

CHAPTER XXVI. THE FINDING OF NADA

Umslopogaas marshalled his companies.

"There is little light left," he said, "but it must serve us to start these conies from their burrows. Come, my brother Galazi, you know where the conies hide, take my place and lead us."

So Galazi led the impi. Turning a corner of the glen, he came with them to a large open space that had a fountain in its midst, and this place was full of thousands of cattle. Then he turned again to the left, and brought them to the inner side of the mountain, where the cliff hung over, and here was the mouth of a great cave. Now the cave was dark, but by its door was stacked a pile of resinous wood to serve as torches.

"Here is that which will give us light," said Galazi, and one man of every two took a torch and lit it at a fire that burned near the mouth of the cave. Then they rushed in, waving the flaring torches and with assegais aloft. Here for the last time the Halakazi stood against them, and the torches floated up and down upon the wave of war. But they did not stand for very long, for all the heart was out of them. Wow! yes, many were killed--I do not know how many. I know this only, that the Halakazi are no more a tribe since Umslopogaas, who is named Bulalio, stamped them with his feet--they are nothing but a name now. The People of the Axe drove them out into the open and finished the fight by starlight among the cattle.

In one corner of the cave Umslopogaas saw a knot of men clustering round something as though to guard it. He rushed at the men, and with him went Galazi and others. But when Umslopogaas was through, by the light of his torch he perceived a tall and slender man, who leaned against the wall of the cave and held a shield before his face.

"You are a coward!" he cried, and smote with Groan-Maker. The great axe pierced the hide, but, missing the head behind, rang loudly against the rock, and as it struck a sweet voice said:--

"Ah! soldier, do not kill me! Why are you angry with me?"

Now the shield had come away from its holder's hands upon the blade of the axe, and there was something in the notes of the voice that caused Umslopogaas to smite no more: it was as though a memory of childhood had come to him in a dream. His torch was burning low, but he thrust it forward to look at him who crouched against the rock. The dress was the dress of a man, but this was no man's form--nay, rather that of a lovely woman, well-nigh white in colour. She dropped her hands from before her face, and now he could see her well. He saw eyes that shone like stars, hair that curled and fell upon the shoulders, and such beauty as was not known among our people. And as the voice had spoken to him of something that was lost, so did the eyes seem to shine across the blackness of many years, and the beauty to bring back he knew not what.

He looked at the girl in all her loveliness, and she looked at him in his fierceness and his might, red with war and wounds. They both looked long, while the torchlight flared on them, on the walls of the cave, and the broad blade of Groan-Maker, and from around rose the sounds of the fray.

"How are you named, who are so fair to see?" he asked at length.

"I am named the Lily now: once I had another name. Nada, daughter of Mopo, I was once; but name and all else are dead, and I go to join them. Kill me and make an end. I will shut my eyes, that I may not see the great axe flash."

Now Umslopogaas gazed upon her again, and Groan-Maker fell from his hand.

"Look on me, Nada, daughter of Mopo," he said in a low voice; "look at me and say who am I."

She looked once more and yet again. Now her face was thrust forward as one who gazes over the edge of the world; it grew fixed and strange. "By my heart," she said, "by my heart, you are Umslopogaas, my brother who is dead, and whom dead as living I have loved ever and alone."

Then the torch flared out, but Umslopogaas took hold of her in the darkness and pressed her to him and kissed her, the sister whom he found

after many years, and she kissed him.

"You kiss me now," she said, "yet not long ago that great axe shore my locks, missing me but by a finger's-breadth--and still the sound of fighting rings in my ears! Ah! a boon of you, my brother--a boon: let there be no more death since we are met once more. The people of the Halakazi are conquered, and it is their just doom, for thus, in this same way, they killed those with whom I lived before. Yet they have treated me well, not forcing me into wedlock, and protecting me from Dingaas; so spare them, my brother, if you may."

Then Umslopogaas lifted up his voice, commanding that the killing should cease, and sent messengers running swiftly with these words: "This is the command of Bulalio: that he who lifts hand against one more of the people of the Halakazi shall be killed himself"; and the soldiers obeyed him, though the order came somewhat late, and no more of the Halakazi were brought to doom. They were suffered to escape, except those of the women and children who were kept to be led away as captives. And they ran far that night. Nor did they come together again to be a people, for they feared Galazi the Wolf, who would be chief over them, but they were scattered wide in the world, to sojourn among strangers.

Now when the soldiers had eaten abundantly of the store of the Halakazi, and guards had been sent to ward the cattle and watch against surprise, Umslopogaas spoke long with Nada the Lily, taking her apart, and he told

her all his story. She told him also the tale which you know, my father, of how she had lived with the little people that were subject to the Halakazi, she and her mother Macrophia, and how the fame of her beauty had spread about the land. Then she told him how the Halakazi had claimed her, and of how, in the end, they had taken her by force of arms, killing the people of that kraal, and among them her own mother. Thereafter, she had dwelt among the Halakazi, who named her anew, calling her the Lily, and they had treated her kindly, giving her reverence because of her sweetness and beauty, and not forcing her into marriage.

"And why would you not wed, Nada, my sister?" asked Umslopogaas, "you who are far past the age of marriage?"

"I cannot tell you," she answered, hanging her head; "but I have no heart that way. I only seek to be left alone."

Now Umslopogaas thought awhile and spoke. "Do you not know then, Nada, why it is that I have made this war, and why the people of the Halakazi are dead and scattered and their cattle the prize of my arm? I will tell you: I am come here to win you, whom I knew only by report as the Lily maid, the fairest of women, to be a wife to Dingaan. The reason that I began this war was to win you and make my peace with Dingaan, and now I have carried it through to the end."

Now when she heard these words, Nada the Lily trembled and wept,

and, sinking to the earth, she clasped the knees of Umslopogaas in supplication: "Oh, do not this cruel thing by me, your sister," she prayed; "take rather that great axe and make an end of me, and of the beauty which has wrought so much woe, and most of all to me who wear it! Would that I had not moved my head behind the shield, but had suffered the axe to fall upon it. To this end I was dressed as a man, that I might meet the fate of a man. Ah! a curse be on my woman's weakness that snatched me from death to give me up to shame!"

Thus she prayed to Umslopogaas in her low sweet voice, and his heart was shaken in him, though, indeed, he did not now purpose to give Nada to Dingaan, as Baleka was given to Chaka, perhaps in the end to meet the fate of Baleka.

"There are many, Nada," he said, "who would think it no misfortune that they should be given as a wife to the first of chiefs."

"Then I am not of their number," she answered; "nay, I will die first, by my own hand if need be."

Now Umslopogaas wondered how it came about that Nada looked upon marriage thus, but he did not speak of the matter; he said only, "Tell me then, Nada, how I can deliver myself of this charge. I must go to Dingaan as I promised our father Mopo, and what shall I say to Dingaan when he asks for the Lily whom I went out to pluck and whom his heart desires? What shall I say to save myself alive from the wrath of

Dingaan?"

Then Nada thought and answered, "You shall say this, my brother. You shall tell him that the Lily, being clothed in the war-dress of a warrior, fell by chance in the fray. See, now, none of your people know that you have found me; they are thinking of other things than maids in the hour of their victory. This, then, is my plan: we will search now by the starlight till we find the body of a fair maid, for, doubtless, some were killed by hazard in the fight, and on her we will set a warrior's dress, and lay by her the corpse of one of your own men. To-morrow, at the light, you shall take the captains of your soldiers and, having laid the body of the girl in the dark of the cave, you shall show it to them hurriedly, and tell them that this was the Lily, slain by one of your own people, whom in your wrath you slew also. They will not look long on so common a sight, and if by hazard they see the maid, and think her not so very fair, they will deem that it is death which has robbed her of her comeliness. So the tale which you must tell to Dingaan shall be built up firmly, and Dingaan shall believe it to be true."

"And how shall this be, Nada?" asked Umslopogaas. "How shall this be when men see you among the captives and know you by your beauty? Are there, then, two such Lilies in the land?"

"I shall not be known, for I shall not be seen, Umslopogaas. You must set me free to-night. I will wander hence disguised as a youth and covered with a blanket, and if any meet me, who shall say that I am the

Lily?"

"And where will you wander, Nada? to your death? Must we, then, meet after so many years to part again for ever?"

"Where was it that you said you lived, my brother? Beneath the shade of a Ghost Mountain, that men may know by a shape of stone which is fashioned like an old woman frozen into stone, was it not? Tell me of the road thither."

So Umslopogaas told her the road, and she listened silently.

"Good," she said. "I am strong and my feet are swift; perhaps they may serve to bring me so far, and perhaps, if I win the shadow of that mountain, you will find me a hut to hide in, Umslopogaas, my brother."

"Surely it shall be so, my sister," answered Umslopogaas, "and yet the way is long and many dangers lie in the path of a maid journeying alone, without food or shelter," and as he spoke Umslopogaas thought of Zinita his wife, for he guessed that she would not love Nada, although she was only his sister.

"Still, it must be travelled, and the dangers must be braved," she answered, smiling. "Alas! there is no other way."

Then Umslopogaas summoned Galazi the Wolf and told him all this story,

for Galazi was the only man whom he could trust. The Wolf listened in silence, marvelling the while at the beauty of Nada, as the starlight showed it. When everything was told, he said only that he no longer wondered that the people of the Halakazi had defied Dingaana and brought death upon themselves for the sake of this maid. Still, to be plain, his heart thought ill of the matter, for death was not done with yet: there before them shone the Star of Death, and he pointed to the Lily.

Now Nada trembled at his words of evil omen, and the Slaughterer grew angry, but Galazi would neither add to them nor take away from them. "I have spoken that which my heart hears," he answered.

Then they rose and went to search among the dead for a girl who would suit their purpose; soon they found one, a tall and fair maiden, and Galazi bore her in his arms to the great cave. Here in the cave were none but the dead, and, tossed hither and thither in their last sleep, they looked awful in the glare of the torches.

"They sleep sound," said the Lily, gazing on them; "rest is sweet."

"We shall soon win it, maiden," answered Galazi, and again Nada trembled.

Then, having arrayed her in the dress of a warrior, and put a shield and spear by her, they laid down the body of the girl in a dark place in the cave, and, finding a dead warrior of the People of the Axe, placed him

beside her. Now they left the cave, and, pretending that they visited the sentries, Umslopogaas and Galazi passed from spot to spot, while the Lily walked after them like a guard, hiding her face with a shield, holding a spear in her hand, and having with her a bag of corn and dried flesh.

So they passed on, till at length they came to the entrance in the mountain side. The stones that had blocked it were pulled down so as to allow those of the Halakazi to fly who had been spared at the entreaty of Nada, but there were guards by the entrance to watch that none came back. Umslopogaas challenged them, and they saluted him, but he saw that they were worn out with battle and journeying, and knew little of what they saw or said. Then he, Galazi, and Nada and passed through the opening on to the plain beyond.

Here the Slaughterer and the Lily bade each other farewell, while Galazi watched, and presently the Wolf saw Umslopogaas return as one who is heavy at heart, and caught sight of the Lily skimming across the plain lightly like a swallow.

"I do not know when we two shall meet again," said Umslopogaas so soon as she had melted into the shadows of the night.

"May you never meet," answered Galazi, "for I am sure that if you meet that sister of yours will bring death on many more than those who now lie low because of her loveliness. She is a Star of Death, and when she

sets the sky shall be blood red."

Umslopogaas did not answer, but walked slowly through the archway in the mountain side.

"How is this, chief?" said he who was captain of the guard. "Three went out, but only two return."

"Fool!" answered Umslopogaas. "Are you drunk with Halakazi beer, or blind with sleep? Two went out, and two return. I sent him who was with us back to the camp."

"So be it, father," said the captain. "Two went out, and two return. All is well!"