

CHAPTER XXX. THE COMING OF NADA

One night--it was a night of full moon--I sat alone with Umslopogaas in my hut, and we spoke of the matter of our plots; then, when we had finished that talk, we spoke of Nada the Lily.

"Alas! my uncle," said Umslopogaas sadly, "we shall never look more on Nada; she is surely dead or in bonds, otherwise she had been here long ago. I have sought far and wide, and can hear no tidings and find nothing."

"All that is hidden is not lost," I answered, yet I myself believed that there was an end of Nada.

Then we were silent awhile, and presently, in the silence, a dog barked. We rose, and crept out of the hut to see what it might be that stirred, for the night drew on, and it was needful to be wary, since a dog might bark at the stirring of a leaf, or perhaps it might be the distant footfall of an impi that it heard.

We had not far to look, for standing gazing at the huts, like one who is afraid to call, was a tall slim man, holding an assegai in one hand and a little shield in the other. We could not see the face of the man, because the light was behind him, and a ragged blanket hung about his shoulders. Also, he was footsore, for he rested on one leg. Now we were peering round the hut, and its shadow hid us, so that the man saw

nothing. For awhile he stood still, then he spoke to himself, and his voice was strangely soft.

"Here are many huts," said the voice, "now how may I know which is the house of my brother? Perhaps if I call I shall bring soldiers to me, and be forced to play the man before them, and I am weary of that. Well, I will lie here under the fence till morning; it is a softer bed than some I have found, and I am worn out with travel--sleep I must," and the figure sighed and turned so that the light of the moon fell full upon its face.

My father, it was the face of Nada, my daughter, whom I had not seen for so many years, yet across the years I knew it at once; yes, though the bud had become a flower I knew it. The face was weary and worn, but ah! it was beautiful, never before nor since have I seen such beauty, for there was this about the loveliness of my daughter, the Lily: it seemed to flow from within--yes, as light will flow through the thin rind of a gourd, and in that she differed from the other women of our people, who, when they are fair are fair with the flesh alone.

Now my heart went out to Nada as she stood in the moonlight, one forsaken, not having where to lay her head, Nada, who alone was left alive of all my children. I motioned to Umslopogaas to hide himself in the shadow, and stepped forward.

"Ho!" I said roughly, "who are you, wanderer, and what do you here?"

Now Nada started like a frightened bird, but quickly gathered up her thoughts, and turned upon me in a lordly way.

"Who are you that ask me?" she said, feigning a man's voice.

"One who can use a stick upon thieves and night-prowlers, boy. Come, show your business or be moving. You are not of this people; surely that moocha is of a Swazi make, and here we do not love Swazis."

"Were you not old, I would beat you for your insolence," said Nada, striving to look brave and all the while searching a way to escape.

"Also, I have no stick, only a spear, and that is for warriors, not for an old umfagozan like you." Ay, my father, I lived to hear my daughter name me an umfagozan--a low fellow!

Now making pretence to be angry, I leaped at her with my kerrie up, and, forgetting her courage, she dropped her spear, and uttered a little scream. But she still held the shield before her face. I seized her by the arm, and struck a blow upon the shield with my kerrie--it would scarcely have crushed a fly, but this brave warrior trembled sorely.

"Where now is your valour, you who name me umfagozan?" I said: "you who cry like a maid and whose arm is soft as a maid's."

She made no answer, but hugged her tattered blanket round her, and

shifting my grip from her arm, I seized it and rent it, showing her breast and shoulder; then I let her go, laughing, and said:--

"Lo! here is the warrior that would beat an old umfagozan for his insolence, a warrior well shaped for war! Now, my pretty maid who wander at night in the garment of a man, what tale have you to tell? Swift with it, lest I drag you to the chief as his prize! The old man seeks a new wife, they tell me?"

Now when Nada saw that I had discovered her she threw down the shield after the spear, as a thing that was of no more use, and hung her head sullenly. But when I spoke of dragging her to the chief then she flung herself upon the ground, and clasped my knees, for since I called him old, she thought that this chief could not be Umslopogaas.

"Oh, my father," said the Lily, "oh, my father, have pity on me! Yes, yes! I am a girl, a maid--no wife--and you who are old, you, perchance have daughters such as I, and in their name I ask for pity. My father, I have journeyed far, I have endured many things, to find my way to a kraal where my brother rules, and now it seems I have come to the wrong kraal. Forgive me that I spoke to you so, my father; it was but a woman's feint, and I was hard pressed to hide my sex, for my father, you know it is ill to be a lonely girl among strange men."

Now I said nothing in answer, for this reason only: that when I heard Nada call me father, not knowing me, and saw her clasp my knees and pray

to me in my daughter's name, I, who was childless save for her, went nigh to weeping. But she thought that I did not answer her because I was angry, and about to drag her to this unknown chief, and implored me the more even with tears.

"My father," she said, "do not this wicked thing by me. Let me go and show me the path that I shall ask: you who are old, you know that I am too fair to be dragged before this chief of yours. Hearken! All I knew are dead, I am alone except for this brother I seek. Oh! if you betray me may such a fate fall upon your own daughter also! May she also know the day of slavery, and the love that she wills not!" and she ceased, sobbing.

Now I turned my head and spoke towards the hut, "Chief," I said, "your Ehlose is kind to you to-night, for he has given you a maid fair as the Lily of the Halakazi"--here Nada glanced up wildly. "Come, then, and take the girl."

Now Nada turned to snatch up the assegai from the ground, but whether to kill me, or the chief she feared so much, or herself, I do not know, and as she turned, in her woe she called upon the name of Umslopogaas. She found the assegai, and straightened herself again. And lo! there before her stood a tall chief leaning on an axe; but the old man who threatened her was gone--not very far, in truth, but round the corner of the hut.

Now Nada the Lily looked, then rubbed her eyes, and looked again.

"Surely I dream?" she said at last. "But now I spoke to an old man, and in his place there stands before me the shape of one whom I desire to see."

"I thought, Maiden, that the voice of a certain Nada called upon one Umslopogaas," said he who leaned upon the axe.

"Ay, I called: but where is the old man who treated me so scurvily? Nay, what does it matter?--where he is, there let him stop. At least, you are Umslopogaas, my brother, or should be by your greatness and the axe. To the man I cannot altogether swear in this light; but to the axe I can swear, for once it passed so very near my eyes."

Thus she spoke on, gaining time, and all the while she watched Umslopogaas till she was sure that it was he and no other. Then she ceased talking, and, flinging herself on him, she kissed him.

"Now I trust that Zinita sleeps sound," murmured Umslopogaas, for suddenly he remembered that Nada was no sister of his, as she thought.

Nevertheless, he took her by the hand and said, "Enter, sister. Of all maidens in the world you are the most welcome here, for know I believed you dead."

But I, Mopo, ran into the hut before her, and when she entered she found

me sitting by the fire.

"Now, here, my brother," said Nada, pointing at me with her finger, "here is that old umfagozan, that low fellow, who, unless I dream, but a very little while ago brought shame upon me--ay, my brother, he struck me, a maid, with his kerrie, and that only because I said that I would stab him for his insolence, and he did worse: he swore that he would drag me to some old chief of his to be a gift to him, and this he was about to do, had you not come. Will you suffer these things to go unpunished, my brother?"

Now Umslopogaas smiled grimly, and I answered:--

"What was it that you called me just now, Nada, when you prayed me to protect you? Father, was it not?" and I turned my face towards the blaze of the fire, so that the full light fell upon it.

"Yes, I called you father, old man. It is not strange, for a homeless wanderer must find fathers where she can--and yet! no, it cannot be--so changed--and that white hand? And yet, oh! who are you? Once there was a man named Mopo, and he had a little daughter, and she was called Nada--Oh! my father, my father, I know you now!"

"Ay, Nada, and I knew you from the first; through all your man's wrappings I knew you after these many years."

So the Lily fell upon my neck and sobbed there, and I remember that I also wept.

Now when she had sobbed her fill of joy, Umslopogaas brought Nada the Lily mass to eat and mealie porridge. She ate the curdled milk, but the porridge she would not eat, saying that she was too weary.

Then she told us all the tale of her wanderings since she had fled away from the side of Umslopogaas at the stronghold of the Halakazi, and it was long, so long that I will not repeat it, for it is a story by itself. This I will say only: that Nada was captured by robbers, and for awhile passed herself off among them as a youth. But, in the end, they found her out and would have given her as a wife to their chief, only she persuaded them to kill the chief and make her their ruler. They did this because of that medicine of the eyes which Nada had only among women, for as she ruled the Halakazi so she ruled the robbers. But, at the last, they all loved her, and she gave it out that she would wed the strongest. Then some of them fell to fighting, and while they killed each other--for it came about that Nada brought death upon the robbers as on all others--she escaped, for she said that she did not wish to look upon their struggle but would await the upshot in a place apart.

After that she had many further adventures, but at length she met an old woman who guided her on her way to the Ghost Mountain. And who this old woman was none could discover, but Galazi swore afterwards that she was the Stone Witch of the mountain, who put on the shape of an aged woman

to guide Nada to Umslopogaas, to be the sorrow and the joy of the People of the Axe. I do not know, my father, yet it seems to me that the old witch would scarcely have put off her stone for so small a matter.

Now, when Nada had made an end of her tale, Umslopogaas told his, of how things had gone with Dingaana. When he told her how he had given the body of the girl to the king, saying that it was the Lily's stalk, she said it had been well done; and when he spoke of the slaying of the traitor she clapped her hands, though Nada, whose heart was gentle, did not love to hear of deeds of death. At last he finished, and she was somewhat sad, and said it seemed that her fate followed her, and that now the People of the Axe were in danger at the hands of Dingaana because of her.

"Ah! my brother," she cried, taking Umslopogaas by the hand, "it were better I should die than that I should bring evil upon you also."

"That would not mend matters, Nada," he answered. "For whether you be dead or alive, the hate of Dingaana is already earned. Also, Nada, know this: I am not your brother."

When the Lily heard these words she uttered a little cry, and, letting fall the hand of Umslopogaas, clasped mine, shrinking up against me.

"What is this tale, father?" she asked. "He who was my twin, he with whom I have been bred up, says that he has deceived me these many years, that he is not my brother; who, then, is he, father?"

"He is your cousin, Nada."

"Ah," she answered, "I am glad. It would have grieved me had he whom I loved been shown to be but a stranger in whom I have no part," and she smiled a little in the eyes and at the corners of her mouth. "But tell me this tale also."

So I told her the tale of the birth of Umslopogaas, for I trusted her.

"Ah," she said, when I had finished, "ah! you come of a bad stock, Umslopogaas, though it is a kingly one. I shall love you little henceforth, child of the hyena man."

"Then that is bad news," said Umslopogaas, "for know, Nada, I desire now that you should love me more than ever--that you should be my wife and love me as your husband!"

Now the Lily's face grew sad and sweet, and all the hidden mockery went out of her talk--for Nada loved to mock.

"Did you not speak to me on that night in the Halakazi caves, Umslopogaas, of one Zinita, who is your wife, and Inkosikaas of the People of the Axe?"

Then the brow of Umslopogaas darkened: "What of Zinita?" he said. "It is

true she is my chieftainess; is it not allowed a man to take more than one wife?"

"So I trust," answered Nada, smiling, "else men would go unwed for long, for few maids would marry them who then must labour alone all their days. But, Umslopogaas, if there are twenty wives, yet one must be first. Now this has come about hitherto: that wherever I have been it has been thrust upon me to be first, and perhaps it might be thus once more--what then, Umslopogaas?"

"Let the fruit ripen before you pluck it, Nada," he answered. "If you love me and will wed me, it is enough."

"I pray that it may not be more than enough," she said, stretching out her hand to him. "Listen, Umslopogaas: ask my father here what were the words I spoke to him many years ago, before I was a woman, when, with my mother, Macropha, I left him to go among the Swazi people. It was after you had been borne away by the lion, Umslopogaas, I told my father that I would marry no man all my life, because I loved only you, who were dead. My father reproached me, saying that I must not speak thus of my brother, but it was my heart which spoke, and it spoke truly; for see, Umslopogaas, you are no brother to me! I have kept that vow. How many men have sort me in wedlock since I became a woman, Umslopogaas? I tell you that they are as the leaves upon a tree. Yet I have given myself to none, and this has been my fortune: that none have sought to constrain me to marriage. Now I have my reward, for he whom I lost is found again,

and to him alone I give my love. Yet, Umslopogaas, beware! Little luck has come to those who have loved me in the past; no, not even to those who have but sought to look on me."

"I will bear the risk, Nada," the Slaughterer answered, and gathering her to his great breast he kissed her.

Presently she slipped from his arms and bade him begone, for she was weary and would rest.

So he went.