spoken to every captain of the Amazembe regiment, appointed their stations and warned them carefully not by look or action to arouse the suspicions of the two hundred either before or after they had assembled. No, there was nothing to fear there.

The twenty men—all personally known to me—knew their part too. I had explained everything. They would be at the little kraal, well concealed, at the proper time; there would be no hitch there either.

"Watala!" The King addressed me sharply, angrily. I looked up in sudden alarm.

"Yes, my lord."

"The nation shall suffer for this treason! Thou dost talk of two hundred traitors, but two thousand be nearer the mark, and, by my mother, when we have rid us of the first number, the second shall taste the spear."

"All traitors deserve to die, O King," I said.

For answer His Majesty flung his little spear to

the back of the hut, and without so much as a good night to me, he threw himself upon his mat, and his steady breathing a few moments later told me that he was sleeping peacefully—the first time, no doubt, for many moons.

I was awake at the first sign of dawn, and at once dressed and went to Sofihla's hut—the senior captain of the Amazembe. In a few hurried whispers I learned, as I knew it would be, that all was in readiness. As I left him I said:

“If by chance I am not here to give the signal, do thou fall upon the dogs at the first sign of tumult at the little kraal which thou canst see from here.”

“Thy commands shall be obeyed,” said the captain; “but, O Watala, be not over-slow in giving the signal, for my warriors, like dogs held back at the chase, are eager to get at the traitors' throats.”

“Good!” I replied. “But mark well that none escape, captain. Farewell,” and I turned and went towards the royal apartments, meaning to have a final word with the King. I was but five paces from the royal enclosure when a warrior ran up to me, breathless. “Sire,” he panted, “Bejana, one of the captains of the Amazembe, desires to speak to thee in private. The matter is urgent, and he may not, he says, leave his post.”

A sudden nervousness seized me. Had anything gone amiss? The message was urgent. What could it be? Some slight misunderstanding of the plans, perhaps. These and other questions rushed to my mind as I walked, without undignified haste,

towards Bejana's hut, some two hundred paces off. It was just before sunrise and there were not many men about. The door of Bejana's hut was open, and without any hesitation I stooped down and crept through the opening. As I did so five pairs of hands instantly seized me, and without a word, with scarcely a sound, they flung me to the floor and bound me hand and foot!

There was no mistaking the position, my father. My plot had been found out, and here was I caught, helpless and unable to lift a finger in my defence or in that of him for whom I was now about to die, and who, at that very moment perhaps, was sharing the same fate as that which awaited me.

Of all the emotions that leapt through me in those first few moments, anger at thus being betrayed was, I think, uppermost, but that soon gave place to anxiety for the King's safety. I have known many disappointments, borne many hardships and felt many sorrows in my life, but this, in its combination of all three, was the greatest blow of all.

They had thrown me on my face, so that I could not see who my assailants were, but presently I felt rather than saw the doorway darken, and someone entered.

It was Dingana!

"Hail! Watala, Chief Herder of the late King's cattle," he sneered.

Late King! Had they then already done my master to death? All plots work quickly when they come to a head——

"Come, thou dog, salute me," he went on, "for

to-day I am King!" and he spurned me over with his foot. But I looked him steadily in the face as I said:

"Your Royal Highness, deal with me as thou wilt, but compel me not to call thee King."

"How so? thou crafty hound! thou two-faced monster! I am the King, I tell thee!"

"Thou art indeed a king—the king of murderers. If, alas! His Majesty hath breathed his last, I shall salute him, though dead, with greater reverence than thou, who, though King, must ever wear the mark of murderer on thy brow and be thrice accursed as the slayer of thine own brother, the greatest King of all."

I have often marvelled that he did not stab me to my death there and then. Surely no King had ever put up with greater insult than Dingana suffered at my hands as I lay there helpless, yet careless of what he might do to me. All feeling had left me save that of a blind and unreasoning rage against this monster in the shape of man. It might have been my terrible anger that made him stay his hand, but however that may be, it was at the moment that I expected him to kill me that he said:

"Silence, thou dog! lest I torture thee before thy final punishment. Take him out," he commanded, "to the place I have told ye of."

But as they made to lift me up Dingana stopped them.

"Stay!" he said; "I have another word to say. Behold, Watala, thy King!"

I could do naught but gaze upwards in dumb



"... for I leapt forward with a mighty spring." Page 132

hatred at his coarse and brutal face, but at the next instant he went on:

“And in token of my power, O Watala, I treat thee thus,” and the black monster, placing his foot upon my neck, raised himself—the full weight of his body—upon that unnatural perch, at the same time thrusting his spear through the fleshy part of my arm just below the shoulder, and pinned me thus to the floor of the hut.

I can see the gleam of cruel triumph in his evil eyes to this day, my father. I struggled for breath, my eyes starting from their sockets, but I could make no sound. My head swam, darkness began to close upon me, and ever that murderous weight upon my throat—the weight of the world, it seemed—my body stiffened for the final spasm—certain forerunner of a strangled death—when suddenly I was able to breathe again and my eyes to see once more, and, looking up, I saw rather than felt he was no longer there. When I was able to take note of my surroundings again Dingana had gone; but I was not to be left in peace for long, for presently they lifted me up and carried me upon their shoulders out through the lower gate and to the little kraal.

Without hesitation—indeed, their every action seemed part of a well-rehearsed plan—they bore me straight to the hut always occupied by the King's body-servant, Mbopo, who was there ready, it seemed, to receive me!

Had he, too, turned traitor to the King?—he, the King's own personal servant and constant attendant?—he whom I, no less than His Majesty,

had trusted above all men? Impossible! And yet there he was, with the unmistakable look of guilt upon his face.

There are times when one's emotions outstrip all language. This was one of them. For a few moments we did naught but look at each other—he uneasily, shiftily, and I, I doubt not, with a stare of growing horror and shame to think that he, of all men—— But why talk of it, my father?

“Art thou turned a traitor, too, Mbopo?” I asked in a voice that told of my sorrow and his shame that such a thing could be.

“Men and things change,” he said. “Things are not now what they were.”

For a few moments I merely gazed at the villain, and then, speaking calmly, I addressed him thus:

“It is true that men and things change—thou thyself art living evidence of that truth. The gradual changes that are wrought by Nature all men understand—the budding leaf, the fragrant blossoming, the welcome yield of fruit—all these follow in well-established sequence, just as we expect the child to grow to youth, the youth to man. But of all the fruits that man may yield that most expected in the natural run is loyalty to the King; but this—*this*—I cannot give it a name, Mbopo. In other men it bears the name of treason, but coming from thee! There is no name that can be made of it! Men, wild animals—nay, even reptiles—bring forth each of their kind, but thy crime stamps thee ever as a monster—some Monstrous Thing—an abortion of the Zulu nation!”

I had been placed in a sitting position against

the wall of the hut, and, bound though I was, I shook with the fearful rage that filled me.

"Call me what thou wilt, Watala. I no longer serve the Tshaka dog!"

"Thou art a brave man to speak thus of the greatest of all kings, whose body, though done to death by traitor's spear, is not yet cold. Thou wert ever a brave man, Mbopo," I added, with a sneer that made the villain wince.

"It is well that thou shouldst speak of him as dead, for although he still lives, he will have breathed his last before the time of milking this very day."

"What!" I exclaimed, a sudden hope surging through me, for I had thought His Majesty already dead, "doth the King still live?"

"Even as thou, Watala; but his end is at hand. I have told thee——"

But not listening to his words—there was no need for words just then—the King still lived! Putting forth the whole of my strength—it was the strength of five men at the moment, my father—with one supreme effort I burst my bonds and leapt for the door before the dog well knew that I was free. But I was just too late, for at the same instant he too reached it and blocked my way, shouting as he did so:

"Guard! guard! Watala hath freed himself! Quick! quick!"

With a terrible oath I flung myself at him and bore him to the ground; but the spirits were against me, for as we fell my right arm was pinned beneath and he on top. Just then the men of the guard rushed into the hut, but not before I had

seized the dog by the ear with my left hand, and as easily as one might peel an ear of maize I wrenched it from his head and flung it in his face.

"Thou black villain!" I hissed, now angry beyond all words that I had been thwarted in this, my last attempt to save the King. With a cry of pain the dog let go his hold upon me as three other pairs of hands held me fast, while one of them knelt upon my chest and bound me, this time leaving naught to chance.

Could I not give warning of the King's danger to some chance passers-by? I could still use my voice!

"Treason! treason!" I shouted with all my might. "'Tis I, Watala, who speaks. Treason! Help! Help! The King! the King! Help!"

But none heard me, my father, and one of those that held me clapped his hands to my mouth, and a moment later they gagged me with a piece of goat-skin, and I was powerless even to make a sound.

Mbopo had run from the hut, no doubt to get his wound dressed, and I lay there panting upon the floor, the three men guarding me; nor did they so much as take their eyes off me, for they feared me still, my father.

Presently the doorway darkened and Dingana entered.

"Take him," he said, "and tie him to the tree I have told ye of"; and he left the hut again.

And then, my father, they carried me out and tied me, still gagged, securely to a tree facing the small cattle enclosure in which at night the royal herd was kept, but which at this time of day was empty.

Surely there would be some who would see me thus, and, seeing, understand and so give warning to my master? It was a vain hope, my father, for few were allowed to approach the King's private residence, but in my anxiety I searched quickly in every direction that my bonds would allow, but I could see no one save those who guarded me.

A strange quiet filled the place, and for the first time in my life, my father, I lost all hope in the depths of a black despair.

Now I should tell you that it was in this cattle enclosure that the King always attended to his private affairs; it was his daily custom to do so at this time of the day. It was a sheltered spot. The enclosure consisted of a dry brush-wood fence about as high as one's chest, and it could be easily seen through. At one point in this circular fence there was a large thorn-tree, and it was under this that the King always sat when disposing of his business, and it was here that I knew he would sit to-day, for I could see his chair and mat placed in the shade there ready to receive him.

The tree to which I was bound was but three paces from the one I have just described, but on the outside of the enclosure.

For some reason which I could not at first understand, the men who guarded me (there were six of them now) formed a circle round me; their purpose, as I soon learned, was to keep me concealed from the King when he should approach.

All was still as death save the frantic beating of my heart. There are times when one can sense through some unknown channel that something

terrible is afoot; this was such a time, and there was I bound, helpless, voiceless, powerless to do aught but wait for the coming of some tragedy which my brain refused to conjure up and against which my every sense rebelled. It is suspense such as this that must surely often cause the loss of reason.

Presently there rose upon the morning air the familiar sounds of the Royal Praiser chanting the King's praises. Indistinct at first, the sounds became nearer and louder. Hark! Yes! now I could distinguish the words themselves:

*"Terrific son of Zulu!
Great One whose voice is thunder!
Whose noble head no blow may threaten!
Bayete! Mighty One!*

*"Voice that echoes through the nation!
Flame that scorches the living forest
And chars the growing tree!
Bayete! Mighty One!"*

And there, from between the huts, I saw him come—him, my beloved King! Proud, erect, a King of kings, his fine leopard-skin kaross falling in graceful folds the full length of his majestic height, the little spear as ever in his hand.

The Praiser, facing the King and therefore walking backwards as etiquette demanded, was working himself up into a frenzy of loyal passion, his broad black oxhide shield rising and falling in splendid emphasis of his deep-throated words of praise. Slowly, slowly they came, the King unattended, save by the Praiser, for it was his pleasure to dispense with all pomp in his private

home; they were through the little gate now, advancing towards the thorn-tree.

*"Tshaka of the heavy footfall!
King, whose weapon swift o'erleaps
All other puny weapons!
Bayete! Mighty One!*

*"King to whom kings do homage!
Whose voice smites every homestead!
Voice that all do hear!
Bayete! Bayete! Bayete!"*

With a final burst of wonderful admiration the Praiser ceased. His Majesty sat heavily down upon his chair, his feet upon the mat, and for a few moments glared majestically round him as two men of rank entered the enclosure, closely followed by Mbopo, the wound upon his head, now dressed, being concealed under his head-dress.

Where were Dingana and Mhlangana? What did their absence mean? Oh, my father, what would I have given to have been able at that moment to raise a single shout of warning to the King! But try as I would I could make no impression upon my gag and I was perforce compelled to watch in dumb and helpless terror each incident of the fateful morning, and every one is stamped upon my brain for ever, my father.

The King's back was towards me, but I could see him and all that passed within the kraal.

As His Majesty sat down, the Praiser stepped to his side, sheltering with his shield the royal head from the morning sun, while Mbopo stood at respectful attention—the treacherous snake!—five paces from and straight before the King, his

shield placed upon the ground before him. Behind him the two other men squatted as they, with Mbopo, waited for the King to speak.

His Majesty was toying nervously—more nervously than usual—with the little weapon, and I saw that now and again he glanced anxiously towards the place where the two hundred traitors had been commanded to assemble—for their death. In my anxiety for the King's safety I had forgotten that part of my plan whereby the traitors were to be surrounded by the Amazembe and put to death, but now I suddenly remembered, and I wondered what was happening there, but from where I was I could not see that portion of the Royal Kraal.

But all thought of them and their fate was suddenly banished from my mind, for the King was speaking.

"Mbopo," he said, sternly, "I have had a dream—an evil dream, thou dog!—a dream, dost thou hear?"

"I hear, O Great One," Mbopo replied.

"And what, thinkest thou, was the burden of my dream—what thinkest thou, I ask?" He had now risen slowly to his feet, the little spear gripped angrily. "What thinkest thou?"

"Nay, I cannot guess, O Royal Elephant."

"I dreamt," the King went on, more angrily and spitting out each word with fearful emphasis, "I dreamt that thou wert King!" Mbopo made a sudden start of fear. "Yes, thou, a commoner, didst reign in my stead!" pointing at him accusingly with the little weapon—"thou, a mere commoner,

didst supplant me—the King! Interpret the vision. Speak! what doth it mean?” and he sat down slowly again, his eyes fixed with an angry glare upon the man before him.

“As commoner,” Mbopo replied, “I can never fill the throne. The King’s dream did but emphasise the impossibility of such an event, O Great One.”

It was at this moment that I saw Dingana and Mhlangana emerge together from between the huts, some fifty paces to my right; they were in earnest conversation, and I saw them look more than once first towards the King and then in the direction of the royal apartments in the main Royal Kraal. Presently they disappeared again behind the huts. The King had not seen them—he could not from where he sat.

“But seemingly,” His Majesty was saying, “impossible things are dreamed of that often come to pass, Mbopo.”

“It is not for me to dispute Thy Majesty’s power to interpret dreams, but for once, O King, thy dog must bark in disapproval at thee.”

“Thou art too quick, Mbopo. Of what dost thou disapprove? I have not yet interpreted the dream—indeed, I must think awhile before I do so and—look thou, Mbopo,” he added suddenly, smiling cruelly and caressing his little spear.

“Yes, Thy Majesty.”

“When I have returned from my hunting expedition, I shall give thee the true meaning of the vision.”

“*Bayete!*” answered Mbopo.

"And now, what matters are there to dispose of? Do any wait to see me on private business? My time is short and we must complete our business with dispatch. I have already scented the game, Mbopo, and my fingers twitch to hurl the spear."

"There are three men who crave audience with the King," answered Mbopo—"the three men whom thou didst send five moons ago to procure for thee a supply of cranes' feathers."

"Let them be summoned forthwith," and instantly the Praiser left to do the King's bidding. "Dost thou say they left five moons ago, Mbopo?"

"That and more, O King."

"'Tis a long time to be absent on so small a matter—too long. The dogs shall be punished! When the Praiser returns," he added suddenly, leaning forward and speaking in a lower tone, "send for the executioners, but let not the three men overhear thee."

"*Bayete!*" saluted Mbopo.

Just then there were sounds of the Praiser chanting the King's praises, and a moment later he entered the gate, followed by three men each carrying a large bunch of beautiful cranes' and other feathers. They halted ten paces in front of the King, gave the royal salute, seated themselves, the feathers placed on the ground before them, while the Praiser returned to the King's side as before.

It is not my purpose, my father, to dwell overmuch upon the emotions that filled me on this, the most terrible day of my life, but whereas those feelings which up to now had overwhelmed me

can be expressed in words, no gift of speech can convey to you those that swept through me at the moment that I saw Dingana and Mhlangana come into view once more from behind the huts. It is true that the quickly happening events of the morning had prepared me in some measure for what was to come, but, even so, my brain refused to grasp as being impossible, unthinkable, that the greatest tragedy that could befall my people would be enacted there, in the bright light of day, before my very eyes, and I unable to raise my voice or move my little finger—I who would have given my life to do either—in defence of my royal master.

These two—Dingana and Mhlangana—were clothed in long jackal-skin karosses, beneath which I saw, in hateful outline, the spears they held there; but it was the distorted look of undaunted evil upon their faces more than the menace of their weapons that proclaimed the murder in their hearts.

Slowly, but without stealth, they approached the gate; here they separated, Dingana remaining where he was while Mhlangana advanced along the outside of the brush-wood fence and crept noiselessly forward until just behind the King—and there he stood.

It is the lot of most men to undergo hardships, even tortures both of mind and body, but it was as though every pain I had ever felt was brought within the compass of that single moment!

I strained at my thongs with the strength of a madman—nay, ten madmen. The raw hide cut deep into my flesh until the blood dripped from

the open wounds at my ankles, my wrist, my chest. I tried again and again to shout, but the only sound that came from my cracked and burning throat was a husky croak which did not even reach my guards. Again and again I put forth my greatest strength, but it served only to deepen my wounds, for I could not burst a single thong. "King! King!" I shouted, though my lips could neither form a word nor make a sound. "King! King! My master! Oh, look round but once—just once, O King! 'Tis I, Watala, who speaks! King! King!" and again I struggled, but I was beaten. Yes, my father, for the first time and only time my skill of brain and my strength of arm were beaten quite, and bruised and broken I had perforce to watch—yes, watch—that which—! "No! no!—not that! not that! King! King!—oh, my beloved master!" and with one more final and supreme effort I strove again to show and free myself, but to no avail.

My eyes by now were dim, but not with tears, for it was drops of blood that trickled from my eyes and down my naked chest!

But silence! The King is speaking again.

"Five moons ago and more ye were sent to procure crane feathers—my only emblem of royalty—five moons ago—do ye hear?"

"It is so, O Mighty One!" one of the men replied.

"And how comes it, ye dogs, that ye have taken so long to carry out my commands?"

"O King," the same man replied, "at this season the birds do fly to foreign parts, and it hath been impossible to procure the feathers earlier."

"What! impossible dost thou say?—impossible!" demanded the King with rising anger.

"Impossible, Thy Majesty."

"Then are not all things possible to those that serve the King?" he asked, smiling pleasantly, with that swift change of manner so remarkable in him.

It was at this moment that Zozo, the witch-doctor, shuffled through the gate, followed by four executioners. I have already told you, my father, of this wizened-up monster and of his foul and loathsome office, but that day he seemed more loathsome than ever before, and, terrible though my position was, I yet had time to feel a sense of unusual dread at his approach.

"All is possible to those that serve the King! He, he, he, he! It is I, Zozo, the Searcher into other worlds, who say so," the misshapen wretch screeched in his high-pitched, rasping voice.

"Well said, my worthy doctor—well said," put in the King, smiling encouragingly.

"Do ye serve the King?" again yelled the doctor at the three now terrified men.

"We, as all men, do," replied their spokesman.

"And have ye served him well?" he screamed as he hopped forward like a tailless baboon and peered closely into the face of each man, the spittle dribbling from his toothless mouth and down his shrivelled chest.

"As well as any living men."

"And that is never too well! He, he, he, he! Never too well! He, he, he, he!"

"Why, how now? ye dogs! How have ye dared to loiter on the King's service?" suddenly put in

Mbopo, who, snatching up a stick and leaping at the three men, made as though to strike them, and they, thinking that this was the signal for their execution, took fright and fled in terrible fear—one through the gate and the other two over the brushwood fence.

“Kill them! kill them! the dogs!” the King shouted; at which the Praiser, the executioners, as well as the two men of rank, ran off in pursuit, two of them hurling their spears at the fugitives, but to no purpose, for they had already got too far.

“Ha, ha, ha, ha!” shrieked the witch-doctor in a mad frenzy of fiendish delight. “After them, the jackals—hunt them—slay them—tear their black hearts from their bodies!” and he, too, cantered off in his monkey fashion after them.

“How comes this? thou dog!” the King said angrily, addressing Mbopo. “Who art thou to behave thus in my presence? Thou dost forget thyself!”

As the King spoke, my eyes were on Mbopo, and what I saw made me catch suddenly at my breath—my heart froze within me, and my brain seemed to stop working, for this is what he was doing: Slowly and deliberately, and ignoring the King’s question with measured insolence, he picked up the shield at his feet and brought out from underneath the two thongs of oxhide, one white and the other black—the two that I had prepared for Dingana’s and Mhlangana’s death.

Without so much as looking up, he began to uncoil one with a significance which required no words to convey its meaning.

I glanced swiftly to the right. Dingana still stood there, but the spear he had first concealed was now held openly in his hand, the broad blade gleaming with wicked menace in the morning sun. And Mhlangana, he too had brought out his, and I noticed that it trembled in his grasp—he was only three paces from me and barely two behind the King; indeed, he could have touched His Majesty, for the brush-wood fence was broken hereabouts and offered no obstacle.

In a world of frantic fear I sought the faces of the six who guarded me—three on either side. Surely one of them was loyal to the King? But no; they stood there motionless, their faces expressionless and their eyes fixed in fascinated stare straight before them, and I knew with sickening certainty that not one of them would lift a finger to aid the King in his dire need.

These things take long to tell, but they were the happenings of a few moments.

It will never be known how great was the shock to His Majesty when he saw, and seeing understood to the full, Mbopo's unspoken message as he uncoiled the thongs, for my father must remember that up to that moment the King suspected nothing; indeed, he had placed his whole confidence in me and in the success which he felt would attend my plan—and now—the thongs!

“Dost thou not know? Dost thou not——” The King faltered as he had never faltered before, and looking furtively to his right saw, for the first time, Dingana with upraised spear. A sudden fear seized him, followed by a deep gasp of horror as

his hands shot swiftly to his face, as though to shut out some fearsome sight, the little spear flung, without intent, from his hand and falling with ominous clash at Mbopo's feet.

"Dost thou not know, I say, that—I—am——"
He rose steadily to his feet.

"I know one thing, O Son of Senzangakona," hissed Mbopo, as he placed one foot firmly upon the little weapon, "one thing that thou hast taught me—that thou hast taught the nation—one thing above all others, and that is that *all things are possible to those that serve the King. BAYETE!*"

Oh! my father, the terrible mocking, taunting, insulting emphasis he put into that hissing salute! Stung by it as surely no monarch was ever stung before, a sudden majestic dignity seemed to descend upon the King the like of which I cannot attempt to describe. Slowly his finely tapered fingers undid the fastenings of his leopard-skin kaross, which, falling to his feet, revealed his noble body, naked quite save for the oxhide loin-coverings at his middle. Drawing himself to his full height and folding his arms with kingly grace across his chest he said, looking first at Dingana and then at Mbopo (as yet he was unaware of Mhlangana's presence):

"I am King! All things ARE possible, SHALL be possible to those that serve me! I tell ye, I——"

"NO! NO! it cannot be! Help! HELP!—The King! The King!" I seemed to be yelling with all the power of my lungs, for at that moment Mhlangana took a sudden step forward, and raising

his spear high above his head, he aimed a savage, treacherous blow at my beloved master's back, saying, as the broad-bladed weapon plunged deep to its mark:

"Take that from me!"

And Dingana, rushing up, and pausing for an instant before the King, hurled his own weapon, with the strength born of lifelong hate, straight into the King's right side, exclaiming with an angry hiss:

"And that from Dingana!"

And Mbopo, not to be outdone, snatched up the little royal weapon at his feet, stepped up and thrust it savagely deep into the royal chest, saying:

"And this from me," and then, moving back a pace, and dangling the thong tauntingly before the King's face, "and this," he went on, "IS THE NATION'S WISH!" and at that he slashed him mercilessly with it right across the face.

His Majesty received the first three blows standing, his left hand covering the first, his right the second, while at the third he came rigidly to attention; but at the fourth he staggered, tottered, and then fell to his hands and knees facing the three men, for by now Mhlangana had joined the other two.

"What have I done, O children of my father?" half-wailed the stricken monarch, blood dripping from his mouth, as he fell backwards against the brush-wood fence which propped him up, his arms hanging helplessly at his sides.

"Thou hast done nothing to us yet!" Dingana snarled; and then, snatching the thong from

Mbopo and flinging it at the King, "but there it is. Do it now, thou dog!"

"Ye have slain me surely!" He was gasping for breath now. "Curse ye fools all three, for ye think to rule in my stead." He rose now by some wonderful effort to his knees, his left hand clutching the ground for support, while with his right he pointed a shaking finger out towards the sea. "But I see them coming from out the sea—the white men who shall eat ye up. I do wish it so—it—is—my wish—it is—the King's—the King's desire!"

All three stepped angrily forward, but they could do him no further hurt, for he—the maker of the nation—Tshaka, the King—my beloved master, had fallen back—DEAD!

And at that moment I, too, ceased to live, for I fainted, my father.

What more is there to tell save that which concerns me and which therefore cannot interest you, my father?

But this much must be told: Mbopo had overheard my conversation with the King the night before and had straightway warned the King's brothers. As the King's body-servant he had every access to the royal apartments, and as he was (unknown to the King and unsuspected by me) a supporter of Dingana's cause, the traitors had arranged, in order to make doubly sure of me, that he should contrive to overhear some of my conversation with His Majesty, and it was on that night that he did so for the first time, for no sooner had he left us than he crept round the outside of the hut, and pressing his ear against

the thatched wall immediately opposite to where the King and I sat talking, he had overheard every word that had passed.

As for me, they cut me down from the tree, and Dingana, secure in his new-found power, and secretly, I believe, admiring those high qualities in me of which throughout my life I had given so much evidence, decided to spare my life.

"I thank thee, Royal One, for thy clemency," I said. "Some day the nation will thank thee even as I do."

"Enough, Watala; say no more. Come, we shall drink a draught in commemoration of the peace between us."

And that night I drank his beer, but I made a vow with every drop I swallowed that I would yet avenge the Son of Senzangakona's murder in some manner befitting that illustrious King.

And in the end this indeed came to pass.

But that is another tale, and I can see that thou art yawning.

Farewell, my father—farewell! May the spirits ever watch over thee!

BAYETE!