

"What meanest thou, thou dog, that thou dost speak to us words of such ill omen?" said the Prince Dingaan in a low voice.

"Have I not told you, oh ye princes? I whispered, that ye must strike or die, and has not your heart failed you now, hearken! Chaka has dreamed another dream. Now it is Chaka who strikes, and ye are already dead, ye children of Senzangaona."

"If the slayers of the king be without the gates, at least thou shalt die first, thou who hast betrayed us!" quoth the Prince Dingaan, and drew an assegai from under his kaross.

"First hear the king's dream, O prince," I said. "Then, if thou wilt, kill me and die. Chaka the king slept and dreamed that he lay dead, and that one of you, the princes, wore his royal kaross."

"Who wore the royal kaross?" asked Dingaan eagerly, and both looked up waiting on my words.

"The Prince Umhlangana wore it—in the dream of Chaka—O Dingaan, shoot of a royal stock," I answered.

Now Dingaan scowled heavily. "Chaka dreamed this also," I went on—"that one of you, the princes, held his royal spear."

"Who held the royal spear?" asked Umhlangana.

"The Prince Dingaan held it—in the dream of Chaka—O Umhlangana, sprung from the root of kings, and it dripped blood."

Now the face of Umhlangana grew dark. "Chaka dreamed this also. That I, Mopo, your dog, came up and gave the royal salute, even the Bayete."

"To whom didst thou give the Bayete O Mopo, son of Makedama?" asked both of the princes.

"I gave it to both of you, O twin stars of the morning, princes of the Zulu—in the dream of Chaka I gave it to both of you."

"But what avails it to talk thus, ye lords of the land," I went on, "seeing that, both of you, ye are already as dead men, and that vultures which are hungry tonight tomorrow shall be filled with flesh of the best? Chaka the king is now a doctor of dreams, and to clear away such a dream as this he has a purging medicine."

"These are the words of Chaka the king, O ye bulls who lead the herd! All are doomed, ye twain and I, and many another man who loves us. In the great kraal beyond the river there sits a regiment; it is summoned—and then, good night! Have ye any words to say to those yet left upon the earth? Perhaps it will be given to me to live a little while after ye are gone, and I may bring them to their ears."

"Can we not rise up now and fall upon Chaka?" asked Dingaan.

"It is not possible," I said. "The king is guarded."

"Hast thou no plan, Mopo?" groaned Umhlangana. "Methinks thou hast a plan to save us."

"And if I have a plan, ye princes, what shall be my reward?"

Now, both the princes offered me good things, till in the end both of them swore by their heads and by the bones of Senzangaona, their father, and by many other things, that I should be the first man in the land after them, its kings, and should command the impi of the land, if I would but show them a way to kill Chaka and become kings. Then, when they had done swearing I spoke, weighing my words:

"In the great kraal beyond the river, O ye princes, there sit not one regiment, but two. One is named the Slayers and loves Chaka the king, who has done well by them, giving them cattle and wives. The other is named the Bees, and that regiment is hungry and longs for cattle and girls; moreover, of that regiment the Prince Umhlangana is the general, and it loves him. Now, this is my plan—to summon the Bees in the name of Umhlangana, not the Slayers in the name of Chaka. Bend forward, O princes, that I may whisper in your ears."

So they bent forward and I whispered awhile of the death of a king. Then I crept from the hut and rousing certain trusty messengers dispatched them.

CHAPTER XIX. THE DEATH OF CHAKA.



"Would now that I had hearkened to the voice of Nobela!"

Now, on the morning, two hours before midday, Chaka came from the hut where he had sat through the night and moved to a little kraal surrounded by a fence that was some fifty paces distant from the hut. I accompanied him, walking after him. As we went, the king said in a low voice:

"All is prepared, Mopo?"

"All is prepared, Black One," I answered. "The regiment of the Slayers will be here by noon."

"Where are the princes, Mopo?" asked the king again.

"The princes sit with their wives in the houses of their women, O king," I answered. "They drink beer and sit in the laps of their wives."

Chaka smiled grimly. "For the last time, Mopo."

"For the last time, O king."

We came to the kraal, and Chaka sat down in the shade of the reed fence upon an ox hide that was brayed soft. Near to him stood a girl holding a gourd of beer; there were also present the old

omen inguazonca, brother of Unandi, Mother of the Heavens, and the chief Umxamama, whom Chaka loved. When we had sat a little while in the kraal certain men came in bearing cranes' feathers, which the king had sent them to gather a month's journey from the kraal Duguzza, and they were admitted before the king. These men had been away long upon their errand, and Chaka was angry with them. Now the leader of the men was an old captain of Chaka's who had fought under him in many battles, but whose service was done, because his right hand had been shorn away by the blow of an ax. He was a great man and very brave.

Chaka asked the man why he had been so long in finding the feathers, and he answered that the birds had flown from that part of the country whither he was sent, and he must wait there till they returned, that he might snare them.

"Thou shouldst have followed the cranes, thou disobedient dog," said the king. "Let him be taken away and all those who were with him."

Now some of the men prayed a little for mercy, but the captain did but salute the king, calling him "Father" and craving a boon before he died.

"What wouldst thou?" asked Chaka.

"My father," said the man, "I would ask thee two things. I have fought many times at thy side in battle while we were both young, nor did I ever turn my back upon the foe. The blow that shore the hand from off this arm was aimed at thy head, O king. I staid it with my naked arm. It is nothing; at thy will I live and at thy will I die. Who am I that I should question the word of the king? Yet I would ask this—that thou wilt withdraw the kaross from about thee, O king, that for the last time my eyes may feast themselves upon the body of him whom above all men I love."

"Thou art long winded," said the king. "What more?"

"This, my father—that I may bid farewell to my son; he is a little child, so high, O king," and he held his hand above his knee.

"Thy first boon is granted," said the king, slipping the kaross from his shoulders and showing the great breast beneath. "For the second it shall be granted also, for I will not willingly divide the father and son. Bring the boy here; thou shalt bid him farewell, then thou shalt slay him with thine own hand ere thou thyself art slain. It will be good sport to see."

Now the man turned gray beneath the blackness of his skin and trembled a little as he murmured, "The king's will is the will of his servant; let the child be brought."

But I looked at Chaka and saw that the tears were running down his face and that he only spoke thus to try the captain who loved him to the last.

"Let the man go," said the king; "him and those with him."

So they went, glad at heart and praising the king.

I have told you this, my father, though it has not to do with my story, because then, and then only, did I ever see Chaka show mercy to one whom he had doomed to die.

As the captain and his people left the gate of the kraal it was spoken in the ear of the king that a man sought audience of him. He was admitted crawling on his knees. I looked and saw that this was that Masilo whom Chaka had charged with a message to him who was named Bulalio, or the Slaughterer, and who ruled over the People of the Ax. It was Masilo indeed, but he was no longer fat, for much travel had made him thin; moreover, on his back were the marks of rods, as yet scarcely healed over.

"Who art thou?" said Chaka.

"I am Masilo, of the People of the Ax, to whom command was given to run with a message to Bulalio the Slaughterer, their chief, and to return on the thirtieth day. Behold, O king, I have returned, though in a sorry plight."

"It seems so," said the king, laughing aloud. "I remember now. Speak on, Masilo the Thin, who wast Masilo the Fat. What of this Slaughterer? Does he come with his people to lay the ax Groanmaker in my hands?"

"Nay, O king, he comes not. He met me with scorn, and with scorn he drove me from his kraal. Moreover, as I went I was seized by the servants of Zinita, she whom I loved, but who is now the wife of the Slaughterer, and laid on my face upon the ground and beaten cruelly, while Zinita numbered the strokes."

"Hah!" said the king. "And what were the words of this puppy?"

"These were his words, O king: 'Bulalio the Slaughterer, who sits beneath the shadow of the Witch mountain, to Chaka the Slaughterer, who sits in the kraal Duguzza—to thee I pay no tribute. If thou wouldst have the ax Groanmaker, come to the Ghost mountain and take it. This I promise thee: Thou shalt look on a face thou knowest, for there is one there who would be avenged for the blood of a certain Mopo.'"

Now while Masilo told this tale I had seen two things—first, that a little piece of stick was thrust through the straw of the fence, and, second, that the regiment of the Bees was clustering on the slope opposite to the kraal in obedience to the summons I had sent them in the name of Umhlangana. The stick told me that the princes were hidden behind the fence waiting the signal, and the coming of the regiment that it was time to do the deed.

When Masilo had spoken Chaka sprang up in fury. His eyes rolled, his face worked, foam flew from his lips, for such words as these had never offended his ears since he was king.

For awhile he gasped, shaking his small spear, for at first he could not speak. At length he found words:

"The dog," he hissed—"the dog, who dares thus to spit in my face! Hearken all! As with my last breath I command that this Slaughterer be torn limb from limb—he and all his tribe! And thou—thou darrest to bring me this talk from a skunk of the mountains! And thou, too, Mopo—thy name is named in it! Well, of these presently. Ho! Umxam-

ama, my servant, slay me this slave or a messenger. Swiftly!"

Now, the old chief Umxamama sprang up to do the king's bidding, but he was feeble with age, and the end of it was that Masilo, being mad with fear, killed Umxamama, not Umxamama Masilo. Then Inguzonca, brother of Unandi, Mother of the Heavens, fell upon Masilo and ended him, but was hurt himself in so doing. Now I looked at Chaka, who stood shaking the little red spear, and thought swiftly, for the hour had come. "Help!" I cried. "One is slaying the king!"

As I spoke the reed fence burst asunder and through it plunged the princes Umhlangana and Dingaan as bulls plunge through a brake.

Then I pointed to Chaka with my withered hand, saying, "Behold your king!"

Now, from beneath the shelter of his kaross each prince drew out a short-stabbing spear and plunged it into the body of Chaka the king. Umhlangana smote him on the left shoulder, Dingaan struck him in the right side. Chaka dropped the little spear handled with the red wood and looked around, and so royally that the princes, his brothers, grew afraid and shrank away from him.

Twice he looked on each; then he spoke, saying: "What! Do you slay me, my brothers—dogs of mine own house, whom I have fed? Do you slay me, thinking to possess the land and to rule it? I tell you it shall not be for long. I hear a sound of running feet—the feet of a great white people. They shall stamp you flat, children of my father! They shall rule the land that I have won, and you and your people shall be their slaves!"

Thus Chaka spoke while the blood ran down him to the ground, and again he looked on them royally, like a buck at gaze.

"Make an end, O ye who would be kings!" I cried. But their hearts had turned to water and they could not. Then I, Mopo, sprang forward and picked from the ground that little assegai handled with the royal wood—the same assegai with which Chaka had murdered Unandi his mother and Moosa my son—and lifted it on high; and while I lifted it, my father, once more, as when I was young, a red veil seemed to wave before my eyes.

"Wherefore wouldst thou kill me, Mopo?" said the king.

"For the sake of Baleka, my sister, to whom I swore the deed, and of all my kin," I cried, and plunged the spear through him. He sank down upon the tanned ox hide and lay there dying. Once more he spoke, and once only, saying, "Would now that I had hearkened to the voice of Nobela, who warned me against thee, thou dog!" Then he was silent forever. But I knelt over him and called in his ear the names of those of my blood who had died at his hands—the name of Makedama my father, of my mother, of Anadi my wife, of Moosa my son, and all my other wives and children, and of Baleka my sister. His eyes were open, and I think that he saw and understood. At the least, he turned his head aside, shut his eyes and groaned. Presently he was dead.

Thus, then, my father, did Chaka the king, the greatest man who ever lived in Zululand, and the most evil, pass by my hand to those kraals of the Inkosazana where no sleep is. In blood he died as he had lived in blood. But it is a lie to say, as some do, that he died a coward, praying for mercy. Chaka died as he had lived, a brave man.

Now he was dead and the regiment of the Bees drew near, nor could I know how they would take this matter, for, though the Prince Umhlangana was their general, yet all the soldiers loved the king because he had no equal in battle, and when he gave he gave with an open hand. I looked around; the princes stood like men amazed; the girl had fled; the chief Umxamama was dead at the hands of dead Masilo, and the old chief Inguzonca, who had killed Masilo, stood by hurt and wondering. There were no others in the kraal.

"Awake, ye kings!" I cried to the brothers; "the impi is at the gates! Swift, now stab that man!"—and I pointed to the old chief—"and leave the matter to my wit."

Then Dingaan roused himself, and springing upon Inguzonca, the brother of Unandi, smote him a great blow with his spear, so that he sank down dead without a word. Then again the princes stood silent and amazed.

"This one will tell no tales," I cried, pointing to the fallen chief.

Now a rumor of the slaying had got abroad among the women, who had heard cries and seen the flashing of spears above the fence, and from the women it had come to the regiment of the Bees, who had advanced to the gates of the kraal singing. Then of a sudden they ceased their singing and rushed toward the little kraal where we stood.

Then I ran to meet them, uttering cries of woe, holding in my hand the little assegai of the king red with the king's blood, and spoke with the captains in the gate, saying:

"Lament, ye captains and ye soldiers, weep and lament, for your father is no more! He who nursed you is no more! The king is dead! Now earth and heaven will come together, for the king is dead!"

"How so, Mopo?" cried the leader of the Bees. "How is our father dead?"

"He is dead by the hand of a wicked wanderer named Masilo, who, when he was doomed to die by the king, snatched this assegai from the king's hand and stabbed him; and afterward, before he could be cut down himself by us three, the princes and myself, he killed the chiefs Inguzonca and Umxamama also. Draw near and look on him who was the king; it is the command of Dingaan and Umhlangana, the kings, that you draw near and look on him who was the king, that his death at the hand of Masilo may be told through all the land."

Now my tale is not of the reign of Chaka, but of the lives of a handful of people who lived in those days, and of whom I and Umslopogas alone are left alive—if indeed Umslopogas, the son

of Unaka, is still living on the earth. Therefore in a few words I will pass over all that came about after the fall of Chaka until I was sent down by Dingaan, the king, to summon him, surrender to the king who was called the Slaughterer and who ruled the People of the Ax. Ah! would that I had known for certain that this was none other than Umslopogas, for then had Dingaan gone the way that Chaka went and which Umhlangana followed, and Umslopogas had ruled the people of the Zulus as their king. But, alas! my wisdom failed me. I paid no heed to the voice of my heart which told me that this was Umslopogas who sent the message to Chaka threatening vengeance for one Mopo, and I knew nothing till too late; surely, I thought, the man spoke of some other Mopo. For thus, my father, does destiny make fools of us men.

This came about, my father. Matters were made straight in the land after the death of Chaka. At first people said that Masilo, the stranger, had stabbed the king; then it was known that Mopo, the wise man, the doctor and body servant of the king, had slain the king, and that the two great bulls, his brothers Umhlangana and Dingaan, children of Senzangaona, had also lifted spears against him. But he was dead and earth and heaven had not come together. So what did it matter? Moreover the two new kings promised to deal gently with the people and lighten the heavy yoke of Chaka, and men in a bad case are always ready to hope for a better. So it came about that the only enemies the princes found were each other and Engwade, the son of Unandi, Chaka's half brother. But I, Mopo, who was now the first man in the land after the kings, ceasing to be a doctor and becoming a general, went up against Engwade with the regiment of the Bees and the regiment of the Slayers and smote him in his kraals. It was a hard fight, but in the end I destroyed him and all his people. Engwade killed eight men with his own hand before I slew him. Then I came back to the kraal with the few that were left alive of the regiments.

After that the two kings quarreled more and more, and I weighed them both in my balance, for I would know which was the most favorable to me. In the end I found that both feared me, but that Umhlangana would certainly put me to death if he gained the upper hand, whereas this was not yet in the mind of Dingaan. So I pressed down the balance of Umhlangana and raised that of Dingaan, sending the fears of Umhlangana to sleep till I could cause his hut to be surrounded. Then Umhlangana followed upon the road of Chaka his brother, the road of the assegai, and Dingaan ruled alone for awhile. Such are the things that befall princes of this earth, my father.

It was fourteen days after the passing away of the Prince Umhlangana that the great army came back in a sorry plight from the marshes of the Limpopo, for half of them were left dead of fever and the might of the foe, and the rest were starving. It was well for them who yet lived that Chaka was no more, else they had joined their brethren who were dead on the way, since never before for many years had a Zulu impi returned unvictorious and without a single head of cattle. Thus it came about that they were glad enough to welcome a king who spared their lives, and thenceforth, till his fate found him, Dingaan reigned unquestioned.

Now Dingaan was a prince of the blood of Chaka indeed; for, like Chaka, he was great in presence and cruel at heart, but he had not the might and the mind of Chaka. Moreover, he was treacherous and a liar, and these Chaka was not. Also, he loved women much, and spent with them the time that he should have given to matters of the state. Yet he reigned awhile in the land. I must tell this also, that Dingaan would have killed Panda his half brother, so that the house of Senzangaona his father might be swept out clean. Now Panda was a man of gentle heart, who did not love war, and therefore it was thought that he was half witted; and because I loved Panda, when the question of his slaying came on I and the chief Mapita spoke against it and pleaded for him, saying that there was nothing to be feared at his hands who was a fool. So in the end Dingaan gave way, saying, "Well, you ask me to spare this dog and I will spare him, but one day he will bite me."

So Panda was made governor of the king's cattle. Yet in the end the words of Dingaan came true, for it was the grip of Panda's teeth that pulled him from the throne; only, if Panda was the dog that bit, I, Mopo, was the man who set him on the hunt.

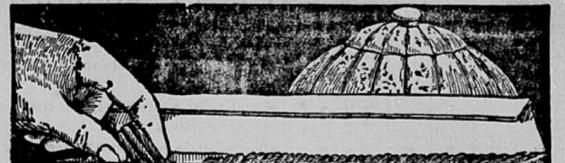
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