

CHAPTER XV. THE DEATH OF THE KING'S SLAYERS

When Umslopogaas heard these words his heart was heavy, and a great anger burned in his breast, for he thought that I, Mopo, was dead with the rest of his house, and he loved me. But he said nothing; only, watching till none were looking, he slipped past the backs of the captains and won the door of the hut. Soon he was clear of the kraal, and, running swiftly, crossed the river and came to the Ghost Mountain. Meanwhile, the captain asked the headman of the kraal if he knew anything of such a youth as him for whom they sought. The headman told the captain of Galazi the Wolf, but the captain said that this could not be the lad, for Galazi had dwelt many moons upon the Ghost Mountain.

"There is another youth," said the headman; "a stranger, fierce, strong and tall, with eyes that shine like spears. He is in the hut now; he sits yonder in the shadow."

The captain rose and looked into the shadow, but Umslopogaas was gone.

"Now this youth is fled," said the headman, "and yet none saw him fly! Perhaps he also is a wizard! Indeed, I have heard that now there are two of them upon the Ghost Mountain, and that they hunt there at night with the ghost-wolves, but I do not know if it is true."

"Now I am minded to kill you," said the captain in wrath, "because you have suffered this youth to escape me. Without doubt it is Umslopogaas,

son of Mopo."

"It is no fault of mine," said the headmen. "These young men are wizards, who can pass hither and thither at will. But I say this to you, captain of the king, if you will go on the Ghost Mountain, you must go there alone with your soldiers, for none in these parts dare to tread upon that mountain."

"Yet I shall dare to-morrow," said the captain. "We grow brave at the kraal of Chaka. There men do not fear spears or ghosts or wild beasts or magic, but they fear the king's word alone. The sun sets--give us food. To-morrow we will search the mountain."

Thus, my father, did this captain speak in his folly,--he who should never see another sun.

Now Umslopogaas reached the mountain, and when he had passed the forest--of which he had learned every secret way--the darkness gathered, and the wolves awoke in the darkness and drew near howling. Umslopogaas howled in answer, and presently that great wolf Deathgrip came to him. Umslopogaas saw him and called him by his name; but, behold! the brute did not know him, and flew at him, growling. Then Umslopogaas remembered that the she-wolf's skin was not bound about his shoulders, and therefore it was that the wolf Deathgrip knew him not. For though in the daytime, when the wolves slept, he might pass to and fro without the skin, at night it was not so. He had not brought the skin, because he

dared not wear it in the sight of the men of the kraal, lest they should know him for one of the Wolf-Brethren, and it had not been his plan to seek the mountain again that night, but rather on the morrow. Now Umslopogaas knew that his danger was great indeed. He beat back Deathgrip with his kerrie, but others were behind him, for the wolves gathered fast. Then he bounded away towards the cave, for he was so swift of foot that the wolves could not catch him, though they pressed him hard, and once the teeth of one of them tore his moocha. Never before did he run so fast, and in the end he reached the cave and rolled the rock to, and as he did so the wolves dashed themselves against it. Then he clad himself in the hide of the she-wolf, and, pushing aside the stone, came out. And, lo! the eyes of the wolves were opened, and they knew him for one of the brethren who ruled over them, and slunk away at his bidding.

Now Umslopogaas sat himself down at the mouth of the cave waiting for Galazi, and he thought. Presently Galazi came, and in few words Umslopogaas told him all his tale.

"You have run a great risk, my brother," said Galazi. "What now?"

"This," said Umslopogaas: "these people of ours are hungry for the flesh of men; let us feed them full on the soldiers of Chaka, who sit yonder at the kraal seeking my life. I would take vengeance for Mopo, my father, and all my brethren who are dead, and for my mothers, the wives of Mopo. What say you?"

Galazi laughed aloud. "That will be merry, my brother," he said. "I weary of hunting beasts, let us hunt men to-night."

"Ay, to-night," said Umslopogaas, nodding. "I long to look upon that captain as a maid longs for her lover's kiss. But first let us rest and eat, for the night is young; then, Galazi, summon our impi."

So they rested and ate, and afterwards went out armed, and Galazi howled to the wolves, and they came in tens and twenties till all were gathered together. Galazi moved among them, shaking the Watcher, as they sat upon their haunches, and followed him with their fiery eyes.

"We do not hunt game to-night, little people," he cried, "but men, and you love the flesh of men."

Now all the wolves howled as though they understood. Then the pack divided itself as was its custom, the she-wolves following Umslopogaas, the dog-wolves following Galazi, and in silence they moved swiftly down towards the plain. They came to the river and swam it, and there, eight spear throws away, on the farther side of the river stood the kraal.

Now the Wolf-Brethren took counsel together, and Galazi, with the dog-wolves, went to the north gate, and Umslopogaas with the she-wolves to the south gate. They reached them safely and in silence, for at the bidding of the brethren the wolves ceased from their howlings. The gates were stopped with thorns, but the brethren pulled out the thorns and

made a passage. As they did this it chanced that certain dogs in the kraal heard the sound of the stirred boughs, and awakening, caught the smell of the wolves that were with Umslopogaas, for the wind blew from that quarter. These dogs ran out barking, and presently they came to the south gate of the kraal, and flew at Umslopogaas, who pulled away the thorns. Now when the wolves saw the dogs they could be restrained no longer, but sprang on them and tore them to fragments, and the sound of their worrying came to the ears of the soldiers of Chaka and of the dwellers in the kraal, so that they sprang from sleep, snatching their arms. And as they came out of the huts they saw in the moonlight a man wearing a wolf's hide rushing across the empty cattle kraal, for the grass was long and the cattle were out at graze, and with him countless wolves, black and grey. Then they cried aloud in terror, saying that the ghosts were on them, and turned to flee to the north gate of the kraal. But, behold! here also they met a man clad in a wolf's skin only, and with him countless wolves, black and grey.

Now, some flung themselves to earth screaming in their fear, and some strove to run away, but the greater part of the soldiers, and with them many of the men of the kraal, came together in knots, being minded to die like men at teeth of the ghosts, and that though they shook with fear. Then Umslopogaas howled aloud, and howled Galazi, and they flung themselves upon the soldiers and the people of the kraal, and with them came the wolves. Then a crying and a baying rose up to heaven as the grey wolves leaped and bit and tore. Little they heeded the spears and kerries of the soldiers. Some were killed, but the rest did not stay.

Presently the knots of men broke up, and to each man wolves hung by twos and threes, dragging him to earth. Some few fled, indeed, but the wolves hunted them by gaze and scent, and pulled them down before they passed the gates of the kraal.

The Wolf-Brethren also ravened with the rest. Busy was the Watcher, and many bowed beneath him, and often the spear of Umslopogaas flashed in the moonlight. It was finished; none were left living in that kraal, and the wolves growled sullenly as they took their fill, they who had been hungry for many days. Now the brethren met, and laughed in their wolf joy, because they had slaughtered those who were sent out to slaughter. They called to the wolves, bidding them search the huts, and the wolves entered the huts as dogs enter a thicket, and killed those who lurked there, or drove them forth to be slain without. Presently a man, great and tall, sprang from the last of the huts, where he had hidden himself, and the wolves outside rushed on him to drag him down. But Umslopogaas beat them back, for he had seen the face of the man: it was that captain whom Chaka had sent out to kill him. He beat them back, and stalked up to the captain, saying: "Greeting to you, captain of the king! Now tell us what is your errand here, beneath the shadow of her who sits in stone?" And he pointed with his spear to the Grey Witch on the Ghost Mountain, on which the moon shone bright.

Now the captain had a great heart, though he had hidden from the wolves, and answered boldly:--

"What is that to you, wizard? Your ghost wolves had made an end of my errand. Let them make an end of me also."

"Be not in haste, captain," said Umslopogaas. "Say, did you not seek a certain youth, the son of Mopo?"

"That is so," answered the captain. "I sought one youth, and I have found many evil spirits." And he looked at the wolves tearing their prey, and shuddered.

"Say, captain," quoth Umslopogaas, drawing back his hood of wolf's hide so that the moonlight fell upon his face, "is this the face of that youth whom you sought?"

"It is the face," answered the captain, astonished.

"Ay," laughed Umslopogaas, "it is the face. Fool! I knew your errand and heard your words, and thus have I answered them." And he pointed to the dead. "Now choose, and swiftly. Will you run for your life against my wolves? Will you do battle for your life against these four?" And he pointed to Greysnout and to Blackfang, to Blood and to Deathgrip, who watched him with slavering lips; "or will you stand face to face with me, and if I am slain, with him who bears the club, and with whom I rule this people black and grey?"

"I fear ghosts, but of men I have no fear, though they be wizards,"

answered the captain.

"Good!" cried Umslopogaas, shaking his spear.

Then they rushed together, and that fray was fierce. For presently the spear of Umslopogaas was broken in the shield of the captain and he was left weaponless. Now Umslopogaas turned and fled swiftly, bounding over the dead and the wolves who preyed upon them, and the captain followed with uplifted spear, and mocked him as he came. Galazi also wondered that Umslopogaas should fly from a single man. Hither and thither fled Umslopogaas, and always his eyes were on the earth. Of a sudden, Galazi, who watched, saw him sweep forward like a bird and stoop to the ground. Then he wheeled round, and lo! there was an axe in his hand. The captain rushed at him, and Umslopogaas smote as he rushed, and the blade of the great spear that was lifted to pierce him fell to the ground hewn from its haft. Again Umslopogaas smote: the moon-shaped axe sank through the stout shield deep into the breast beyond. Then the captain threw up his arms and fell to the earth.

"Ah!" cried Umslopogaas, "you sought a youth to slay him, and have found an axe to be slain by it! Sleep softly, captain of Chaka."

Then Umslopogaas spoke to Galazi, saying: "My brother, I will fight no more with the spear, but with the axe alone; it was to seek an axe that I ran to and fro like a coward. But this is a poor thing! See, the haft is split because of the greatness of my stroke! Now this is my

desire--to win that great axe of Jikiza, which is called Groan-Maker, of which we have heard tell, so that axe and club may stand together in the fray."

"That must be for another night," said Galazi. "We have not done so ill for once. Now let us search for pots and corn, of which we stand in need, and then to the mountain before dawn finds us."

Thus, then, did the Wolf-Brethren bring death on the impi of Chaka, and this was but the first of many deaths that they wrought with the help of the wolves. For ever they ravened through the land at night, and, falling on those they hated, they ate them up, till their name and the name of the ghost-wolves became terrible in the ears of men, and the land was swept clean. But they found that the wolves would not go abroad to worry everywhere. Thus, on a certain night, they set out to fall upon the kraals of the People of the Axe, where dwelt the chief Jikiza, who was named the Unconquered, and owned the axe Groan-Maker, but when they neared the kraal the wolves turned back and fled. Then Galazi remembered the dream that he had dreamed, in which the Dead One in the cave had seemed to speak, telling him that there only where the men-eaters had hunted in the past might the wolves hunt to-day. So they returned home, but Umslopogaas set himself to find a plan to win the axe.