

## CHAPTER XIV. THE WOLF-BRETHREN

Now, my father, on the morrow night, once again Umslopogaas and Galazi the wolf sat by the fire in the mouth of their cave, as we sit to-night, my father, and Galazi took up his tale.

"I passed on till I came to the river; it was still full, but the water had run down a little, so that my feet found foothold. I waded into the river, using the Watcher as a staff, and the stream reached to my elbows, but no higher. Now one on the farther bank of the river saw that which sat upon my shoulders, and saw also the wolf's skin on my head, and ran to the kraal crying, 'Here comes one who walks the waters on the back of a wolf.'

"So it came about that when I drew towards the kraal all the people of the kraal were gathered together to meet me, except the old woman, who could not walk so far. But when they saw me coming up the slope of the hill, and when they knew what it was that sat upon my shoulders, they were smitten with fear. Yet they did not run, because of their great wonder, only they walked backward before me, clinging each to each and saying nothing. I too came on silently, till at length I reached the kraal, and before its gates sat the old woman basking in the sun of the afternoon. Presently she looked up and cried:--

"'What ails you, people of my house, that you walk backwards like men bewitched, and who is that tall and deathly man who comes toward you?'

"But still they drew on backward, saying no word, the little children clinging to the women, the women clinging to the men, till they had passed the old wife and ranged themselves behind her like a regiment of soldiers. Then they halted against the fence of the kraal. But I came on to the old woman, and lifted him who sat upon my shoulders, and placed him on the ground before her, saying, 'Woman, here is your son; I have snatched him with much toil from the jaws of the ghosts--and they are many up yonder--all save one foot, which I could not find. Take him now and bury him, for I weary of his fellowship.'

"She looked upon that which sat before her. She put out her withered hand and drew the bandage from his sunken eyes. Then she screamed aloud a shrill scream, and, flinging her arms about the neck of the Dead One, she cried: 'It is my son whom I bore--my very son, whom for twice ten years and half a ten I have not looked upon. Greeting, my son, greeting! Now shalt thou find burial, and I with thee--ay, I with thee!'

"And once more she cried aloud, standing upon her feet with arms outstretched. Then of a sudden foam burst from her lips, and she fell forward upon the body of her son, and was dead.

"Now silence came upon the place again, for all were fearful. At last one cried: 'How is this man named who has won the body from the ghosts?'

"'I am named Galazi,' I answered.

"Nay,' said he. 'The Wolf you are named. Look at the wolf's red hide upon his head!'

"I am named Galazi, and the Wolf you have named me,' I said again. 'So be it: I am named Galazi the Wolf.'

"Methinks he is a wolf,' said he. 'Look, now, at his teeth, how they grin! This is no man, my brothers, but a wolf.'

"No wolf and no man,' said another, 'but a wizard. None but a wizard could have passed the forest and won the lap of her who sits in stone forever.'

"Yes, yes! he is a wolf--he is a wizard!' they screamed. 'Kill him! Kill the wolf-wizard before he brings the ghosts upon us!' And they ran towards me with uplifted spears.

"I am a wolf indeed,' I cried, 'and I am a wizard indeed, and I will bring wolves and ghosts upon you ere all is done.' And I turned and fled so swiftly that soon they were left behind me. Now as I ran I met a girl; a basket of mealies was on her head, and she bore a dead kid in her hand. I rushed at her howling like a wolf, and I snatched the mealies from her head and the kid from her hand. Then I fled on, and coming to the river, I crossed it, and for that night I hid myself in the rocks beyond, eating the mealies and the flesh of the kid.

"On the morrow at dawn I rose and shook the dew from the wolf-hide. Then I went on into the forest and howled like a wolf. They knew my voice, the ghost-wolves, and howled in answer from far and near. Then I heard the pattering of their feet, and they came round me by tens and by twenties, and fawned upon me. I counted their number; they numbered three hundred and sixty and three.

"Afterwards, I went on to the cave, and I have lived there in the cave, Umslopogaas, for nigh upon twelve moons, and I have become a wolf-man. For with the wolves I hunt and raven, and they know me, and what I bid them that they do. Stay, Umslopogaas, now you are strong again, and, if your courage does not fail you, you shall see this very night. Come now, have you the heart, Umslopogaas?"

Then Umslopogaas rose and laughed aloud. "I am young in years," he cried, "and scarcely come to the full strength of men; yet hitherto I have not turned my back on lion or witch, on wolf or man. Now let us see this impi of yours--this impi black and grey, that runs on four legs with fangs for spears!"

"You must first bind on the she-wolf's hide, Umslopogaas," quoth Galazi, "else, before a man could count his fingers twice there would be little enough left of you. Bind it about the neck and beneath the arms, and see that the fastenings do not burst, lest it be the worse for you."

So Umslopogaas took the grey wolf's hide and bound it on with thongs of leather, and its teeth gleamed upon his head, and he took a spear in his hand. Galazi also bound on the hide of the king of the wolves, and they went out on to the space before the cave. Galazi stood there awhile, and the moonlight fell upon him, and Umslopogaas saw that his face grew wild and beastlike, that his eyes shone, and his teeth grinned beneath his curling lips. He lifted up his head and howled out upon the night.

Thrice Galazi lifted his head and thrice he howled loudly, and yet more loud. But before ever the echoes had died in the air, from the heights of the rocks above and the depths of the forest beneath, there came howlings in answer. Nearer they grew and nearer; now there was a sound of feet, and a wolf, great and grey, bounded towards them, and after him many another. They came to Galazi, they sprang upon him, fawning round him, but he beat them down with the Watcher. Then of a sudden they saw Umslopogaas, and rushed at him open-mouthed.

"Stand and do not move!" cried Galazi. "Be not afraid!"

"I have always fondled dogs," answered Umslopogaas, "shall I learn to fear them now?"

Yet though he spoke boldly, in his heart he was afraid, for this was the most terrible of all sights. The wolves rushed on him open-mouthed, from before and from behind, so that in a breath he was well-nigh hidden by their forms. Yet no fang pierced him, for as they leapt they smelt the smell of the skin upon him. Then Umslopogaas saw that the wolves leapt

at him no more, but the she-wolves gathered round him who wore the she-wolf's skin. They were great and gaunt and hungry, all were full-grown, there were no little ones, and their number was so many that he could not count them in the moonlight. Umslopogaas, looking into their red eyes, felt his heart become as the heart of a wolf, and he, too, lifted up his head and howled, and the she-wolves howled in answer.

"The pack is gathered; now for the hunt!" cried Galazi. "Make your feet swift, my brother, for we shall journey far to-night. Ho, Blackfang! ho, Greysnout! Ho, my people black and grey, away! away!"

He spoke and bounded forward, and with him went Umslopogaas, and after him streamed the ghost-wolves. They fled down the mountain sides, leaping from boulder to boulder like bucks. Presently they stood by a kloof that was thick with trees. Galazi stopped, holding up the Watcher, and the wolves stopped with him.

"I smell a quarry," he cried; "in, my people, in!"

Then the wolves plunged silently into the great kloof, but Galazi and Umslopogaas drew to the foot of it and waited. Presently there came a sound of breaking boughs, and lo! before them stood a buffalo, a bull who lowed fiercely and sniffed the air.

"This one will give us a good chase, my brother; see, he is gaunt and thin! Ah! that meat is tender which my people have hunted to the death!"

As Galazi spoke, the first of the wolves drew from the covert and saw the buffalo; then, giving tongue, they sprang towards it. The bull saw also, and dashed down the hill, and after him came Galazi and Umslopogaas, and with them all their company, and the rocks shook with the music of their hunting. They rushed down the mountain side, and it came into the heart of Umslopogaas, that he, too, was a wolf. They rushed madly, yet his feet were swift as the swiftest; no wolf could outstrip him, and in him was but one desire--the desire of prey. Now they neared the borders of the forest, and Galazi shouted. He shouted to Greysnout and to Blackfang, to Blood and to Deathgrip, and these four leaped forward from the pack, running so swiftly that their bellies seemed to touch the ground. They passed about the bull, turning him from the forest and setting his head up the slope of the mountain. Then the chase wheeled, the bull leaped and bounded up the mountain side, and on one flank lay Greysnout and Deathgrip and on the other lay Blood and Blackfang, while behind came the Wolf-Brethren, and after them the wolves with lolling tongues. Up the hill they sped, but the feet of Umslopogaas never wearied, his breath did not fail him. Once more they drew near the lap of the Grey Witch where the cave was. On rushed the bull, mad with fear. He ran so swiftly that the wolves were left behind, since here for a space the ground was level to his feet. Galazi looked on Umslopogaas at his side, and grinned.

"You do not run so ill, my brother, who have been sick of late. See now if you can outrun me! Who shall touch the quarry first?"

Now the bull was ahead by two spear-throws. Umslopogaas looked and grinned back at Galazi. "Good!" he cried, "away!"

They sped forward with a bound, and for awhile it seemed to Umslopogaas as though they stood side by side, only the bull grew nearer and nearer. Then he put out his strength and the swiftness of his feet, and lo! when he looked again he was alone, and the bull was very near. Never were feet so swift as those of Umslopogaas. Now he reached the bull as he laboured on. Umslopogaas placed his hands upon the back of the bull and leaped; he was on him, he sat him as you white men sit a horse. Then he lifted the spear in his hand, and drove it down between the shoulders to the spine, and of a sudden the great buffalo staggered, stopped, and fell dead.

Galazi came up. "Who now is the swiftest, Galazi?" cried Umslopogaas, "I, or you, or your wolf host?"

"You are the swiftest, Umslopogaas," said Galazi, gasping for his breath. "Never did a man run as you run, nor ever shall again."

Now the wolves streamed up, and would have torn the carcass, but Galazi beat them back, and they rested awhile. Then Galazi said, "Let us cut meat from the bull with a spear."



So they cut meat from the bull, and when they had finished Galazi motioned to the wolves, and they fell upon the carcase, fighting furiously. In a little while nothing was left except the larger bones, and yet each wolf had but a little.

Then they went back to the cave and slept.

Afterwards Umslopogaas told Galazi all his tale, and Galazi asked him if he would abide with him and be his brother, and rule with him over the wolf-kind, or seek his father Mopo at the kraal of Chaka.

Umslopogaas said that it was rather in his mind to seek his sister Nada, for he was weary of the kraal of Chaka, but he thought of Nada day and night.

"Where, then, is Nada, your sister?" asked Galazi.

"She sleeps in the caves of your people, Galazi; she tarries with the Halakazi."

"Stay awhile, Umslopogaas," cried Galazi; "stay till we are men indeed. Then we will seek this sister of yours and snatch her from the caves of the Halakazi."

Now the desire of this wolf-life had entered into the heart of Umslopogaas, and he said that it should be so, and on the morrow they

made them blood-brethren, to be one till death, before all the company of ghost-wolves, and the wolves howled when they smelt the blood of men. In all things thenceforth these two were equal, and the ghost-wolves hearkened to the voice of both of them. And on many a moonlight night they and the wolves hunted together, winning their food. At times they crossed the river, hunting in the plains, for game was scarce on the mountain, and the people of the kraal would come out, hearing the mighty howling, and watch the pack sweep across the veldt, and with them a man or men. Then they would say that the ghosts were abroad and creep into their huts shivering with fear. But as yet the Wolf-Brethren and their pack killed no men, but game only, or, at times, elephants and lions.

Now when Umslopogaas had abode some moons in the Witch Mountain, on a night he dreamed of Nada, and awakening soft at heart, bethought himself that he would learn tidings concerning me, his father, Mopo, and what had befallen me and her whom he deemed his mother, and Nada, his sister, and his other brethren. So he clothed himself, hiding his nakedness, and, leaving Galazi, descended to that kraal where the old woman had dwelt, and there gave it out that he was a young man, a chief's son from a far place, who sought a wife. The people of the kraal listened to him, though they held that his look was fierce and wild, and one asked if this were Galazi the Wolf, Galazi the Wizard. But another answered that this was not Galazi, for their eyes had seen him. Umslopogaas said that he knew nothing of Galazi, and little of wolves, and lo! while he spoke there came an impi of fifty men and entered the kraal. Umslopogaas looked at the leaders of the impi and knew them for captains of Chaka.

At first he would have spoken to them, but his Ehlose bade him hold his peace. So he sat in a corner of the big hut and listened. Presently the headman of the kraal, who trembled with fear, for he believed that the impi had been sent to destroy him and all that were his, asked the captain what was his will.

"A little matter, and a vain," said the captain. "We are sent by the king to search for a certain youth, Umslopogaas, the son of Mopo, the king's doctor. Mopo gave it out that the youth was killed by a lion near these mountains, and Chaka would learn if this is true."

"We know nothing of the youth," said the headman. "But what would ye with him?"

"Only this," answered the captain, "to kill him."

"That is yet to do," thought Umslopogaas.

"Who is this Mopo?" asked the headman.

"An evildoer, whose house the king has eaten up--man, woman, and child," answered the captain.