

CHAPTER XXIX. MOPO TELLS HIS TALE

Now afterwards, as we went upon our road, Umslopogaas told me all there was to tell of the slaying of the Halakazi and of the finding of Nada.

When I heard that Nada, my daughter, still lived, I wept for joy, though like Umslopogaas I was torn by doubt and fear, for it is far for an unaided maid to travel from Swaziland to the Ghost Mountain. Yet all this while I said nothing to Umslopogaas of the truth as to his birth, because on the journey there were many around us, and the very trees have ears, and the same wind to which we whispered might whisper to the king. Still I knew that the hour had come now when I must speak, for it was in my mind to bring it about that Umslopogaas should be proclaimed the son of Chaka, and be made king of the Zulus in the place of Dingaan, his uncle. Yet all these things had gone cross for us, because it was fated so, my father. Had I known that Umslopogaas still lived when I slew Chaka, then I think that I could have brought it about that he should be king. Or had things fallen out as I planned, and the Lily maid been brought to Dingaan, and Umslopogaas grew great in his sight, then, perhaps, I could have brought it about. But all things had gone wrong. The Lily was none other than Nada; and how could Umslopogaas give Nada, whom he thought his sister, and who was my daughter, to Dingaan against her will? Also, because of Nada, Dingaan and Umslopogaas were now at bitter enmity, and for this same cause I was disgraced and a fugitive, and my counsels would no longer be heard in the ear of the king.

So everything must be begun afresh: and as I walked with the impi towards the Ghost Mountain, I thought much and often of the manner in which this might be done. But as yet I said nothing.

Now at last we were beneath the Ghost Mountain, and looked upon the face of the old Witch who sits there aloft forever waiting for the world to die; and that same night we came to the kraal of the People of the Axe, and entered it with a great singing. But Galazi did not enter at that time; he was away to the mountain to call his flock of wolves, and as we passed its foot we heard the welcome that the wolves howled in greeting to him.

Now as we drew near the kraal, all the women and children came out to meet us, headed by Zinita, the head wife of Umslopogaas. They came joyfully, but when they found how many were wanting who a moon before had gone thence to fight, their joy was turned to mourning, and the voice of their weeping went up to heaven.

Umslopogaas greeted Zinita kindly; and yet I thought that there was something lacking. At first she spoke to him softly, but when she learned all that had come to pass, her words were not soft, for she reviled me and sang a loud song at Umslopogaas.

"See now, Slaughterer," she said, "see now what has come about because you listened to this aged fool!"--that was I, my father--"this fool who calls himself 'Mouth'! Ay, a mouth he is, a mouth out of which proceed

folly and lies! What did he counsel you to do?--to go up against these Halakazi and win a girl for Dingaan! And what have you done?--you have fallen upon the Halakazi, and doubtless have killed many innocent people with that great axe of yours, also you have left nearly half of the soldiers of the Axe to whiten in the Swazi caves, and in exchange have brought back certain cattle of a small breed, and girls and children whom we must nourish!

"Nor does the matter end here. You went, it seems, to win a girl whom Dingaan desired, yet when you find that girl you let her go, because, indeed, you say she was your sister and would not wed Dingaan. Forsooth, is not the king good enough for this sister of yours? Now what is the end of the tale? You try to play tricks on the king, because of your sister, and are found out. Then you kill a man before Dingaan and escape, bringing this fool of an aged Mouth with you, that he may teach you his own folly. So you have lost half of your men, and you have gained the king for a foe who shall bring about the death of all of us, and a fool for a councillor. Wow! Slaughterer, keep to your trade and let others find you wit."

Thus she spoke without ceasing, and there was some truth in her words. Zinita had a bitter tongue. I sat silent till she had finished, and Umslopogaas also remained silent, though his anger was great, because there was no crack in her talk through which a man might thrust a word.

"Peace, woman!" I said at length, "do not speak ill of those who are

wise and who had seen much before you were born."

"Speak no ill of him who is my father," growled Umslopogaas. "Ay! though you do not know it, this Mouth whom you revile is Mopo, my father."

"Then there is a man among the People of the Axe who has a fool for a father. Of all tidings this is the worst."

"There is a man among the People of the Axe who has a jade and a scold for a wife," said Umslopogaas, springing up. "Begone, Zinita!--and know this, that if I hear you snarl such words of him who is my father, you shall go further than your own hut, for I will put you away and drive you from my kraal. I have suffered you too long."

"I go," said Zinita. "Oh! I am well served! I made you chief, and now you threaten to put me away."

"My own hands made me chief," said Umslopogaas, and, springing up, he thrust her from the hut.

"It is a poor thing to be wedded to such a woman, my father," he said presently.

"Yes, a poor thing, Umslopogaas, yet these are the burdens that men must bear. Learn wisdom from it, Umslopogaas, and have as little to do with women as may be; at the least, do not love them overmuch, so shall

you find the more peace." Thus I spoke, smiling, and would that he had listened to my counsel, for it is the love of women which has brought ruin on Umslopogaas!

All this was many years ago, and but lately I have heard that Umslopogaas is fled into the North, and become a wanderer to his death because of the matter of a woman who had betrayed him, making it seem that he had murdered one Loustra, who was his blood brother, just as Galazi had been. I do not know how it came about, but he who was so fierce and strong had that weakness like his uncle Dingaan, and it has destroyed him at the last, and for this cause I shall behold him no more.

Now, my father, for awhile we were silent and alone in the hut, and as we sat I thought I heard a rat stir in the thatch.

Then I spoke. "Umslopogaas, at length the hour has come that I should whisper something into your ear, a word which I have held secret ever since you were born."

"Speak on, my father," he said, wondering.

I crept to the door of the hut and looked out. The night was dark and I could see none about, and could hear no one move, yet, being cautious, I walked round the hut. Ah, my father, when you have a secret to tell, be not so easily deceived. It is not enough to look forth and to peer

round. Dig beneath the floor, and search the roof also; then, having done all this, go elsewhere and tell your tale. The woman was right: I was but a fool, for all my wisdom and my white hairs. Had I not been a fool I would have smoked out that rat in the thatch before ever I opened my lips. For the rat was Zinita, my father--Zinita, who had climbed the hut, and now lay there in the dark, her ear upon the smoke-hole, listening to every word that passed. It was a wicked thing to do, and, moreover, the worst of omens, but there is little honour among women when they learn that which others wish to hide away from them, nor, indeed, do they then weight omens.

So having searched and found nothing, I spoke to Umslopogaas, my fosterling, not knowing that death in a woman's shape lay on the hut above us. "Hearken," I said, "you are no son of mine, Umslopogaas, though you have called me father from a babe. You spring from a loftier stock, Slaughterer."

"Yet I was well pleased with my fathering, old man," said Umslopogaas.

"The breed is good enough for me. Say, then, whose son am I?"

Now I bent forward and whispered to him, yet, alas! not low enough. "You are the son of the Black One who is dead, yea, sprung from the blood of Chaka and of Baleka, my sister."

"I still have some kinship with you then, Mopo, and that I am glad of.

Wow! who would have guessed that I was the son of the Silwana, of that

hyena man? Perhaps it is for this reason that, like Galazi, I love the company of the wolves, though no love grows in my heart for my father or any of his house."

"You have little cause to love him, Umslopogaas, for he murdered your mother, Baleka, and would have slain you also. But you are the son of Chaka and of no other man."

"Well, his eyes must be keen indeed, my uncle, who can pick his own father out of a crowd. And yet I once heard this tale before, though I had long forgotten it."

"From whom did you hear it, Umslopogaas? An hour since, it was known to one alone, the others are dead who knew it. Now it is known to two"--ah! my father, I did not guess of the third;--"from whom, then, did you hear it?"

"It was from the dead; at least, Galazi the Wolf heard it from the dead One who sat in the cave on Ghost Mountain, for the dead One told him that a man would come to be his brother who should be named Umslopogaas Bulalio, son of Chaka, and Galazi repeated it to me, but I had long forgotten it."

"It seems that there is wisdom among the dead," I answered, "for lo! to-day you are named Umslopogaas Bulalio, and to-day I declare you the son of Chaka. But listen to my tale."

Then I told him all the story from the hour of his birth onwards, and when I spoke of the words of his mother, Baleka, after I had told my dream to her, and of the manner of her death by the command of Chaka, and of the great fashion in which she had died, then, I say, Umslopogaas wept, who, I think, seldom wept before or after. But as my tale drew it its end I saw that he listened ill, as a man listens who has a weightier matter pressing on his heart, and before it was well done he broke in:--

"So, Mopo, my uncle, if I am the son of Chaka and Baleka, Nada the Lily is no sister to me."

"Nay, Umslopogaas, she is only your cousin."

"Over near of blood," he said; "yet that shall not stand between us," and his face grew glad.

I looked at him in question.

"You grow dull, my uncle. This is my meaning: that I will marry Nada if she still lives, for it comes upon me now that I have never loved any woman as I love Nada the Lily," and while he spoke, I heard the rat stir in the thatch of the hut.

"Wed her if you will, Umslopogaas," I answered, "yet I think that one Zinita, your Inkosikasi, will find words to say in the matter."

"Zinita is my head wife indeed, but shall she hold me back from taking other wives, after the lawful custom of our people?" he asked angrily, and his anger showed that he feared the wrath of Zinita.

"The custom is lawful and good," I said, "but it has bred trouble at times. Zinita can have little to say if she continues in her place and you still love her as of old. But enough of her. Nada is not yet at your gates, and perhaps she will never find them. See, Umslopogaas, it is my desire that you should rule in Zululand by right of blood, and, though things point otherwise, yet I think a way can be found to bring it about."

"How so?" he asked.

"Thus: Many of the great chiefs who are friends to me hate Dingaan and fear him, and did they know that a son of Chaka lived, and that son the Slaughterer, he well might climb to the throne upon their shoulders. Also the soldiers love the name of Chaka, though he dealt cruelly with them, because at least he was brave and generous. But they do not love Dingaan, for his burdens are the burdens of Chaka but his gifts are the gifts of Dingaan; therefore they would welcome Chaka's son if once they knew him for certain. But it is here that the necklet chafes, for there is but my word to prove it. Yet I will try."

"Perhaps it is worth trying and perhaps it is not, my uncle," answered

Umslopogaas. "One thing I know: I had rather see Nada at my gates to-night than hear all the chiefs in the land crying 'Hail, O King!'"

"You will live to think otherwise, Umslopogaas; and now spies must be set at the kraal Umgugundhlovu to give us warning of the mind of the king, lest he should send an impi suddenly to eat you up. Perhaps his hands may be too full for that ere long, for those white Amaboona will answer his assegais with bullets. And one more word: let nothing be said of this matter of your birth, least of all to Zinita your wife, or to any other woman."

"Fear not, uncle," he answered; "I know how to be silent."

Now after awhile Umslopogaas left me and went to the hut of Zinita, his Inkosikasi, where she lay wrapped in her blankets, and, as it seemed, asleep.

"Greeting, my husband," she said slowly, like one who wakens. "I have dreamed a strange dream of you. I dreamed that you were called a king, and that all the regiments of the Zulus filed past giving you the royal salute, Bayete."

Umslopogaas looked at her wondering, for he did not know if she had learned something or if this was an omen. "Such dreams are dangerous," he said, "and he who dreams them does well to lock them fast till they be forgotten."

"Or fulfilled," said Zinita, and again Umslopogaas looked at her wondering.

Now after this night I began my work, for I established spies at the kraal of Dingaan, and from them I learned all that passed with the king.

At first he gave orders that an impi should be summoned to eat up the People of the Axe, but afterwards came tidings that the Boers, to the number of five hundred mounted men, were marching on the kraal Umgugundhlovu. So Dingaan had no impi to spare to send to the Ghost Mountain, and we who were beneath its shadow dwelt there in peace.

This time the Boers were beaten, for Bogoza, the spy, led them into an ambush; still few were killed, and they did but draw back that they might jump the further, and Dingaan knew this. At this time also the English white men of Natal, the people of George, who attacked Dingaan by the Lower Tugela, were slain by our soldiers, and those with them.

Also, by the help of certain witch-doctors, I filled the land with rumours, prophecies, and dark sayings, and I worked cunningly on the minds of many chiefs that were known to me, sending them messages hardly to be understood, such as should prepare their thoughts for the coming of one who should be declared to them. They listened, but the task was long, for the men dwelt far apart, and some of them were away with the regiments.

So the time went by, till many days had passed since we reached the Ghost Mountain. Umslopogaas had no more words with Zinita, but she always watched him, and he went heavily. For he awaited Nada, and Nada did not come.

But at length Nada came.