

CHAPTER XXXIII. THE END OF THE PEOPLE, BLACK AND GREY

Galazi rushed through the town crying aloud, and behind him rose a stir of men. All slept and no sentinels were set, for Umslopogaas was so lost in his love for the Lily that he forgot his wisdom, and thought no more of war or death or of the hate of Dingaan. Presently the Wolf came to the large new hut which Umslopogaas had caused to be built for Nada the Lily, and entered it, for there he knew that he should find his brother Bulalio. On the far side of the hut the two lay sleeping, and the head of Umslopogaas rested on the Lily's breast, and by his side gleamed the great axe Groan-Maker.

"Awake!" cried the Wolf.

Now Umslopogaas sprang to his feet grasping at his axe, but Nada threw her arms wide, murmuring; "Let me sleep on, sweet is sleep."

"Sound shall ye sleep, anon!" gasped Galazi. "Swift, brother, bind on the wolf's hide, take shield! Swift, I say--for the Slayers of the king are at your gates!"

Now Nada sprang up also, and they did his bidding like people in a dream; and, while they found their garments and a shield, Galazi took beer and drank it, and got his breath again. They stood without the hut. Now the heaven was grey, and east and west and north and south tongues of flame shot up against the sky, for the town had been fired by the

Slayers.

Umslopogaas looked and his sense came back to him: he understood. "Which way, brother?" he said.

"Through the fire and the impi to our Grey People on the mountain," said Galazi. "There, if we can win it, we shall find succour."

"What of my people in the kraal," asked Umslopogaas.

"They are not many, brother; the women and the children are gone. I have roused the men--most will escape. Hence, ere we burn!"

Now they ran towards the fence, and as they went men joined them to the number of ten, half awakened, fear-stricken, armed--some with spears, some with clubs--and for the most part naked. They sped on together towards the fence of the town that was now but a ring of fire, Umslopogaas and Galazi in front, each holding the Lily by a hand. They neared the fence--from without came the shouts of the Slayers--lo! it was afire. Nada shrank back in fear, but Umslopogaas and Galazi dragged her on. They rushed at the blazing fence, smiting with axe and club. It broke before them, they were through but little harmed. Without were a knot of the Slayers, standing back a small space because of the heat of the flames. The Slayers saw them, and crying, "This is Bulalio, kill the wizard!" sprang towards them with uplifted spears. Now the People of the Axe made a ring round Nada, and in the front of it were Umslopogaas

and Galazi. Then they rushed on and met those of the Slayers who stood before them, and the men of Dingaan were swept away and scattered by Groan-Maker and the Watcher, as dust is swept of a wind, as grass is swept by a sickle.

They were through with only one man slain, but the cry went up that the chief of the wizards and the Lily, his wife, had fled. Then, as it was these whom he was chiefly charged to kill, the captain called off the impi from watching for the dwellers in the town, and started in pursuit of Umslopogaas. Now, at this time nearly a hundred men of the People of the Axe had been killed and of the Slayers some fifty men, for, having been awakened by the crying of Galazi, the soldiers of the axe fought bravely, though none saw where his brother stood, and none knew whither their chief had fled except those ten who went with the brethren.

Meanwhile, the Wolf-Brethren and those with them were well away, and it had been easy for them to escape, who were the swiftest-footed of any in the land. But the pace of a regiment is the pace of its slowest-footed soldier, and Nada could not run with the Wolf-Brethren. Yet they made good speed, and were halfway down the gorge that led to the river before the companies of Dingaan poured into it. Now they came to the end of it, and the foe was near--this end of the gorge is narrow, my father, like the neck of a gourd--then Galazi stopped and spoke:--

"Halt! ye People of the Axe," he said, "and let us talk awhile with these who follow till we get our breath again. But you, my brother, pass

the river with the Lily in your hand. We will join you in the forest; but if perchance we cannot find you, you know what must be done: set the Lily in the cave, then return and call up the grey impi. Wow! my brother, I must find you if I may, for if these men of Dingaana have a mind for sport there shall be such a hunting on the Ghost Mountain as the old Witch has not seen. Go now, my brother!"

"It is not my way to turn and run while others stand and fight," growled Umslopogaas; "yet, because of Nada, it seems that I must."

"Oh! heed me not, my love," said Nada, "I have brought thee sorrow--I am weary, let me die; kill me and save yourselves!"

For answer, Umslopogaas took her by the hand and fled towards the river; but before he reached it he heard the sounds of the fray, the war-cry of the Slayers as they poured upon the People of the Axe, the howl of his brother, the Wolf, when the battle joined--ay, and the crash of the Watcher as the blow went home.

"Well bitten, Wolf!" he said, stopping; "that one shall need no more; oh! that I might"--but again he looked at Nada, and sped on.

Now they had leaped into the foaming river, and here it was well that the Lily could swim, else both had been lost. But they won through and passed forward to the mountain's flank. Here they walked on among the trees till the forest was almost passed, and at length Umslopogaas heard

the howling of a wolf.

Then he must set Nada on his shoulders and carry her as once Galazi had carried another, for it was death for any except the Wolf-Brethren to walk on the Ghost Mountain when the wolves were awake.

Presently the wolves flocked around him, and leaped upon him in joy, glaring with fierce eyes at her who sat upon his shoulders. Nada saw them, and almost fell from her seat, fainting with fear, for they were many and dreadful, and when they howled her blood turned to ice.

But Umslopogaas cheered her, telling her that these were his dogs with whom he went out hunting, and with whom he should hunt presently. At length they came to the knees of the Old Witch and the entrance to the cave. It was empty except for a wolf or two, for Galazi abode here seldom now; but when he was on the mountain would sleep in the forest, which was nearer the kraal of his brother the Slaughterer.

"Here you must stay, sweet," said Umslopogaas when he had driven out the wolves. "Here you must rest till this little matter of the Slayers is finished. Would that we had brought food, but we had little time to seek it! See, now I will show you the secret of the stone; thus far I will push it, no farther. Now a touch only is needed to send it over the socket and home; but then they must be two strong men who can pull it back again. Therefore push it no farther except in the utmost need, lest it remain where it fall, whether you will it or not. Have no fear, you

are safe here; none know of this place except Galazi, myself and the wolves, and none shall find it. Now I must be going to find Galazi, if he still lives; if not, to make what play I can against the Slayers, alone with the wolves."

Now Nada wept, saying that she feared to be left, and that she should never see him more, and her grief rung his heart. Nevertheless, Umslopogaas kissed her and went, closing the stone after him in that fashion of which he had spoken. When the stone was shut the cave was almost dark, except for a ray of light that entered by a hole little larger than a man's hand, that, looked at from within, was on the right of the stone. Nada sat herself so that this ray struck full on her, for she loved light, and without it she would pine as flowers do. There she sat and thought in the darksome cave, and was filled with fear and sorrow. And while she brooded thus, suddenly the ray went out, and she heard a noise as of some beast that smells at prey. She looked, and in the gloom she saw the sharp nose and grinning fangs of a wolf that were thrust towards her through the little hole.

Nada cried aloud in fear, and the fangs were snatched back, but presently she heard a scratching without the cave, and saw the stone shake. Then she thought in her foolishness that the wolf knew how to open the stone, and that he would do this, and devour her, for she had heard the tale that all these wolves were the ghosts of evil men, having the understanding of men. So, in her fear and folly, she seized the rock and dragged on it as Umslopogaas had shown her how to do. It shook, it

slipped over the socket ledge, and rolled home like a pebble down the mouth of a gourd.

"Now I am safe from the wolves," said Nada. "See, I cannot so much as stir the stone from within." And she laughed a little, then ceased from laughing and spoke again. "Yet it would be ill if Umslopogaas came back no more to roll away that rock, for then I should be like one in a grave--as one who is placed in a grave being yet strong and quick." She shuddered as she thought of it, but presently started up and set her ear to the hole to listen, for from far down the mountain there rose a mighty howling and a din of men.

When Umslopogaas had shut the cave, he moved swiftly down the mountain, and with him went certain of the wolves; not all, for he had not summoned them. His heart was heavy, for he feared that Galazi was no more. Also he was mad with rage, and plotted in himself to destroy the Slayers of the king, every man of them; but first he must learn what they would do. Presently, as he wended, he heard a long, low howl far away in the forest; then he rejoiced, for he knew the call--it was the call of Galazi, who had escaped the spears of the Slayers.

Swiftly he ran, calling in answer. He won the place. There, seated on a stone, resting himself, was Galazi, and round him surged the numbers of the Grey People. Umslopogaas came to him and looked at him, for he seemed somewhat weary. There were flesh wounds on his great breast and arms, the little shield was well-nigh hewn to strips, and the Watcher

showed signs of war.

"How went it, brother?" asked Umslopogaas.

"Not so ill, but all those who stood with me in the way are dead, and with them a few of the foe. I alone am fled like a coward. They came on us thrice, but we held them back till the Lily was safe; then, all our men being down, I ran, Umslopogaas, and swam the torrent, for I was minded to die here in my own place."

Now, though he said little of it, I must tell you, my father, that Galazi had made a great slaughter there in the neck of the donga. Afterwards I counted the slain, and they were many; the nine men of the People of the Axe were hidden in them.

"Perhaps it shall be the Slayers who die, brother."

"Perhaps, at least, there shall be death for some. Still it is in my mind, Slaughterer, that our brotherhood draws to an end, for the fate of him who bears the Watcher, and which my father foretold, is upon me. If so, farewell. While it lasted our friendship has been good, and its ending shall be good. Moreover, it would have endured for many a year to come had you not sought, Slaughterer, to make good better, and to complete our joy of fellowship and war with the love of women. From that source flow these ills, as a river from a spring; but so it was fated. If I fall in this fray may you yet live on to fight in many another, and

at the last to die gloriously with axe aloft; and may you find a brisker man and a better Watcher to serve you in your need. Should you fall and I live on, I promise this: I will avenge you to the last and guard the Lily whom you love, offering her comfort, but no more. Now the foe draws on, they have travelled round about by the ford, for they dared not face the torrent, and they cried to me that they are sworn to slay us or be slain, as Dingaan, the king, commanded. So the fighting will be of the best, if, indeed, they do not run before the fangs of the Grey People. Now, Chief, speak your word that I may obey it."

Thus Galazi spoke in the circle of the wolves, while Umslopogaas leaned upon his Axe Groan-Maker, and listened to him, ay, and wept as he listened, for after the Lily and me, Mopo, he loved Galazi most dearly of all who lived. Then he answered:--

"Were it not for one in the cave above, who is helpless and tender, I would swear to you, Wolf, that if you fall, on your carcase I will die; and I do swear that, should you fall, while I live Groan-Maker shall be busy from year to year till every man of yonder impi is as you are. Perchance I did ill, Galazi, when first I hearkened to the words of Zinita and suffered women to come between us. May we one day find a land where there are no women, and war only, for in that land we shall grow great. But now, at the least, we will make a good end to this fellowship, and the Grey People shall fight their fill, and the old Witch who sits aloft waiting for the world to die shall smile to see that fight, if she never smiled before. This is my word: that we fall

upon the men of Dingaan twice, once in the glade of the forest whither they will come presently, and, if we are beaten back, then we must stand for the last time on the knees of the Witch in front of the cave where Nada is. Say, Wolf, will the Grey Folk fight?"

"To the last, brother, so long as one is left to lead them, after that I do not know! Still they have only fangs to set against spears. Slaughterer, your plan is good. Come, I am rested."

So they rose and numbered their flock, and all were there, though it was not as it had been years ago when first the Wolf-Brethren hunted on Ghost Mountain; for many of the wolves had died by men's spears when they harried the kraals of men, and no young were born to them. Then, as once before, the pack was halved, and half, the she-wolves, went with Umslopogaas, and half, the dog-wolves, went with Galazi.

Now they passed down the forest paths and hid in the tangle of the thickets at the head of the darksome glen, one on each side of the glen. Here they waited till they heard the footfall of the impi of the king's Slayers, as it came slowly along seeking them. In front of the impi went two soldiers watching for an ambush, and these two men were the same who had talked together that dawn when Galazi sprang between them. Now also they spoke as they peered this way and that; then, seeing nothing, stood awhile in the mouth of the glen waiting the coming of their company; and their words came to the ears of Umslopogaas.

"An awful place this, my brother," said one. "A place full of ghosts and strange sounds, of hands that seem to press us back, and whinings as of invisible wolves. It is named Ghost Mountain, and well named. Would that the king had found other business for us than the slaying of these sorcerers--for they are sorcerers indeed, and this is the home of their sorceries. Tell me, brother, what was that which leaped between us this morning in the dark! I say it was a wizard. Wow! they are all wizards. Could any who was but a man have done the deeds which he who is named the Wolf wrought down by the river yonder, and then have escaped? Had the Axe but stayed with the Club they would have eaten up our impi."

"The Axe had a woman to watch," laughed the other. "Yes, it is true this is a place of wizards and evil things. Methinks I see the red eyes of the Esedowana glaring at us through the dark of the trees and smell their smell. Yet these wizards must be caught, for know this, my brother: if we return to Umgugundhlovu with the king's command undone, then there are stakes hardening in the fire of which we shall taste the point. If we are all killed in the catching, and some, it seems, are missing already, yet they must be caught. Say, my brother, shall we draw on? The impi is nigh. Would that Faku, our captain yonder, might find two others to take our place, for in this thicket I had rather run last than first. Well, here leads the spoor--a wondrous mass of wolf-spoor mixed with the footprints of men; perhaps they are sometimes the one and sometimes the other--who knows, my brother? It is a land of ghosts and wizards. Let us on! Let us on!"

Now all this while the Wolf-Brethren had much ado to keep their people quiet, for their mouths watered and their eyes shone at the sight of the men, and at length it could be done no more, for with a howl a single she-wolf rushed from her lair and leapt at the throat of the man who spoke, nor did she miss her grip. Down went wolf and man, rolling together on the ground, and there they killed each other.

"The Esedowana! the Esedowana are upon us!" cried the other scout, and, turning, fled towards the impi. But he never reached it, for with fearful howlings the ghost-wolves broke their cover and rushed on him from the right and the left, and lo! there was nothing of him left except his spear alone.

Now a low cry of fear rose from the impi, and some turned to fly, but Faku, the captain, a great and brave man, shouted to them, "Stand firm, children of the king, stand firm, these are no Esedowana, these are but the Wolf-Brethren and their pack. What! will ye run from dogs, ye who have laughed at the spears of men? Ring round! Stand fast!"

The soldiers heard the voice of their captain, and they obeyed his voice, forming a double circle, a ring within a ring. They looked to the right, there, Groan-Maker aloft, the wolf fangs on his brow, the worn wolf-hide streaming on the wind, Bulalio rushed upon them like a storm, and with him came his red-eyed company. They looked to the left--ah, well they know that mighty Watcher! Have they not heard his strokes down by the river, and well they know the giant who wields it like a wand,

the Wolf King, with the strength of ten! Wow! They are here! See the people black and grey, hear them howl their war-chant! Look how they leap like water--leap in a foam of fangs against the hedge of spears! The circle is broken; Groan-Maker has broken it! Ha! Galazi also is through the double ring; now must men stand back to back or perish!

How long did it last? Who can say? Time flies fast when blows fall thick. At length the brethren are beaten back; they break out as they broke in, and are gone, with such of their wolf-folk as were left alive. Yet that impi was somewhat the worse, but one-third of those lived who looked on the sun without the forest; the rest lay smitten, torn, mangled, dead, hidden under the heaps of bodies of wild beasts.

"Now this is a battle of evil spirits that live in the shapes of wolves, and as for the Wolf-Brethren, they are sorcerers of the rarest," said Faku the captain, "and such sorcerers I love, for they fight furiously. Yet I will slay them or be slain. At the least, if there be few of us left, the most of the wolves are dead also, and the arms of the wizards grow weary."

So he moved forward up the mountain with those of the soldiers who remained, and all the way the wolves harried them, pulling down a man here and a man there; but though they heard and saw them cheering on their pack the Wolf-Brethren attacked them no more, for they saved their strength for the last fight of all.

The road was long up the mountain, and the soldiers knew little of the path, and ever the ghost-wolves harried on their flanks. So it was evening before they came to the feet of the stone Witch, and began to climb to the platform of her knees. There, on her knees as it were, they saw the Wolf-Brethren standing side by side, such a pair as were not elsewhere in the world, and they seemed afire, for the sunset beat upon them, and the wolves crept round their feet, red with blood and fire.

"A glorious pair!" quoth great Faku; "would that I fought with them rather than against them! Yet, they must die!" Then he began to climb to the knees of the Witch.

Now Umslopogaas glanced up at the stone face of her who sat aloft, and it was alight with the sunset.

"Said I not that the old Witch should smile at this fray?" he cried.

"Lo! she smiles! Up, Galazi, let us spend the remnant of our people on the foe, and fight this fight out, man to man, with no beast to spoil it! Ho! Blood and Greysnout! ho! Deathgrip! ho! wood-dwellers grey and black, at them, my children!"

The wolves heard; they were few and they were sorry to see, with weariness and wounds, but still they were fierce. With a howl, for the last time they leaped down upon the foe, tearing, harrying, and killing till they themselves were dead by the spear, every one of them except Deathgrip, who crept back sorely wounded to die with Galazi.

"Now I am a chief without a people," cried Galazi. "Well, it has been my lot in life. So it was in the Halakazi kraals, so it is on Ghost Mountain at the last, and so also shall it be even for the greatest kings when they come to their ends, seeing that they, too, must die alone. Say, Slaughterer, choose where you will stand, to the left or to the right."

Now, my father, the track below separated, because of a boulder, and there were two little paths which led to the platform of the Witch's knees with, perhaps, ten paces between them. Umslopogaas guarded the left-hand path and Galazi took the right. Then they waited, having spears in their hands. Presently the soldiers came round the rock and rushed up against them, some on one path and some on the other.

Then the brethren hurled their spears at them and killed three men.

Now the assegais were done, and the foe was on them. Umslopogaas bends forward, his long arm shoots out, the axe gleams, and a man who came on falls back.

"One!" cries Umslopogaas.

"One, my brother!" answers Galazi, as he draws back the Watcher from his blow.

A soldier rushes forward, singing. To and fro he moves in front of

Umslopogaas, his spear poised to strike. Groan-Maker swoops down, but the man leaps back, the blow misses, and the Slaughterer's guard is down.

"A poor stroke, Sorcerer!" cries the man as he rushes in to stab him. Lo! the axe wheels in the air, it circles swiftly low down by the ground; it smites upward. Before the spearsman can strike the horn of Groan-Maker has sped from chin to brain.

"But a good return, fool!" says Umslopogaas.

"Two!" cries Galazi, from the right.

"Two! my brother," answers Umslopogaas.

Again two men come on, one against each, to find no better luck. The cry of "Three!" passes from brother to brother, and after it rises the cry of "Four!"

Now Faku bids the men who are left to hold their shields together and push the two from the mouths of the paths, and this they do, losing four more men at the hands of the brethren before it is done.

"Now we are on the open! Ring them round and down with them!" cries Faku.

But who shall ring round Groan-Maker that shines on all sides at once, Groan-Maker who falls heavily no more, but pecks and pecks and pecks like a wood-bird on a tree, and never pecks in vain? Who shall ring round those feet swifter than the Sassaby of the plains? Wow! He is here! He is there! He is a sorcerer! Death is in his hand, and death looks out of his eyes!

Galazi lives yet, for still there comes the sound of the Watcher as it thunders on the shields, and the Wolf's hoarse cry of the number of the slain. He has a score of wounds, yet he fights on! his leg is almost hewn from him with an axe, yet he fights on! His back is pierced again and again, yet he fights on! But two are left alive before him, one twists round and spears him from behind. He heeds it not, but smites down the foe in front. Then he turns and, whirling the Watcher on high, brings him down for the last time, and so mightily that the man before him is crushed like an egg.

Galazi brushes the blood from his eyes and glares round on the dead. "All! Slaughterer," he cries.

"All save two, my brother," comes the answer, sounding above the clash of steel and the sound of smitten shields.

Now the Wolf would come to him, but cannot, for his life ebbs.

"Fare you well, my brother! Death is good! Thus, indeed, I would die,

for I have made me a mat of men to lie on," he cried with a great voice.

"Fare you well! Sleep softly, Wolf!" came the answer. "All save one!"

Now Galazi fell dying on the dead, but he was not altogether gone, for he still spoke. "All save one! Ha! ha! ill for that one then when Groan-Maker yet is up. It is well to have lived so to die. Victory! Victory!"

And Galazi the Wolf struggled to his knees and for the last time shook the Watcher about his head, then fell again and died.

Umslopogaas, the son of Chaka, and Faku, the captain of Dingaan, gazed on each other. They alone were left standing upon the mountain, for the rest were all down. Umslopogaas had many wounds. Faku was unhurt; he was a strong man, also armed with an axe.

Faku laughed aloud. "So it has come to this, Slaughterer," he said, "that you and I must settle whether the king's word be done or no. Well, I will say that however it should fall out, I count it a great fortune to have seen this fight, and the highest of honours to have had to do with two such warriors. Rest you a little, Slaughterer, before we close. That wolf-brother of yours died well, and if it is given me to conquer in this bout, I will tell the tale of his end from kraal to kraal throughout the land, and it shall be a tale forever."