

CHAPTER XXIII. MOPO REVEALS HIMSELF TO THE SLAUGHTERER

All that night we watched, but we neither saw nor heard any more of the wolves, nor of the men who hunted with them. On the morrow, at dawn, I sent a runner to Bulalio, chief of the People of the Axe, saying that a messenger came to him from Dingaan, the king, who desired to speak with him in peace within the gates of his kraal. I charged the messenger, however, that he should not tell my name, but should say only that it was "Mouth of Dingaan." Then I and those with me followed slowly on the path of the man whom I sent forward, for the way was still far, and I had bidden him return and meet me bearing the words of the Slaughterer, Holder of the Axe.

All that day till the sun grew low we walked round the base of the great Ghost Mountain, following the line of the river. We met no one, but once we came to the ruins of a kraal, and in it lay the broken bones of many men, and with the bones rusty assegais and the remains of ox-hide shields, black and white in colour. Now I examined the shields, and knew from their colour that they had been carried in the hands of those soldiers who, years ago, were sent out by Chaka to seek for Umslopogaas, but who had returned no more.

"Now," I said, "it has fared ill with those soldiers of the Black One who is gone, for I think that these are the shields they bore, and that their eyes once looked upon the world through the holes in yonder skulls."

"These are the shields they bore, and those are the skulls they wore," answered one. "See, Mopo, son of Makedama, this is no man's work that has brought them to their death. Men do not break the bones of their foes in pieces as these bones are broken. Wow! men do not break them, but wolves do, and last night we saw wolves a-hunting; nor did they hunt alone, Mopo. Wow! this is a haunted land!"

Then we went on in silence, and all the way the stone face of the Witch who sits aloft forever stared down on us from the mountain top. At length, an hour before sundown, we came to the open lands, and there, on the crest of a rise beyond the river, we saw the kraal of the People of the Axe. It was a great kraal and well built, and their cattle were spread about the plains like to herds of game for number. We went to the river and passed it by the ford, then sat down and waited, till presently I saw the man whom I had sent forward returning towards us. He came and saluted me, and I asked him for news.

"This is my news, Mopo," he said: "I have seen him who is named Bulalio, and he is a great man--long and lean, with a fierce face, and carrying a mighty axe, such an axe as he bore last night who hunted with the wolves. When I had been led before the chief I saluted him and spoke to him--the words you laid upon my tongue I told to him. He listened, then laughed aloud, and said: 'Tell him who sent you that the mouth of Dingaen shall be welcome, and shall speak the words of Dingaen in peace; yet I would that it were the head of Dingaen that came and not his mouth

only, for then Axe Groan-Maker would join in our talk--ay, because of one Mopo, whom his brother Chaka murdered, it would also speak with Dingaan. Still, the mouth is not the head, so the mouth may come in peace."

Now I started when for the second time I heard talk of one Mopo, whose name had been on the lips of Bulalio the Slaughterer. Who was there that would thus have loved Mopo except one who was long dead? And yet, perhaps the chief spoke of some other Mopo, for the name was not my own only--in truth, Chaka had killed a chief of that name at the great mourning, because he said that two Mopos in the land were one too many, and that though this Mopo wept sorely when the tears of others were dry. So I said only that this Bulalio had a high stomach, and we went on to the gates of the kraal.

There were none to meet us at the gates, and none stood by the doors of the huts within them, but beyond, from the cattle kraal that was in the centre of the huts, rose a dust and a din as of men gathering for war. Now some of those with me were afraid, and would have turned back, fearing treachery, and they were yet more afraid when, on coming to the inner entrance of the cattle kraal, we saw some five hundred soldiers being mustered there company by company, by two great men, who ran up and down the ranks shouting.

But I cried, "Nay! nay! Turn not back! Bold looks melt the hearts of foes. Moreover, if this Bulalio would have murdered us, there was no

need for him to call up so many of his warriors. He is a proud chief, and would show his might, not knowing that the king we serve can muster a company for every man he has. Let us go on boldly."

So we walked forward towards the impi that was gathered on the further side of the kraal. Now the two great men who were marshalling the soldiers saw us, and came to meet us, one following the other. He who came first bore the axe upon his shoulder, and he who followed swung a huge club. I looked upon the foremost of them, and ah! my father, my heart grew faint with joy, for I knew him across the years. It was Umslopogaas! my fosterling, Umslopogaas! and none other, now grown into manhood--ay, into such a man as was not to be found beside him in Zululand. He was great and fierce, somewhat spare in frame, but wide shouldered and shallow flanked. His arms were long and not over big, but the muscles stood out on them like knots in a rope; his legs were long also, and very thick beneath the knee. His eye was like an eagle's, his nose somewhat hooked, and he held his head a little forward, as a man who searches continually for a hidden foe. He seemed to walk slowly, and yet he came swiftly, but with a gliding movement like that of a wolf or a lion, and always his fingers played round the horn handle of the axe Groan-Maker. As for him who followed, he was great also, shorter than Umslopogaas by the half of a head, but of a sturdier build. His eyes were small, and twinkled unceasingly like little stars, and his look was very wild, for now and again he grinned, showing his white teeth.

When I saw Umslopogaas, my father, my bowels melted within me, and I

longed to run to him and throw myself upon his neck. Yet I took council with myself and did not--nay, I dropped the corner of the kaross I wore over my eyes, hiding my face lest he should know me. Presently he stood before me, searching me out with his keen eyes, for I drew forward to greet him.

"Greeting, Mouth of Dingaen!" he said in a loud voice. "You are a little man to be the mouth of so big a chief."

"The mouth is a little member, even of the body of a great king, O Chief Bulalio, ruler of the People of the Axe, wizard of the wolves that are upon the Ghost Mountain, who aforetime was named Umslopogaas, son of Mopo, son of Makedama."

Now when Umslopogaas heard these words he started like a child at a rustling in the dark and stared hard at me.

"You are well instructed," he said.

"The ears of the king are large, if his mouth be small, O Chief Bulalio," I answered, "and I, who am but the mouth, speak what the ears have heard."

"How know you that I have dwelt with the wolves upon the Ghost Mountain, O Mouth?" he asked.

"The eyes of the king see far, O Chief Bulalio. Thus last night they saw a great chase and a merry. It seems that they saw a koodoo bull running at speed, and after him countless wolves making their music, and with the wolves two men clad in wolves' skins, such men as you, Bulalio, and he with the club who follows you."

Now Umslopogaas lifted the axe Groan-Maker as though he would cut me down, then let it fall again, while Galazi the Wolf glared at me with wide-opened eyes.

"How know you that once I was named Umslopogaas, who have lost that name these many days? Speak, O Mouth, lest I kill you."

"Slay if you will, Umslopogaas," I answered, "but know that when the brains are scattered the mouth is dumb. He who scatters brains loses wisdom."

"Answer!" he said.

"I answer not. Who are you that I should answer you? I know; it is enough. To my business."

Now Umslopogaas ground his teeth in anger. "I am not wont to be thwarted here in my own kraal," he said; "but do your business. Speak it, little Mouth."

"This is my business, little Chief. When the Black One who is gone yet lived, you sent him a message by one Masilo--such a message as his ears had never heard, and that had been your death, O fool puffed up with pride, but death came first upon the Black One, and his hand was stayed. Now Dingaan, whose shadow lies upon the land, the king whom I serve, and who sits in the place of the Black One who is gone, speaks to you by me, his mouth. He would know this: if it is true that you refuse to own his sovereignty, to pay tribute to him in men and maids and cattle, and to serve him in his wars? Answer, you little headman!--answer in few words and short!"

Now Umslopogaas gasped for breath in his rage, and again he fingered the great axe. "It is well for you, O Mouth," he said, "that I swore safe conduct to you, else you had not gone hence--else you had been served as I served certain soldiers who in bygone years were sent to search out one Umslopogaas. Yet I answer you in few words and short. Look on those spears--they are but a fourth part of the number I can muster: that is my answer. Look now on yonder mountain, the mountain of ghosts and wolves--unknown, impassable, save to me and one other: that is my answer. Spears and mountains shall come together--the mountain shall be alive with spears and with the fangs of beasts. Let Dingaan seek his tribute there! I have spoken!"

Now I laughed shrilly, desiring to try the heart of Umslopogaas, my fosterling, yet further.

"Fool!" I said. "Boy with the brain of a monkey, for every spear you have Dingaan, whom I serve, can send a hundred, and your mountain shall be stamped flat; and for your ghosts and wolves, see, with the mouth of Dingaan I spit upon them!" and I spat upon the ground.

Now Umslopogaas shook in his rage, and the great axe glimmered as he shook. He turned to the captain who was behind him, and said: "Say, Galazi the Wolf, shall we kill this man and those with him?"

"Nay," answered the Wolf, grinning, "do not kill them; you have given them safe conduct. Moreover, let them go back to their dog of a king, that he may send out his puppies to do battle with our wolves. It will be a pretty fight."

"Get you gone, O Mouth," said Umslopogaas; "get you gone swiftly, lest mischief befall you! Without my gates you shall find food to satisfy your hunger. Eat of it and begone, for if to-morrow at the noon you are found within a spear's throw of this kraal, you and those with you shall bide there forever, O Mouth of Dingaan the king!"

Now I made as though I would depart, then, turning suddenly, I spoke once more, saying:--

"There were words in your message to the Black One who is dead of a certain man--nay, how was he named?--of a certain Mopo."

Now Umslopogaas started as one starts who is wounded by a spear, and stared at me.

"Mopo! What of Mopo, O Mouth, whose eyes are veiled? Mopo is dead, whose son I was!"

"Ah!" I said, "yes, Mopo is dead--that is, the Black One who is gone killed a certain Mopo. How came it, O Bulalio, that you were his son?"

"Mopo is dead," quoth Umslopogaas again; "he is dead with all his house, his kraal is stamped flat, and that is why I hated the Black One, and therefore I hate Dingaan, his brother, and will be as are Mopo and the house of Mopo before I pay him tribute of a single ox."

All this while I had spoken to Umslopogaas in a feigned voice, my father, but now I spoke again and in my own voice, saying:--

"So! Now you speak from your heart, young man, and by digging I have reached the root of the matter. It is because of this dead dog of a Mopo that you defy the king."

Umslopogaas heard the voice, and trembled no more with anger, but rather with fear and wonder. He looked at me hard, answering nothing.

"Have you a hut near by, O Chief Bulalio, foe of Dingaan the king, where I, the mouth of the king, may speak with you a while apart, for I would

learn your message word by word that I may deliver it without fault. Fear not, Slaughterer, to sit alone with me in an empty hut! I am unarmed and old, and there is that in your hand which I should fear," and I pointed to the axe.

Now Umslopogaas, still shaking in his limbs, answered "Follow me, O Mouth, and you, Galazi, stay with these men."

So I followed Umslopogaas, and presently we came to a large hut. He pointed to the doorway, and I crept through it and he followed after me. Now for a while it seemed dark in the hut, for the sun was sinking without and the place was full of shadow; so I waited while a man might count fifty, till our eyes could search the darkness. Then of a sudden I threw the blanket from my face and looked into the eyes of Umslopogaas.

"Look on me now, O Chief Bulalio, O Slaughterer, who once was named Umslopogaas--look on me and say who am I?" Then he looked at me and his jaw fell.

"Either you are Mopo my father grown old--Mopo, who is dead, or the Ghost of Mopo," he answered in a low voice.

"I am Mopo, your father, Umslopogaas," I said. "You have been long in knowing me, who knew you from the first."

Then Umslopogaas cried aloud, but yet softly, and letting fall the axe

Groan-Maker, he flung himself upon my breast and wept there. And I wept also.

"Oh! my father," he said, "I thought that you were dead with the others, and now you have come back to me, and I, I would have lifted the axe against you in my folly. Oh, it is well that I have lived, and not died, since once more I look upon your face--the face that I thought dead, but which yet lives, though it be sorely changed, as though by grief and years."

"Peace, Umslopogaas, my son," I said. "I also deemed you dead in the lion's mouth, though in truth it seemed strange to me that any other man than Umslopogaas could have wrought the deeds which I have heard of as done by Bulalio, Chief of the People of the Axe--ay, and thrown defiance in the teeth of Chaka. But you are not dead, and I, I am not dead. It was another Mopo whom Chaka killed; I slew Chaka, Chaka did not slay me."

"And of Nada, what of Nada, my sister?" he said.

"Macrophia, your mother, and Nada, your sister, are dead, Umslopogaas. They are dead at the hands of the people of the Halakazi, who dwell in Swaziland."

"I have heard of that people," he answered presently, "and so has Galazi the Wolf, yonder. He has a hate to satisfy against them--they murdered

his father; now I have two, for they have murdered my mother and my sister. Ah, Nada, my sister! Nada, my sister!" and the great man covered his face with his hands, and rocked himself to and fro in his grief.

Now, my father, it came into my thoughts to make the truth plain to Umslopogaas, and tell him that Nada was no sister of his, and that he was no son of mine, but rather of that Chaka whom my hand had finished. And yet I did not, though now I would that I had done so. For I saw well how great was the pride and how high was the heart of Umslopogaas, and I saw also that if once he should learn that the throne of Zululand was his by right, nothing could hold him back, for he would swiftly break into open rebellion against Dingaan the king, and in my judgment the time was not ripe for that. Had I known, indeed, but one short year before that Umslopogaas still lived, he had sat where Dingaan sat this day; but I did not know it, and the chance had gone by for a while. Now Dingaan was king and mustered many regiments about him, for I had held him back from war, as in the case of the raid that he wished to make upon the Swazis. The chance had gone by, but it would come again, and till it came I must say nothing. I would do this rather, I would bring Dingaan and Umslopogaas together, that Umslopogaas might become known in the land as a great chief and the first of warriors. Then I would cause him to be advanced to be an induna, and a general ready to lead the impis of the king, for he who leads the impis is already half a king.

So I held my peace upon this matter, but till the dawn was grey Umslopogaas and I sat together and talked, each telling the tale of

those years that had gone since he was borne from me in the lion's mouth. I told him how all my wives and children had been killed, how I had been put to the torment, and showed him my white and withered hand. I told him also of the death of Baleka, my sister, and of all my people of the Langeni, and of how I had revenged my wrongs upon Chaka, and made Dingaan to be king in his place, and was now the first man in the land under the king, though the king feared me much and loved me little. But I did not tell him that Baleka, my sister, was his own mother.

When I had done my tale, Umslopogaas told me his: how Galazi had rescued him from the lioness; how he became one of the Wolf-Brethren; how he had conquered Jikiza and the sons of Jikiza, and become chief of the People of the Axe, and taken Zinita to wife, and grown great in the land.

I asked him how it came about that he still hunted with the wolves as he had done last night. He answered that now he was great and there was nothing more to win, and at times a weariness of life came upon him, and then he must up, and together with Galazi hunt and harry with the wolves, for thus only could he find rest.

I said that I would show him better game to hunt before all was done, and asked him further if he loved his wife, Zinita. Umslopogaas answered that he would love her better if she loved him not so much, for she was jealous and quick to anger, and that was a sorrow to him. Then, when he had slept awhile, he led me from the hut, and I and my people were feasted with the best, and I spoke with Zinita and with Galazi the Wolf.

For the last, I liked him well. This was a good man to have at one's back in battle; but my heart spoke to me against Zinita. She was handsome and tall, but with fierce eyes which always watched Umslopogaas, my fosterling; and I noted that he who was fearless of all other things yet seemed to fear Zinita. Neither did she love me, for when she saw how the Slaughterer clung to me, as it were, instantly she grew jealous--as already she was jealous of Galazi--and would have been rid of me if she might. Thus it came about that my heart spoke against Zinita; nor did it tell me worse things of her than those which she was to do.