

CHAPTER XXVIII. THE LILY IS BROUGHT TO DINGAAN

"How are you named?" said Dingaan.

"We are named Bulalio the Slaughterer and Galazi the Wolf, O King," answered Umslopogaas.

"Was it thou who didst send a certain message to the Black One who is dead, Bulalio?"

"Yea, O King, I sent a message, but from all I have heard, Masilo, my messenger, gave more than the message, for he stabbed the Black One. Masilo had an evil heart."

Now Dingaan winced, for he knew well that he himself and one Mopo had stabbed the Black One, but he thought that this outland chief had not heard the tale, so he said no more of the message.

"How is it that ye dare to come before me armed? Know ye not the rule that he who appears armed before the king dies?"

"We have not heard that law, O King," said Umslopogaas. "Moreover, there is this to be told: by virtue of the axe I bear I rule alone. If I am seen without the axe, then any man may take my place who can, for the axe is chieftainness of the People of the Axe, and he who holds it is its

servant."

"A strange custom," said Dingaan, "but let it pass. And thou, Wolf, what hast thou to say of that great club of thine?"

"There is this to be told of the club, O King," answered Galazi: "by virtue of the club I guard my life. If I am seen without the club, then may any man take my life who can, for the club is my Watcher, not I Watcher of the club."

"Never wast thou nearer to the losing of both club and life," said Dingaan, angrily.

"It may be so, O King," answered the Wolf. "When the hour is, then, without a doubt, the Watcher shall cease from his watching."

"Ye are a strange pair," quoth Dingaan. "Where have you been now, and what is your business at the Place of the Elephant?"

"We have been in a far country, O King!" answered Umslopogaas. "We have wandered in a distant land to search for a Flower to be a gift to a king, and in our searching we have trampled down a Swazi garden, and yonder are some of those who tended it"--and he pointed to the captives--"and without are the cattle that ploughed it."

"Good, Slaughterer! I see the gardeners, and I hear the lowing of the

cattle, but what of the Flower? Where is this Flower ye went so far to dig in Swazi soil? Was it a Lily-bloom, perchance?"

"It was a Lily-bloom, O King! and yet, alas! the Lily has withered. Nothing is left but the stalk, white and withered as are the bones of men."

"What meanest thou?" said Dingaan, starting to his feet.

"That the king shall learn," answered Umslopogaas; and, turning, he spoke a word to the captains who were behind him. Presently the ranks opened up, and four men ran forward from the rear of the companies. On their shoulders they bore a stretcher, and upon the stretcher lay something wrapped about with raw ox-hides, and bound round with rimpis. The men saluted, and laid their burden down before the king.

"Open!" said the Slaughterer; and they opened, and there within the hides, packed in salt, lay the body of a girl who once was tall and fair.

"Here lies the Lily's stalk, O King!" said Umslopogaas, pointing with the axe, "but if her flower blooms on any air, it is not here."

Now Dingaan stared at the sight of death, and bitterness of heart took hold of him, since he desired above all things to win the beauty of the Lily for himself.

"Bear away this carrion and cast it to the dogs!" he cried, for thus he could speak of her whom he would have taken to wife, when once he deemed her dead. "Take it away, and thou, Slaughterer, tell me how it came about that the maid was slain. It will be well for thee if thou hast a good answer, for know thy life hangs on the words."

So Umslopogaas told the king all that tale which had been made ready against the wrath of Dingaan. And when he had finished Galazi told his story, of how he had seen the soldier kill the maid, and in his wrath had killed the soldier. Then certain of the captains who had seen the soldier and the maid lying in one death came forward and spoke to it.

Now Dingaan was very angry, and yet there was nothing to be done. The Lily was dead, and by no fault of any except of one, who was also dead and beyond his reach.

"Get you hence, you and your people," he said to the Wolf-Brethren. "I take the cattle and the captives. Be thankful that I do not take all your lives also--first, because ye have dared to make war without my word, and secondly, because, having made war, ye have so brought it about that, though ye bring me the body of her I sought, ye do not bring the life."

Now when the king spoke of taking the lives of all the People of the Axe, Umslopogaas smiled grimly and glanced at his companies. Then

saluting the king, he turned to go. But as he turned a man sprang forwards from the ranks and called to Dingaan, saying:--

"Is it granted that I may speak truth before the king, and afterwards sleep in the king's shadow?"

Now this was that man who had been captain of the guard on the night when three passed out through the archway and two returned, that same man whom Umslopogaas had degraded from his rank.

"Speak on, thou art safe," answered Dingaan.

"O King, thy ears have been filled with lies," said the soldier.

"Hearken, O King! I was captain of the guard of the gate on that night of the slaying of the Halakazi. Three came to the gate of the mountain--they were Bulalio, the Wolf Galazi, and another. That other was tall and slim, bearing a shield high--so. As the third passed the gate, the kaross he wore brushed against me and slipped aside. Beneath that kaross was no man's breast, O King, but the shape of a woman, almost white in colour, and very fair. In drawing back the kaross this third one moved the shield. Behind that shield was no man's face, O King, but the face of a girl, lovelier than the moon, and having eyes brighter than the stars. Three went out at the mountain gate, O King, only two returned, and, peeping after them, it seemed that I saw the third running swiftly across the plains, as a young maid runs, O King. This also, Elephant, Bulalio yonder denied me when, as captain of the

guard, I asked for the third who had passed the gate, saying that only two had passed. Further, none of the captives were called to swear to the body of the maid, and now it is too late, and that man who lay beside her was not killed by Galazi in the cave. He was killed outside the cave by a blow of a Halakazi kerrie. I saw him fall with my own eyes, and slew the man who smote him. One thing more, King of the World, the best of the captives and the cattle are not here for a gift to thee--they are at the kraal of Bulalio, Chief of the People of the Axe. I have spoken, O King, yes, because my heart loves not lies. I have spoken the truth, and now do thou protect me from these Wolf-Brethren, O King, for they are very fierce."

Now all this while that the traitor told his tale Umslopogaas, inch by inch, was edging near to him and yet nearer, till at length he might have touched him with an outstretched spear. None noted him except I, Mopo, alone, and perhaps Galazi, for all were watching the face of Dingaan as men watch a storm that is about to burst.

"Fear thou not the Wolf-Brethren, soldier," gasped Dingaan, rolling his red eyes; "the paw of the Lion guards thee, my servant."

Ere the words had left the king's lips the Slaughterer leapt. He leaped full on to the traitor, speaking never a word, and oh! his eyes were awful. He leaped upon him, he seized him with his hands, lifting no weapon, and in his terrible might he broke him as a child breaks a stick--nay, I know not how, it was too swift to see. He broke him, and,

hurling him on high, cast him dead at the feet of Dingaan, crying in a great voice:--

"Take thy servant, King! Surely he 'sleeps in thy shadow'!"

Then there was silence, only through the silence was heard a gasp of fear and wonder, for no such deed as this had been wrought in the presence of the king--no, not since the day of Senzangaona the Root.

Now Dingaan spoke, and his voice came thick with rage, and his limbs trembled.

"Slay him!" he hissed. "Slay the dog and all those with him!"

"Now we come to a game which I can play," answered Umslopogaas. "Ho, People of the Axe! Will you stand to be slaughtered by these singed rats?" and he pointed with Groan-Maker at those warriors who had escaped without hurt in the fire, but whose faces the fire had scorched.

Then for answer a great shout went up, a shout and a roar of laughter. And this was the shout:--

"No, Slaughterer, not so are we minded!" and right and left they faced to meet the foe, while from all along the companies came the crackling of the shaken shields.

Back sprang Umslopogaas to head his men; forward leaped the soldiers of the king to work the king's will, if so they might. And Galazi the Wolf also sprang forward, towards Dingaan, and, as he sprang, swung up the Watcher, crying in a great voice:--

"Hold!"

Again there was silence, for men saw that the shadow of the Watcher lay dark upon the head of Dingaan.

"It is a pity that many should die when one will suffice," cried the Wolf again. "Let a blow be struck, and where his shadow lies there shall the Watcher be, and lo! the world will lack a king. A word, King!"

Now Dingaan looked up at the great man who stood above him, and felt the shadow of the shining club lie cold upon his brow, and again he shook--this time it was with fear.

"Begone in peace!" he said.

"A good word for thee, King," said the Wolf, grinning, and slowly he drew himself backwards towards the companies, saying, "Praise the king! The king bids his children go in peace."

But when Dingaan felt that his brow was no longer cold with the shadow of death his rage came back to him, and he would have called to

the soldiers to fall upon the People of the Axe, only I stayed him,
saying:--

"Thy death is in it, O King; the Slaughterer will grind such men as thou
hast here beneath his feet, and then once more shall the Watcher look
upon thee."

Now Dingaan saw that this was true, and gave no command, for he had only
those men with him whom the fire had left. All the rest were gone to
slaughter the Boers in Natal. Still, he must have blood, so he turned on
me.

"Thou art a traitor, Mopo, as I have known for long, and I will serve
thee as yonder dog served his faithless servant!" and he thrust at me
with the assegai in his hand.

But I saw the stroke, and, springing high into the air, avoided it.
Then I turned and fled very swiftly, and after me came certain of the
soldiers. The way was not far to the last company of the People of the
Axe; moreover, it saw me coming, and, headed by Umslopogaas, who walked
behind them all, ran to meet me. Then the soldiers who followed to kill
me hung back out of reach of the axe.

"Here with the king is no place for me any more, my son," I said to
Umslopogaas.

"Fear not, my father, I will find you a place," he answered.

Then I called a message to the soldiers who followed me, saying:--

"Tell this to the king: that he has done ill to drive me from him, for I, Mopo, set him on the throne and I alone can hold him there. Tell him this also, that he will do yet worse to seek me where I am, for that day when we are once more face to face shall be his day of death. Thus speaks Mopo the inyanga, Mopo the doctor, who never yet prophesied that which should not be."

Then we marched from the kraal Umgugundhlovu, and when next I saw that kraal it was to burn all of it which Dingaan had left unburnt, and when next I saw Dingaan--ah! that is to be told of, my father.

We marched from the kraal, none hindering us, for there were none to hinder, and after we had gone a little way Umslopogaas halted and said:--

"Now it is in my mind to return whence we came and slay this Dingaan, ere he slay me."

"Yet it is well to leave a frightened lion in his thicket, my son, for a lion at bay is hard to handle. Doubt not that every man, young and old, in Umgugundhlovu now stands armed about the gates, lest such a thought should take you, my son; and though just now he was afraid, yet Dingaan

will strike for his life. When you might have killed you did not kill; now the hour has gone."

"Wise words!" said Galazi. "I would that the Watcher had fallen where his shadow fell."

"What is your counsel now, father?" asked Umslopogaas.

"This, then: that you two should abide no more beneath the shadow of the Ghost Mountain, but should gather your people and your cattle, and pass to the north on the track of Mosilikatze the Lion, who broke away from Chaka. There you may rule apart or together, and never dream of Dingaan."

"I will not do that, father," he answered. "I will dwell beneath the shadow of the Ghost Mountain while I may."

"And so will I," said Galazi, "or rather among its rocks. What! shall my wolves lack a master when they would go a-hunting? Shall Greysnout and Blackfang, Blood and Deathgrip, and their company black and grey, howl for me in vain?"

"So be it, children. Ye are young and will not listen to the counsel of the old. Let it befall as it chances."

I spoke thus, for I did not know then why Umslopogaas would not leave

his kraals. It was for this reason: because he had bidden Nada to meet him there.

Afterwards, when he found her he would have gone, but then the sky was clear, the danger-clouds had melted for awhile.

Oh! that Umslopogaas my fosterling had listened to me! Now he would have reigned as a king, not wandered an outcast in strange lands I know not where; and Nada should have lived, not died, nor would the People of the Axe have ceased to be a people.

This of Dingaan. When he heard my message he grew afraid once more, for he knew me to be no liar.

Therefore he held his hand for awhile, sending no impi to smite Umslopogaas, lest it might come about that I should bring him his death as I had promised. And before the fear had worn away, it happened that Dingaan's hands were full with the war against the Amaboona, because of his slaughter of the white people, and he had no soldiers to spare with whom to wreak vengeance on a petty chief living far away.

Yet his rage was great because of what had chanced, and, after his custom, he murdered many innocent people to satisfy it.