

CHAPTER VII. UMSLOPOGAAS ANSWERS THE KING

Now the years went on, and this matter slept. Nothing more was heard of it, but still it only slept; and, my father, I feared greatly for the hour when it should awake. For the secret was known by two women--Unandi, Mother of the Heavens, and Baleka, my sister, wife of the king; and by two more--Macrophia and Anadi, my wives--it was guessed at. How, then, should it remain a secret forever? Moreover, it came about that Unandi and Baleka could not restrain their fondness for this child who was called my son and named Umslopogaas, but who was the son of Chaka, the king, and of Baleka, and the grandson of Unandi. So it happened that very often one or the other of them would come into my hut, making pretence to visit my wives, and take the boy upon her lap and fondle it. In vain did I pray them to forbear. Love pulled at their heart-strings more heavily than my words, and still they came. This was the end of it--that Chaka saw the child sitting on the knee of Unandi, his mother.

"What does my mother with that brat of thine, Mopo?" he asked of me.

"Cannot she kiss me, if she will find a child to kiss?" And he laughed like a wolf.

I said that I did not know, and the matter passed over for awhile.

But after that Chaka caused his mother to be watched. Now the boy Umslopogaas grew great and strong; there was no such lad of his years for a day's journey round. But from a babe he was somewhat surly, of few

words, and like his father, Chaka, afraid of nothing. In all the world there were but two people whom he loved--these were I, Mopo, who was called his father, and Nada, she who was said to be his twin sister.

Now it must be told of Nada that as the boy Umslopogaas was the strongest and bravest of children, so the girl Nada was the gentlest and most fair. Of a truth, my father, I believe that her blood was not all Zulu, though this I cannot say for certain. At the least, her eyes were softer and larger than those of our people, her hair longer and less tightly curled, and her skin was lighter--more of the colour of pure copper. These things she had from her mother, Macrophah; though she was fairer than Macrophah--fairer, indeed, than any woman of my people whom I have seen. Her mother, Macrophah, my wife, was of Swazi blood, and was brought to the king's kraal with other captives after a raid, and given to me as a wife by the king. It was said that she was the daughter of a Swazi headman of the tribe of the Halakazi, and that she was born of his wife is true, but whether he was her father I do not know; for I have heard from the lips of Macrophah herself, that before she was born there was a white man staying at her father's kraal. He was a Portuguese from the coast, a handsome man, and skilled in the working of iron. This white man loved the mother of my wife, Macrophah, and some held that Macrophah was his daughter, and not that of the Swazi headman. At least I know this, that before my wife's birth the Swazi killed the white man. But none can tell the truth of these matters, and I only speak of them because the beauty of Nada was rather as is the beauty of the white people than of ours, and this might well happen if her grandfather

chanced to be a white man.

Now Umslopogaas and Nada were always together. Together they ate, together they slept and wandered; they thought one thought and spoke with one tongue. Ou! it was pretty to see them! Twice while they were still children did Umslopogaas save the life of Nada.

The first time it came about thus. The two children had wandered far from the kraal, seeking certain berries that little ones love. On they wandered and on, singing as they went, till at length they found the berries, and ate heartily. Then it was near sundown, and when they had eaten they fell asleep. In the night they woke to find a great wind blowing and a cold rain falling on them, for it was the beginning of winter, when fruits are ripe.

"Up, Nada!" said Umslopogaas, "we must seek the kraal or the cold will kill us."

So Nada rose, frightened, and hand in hand they stumbled through the darkness. But in the wind and the night they lost their path, and when at length the dawn came they were in a forest that was strange to them. They rested awhile, and finding berries ate them, then walked again. All that day they wandered, till at last the night came down, and they plucked branches of trees and piled the branches over them for warmth, and they were so weary that they fell asleep in each other's arms. At dawn they rose, but now they were very tired and berries were few, so

that by midday they were spent. Then they lay down on the side of a steep hill, and Nada laid her head upon the breast of Umslopogaas.

"Here let us die, my brother," she said.

But even then the boy had a great spirit, and he answered, "Time to die, sister, when Death chooses us. See, now! Do you rest here, and I will climb the hill and look across the forest."

So he left her and climbed the hill, and on its side he found many berries and a root that is good for food, and filled himself with them. At length he came to the crest of the hill and looked out across the sea of green. Lo! there, far away to the east, he saw a line of white that lay like smoke against the black surface of a cliff, and knew it for the waterfall beyond the royal town. Then he came down the hill, shouting for joy and bearing roots and berries in his hand. But when he reached the spot where Nada was, he found that her senses had left her through hunger, cold, and weariness. She lay upon the ground like one asleep, and over her stood a jackal that fled as he drew nigh. Now it would seem that there were but two shoots to the stick of Umslopogaas. One was to save himself, and the other to lie down and die by Nada. Yet he found a third, for, undoing the strips of his moocha, he made ropes of them, and with the ropes he bound Nada on his back and started for the king's kraal. He could never have reached it, for the way was long, yet at evening some messengers running through the forest came upon a naked lad with a girl bound to his back and a staff in his hand, who staggered

along slowly with starting eyes and foam upon his lips. He could not speak, he was so weary, and the ropes had cut through the skin of his shoulders; yet one of the messengers knew him for Umslopogaas, the son of Mopo, and they bore him to the kraal. They would have left the girl Nada, thinking her dead, but he pointed to her breast, and, feeling it, they found that her heart still beat, so they brought her also; and the end of it was that both recovered and loved each other more than ever before.

Now after this, I, Mopo, bade Umslopogaas stay at home within the kraal, and not lead his sister to the wilds. But the boy loved roaming like a fox, and where he went there Nada followed. So it came about that one day they slipped from the kraal when the gates were open, and sought out a certain deep glen which had an evil name, for it was said that spirits haunted it and put those to death who entered there. Whether this was true I do not know, but I know that in the glen dwelt a certain woman of the woods, who had her habitation in a cave and lived upon what she could kill or steal or dig up with her hands. Now this woman was mad. For it had chanced that her husband had been "smelt out" by the witch-doctors as a worker of magic against the king, and slain. Then Chaka, according to custom, despatched the slayers to eat up his kraal, and they came to the kraal and killed his people. Last of all they killed his children, three young girls, and would have assegaied their mother, when suddenly a spirit entered into her at the sight, and she went mad, so that they let her go, being afraid to touch her afterwards. So she fled and took up her abode in the haunted glen; and this was

the nature of her madness, that whenever she saw children, and more especially girl children, a longing came upon her to kill them as her own had been killed. This, indeed, she did often, for when the moon was full and her madness at its highest, she would travel far to find children, snatching them away from the kraals like a hyena. Still, none would touch her because of the spirit in her, not even those whose children she had murdered.

So Umslopogaas and Nada came to the glen where the child-slayer lived, and sat down by a pool of water not far from the mouth of her cave, weaving flowers into a garland. Presently Umslopogaas left Nada, to search for rock lilies which she loved. As he went he called back to her, and his voice awoke the woman who was sleeping in her cave, for she came out by night only, like a jackal. Then the woman stepped forth, smelling blood and having a spear in her hand. Presently she saw Nada seated upon the grass weaving flowers, and crept towards her to kill her. Now as she came--so the child told me--suddenly a cold wind seemed to breathe upon Nada, and fear took hold of her, though she did not see the woman who would murder her. She let fall the flowers, and looked before her into the pool, and there, mirrored in the pool, she saw the greedy face of the child-slayer, who crept down upon her from above, her hair hanging about her brow and her eyes shining like the eyes of a lion.

Then with a cry Nada sprang up and fled along the path which Umslopogaas had taken, and after her leapt and ran the mad woman. Umslopogaas heard

her cry. He turned and rushed back over the brow of the hill, and, lo! there before him was the murderess. Already she had grasped Nada by the hair, already her spear was lifted to pierce her. Umslopogaas had no spear, he had nothing but a little stick without a knob; yet with it he rushed at the mad woman and struck her so smartly on the arm that she let go of the girl and turned on him with a yell. Then, lifting her spear, she struck at him, but he leapt aside. Again she struck; but he sprang into the air, and the spear passed beneath him. A third time the woman struck, and, though he fell to earth to avoid the blow, yet the assegai pierced his shoulder. But the weight of his body as he fell twisted it from her hand, and before she could grasp him he was up, and beyond her reach, the spear still fast in his shoulder.

Then the woman turned, screaming with rage and madness, and ran at Nada to kill her with her hands. But Umslopogaas set his teeth, and, drawing the spear from his wound, charged her, shouting. She lifted a great stone and hurled it at him--so hard that it flew into fragments against another stone which it struck; yet he charged on, and smote at her so truly that he drove the spear through her, and she fell down dead. After that Nada bound up his wound, which was deep, and with much pain he reached the king's kraal and told me this story.

Now there were some who cried that the boy must be put to death, because he had killed one possessed with a spirit. But I said no, he should not be touched. He had killed the woman in defence of his own life and the life of his sister; and every one had a right to slay in self-defence,

except as against the king or those who did the king's bidding. Moreover, I said, if the woman had a spirit, it was an evil one, for no good spirit would ask the lives of children, but rather those of cattle, for it is against our custom to sacrifice human beings to the Amatonga even in war, though the Basuta dogs do so. Still, the tumult grew, for the witch-doctors were set upon the boy's death, saying that evil would come of it if he was allowed to live, having killed one inspired, and at last the matter came to the ears of the king. Then Chaka summoned me and the boy before him, and he also summoned the witch-doctors.

First, the witch-doctors set out their case, demanding the death of Umslopogaas. Chaka asked them what would happen if the boy was not killed. They answered that the spirit of the dead woman would lead him to bring evil on the royal house. Chaka asked if he would bring evil on him, the king. They in turn asked the spirits, and answered no, not on him, but on one of the royal house who should be after him. Chaka said that he cared nothing what happened to those who came after him, or whether good or evil befell them. Then he spoke to Umslopogaas, who looked him boldly in the face, as an equal looks at an equal.

"Boy," he said, "what hast thou to say as to why thou shouldst not be killed as these men demand?"

"This, Black One," answered Umslopogaas; "that I stabbed the woman in defence of my own life."

"That is nothing," said Chaka. "If I, the king, wished to kill thee, mightest thou therefore kill me or those whom I sent? The Itongo in the woman was a Spirit King and ordered her to kill thee; thou shouldst then have let thyself be killed. Hast thou no other reason?"

"This, Elephant," answered Umslopogaas; "the woman would have murdered my sister, whom I love better than my life."

"That is nothing," said Chaka. "If I ordered thee to be killed for any cause, should I not also order all within thy gates to be killed with thee? May not, then, a Spirit King do likewise? If thou hast nothing more to say thou must die."

Now I grew afraid, for I feared lest Chaka should slay him who was called my son because of the word of the doctors. But the boy Umslopogaas looked up and answered boldly, not as one who pleads for his life, but as one who demands a right:--

"I have this to say, Eater-up of Enemies, and if it is not enough, let us stop talking, and let me be killed. Thou, O king, didst command that this woman should be slain. Those whom thou didst send to destroy her spared her, because they thought her mad. I have carried out the commandment of the king; I have slain her, mad or sane, whom the king commanded should be killed, and I have earned not death, but a reward."

"Well said, Umslopogaas!" answered Chaka. "Let ten head of cattle be

given to this boy with the heart of a man; his father shall guard them for him. Art thou satisfied now, Umslopogaas?"

"I take that which is due to me, and I thank the king because he need not pay unless he will," Umslopogaas answered.

Chaka stared awhile, began to grow angry, then burst out laughing.

"Why, this calf is such another one as was dropped long ago in the kraal of Senzangaona!" he said. "As I was, so is this boy. Go on, lad, in that path, and thou mayst find those who shall cry the royal salute of Bayete to thee at the end of it. Only keep out of my way, for two of a kind might not agree. Now begone!"

So we went out, but as we passed them I saw the doctors muttering together, for they were ill-pleased and foreboded evil. Also they were jealous of me, and wished to smite me through the heart of him who was called my son.