

CHAPTER XXXI. THE WAR OF THE WOMEN

Now on the morrow at daybreak, leaving his wolves, Galazi came down from the Ghost Mountain and passed through the gates of the kraal.

In front of my hut he saw Nada the Lily and saluted her, for each remembered the other. Then he walked on to the place of assembly and spoke to me.

"So the Star of Death has risen on the People of the Axe, Mopo," he said. "Was it because of her coming that my grey people howled so strangely last night? I cannot tell, but I know this, the Star shone first on me this morning, and that is my doom. Well, she is fair enough to be the doom of many, Mopo," and he laughed and passed on, swinging the Watcher. But his words troubled me, though they were foolish; for I could not but remember that wherever the beauty of Nada had pleased the sight of men, there men had been given to death.

Then I went to lead Nada to the place of assembly and found her awaiting me. She was dressed now in some woman's garments that I had brought her; her curling hair fell upon her shoulders; on her wrist and neck and knee were bracelets of ivory, and in her hand she bore a lily bloom which she had gathered as she went to bathe in the river. Perhaps she did this, my father, because she wished here, as elsewhere, to be known as the Lily, and it is the Zulu fashion to name people from some such trifle. But who can know a woman's reason, or whether a thing is by chance alone, my

father? Also she had begged me of a cape I had; it was cunningly made by Basutus, of the whitest feathers of the ostrich; this she put about her shoulders, and it hung down to her middle. It had been a custom with Nada from childhood not to go about as do other girls, naked except for their girdles, for she would always find some rag or skin to lie upon her breast. Perhaps it was because her skin was fairer than that of other women, or perhaps because she knew that she who hides her beauty often seems the loveliest, or because there was truth in the tale of her white blood and the fashion came to her with the blood. I do not know, my father; at the least she did so.

Now I took Nada by the hand and led her through the morning air to the place of assembly, and ah! she was sweeter than the air and fairer than the dawn.

There were many people in the place of assembly, for it was the day of the monthly meeting of the council of the headmen, and there also were all the women of the kraal, and at their head stood Zinita. Now it had got about that the girl whom the Slaughterer went to seek in the caves of the Halakazi had come to the kraal of the People of the Axe, and all eyes watched for her.

"Wow!" said the men as she passed smiling, looking neither to the right nor to the left, yet seeing all--"Wow! but this flower is fair! Little wonder that the Halakazi died for her!"

The women looked also, but they said nothing of the beauty of Nada; they scarcely seemed to see it.

"That is she for whose sake so many of our people lie unburied," said one.

"Where, then, does she find her fine clothes?" quoth another, "she who came here last night a footsore wanderer?"

"Feathers are not enough for her: look! she must bear flowers also. Surely they are fitter to her hands than the handle of a hoe," said a third.

"Now I think that the chief of the People of the Axe will find one to worship above the axe, and that some will be left mourning," put in a fourth, glancing at Zinita and the other women of the household of the Slaughterer.

Thus they spoke, throwing words like assegais, and Nada heard them all, and knew their meaning, but she never ceased from smiling. Only Zinita said nothing, but stood looking at Nada from beneath her bent brows, while by one hand she held the little daughter of Umslopogaas, her child, and with the other played with the beads about her neck.

Presently, we passed her, and Nada, knowing well who this must be, turned her eyes full upon the angry eyes of Zinita, and held them there awhile. Now what there was in the glance of Nada I cannot say, but I

know that Zinita, who was afraid of few things, found something to fear in it. At the least, it was she who turned her head away, and the Lily passed on smiling, and greeted Umslopogaas with a little nod.

"Hail, Nada!" said the Slaughterer. Then he turned to his headmen and spoke: "This is she whom we went to the caves of the Halakazi to seek for Dingaan. Ou! the story is known now; one told it up at the kraal Umgugundhlovu who shall tell it no more. She prayed me to save her from Dingaan, and so I did, and all would have gone well had it not been for a certain traitor who is done with, for I took another to Dingaan. Look on her now, my friends, and say if I did not well to win her--the Lily flower, such as there is no other in the world, to be the joy of the People of the Axe and a wife to me."

With one accord the headmen answered: "Indeed you did well, Slaughterer," for the glamour of Nada was upon them and they would cherish her as others had cherished her. Only Galazi the Wolf shook his head. But he said nothing, for words do not avail against fate. Now as I found afterwards, since Zinita, the head wife of Umslopogaas, had learned of what stock he was, she had known that Nada was no sister to him. Yet when she heard him declare that he was about to take the Lily to wife she turned upon him, saying:--

"How can this be, Lord?"

"Why do you ask, Zinita?" he answered. "Is it not allowed to a man to

take another wife if he will?"

"Surely, Lord," she said; "but men do not wed their sisters, and I have heard that it was because this Nada was your sister that you saved her from Dingaan, and brought the wrath of Dingaan upon the People of the Axe, the wrath that shall destroy them."

"So I thought then, Zinita," he answered; "now I know otherwise. Nada is daughter to Mopo yonder indeed, but he is no father to me, though he has been named so, nor was the mother of Nada my mother. That is so, Councillors."

Then Zinita looked at me and muttered, "O fool of a Mouth, not for nothing did I fear evil at your hands."

I heard the words and took no note, and she spoke again to Umslopogaas, saying: "Here is a mystery, O Lord Bulalio. Will it then please you to declare to us who is your father?"

"I have no father," he answered, waxing wroth; "the heavens above are my father. I am born of Blood and Fire, and she, the Lily, is born of Beauty to be my mate. Now, woman, be silent." He thought awhile, and added, "Nay, if you will know, my father was Indabazimbi the Witch-finder, the smeller-out of the king, the son of Arpi." This Umslopogaas said at a hazard, since, having denied me, he must declare a father, and dared not name the Black One who was gone. But in

after years the saying was taken up in the land, and it was told that Umslopogaas was the son of Indabazimbi the Witch-finder, who had long ago fled the land; nor did he deny it. For when all this game had been played out he would not have it known that he was the son of Chaka, he who no longer sought to be a king, lest he should bring down the wrath of Panda upon him.

When the people heard this they thought that Umslopogaas mocked Zinita, and yet in his anger he spoke truth when he said first that he was born of the "heavens above," for so we Zulus name the king, and so the witch-doctor Indabazimbi named Chaka on the day of the great smelling out. But they did not take it in this sense. They held that he spoke truly when he gave it out that he was born of Indabazimbi the Witch-doctor, who had fled the land, whither I do not know.

Then Nada turned to Zinita and spoke to her in a sweet and gentle voice: "If I am not sister to Bulalio, yet I shall soon be sister to you who are the Chief's Inkosikaas, Zinita. Shall that not satisfy you, and will you not greet me kindly and with a kiss of peace, who have come from far to be your sister, Zinita?" and Nada held out her hands towards her, though whether she did this from the heart or because she would put herself in the right before the people I do not know. But Zinita scowled, and jerked at her necklace of beads, breaking the string on which they were threaded, so that the beads rolled upon the black earthen floor this way and that.

"Keep your kisses for our lord, girl," Zinita said roughly. "As my beads are scattered so shall you scatter this People of the Axe."

Now Nada turned away with a little sigh, and the people murmured, for they thought that Zinita had treated her badly. Then she stretched out her hand again, and gave the lily in it to Umslopogaas, saying:--

"Here is a token of our betrothal, Lord, for never a head of cattle have my father and I to send--we who are outcasts; and, indeed, the bridegroom must pay the cattle. May I bring you peace and love, my Lord!"

Umslopogaas took the flower, and looked somewhat foolish with it--he who was wont to carry the axe, and not a flower; and so that talk was ended.

Now as it chanced, this was that day of the year when, according to ancient custom, the Holder of the Axe must challenge all and sundry to come up against him to fight in single combat for Groan-Maker and the chieftainship of the people. Therefore, when the talk was done, Umslopogaas rose and went through the challenge, not thinking that any would answer him, since for some years none had dared to stand before his might. Yet three men stepped forward, and of these two were captains, and men whom the Slaughterer loved. With all the people, he looked at them astonished.

"How is this?" he said in a low voice to that captain who was nearest

and who would do battle with him.

For answer the man pointed to the Lily, who stood by. Then Umslopogaas understood that because of the medicine of Nada's beauty all men desired to win her, and, since he who could win the axe would take her also, he must look to fight with many. Well, fight he must or be shamed.

Of the fray there is little to tell. Umslopogaas killed first one man and then the other, and swiftly, for, growing fearful, the third did not come up against him.

"Ah!" said Galazi, who watched, "what did I tell you, Mopo? The curse begins to work. Death walks ever with that daughter of yours, old man."

"I fear so," I answered, "and yet the maiden is fair and good and sweet."

"That will not mend matters," said Galazi.

Now on that day Umslopogaas took Nada the Lily to wife, and for awhile there was peace and quiet. But this evil thing came upon Umslopogaas, that, from the day when he wedded Nada, he hated even to look upon Zinita, and not at her alone, but on all his other wives also. Galazi said it was because Nada had bewitched him, but I know well that the only witcheries she used were the medicine of her eyes, her beauty, and her love. Still, it came to pass that henceforward, and until she had

long been dead, the Slaughterer loved her, and her alone, and that is a strange sickness to come upon a man.

As may be guessed, my father, Zinita and the other women took this ill. They waited awhile, indeed, thinking that it would wear away, then they began to murmur, both to their husband and in the ears of other people, till at length there were two parties in the town, the party of Zinita and the party of Nada.

The party of Zinita was made up of women and of certain men who loved and feared their wives, but that of Nada was the greatest, and it was all of men, with Umslopogaas at the head of them, and from this division came much bitterness abroad, and quarrelling in the huts. Yet neither the Lily nor Umslopogaas heeded it greatly, nor indeed, anything, so lost and well content were they in each other's love.

Now on a certain morning, after they had been married three full moons, Nada came from her husband's hut when the sun was already high, and went down through the rock gully to the river to bathe. On the right of the path to the river lay the mealie-fields of the chief, and in them laboured Zinita and the other women of Umslopogaas, weeding the mealie-plants. They looked up and saw Nada pass, then worked on sullenly. After awhile they saw her come again fresh from the bath, very fair to see, and having flowers twined among her hair, and as she walked she sang a song of love. Now Zinita cast down her hoe.

"Is this to be borne, my sisters?" she said.

"No," answered another, "it is not to be borne. What shall we do--shall we fall upon her and kill her now?"

"It would be more just to kill Bulalio, our lord," answered Zinita.

"Nada is but a woman, and, after the fashion of us women, takes all that she can gather. But he is a man and a chief, and should know wisdom and justice."

"She has bewitched him with her beauty. Let us kill her," said the other women.

"Nay," answered Zinita, "I will speak with her," and she went and stood in the path along which the Lily walked singing, her arms folded across her breast.

Now Nada saw her and, ceasing her song, stretched out her hand to welcome her, saying, "Greeting, sister." But Zinita did not take it.

"It is not fitting, sister," she said, "that my hand, stained with toil, should defile yours, fresh with the scent of flowers. But I am charged with a message, on my own behalf and the behalf of the other wives of our Lord Bulalio; the weeds grow thick in yonder corn, and we women are few; now that your love days are over, will not you come and help us? If you brought no hoe from your Swazi home, surely we will buy you one."

Now Nada saw what was meant, and the blood poured to her head. Yet she answered calmly:--

"I would willingly do this, my sister, though I have never laboured in the fields, for wherever I have dwelt the men have kept me back from all work, save such as the weaving of flowers or the stringing of beads. But there is this against it--Umslopogaas, my husband, charged me that I should not toil with my hands, and I may not disobey my husband."

"Our husband charged you so, Nada? Nay, then it is strange. See, now, I am his head wife, his Inkosikaas--it was I who taught him how to win the axe. Yet he has laid no command on me that I should not labour in the fields after the fashion of women, I who have borne him children; nor, indeed, has he laid such a command upon any of our sisters, his other wives. Can it then be that Bulalio loves you better than us, Nada?"

Now the Lily was in a trap, and she knew it. So she grew bold.

"One must be most loved, Zinita," she said, "as one must be most fair. You have had your hour, leave me mine; perhaps it will be short. Moreover this: Umslopogaas and I loved each other much long years before you or any of his wives saw him, and we love each other to the end. There is no more to say."

"Nay, Nada, there is still something to say; there is this to say: Choose one of two things. Go and leave us to be happy with our lord, or

stay and bring death on all."

Now Nada thought awhile, and answered: "Did I believe that my love would bring death on him I love, it might well chance that I would go and leave him, though to do so would be to die. But, Zinita, I do not believe it. Death chiefly loves the weak, and if he falls it will be on the Flower, not on the Slayer of Men," and she slipped past Zinita and went on, singing no more.

Zinita watched her till she was over the ridge, and her face grew evil as she watched. Then she returned to the women.

"The Lily flouts us all, my sisters," she said. "Now listen: my counsel is that we declare a feast of women to be held at the new moon in a secret place far away. All the women and the children shall come to it except Nada, who will not leave her lover, and if there be any man whom a woman loves, perhaps, my sisters, that man would do well to go on a journey about the time of the new moon, for evil things may happen at the town of the People of the Axe while we are away celebrating our feast."

"What, then, shall befall, my sister?" asked one.

"Nay, how can I tell?" she answered. "I only know that we are minded to be rid of Nada, and thus to be avenged on a man who has scorned our love--ay, and on those men who follow after the beauty of Nada. Is it

not so, my sisters?"

"It is so," they answered.

"Then be silent on the matter, and let us give out our feast."

Now Nada told Umslopogaas of those words which she had bandied with Zinita, and the Slaughterer was troubled. Yet, because of his foolishness and of the medicine of Nada's eyes, he would not turn from his way, and was ever at her side, thinking of little else except of her. Thus, when Zinita came to him, and asked leave to declare a feast of women that should be held far away, he consented, and gladly, for, above all things, he desired to be free from Zinita and her angry looks for awhile; nor did he suspect a plot. Only he told her that Nada should not go to the feast; and in a breath both Zinita and Nada answered that his word was their will, as indeed it was, in this matter.

Now I, Mopo, saw the glamour that had fallen upon my fosterling, and spoke of it with Galazi, saying that a means must be found to wake him. Then I took Galazi fully into my mind, and told him all that he did not know of Umslopogaas, and that was little. Also, I told him of my plans to bring the Slaughterer to the throne, and of what I had done to that end, and of what I proposed to do, and this was to go in person on a journey to certain of the great chiefs and win them over.

Galazi listened, and said that it was well or ill, as the chance might

be. For his part, he believed that the daughter would pull down faster than I, the father, could build up, and he pointed to Nada, who walked past us, following Umslopogaas.

Yet I determined to go, and that was on the day before Zinita was to leave to celebrate the feast of women. So I sought Umslopogaas and told him, and he listened indifferently, for he would be going after Nada, and wearied of my talk of policy. I bade him farewell and left him; to Nada also I bade farewell. She kissed me, yet the name of her husband was mingled with her good-bye.

"Now madness has come upon these two," I said to myself. "Well, it will wear off, they will be changed before I come again."

I guessed little, my father, how changed they would be.