

## CHAPTER XXXII. ZINITA COMES TO THE KING

Dingaan the king sat upon a day in the kraal Umgugundhlovu, waiting till his impis should return from the Income that is now named the Blood River. He had sent them thither to destroy the laager of the Boers, and thence, as he thought, they would presently return with victory. Idly he sat in the kraal, watching the vultures wheel above the Hill of Slaughter, and round him stood a regiment.

"My birds are hungry," he said to a councillor.

"Doubtless there shall soon be meat to feed them, O King!" the councillor answered.

As he spoke one came near, saying that a woman sought leave to speak to the king upon some great matter.

"Let her come," he answered; "I am sick for tidings, perhaps she can tell of the impi."

Presently the woman was led in. She was tall and fair, and she held two children by the hand.

"What is thine errand?" asked Dingaan.

"Justice, O King," she answered.

"Ask for blood, it shall be easier to find."

"I ask blood, O King."

"The blood of whom?"

"The blood of Bulalio the Slaughterer, Chief of the People of the Axe, the blood of Nada the Lily, and of all those who cling to her."

Now Dingaan sprang up and swore an oath by the head of the Black One who was gone.

"What?" he cried, "does the Lily, then, live as the soldier thought?"

"She lives, O King. She is wife to the Slaughterer, and because of her witchcraft he has put me, his first wife, away against all law and honour. Therefore I ask vengeance on the witch and vengeance also on him who was my husband."

"Thou art a good wife," said the king. "May my watching spirit save me from such a one. Hearken! I would gladly grant thy desire, for I, too, hate this Slaughterer, and I, too, would crush this Lily. Yet, woman, thou comest in a bad hour. Here I have but one regiment, and I think that the Slaughterer may take some killing. Wait till my impis return from wiping out the white Amaboona, and it shall be as thou dost desire."

Whose are those children?"

"They are my children and the children of Bulalio, who was my husband."

"The children of him whom thou wouldst cause to be slain."

"Yea, King."

"Surely, woman, thou art as good a mother as wife!" said Dingaan. "Now I have spoken--begone!"

But the heart of Zinita was hungry for vengeance, vengeance swift and terrible, on the Lily, who lay in her place, and on her husband, who had thrust her aside for the Lily's sake. She did not desire to wait--no, not even for an hour.

"Hearken, O King!" she cried, "the tale is not yet all told. This man, Bulalio, plots against thy throne with Mopo, son of Makedama, who was thy councillor."

"He plots against my throne, woman? The lizard plots against the cliff on which it suns itself? Then let him plot; and as for Mopo, I will catch him yet!"

"Yes, O King! but that is not all the tale. This man has another name--he is named Umslopogaas, son of Mopo. But he is no son of Mopo:

he is son to the Black One who is dead, the mighty king who was thy brother, by Baleka, sister to Mopo. Yes, I know it from the lips of Mopo. I know all the tale. He is heir to thy throne by blood, O King, and thou sittest in his place."

For a little while Dingaan sat astounded. Then he commanded Zinita to draw near and tell him that tale.

Now behind the stool on which he sat stood two councillors, nobles whom Dingaan loved, and these alone had heard the last words of Zinita. He bade these nobles stand in front of him, out of earshot and away from every other man. Then Zinita drew near, and told Dingaan the tale of the birth of Umslopogaas and all that followed, and, by many a token and many a deed of Chaka's which he remembered, Dingaan the king knew that it was a true story.

When at length she had done, he summoned the captain of the regiment that stood around: he was a great man named Faku, and he also summoned certain men who do the king's bidding. To the captain of the impi he spoke sharply, saying:--

"Take three companies and guides, and come by night to the town of the People of the Axe, that is by Ghost Mountain, and burn it, and slay all the wizards who sleep therein. Most of all, slay the Chief of the People, who is named Bulalio the Slaughterer or Umslopogaas. Kill him by torture if you may, but kill him and bring his head to me. Take that

wife of his, who is known as Nada the Lily, alive if ye can, and bring her to me, for I would cause her to be slain here. Bring the cattle also. Now go, and go swiftly, this hour. If ye return having failed in one jot of my command, ye die, every one of you--ye die, and slowly. Begone!"

The captain saluted, and, running to his regiment, issued a command. Three full companies leapt forward at his word, and ran after him through the gates of the kraal Umgugundhlovu, heading for the Ghost Mountain.

Then Dingaan called to those who do the king's bidding, and, pointing to the two nobles, his councillors, who had heard the words of Zinita, commanded that they should be killed.

The nobles heard, and, having saluted the king, covered their faces, knowing that they must die because they had learned too much. So they were killed. Now it was one of these councillors who had said that doubtless meat would soon be found to feed the king's birds.

Then the king commanded those who do his bidding that they should take the children of Zinita and make away with them.

But when Zinita heard this she cried aloud, for she loved her children. Then Dingaan mocked her.

"What?" he said, "art thou a fool as well as wicked? Thou sayest that thy husband, whom thou hast given to death, is born of one who is dead, and is heir to my throne. Thou sayest also that these children are born of him; therefore, when he is dead, they will be heirs to my throne. Am I then mad that I should suffer them to live? Woman, thou hast fallen into thine own trap. Take them away!"

Now Zinita tasted of the cup which she had brewed for other lips, and grew distraught in her misery, and wrung her hands, crying that she repented her of the evil and would warn Umslopogaas and the Lily of that which awaited them. And she turned to run towards the gates. But the king laughed and nodded, and they brought her back, and presently she was dead also.

Thus, then, my father, prospered the wickedness of Zinita, the head wife of Umslopogaas, my fosterling.

Now these were the last slayings that were wrought at the kraal Umgugundhlovu, for just as Dingaan had made an end of them and once more grew weary, he lifted his eyes and saw the hillsides black with men, who by their dress were of his own impi--men whom he had sent out against the Boers.

And yet where was the proud array, where the plumes and shields, where the song of victory? Here, indeed, were soldiers, but they walked in groups like women and hung their heads like chidden children.

Then he learned the truth. The impi had been defeated by the banks of the Income; thousands had perished at the laager, mowed down by the guns of the Boers, thousands more had been drowned in the Income, till the waters were red and the bodies of the slain pushed each other under, and those who still lived walked upon them.

Dingaan heard, and was seized with fear, for it was said that the Amaboona followed fast on the track of the conquered.

That day he fled to the bush on the Black Umfolozi river, and that night the sky was crimson with the burning of the kraal Umgugundhlovu, where the Elephant should trumpet no more, and the vultures were scared from the Hill of Slaughter by the roaring of the flames.

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Galazi sat on the lap of the stone Witch, gazing towards the wide plains below, that were yet white with the moon, though the night grew towards the morning. Greysnout whined at his side, and Deathgrip thrust his muzzle into his hand; but Galazi took no heed, for he was brooding on the fall of Umslopogaas from the man that he had been to the level of a woman's slave, and on the breaking up of the People of the Axe, because of the coming of Nada. For all the women and the children were gone to this Feast of Women, and would not return for long, and it seemed to Galazi that many of the men had slipped away also, as though they smelt

some danger from afar.

"Ah, Deathgrip," said Galazi aloud to the wild brute at his side, "changed is the Wolf King my brother, all changed because of a woman's kiss. Now he hunts no more, no more shall Groan-Maker be aloft; it is a woman's kiss he craves, not the touch of your rough tongue, it is a woman's hand he holds, not the smooth haft of horn, he, who of all men, was the fiercest and the first; for this last shame has overtaken him. Surely Chaka was a great king though an evil, and he showed his greatness when he forbade marriage to the warriors, marriage that makes the heart soft and turns blood to water."

Now Galazi ceased, and gazed idly towards the kraal of the People of the Axe, and as he looked his eyes caught a gleam of light that seemed to travel in and out of the edge of the shadow of Ghost Mountain as a woman's needle travels through a skin, now seen and now lost in the skin.

He started and watched. Ah! there the light came out from the shadow. Now, by Chaka's head, it was the light of spears!

One moment more Galazi watched. It was a little impi, perhaps they numbered two hundred men, running silently, but not to battle, for they wore no plumes. Yet they went out to kill, for they ran in companies, and each man carried assegais and a shield.



Now Galazi had heard tell of such impis that hunt by night, and he knew well that these were the king's dogs, and their game was men, a big kraal of sleeping men, otherwise there had been fewer dogs. Is a whole pack sent out to catch an antelope on its form? Galazi wondered whom they sought. Ah! now they turned to the ford, and he knew. It was his brother Umslopogaas and Nada the Lily and the People of the Axe. These were the king's dogs, and Zinita had let them slip. For this reason she had called a feast of women, and taken the children with her; for this reason so many had been summoned from the kraal by one means or another: it was that they might escape the slaughter.

Galazi bounded to his feet. For one moment he thought. Might not these hunters be hunted? Could he not destroy them by the jaws of the wolves as once before they had destroyed a certain impi of the king's? Ay, if he had seen them but one hour before, then scarcely a man of them should have lived to reach the stream, for he would have waylaid them with his wolves. But now it might not be; the soldiers neared the ford, and Galazi knew well that his grey people would not hunt on the further plain, though for this he had heard one reason only, that which was given him by the lips of the dead in a dream.

What, then, might be done? One thing alone: warn Umslopogaas. Yet how? For him who could swim a rushing river, there was, indeed, a swifter way to the place of the People of the Axe--a way that was to the path of the impi as is the bow-string to the strung bow. And yet they had travelled well-nigh half the length of the bow. Still, he might do it, he whose

feet were the swiftest in the land, except those of Umslopogaas. At the least, he would try. Mayhap, the impi would tarry to drink at the ford.

So Galazi thought in his heart, and his thought was swift as the light. Then with a bound he was away down the mountain side. From boulder to boulder he leapt like a buck, he crashed through the brake like a bull, he skimmed the level like a swallow. The mountain was travelled now; there in front of him lay the yellow river foaming in its flood, so he had swum it before when he went to see the dead. Ah! a good leap far out into the torrent; it was strong, but he breasted it. He was through, he stood upon the bank shaking the water from him like a dog, and now he was away up the narrow gorge of stones to the long slope, running low as his wolves ran.

Before him lay the town--one side shone silver with the sinking moon, one was grey with the breaking dawn. Ah! they were there, he saw them moving through the grass by the eastern gate; he saw the long lines of slayers creep to the left and the right.

How could he pass them before the circle of death was drawn? Six spear-throws to run, and they had but such a little way! The mealie-plants were tall, and at a spot they almost touched the fence. Up the path! Could Umslopogaas, his brother, move more fast, he wondered, than the Wolf who sped to save him? He was there, hidden by the mealie stalks, and there, along the fence to the right and to the left, the slayers crept!

"Wow! What was that?" said one soldier of the king to another man as they joined their guard completing the death circle. "Wow! something great and black crashed through the fence before me."

"I heard it, brother," answered the other man. "I heard it, but I saw nothing. It must have been a dog: no man could leap so high."

"More like a wolf," said the first; "at the least, let us pray that it was not an Esedowan (1) who will put us into the hole in its back. Is your fire ready, brother? Wow! these wizards shall wake warm; the signal should be soon."

(1) A fabulous animal, reported by the Zulus to carry off human beings in a hole in its back.

Then arose the sound of a great voice crying, "Awake, ye sleepers, the foe is at your gates!"