

CHAPTER XIII. GALAZI BECOMES KING OF THE WOLVES

On the morrow Umslopogaas awoke, and knew that strength was growing on him fast. Still, all that day he rested in the cave, while Galazi went out to hunt. In the evening he returned, bearing a buck upon his shoulders, and they skinned the buck and ate of it as they sat by the fire. And when the sun was down Galazi took up his tale.

"Now Umslopogaas, son of Mopo, hear! I had passed the forest, and had come, as it were, to the legs of the old stone Witch who sits up aloft there forever waiting for the world to die. Here the sun shone merrily, here lizards ran and birds flew to and fro, and though it grew towards the evening--for I had wandered long in the forest--I was afraid no more. So I climbed up the steep rock, where little bushes grow like hair on the arms of a man, till at last I came to the knees of the stone Witch, which are the space before the cave. I lifted my head over the brink of the rock and looked, and I tell you, Umslopogaas, my blood ran cold and my heart turned to water, for there, before the cave, rolled wolves, many and great. Some slept and growled in their sleep, some gnawed at the skulls of dead game, some sat up like dogs and their tongues hung from their grinning jaws. I looked, I saw, and beyond I discovered the mouth of the cave, where the bones of the boy should be. But I had no wish to come there, being afraid of the wolves, for now I knew that these were the ghosts who live upon the mountain. So I bethought me that I would fly, and turned to go. And, Umslopogaas, even as I turned, the great club Watcher of the Fords swung round and smote

me on the back with such a blow as a man smites upon a coward. Now whether this was by chance or whether the Watcher would shame him who bore it, say you, for I do not know. At the least, shame entered into me. Should I go back to be mocked by the people of the kraal and by the old woman? And if I wished to go, should I not be killed by the ghosts at night in the forest? Nay, it was better to die in the jaws of the wolves, and at once.

"Thus I thought in my heart; then, tarrying not, lest fear should come upon me again, I swung up the Watcher, and crying aloud the war-cry of the Halakazi, I sprang over the brink of the rock and rushed upon the wolves. They, too, sprang up and stood howling, with bristling hides and fiery eyes, and the smell of them came into my nostrils. Yet when they saw it was a man that rushed upon them, they were seized with sudden fear and fled this way and that, leaping by great bounds from the place of rock, which is the knees of the stone Witch, so that presently I stood alone in front of the cave. Now, having conquered the wolf ghosts and no blow struck, my heart swelled within me, and I walked to the mouth of the cave proudly, as a cock walks upon a roof, and looked in through the opening. As it chanced, the sinking sun shone at this hour full into the cave, so that all its darkness was made red with light. Then, once more, Umslopogaas, I grew afraid indeed, for I could see the end of the cave.

"Look now! There is a hole in the wall of the cave, where the firelight falls below the shadow of the roof, twice the height of a man from the

floor. It is a narrow hole and a high, is it not?--as though one had cut it with iron, and a man might sit in it, his legs hanging towards the floor of the cave. Ay, Umslopogaas, a man might sit in it, might he not? And there a man sat, or that which had been a man. There sat the bones of a man, and the black skin had withered on his bones, holding them together, and making him awful to see. His hands were open beside him, he leaned upon them, and in the right hand was a piece of hide from his moocha. It was half eaten, Umslopogaas; he had eaten it before he died. His eyes also were bound round with a band of leather, as though to hide something from their gaze, one foot was gone, one hung over the edge of the niche towards the floor, and beneath it on the floor, red with rust, lay the blade of a broken spear.

"Now come hither, Umslopogaas, place your hand upon the wall of the cave, just here; it is smooth, is it not?--smooth as the stones on which women grind their corn. 'What made it so smooth?' you ask. I will tell you.

"When I peered through the door of the cave I saw this: on the floor of the cave lay a she-wolf panting, as though she had galloped many a mile; she was great and fierce. Near to her was another wolf--he was a dog--old and black, bigger than any I have seen, a very father of wolves, and all his head and flanks were streaked with grey. But this wolf was on his feet. As I watched he drew back nearly to the mouth of the cave, then of a sudden he ran forward and bounded high into the air towards the withered foot of that which hung from the cleft of the rock.

His pads struck upon the rock here where it is smooth, and there for a second he seemed to cling, while his great jaws closed with a clash but a spear's breadth beneath the dead man's foot. Then he fell back with a howl of rage, and drew slowly down the cave. Again he ran and leaped, again the great jaws closed, again he fell down howling. Then the she-wolf rose, and they sprang together, striving to pull down him who sat above. But it was all in vain; they could never come nearer than within a spear's breadth of the dead man's foot. And now, Umslopogaas, you know why the rock is smooth and shines. From month to month and year to year the wolves had ravened there, seeking to devour the bones of him who sat above. Night upon night they had leaped thus against the wall of the cave, but never might their clashing jaws close upon his foot. One foot they had, indeed, but the other they could not come by.

"Now as I watched, filled with fear and wonder, the she-wolf, her tongue lolling from her jaws, made so mighty a bound that she almost reached the hanging foot, and yet not quite. She fell back, and then I saw that the leap was her last for that time, for she had oversprung herself, and lay there howling, the black blood flowing from her mouth. The wolf saw also: he drew near, sniffed at her, then, knowing that she was hurt, seized her by the throat and worried her. Now all the place was filled with groans and choking howls, as the wolves rolled over and over beneath him who sat above, and in the blood-red light of the dying sun the sight and sounds were so horrid that I trembled like a child.

The she-wolf grew faint, for the fangs of her mate were buried in her throat. Then I saw that now was the time to smite him, lest when he had

killed her he should kill me also. So I lifted the Watcher and sprang into the cave, having it in my mind to slay the wolf before he lifted up his head. But he heard my footsteps, or perhaps my shadow fell upon him. Loosing his grip, he looked up, this father of wolves; then, making no sound, he sprang straight at my throat.

"I saw him, and whirling the Watcher aloft, I smote with all my strength. The blow met him in mid-air; it fell full on his chest and struck him backwards to the earth. But there he would not say, for, rising before I could smite again, once more he sprang at me. This time I leaped aside and struck downwards, and the blow fell upon his right leg and broke it, so that he could spring no more. Yet he ran at me on three feet, and, though the club fell on his side, he seized me with his teeth, biting through that leather bag, which was wound about my middle, into the flesh behind. Then I yelled with pain and rage, and lifting the Watcher endways, drove it down with both hands, as a man drives a stake into the earth, and that with so great a stroke that the skull of the wolf was shattered like a pot, and he fell dead, dragging me with him. Presently I sat up on the ground, and, placing the handle of the Watcher between his jaws, I forced them open, freeing my flesh from the grip of his teeth. Then I looked at my wounds; they were not deep, for the leather bag had saved me, yet I feel them to this hour, for there is poison in the mouth of a wolf. Presently I glanced up, and saw that the she-wolf had found her feet again, and stood as though unhurt; for this is the nature of these ghosts, Umslopogaas, that, though they fight continually, they cannot destroy each other. They may be killed by man

alone, and that hardly. There she stood, and yet she did not look at me or on her dead mate, but at him who sat above. I saw, and crept softly behind her, then, lifting the Watcher, I dashed him down with all my strength. The blow fell on her neck and broke it, so that she rolled over and at once was dead.

"Now I rested awhile, then went to the mouth of the cave and looked out. The sun was sinking: all the depth of the forest was black, but the light still shone on the face of the stone woman who sits forever on the mountain. Here, then, I must bide this night, for, though the moon shone white and full in the sky, I dared not wend towards the plains alone with the wolves and the ghosts. And if I dared not go alone, how much less should I dare to go bearing with me him who sat in the cleft of the rock! Nay, here I must bide, so I went out of the cave to the spring which flows from the rock on the right yonder and washed my wounds and drank. Then I came back and sat in the mouth of the cave, and watched the light die away from the face of the world. While it was dying there was silence, but when it was dead the forest awoke. A wind sprang up and tossed it till the green of its boughs waved like troubled water on which the moon shines faintly. From the heart of it, too, came howlings of ghosts and wolves, that were answered by howls from the rocks above--hearken, Umslopogaas, such howlings as we hear to-night!

"It was awful here in the mouth of the cave, for I had not yet learned the secret of the stone, and if I had known it, should I have dared to close it, leaving myself alone with the dead wolves and him whom

the wolves had struggled to tear down? I walked out yonder on to the platform and looked up. The moon shone full upon the face of the stone Witch who sits aloft forever. She seemed to grin at me, and, oh! I grew afraid, for now I knew that this was a place of dead men, a place where spirits perch like vultures in a tree, as they sweep round and round the world. I went back to the cave, and feeling that I must do something lest I should go mad, I drew to me the carcass of the great dog-wolf which I had killed, and, taking my knife of iron, I began to skin it by the light of the moon. For an hour or more I skinned, singing to myself as I worked, and striving to forget him who sat in the cleft above and the howlings which ran about the mountains. But ever the moonlight shone more clearly into the cave: now by it I could see his shape of bone and skin, ay, and even the bandage about his eyes. Why had he tied it there? I wondered--perhaps to hide the faces of the fierce wolves as they sprang upwards to grip him. And always the howlings drew nearer; now I could see grey forms creeping to and fro in the shadows of the rocky place before me. Ah! there before me glared two red eyes: a sharp snout sniffed at the carcass which I skinned. With a yell, I lifted the Watcher and smote. There came a scream of pain, and something galloped away into the shadows.

"Now the skin was off. I cast it behind me, and seizing the carcass dragged it to the edge of the rock and left it. Presently the sound of howlings drew near again, and I saw the grey shapes creep up one by one. Now they gathered round the carcass, now they fell upon it and rent it, fighting horribly till all was finished. Then, licking their red chops,

they slunk back to the forest.

"Did I sleep or did I wake? Nay, I cannot tell. But I know this, that of a sudden I seemed to look up and see. I saw a light--perchance, Umslopogaas, it was the light of the moon, shining upon him that sat aloft at the end of the cave. It was a red light, and he glowed in it as glows a thing that is rotten. I looked, or seemed to look, and then I thought that the hanging jaw moved, and from it came a voice that was harsh and hollow as of one who speaks from an empty belly, through a withered throat.

"Hail, Galazi, child of Siguyana!" said the voice, 'Galazi the Wolf! Say, what dost thou here in the Ghost Mountain, where the stone Witch sits forever, waiting for the world to die?'

"Then, Umslopogaas, I answered, or seemed to answer, and my voice, too, sounded strange and hollow:--

"Hail, Dead One, who sittest like a vulture on a rock! I do this on the Ghost Mountain. I come to seek thy bones and bear them to thy mother for burial.'

"Many and many a year have I sat aloft, Galazi,' answered the voice, 'watching the ghost-wolves leap and leap to drag me down, till the rock grew smooth beneath the wearing of their feet. So I sat seven days and nights, being yet alive, the hungry wolves below, and hunger gnawing at

my heart. So I have sat many and many a year, being dead in the heart of the old stone Witch, watching the moon and the sun and the stars, hearkening to the howls of the ghost-wolves as they ravened beneath me, and learning the wisdom of the old witch who sits above in everlasting stone. Yet my mother was young and fair when I trod the haunted forest and climbed the knees of stone. How seems she now, Galazi?'

"She is white and wrinkled and very aged,' I answered. 'They call her mad, yet at her bidding I came to seek thee, Dead One, bearing the Watcher that was thy father's and shall be mine.'

"It shall be thine, Galazi,' said the voice, 'for thou alone hast dared the ghosts to give me sleep and burial. Hearken, thine also shall be the wisdom of the old witch who sits aloft forever, frozen into everlasting stone--thine and one other's. These are not wolves that thou hast seen, that is no wolf which thou hast slain; nay, they are ghosts--evil ghosts of men who lived in ages gone, and who must now live till they be slain by men. And knowest thou how they lived, Galazi, and what was the food they ate? When the light comes again, Galazi, climb to the breasts of the stone Witch, and look in the cleft which is between her breasts. There shalt thou see how these men lived. And now this doom is on them: they must wander gaunt and hungry in the shape of wolves, haunting that Ghost Mountain where they once fed, till they are led forth to die at the hands of men. Because of their devouring hunger they have leapt from year to year, striving to reach my bones; and he whom thou hast slain was the king of them, and she at his side was their queen.

"Now, Galazi the Wolf, this is the wisdom that I give thee: thou shalt be king of the ghost-wolves, thou and another, whom a lion shall bring thee. Gird the black skin upon thy shoulders, and the wolves shall follow thee; all the three hundred and sixty and three of them that are left, and let him who shall be brought to thee gird on the skin of grey. Where ye twain lead them, there shall they raven, bringing you victory till all are dead. But know this, that there only may they raven where in life they ravened, seeking for their food. Yet, that was an ill gift thou tookest from my mother--the gift of the Watcher, for though without the Watcher thou hadst never slain the king of the ghost-wolves, yet, bearing the Watcher, thou shalt thyself be slain. Now, on the morrow carry me back to my mother, so that I may sleep where the ghost-wolves leap no more. I have spoken, Galazi.'

"Now the Dead One's voice seemed to grow ever fainter and more hollow as he spoke, till at the last I could scarcely hear his words, yet I answered him, asking him this:--

"Who is it, then, that the lion shall bring to me to rule with me over the ghost-wolves, and how is he named?'

"Then the Dead One spoke once more very faintly, yet in the silence of the place I heard his words:--

"He is named Umslopogaas the Slaughterer, son of Chaka, Lion of the

Zulu."

Now Umslopogaas started up from his place by the fire.

"I am named Umslopogaas," he said, "but the Slaughterer I am not named, and I am the son of Mopo, and not the son of Chaka, Lion of the Zulu; you have dreamed a dream, Galazi, or, if it was no dream, then the Dead One lied to you."

"Perchance this was so, Umslopogaas," answered Galazi the Wolf. "Perhaps I dreamed, of perhaps the Dead One lied; nevertheless, if he lied in this matter, in other matters he did not lie, as you shall hear.

"After I had heard these words, or had dreamed that I heard them, I slept indeed, and when I woke the forest beneath was like the clouds of mist, but the grey light glinted upon the face of her who sits in stone above. Now I remembered the dream that I had dreamed, and I would see if it were all a dream. So I rose, and leaving the cave, found a place where I might climb up to the breasts and head of the stone Witch. I climbed, and as I went the rays of the sun lit upon her face, and I rejoiced to see them. But, when I drew near, the likeness to the face of a woman faded away, and I saw nothing before me but rugged heaps of piled-up rock. For this, Umslopogaas, is the way of witches, be they of stone or flesh--when you draw near to them they change their shape.

"Now I was on the breast of the mountain, and wandered to and fro awhile

between the great heaps of stone. At length I found, as it were, a crack in the stone thrice as wide as a man can jump, and in length half a spear's throw, and near this crack stood great stones blackened by fire, and beneath them broken pots and a knife of flint. I looked down into the crack--it was very deep, and green with moss, and tall ferns grew about in it, for the damp gathered there. There was nothing else. I had dreamed a lying dream. I turned to go, then found another mind, and climbed down into the cleft, pushing aside the ferns. Beneath the ferns was moss; I scraped it away with the Watcher. Presently the iron of the club struck on something that was yellow and round like a stone, and from the yellow thing came a hollow sound. I lifted it, Umslopogaas; it was the skull of a child.

"I dug deeper and scraped away more moss, till presently I saw. Beneath the moss was nothing but the bones of men--old bones that had lain there many years; the little ones had rotted, the larger ones remained--some were yellow, some black, and others still white. They were not broken, as are those that hyenas and wolves have worried, yet on some of them I could see the marks of teeth. Then, Umslopogaas, I went back to the cave, never looking behind me.

"Now when I was come to the cave I did this: I skinned the she-wolf also. When I had finished the sun was up, and I knew that it was time to go. But I could not go alone--he who sat aloft in the cleft of the cave must go with me. I greatly feared to touch him--this Dead One, who had spoken to me in a dream; yet I must do it. So I brought stones and piled

them up till I could reach him; then I lifted him down, for he was very light, being but skin and bones. When he was down, I bound the hides of the wolves about me, then leaving the leather bag, into which he could not enter, I took the Dead One and placed him on my shoulders as a man might carry a child, for his legs were fixed somewhat apart, and holding him by the foot which was left on him, I set out for the kraal. Down the slope I went as swiftly as I could, for now I knew the way, seeing and hearing nothing, except once, when there came a rush of wings, and a great eagle swept down at that which sat upon my shoulders. I shouted, and the eagle flew away, then I entered the dark of the forest. Here I must walk softly, lest the head of him I carried should strike against the boughs and be smitten from him.

"For awhile I went on thus, till I drew near to the heart of the forest. Then I heard a wolf howl on my right, and from the left came answering howls, and these, again, were answered by others in front of and behind me. I walked on boldly, for I dared not stay, guiding myself by the sun, which from time to time shone down on me redly through the boughs of the great trees. Now I could see forms grey and black slinking near my path, sniffing at the air as they went, and now I came to a little open place, and, behold! all the wolves in the world were gathered together there. My heart melted, my legs trembled beneath me. On every side were the brutes, great and hungry. And I stood still, with club aloft, and slowly they crept up, muttering and growling as they came, till they formed a deep circle round me. Yet they did not spring on me, only drew nearer and ever nearer. Presently one sprang, indeed, but not at me; he sprang

at that which sat upon my shoulders. I moved aside, and he missed his aim, and, coming to the ground again, stood there growling and whining like a beast afraid. Then I remembered the words of my dream, if dream it were, how that the Dead One had given me wisdom that I should be king of the ghost-wolves--I and another whom a lion should bear to me. Was it not so? If it was not so, how came it that the wolves did not devour me?

"For a moment I stood thinking, then I lifted up my voice and howled like a wolf, and lo! Umslopogaas, all the wolves howled in answer with a mighty howling. I stretched out my hand and called to them. They ran to me, gathering round me as though to devour me. But they did not harm me; they licked my legs with their red tongues, and fighting to come near me, pressed themselves against me as does a cat. One, indeed, snatched at him who sat on my shoulder, but I struck him with the Watcher and he slunk back like a whipped hound; moreover, the others bit him so that he yelled. Now I knew that I had no more to fear, for I was king of the ghost-wolves, so I walked on, and with me came all the great pack of them. I walked on and on, and they trotted beside me silently, and the fallen leaves crackled beneath their feet, and the dust rose up about them, till at length I reached the edge of the forest.

"Now I remembered that I must not be seen thus by men, lest they should think me a wizard and kill me. Therefore, at the edge of the forest I halted and made signs to the wolves to go back. At this they howled piteously, as though in grief, but I called to them that I would come again and be their king, and it seemed as though their brute hearts

understood my words. Then they all went, still howling, till presently I was alone.

"And now, Umslopogaas, it is time to sleep; to-morrow night I will end my tale."