

CHAPTER XXXIV. THE LILY'S FAREWELL

Umslopogaas listened, but he made no answer to the words of Faku the captain, though he liked them well, for he would not waste his breath in talking, and the light grew low.

"I am ready, Man of Dingaan," he said, and lifted his axe.

Now for awhile the two circled round and round, each waiting for a chance to strike. Presently Faku smote at the head of Umslopogaas, but the Slaughterer lifted Groan-Maker to ward the blow. Faku crooked his arm and let the axe curl downwards, so that its keen edge smote Umslopogaas upon the head, severing his man's ring and the scalp beneath.

Made mad with the pain, the Slaughterer awoke, as it were. He grasped Groan-maker with both hands and struck thrice. The first blow hewed away the plumes and shield of Faku, and drove him back a spear's length, the second missed its aim, the third and mightiest twisted in his wet hands, so that the axe smote sideways. Nevertheless, it fell full on the breast of the captain Faku, shattering his bones, and sweeping him from the ledge of rock on to the slope beneath, where he lay still.

"It is finished with the daylight," said Umslopogaas, smiling grimly.

"Now, Dingaan, send more Slayers to seek your slain," and he turned to find Nada in the cave.

But Faku the captain was not yet dead, though he was hurt to death. He sat up, and with his last strength he hurled the axe in his hand at him whose might had prevailed against him. The axe sped true, and Umslopogaas did not see it fly. It sped true, and its point struck him on the left temple, driving in the bone and making a great hole. Then Faku fell back dying, and Umslopogaas threw up his arms and dropped like an ox drops beneath the blow of the butcher, and lay as one dead, under the shadow of a stone.

All day long Nada crouched in the cave listening to the sounds of war that crept faintly up the mountain side; howling of wolves, shouting of men, and the clamour of iron on iron. All day long she sat, and now evening came apace, and the noise of battle drew near, swelled, and sank, and died away. She heard the voices of the Wolf-Brethren as they called to each other like bucks, naming the number of the slain. She heard Galazi's cry of "Victory!" and her heart leapt to it, though she knew that there was death in the cry. Then for the last time she heard the faint ringing of iron on iron, and the light went out and all grew still.

All grew still as the night. There came no more shouting of men and no more clash of arms, no howlings of wolves, no cries of pain or triumph--all was quiet as death, for death had taken all.

For awhile Nada the Lily sat in the dark of the cave, saying to herself,

"Presently he will come, my husband, he will surely come; the Slayers are slain--he does not but tarry to bind his wounds; a scratch, perchance, here and there. Yes, he will come, and it is well, for I am weary of my loneliness, and this place is grim and evil."

Thus she spoke to herself in hope, but nothing came except the silence. Then she spoke again, and her voice echoed in the hollow cave. "Now I will be bold, I will fear nothing, I will push aside the stone and go out to find him. I know well he does but linger to tend some who are wounded, perhaps Galazi. Doubtless Galazi is wounded. I must go and nurse him, though he never loved me, and I do not love him overmuch who would stand between me and my husband. This wild wolf-man is a foe to women, and, most of all, a foe to me; yet I will be kind to him. Come, I will go at once," and she rose and pushed at the rock.

Why, what was this? It did not stir. Then she remembered that she had pulled it beyond the socket because of her fear of the wolf, and that the rock had slipped a little way down the neck of the cave. Umslopogaas had told her that she must not do this, and she had forgotten his words in her foolishness. Perhaps she could move the stone; no, not by the breadth of a grain of corn. She was shut in, without food or water, and here she must bide till Umslopogaas came. And if he did not come? Then she must surely die.

Now she shrieked aloud in her fear, calling on the name of Umslopogaas. The walls of the cave answered "Umslopogaas! Umslopogaas!" and that was

all.

Afterwards madness fell upon Nada, my daughter, and she lay in the cave for days and nights, nor knew ever how long she lay. And with her madness came visions, for she dreamed that the dead One whom Galazi had told her of sat once more aloft in his niche at the end of the cave and spoke to her, saying:--

"Galazi is dead! The fate of him who bears the Watcher has fallen on him. Dead are the ghost-wolves; I also am dead of hunger in this cave, and as I died so shall you die, Nada the Lily! Nada, Star of Death! because of whose beauty and foolishness all this death has come about."

This is seemed to Nada, in her madness, that the shadow of him who had sat in the niche spoke to her from hour to hour.

It seemed to Nada, in her madness, that twice the light shone through the hole by the rock, and that was day, and twice it went out, and that was night. A third time the ray shone and died away, and lo! her madness left her, and she awoke to know that she was dying, and that a voice she loved spoke without the hole, saying in hollow accents:--

"Nada? Do you still live, Nada?"

"Yea," she answered hoarsely. "Water! give me water!"

Next she heard a sound as of a great snake dragging itself along painfully. A while passed, then a trembling hand thrust a little gourd of water through the hole. She drank, and now she could speak, though the water seemed to flow through her veins like fire.

"Is it indeed you, Umslopogaas?" she said, "or are you dead, and do I dream of you?"

"It is I, Nada," said the voice. "Hearken! have you drawn the rock home?"

"Alas! yes," she answered. "Perhaps, if the two of us strive at it, it will move."

"Ay, if our strength were what it was--but now! Still, let us try."

So they strove with a rock, but the two of them together had not the strength of a girl, and it would not stir.

"Give over, Umslopogaas," said Nada; "we do but waste the time that is left to me. Let us talk!"

For awhile there was no answer, for Umslopogaas had fainted, and Nada beat her breast, thinking that he was dead.

Presently he spoke, however, saying, "It may not be; we must perish

here, one on each side of the stone, not seeing the other's face, for my might is as water; nor can I stand upon my feet to go and seek for food."

"Are you wounded, Umslopogaas?" asked Nada.

"Ay, Nada, I am pierced to the brain with the point of an axe; no fair stroke, the captain of Dingaan hurled it at me when I thought him dead, and I fell. I do not know how long I have lain yonder under the shadow of the rock, but it must be long, for my limbs are wasted, and those who fell in the fray are picked clean by the vultures, all except Galazi, for the old wolf Deathgrip lies on his breast dying, but not dead, licking my brother's wounds, and scares the fowls away. It was the beak of a vulture, who had smelt me out at last, that woke me from my sleep beneath the stone, Nada, and I crept hither. Would that he had not awakened me, would that I had died as I lay, rather than lived a little while till you perish thus, like a trapped fox, Nada, and presently I follow you."

"It is hard to die so, Umslopogaas," she answered, "I who am yet young and fair, who love you, and hoped to give you children; but so it has come about, and it may not be put away. I am well-nigh sped, husband; horror and fear have conquered me, my strength fails, but I suffer little. Let us talk no more of death, let us rather speak of our childhood, when we wandered hand in hand; let us talk also of our love, and of the happy hours that we have spent since your great axe rang upon

the rock in the Halakazi caves, and my fear told you the secret of my womanhood. See, I thrust my hand through the hole; can you not kiss it, Umslopogaas?"

Now Umslopogaas stooped his shattered head, and kissed the Lily's little hand, then he held it in his own, and so they sat till the end--he without, resting his back against the rock, she within, lying on her side, her arm stretched through the little hole. They spoke of their love, and tried to forget their sorrow in it; he told her also of the fray which had been and how it went.

"Ah!" she said, "that was Zinita's work, Zinita who hated me, and justly. Doubtless she set Dingaan on this path."

"A little while gone," quoth Umslopogaas; "and I hoped that your last breath and mine might pass together, Nada, and that we might go together to seek great Galazi, my brother, where he is. Now I hope that help will find me, and that I may live a little while, because of a certain vengeance which I would wreak."

"Speak not of vengeance, husband," she answered, "I, too, am near to that land where the Slayer and the Slain, the Shedder of Blood and the Avenger of Blood are lost in the same darkness. I would die with love, and love only, in my heart, and your name, and yours only, on my lips, so that if anywhere we live again it shall be ready to spring forth to greet you. Yet, husband, it is in my heart that you will not go with me,

but that you shall live on to die the greatest of deaths far away from here, and because of another woman. It seems that, as I lay in the dark of this cave, I saw you, Umslopogaas, a great man, gaunt and grey, stricken to the death, and the axe Groan-maker wavering aloft, and many a man dead upon a white and shimmering way, and about you the fair faces of white women; and you had a hole in your forehead, husband, on the left side."

"That is like to be true, if I live," he answered, "for the bone of my temple is shattered."

Now Nada ceased speaking, and for a long while was silent; Umslopogaas was also silent and torn with pain and sorrow because he must lose the Lily thus, and she must die so wretchedly, for one reason only, that the cast of Faku had robbed him of his strength. Alas! he who had done many deeds might not save her now; he could scarcely hold himself upright against the rock. He thought of it, and the tears flowed down his face and fell on to the hand of the Lily. She felt them fall and spoke.

"Weep not, my husband," she said, "I have been all too ill a wife to you. Do not mourn for me, yet remember that I loved you well." And again she was silent for a long space.

Then she spoke and for the last time of all, and her voice came in a gasping whisper through the hole in the rock:--

"Farewell, Umslopogaas, my husband and my brother, I thank you for your love, Umslopogaas. Ah! I die!"

Umslopogaas could make no answer, only he watched the little hand he held. Twice it opened, twice it closed upon his own, then it opened for the third time, turned grey, quivered, and was still forever!

Now it was at the hour of dawn that Nada died.