The JUNGLE PATROL

GRIPPING STORY OF SCOUTING ADVENTURE IN AFRICA

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THE JUNGLE PATROL

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

Meet five fearless Scouts, a mighty Zulu, and a wily bushman! Lyn Strong and his pals of the Popolaki Patrol don't have to go looking for adventure—it's waiting for them round every twist of the trail in the vast, savage jungles of the Congo. There's danger in plenty, too, from forest man-eaters, cannibals, and Zirafi, the merciless slave-dealer, and the hair-breadth escapes of this daring little band will hold you enthralled!

CHAPTER 1.

The Call in the Forest!

"BWANA!"

Bobo, the Kikuyu gun-bearer, whispered softly.

But the softest whisper was enough to awaken Lyn Strong, the boy guide of Masumpwe, and patrol-leader of the Popolaki Patrol of Boy Scouts.

The burning heat of midday simmered over the Central African forest.

Bird and beast slept in the drowsy heat; only the mosquitoes hummed and buzzed in the shafts of sunlight that fell through the foliage.

With his head leaning on the thick trunk of a tree, Lyn lay in the shade, his sinewy legs, in khaki shorts and flexible mosquito boots, stretched out, his wide-brimmed Scout hat tilted over his face.

His rifle lay by his side, his hand resting on it.

For he was many a long mile from Masumpwe and the plantations of the Popolaki River, and the white man who ventured into the primeval forest without his rifle was likely to leave his bones there.

Bobo sat squatted, peeling bananas

with his black fingers and slicing them with his long knife.

With the pride of a Kikuyu, descendant of the lordly Masai, Bobo disdained such menial tasks as cooking, and only for one white man in all Africa would Bobo have condescended to prepare a meal.

Lyn was the exception.

For had not the Bwana, in the muddy waters of the Popolaki River, dragged him from the gigantic jaws of a crocodile, and given death to that crocodile that had so nearly given it to Bobo?

Not that Bobo remembered the incident clearly. African memories are short. His devotion to the Bwana survived the memory of its cause.

But if Bobo had forgotten why he was loyal to the Bwana, he did not forget his loyalty, and any day Bobo would have stood between his lord and a trumpeting elephant or a man-eating lion.

Suddenly, as a sound came to him from the forest, Bobolobo, the Kikuyu, ceased on the instant to be a cook-boy, and became at once the wary warrior.

"Simba!" murmured Bobolobo.

But the next moment he shook his dusk head, with a click of the two white-and-gold teacups that hung from the lobes of his ears.

It was not a lion.

At that drowsy hour of tropical heat and breathless stillness the lions lay sleeping in shady lairs. Not even a hungry hyena walked abroad in the simmering aisles of the forest.

It was the faint sound that came from the far distance, a faint moaning sound that rose and fell.

Bobo was puzzled.

It was not the voice of any beast that he knew, and Bobo knew the voice of every beast that roamed the forest or desert, from Zanzibar to Boma.

A trace of alarm came into his dusky face.

As likely as not—more likely than not, in Bobo's opinion—it was the howl of one of the innumerable demons that haunted the depths of the African forest.

Bobo knew all about the ghosts of the forest, from the terrible storm ghost that brought the rushing wind and shook mighty trees in his fury as if they were mere reeds, to the small, sneaking ghosts that brought pain and sickness after the drinking of njoha.

He sat for some moments, his head bent, listening, while the strange sound rose and fell—sometimes loud and full of pain, sometimes sinking away into silence.

And at last he whispered "Bwana!" and woke the white lord.

Lyn Strong awakened at the whisper, and he was on his feet, his hat pushed back on his head, his rifle in his hand, within a split second of awakening.

Lyn glanced round him quickly, and then fixed his eyes inquiringly on the giant.

"What is it, Bobo?"

"Bwana, it is the calling of one-that-cries-in-pain," said Bobo.

Bobolobo had learned English more thoroughly than it is usually learned by the natives of that region, but he spoke it with his own idiom.

But the strange sound had died away as Lyn started up, and he listened in vain.

"My ears hear nothing, Bobo!" he said.

"Bwana, it is gone!" said Bobo. "Perhaps he-that-cries-in-the-forest does not desire that a white lord should hear his voice."

Lyn grinned.

"Perhaps it was a signal from one of the fellows," he said.

"Siyo!" said Bobo. "No, Bwana! It was not the voice of one that lives."

Lyn listened.

No sound came through the hush of the tropical forest.

Five members of the Popolaki Patrol were on trek, hunting for the spoor of a man-eating lion who, for a year past, had taken toll of the native cattle and native babies of Masumpwe.

The trek had lasted three days now, and it had led the scouts of Popolaki far afield.

Early that morning they had

separated, to trail in different directions, arranging to meet at sundown at the main camp.

Lyn's brow clouded a little with anxiety, as he listened for a repetition of the sound that had alarmed Bobo.

"Kumbe!" ejaculated Bobo suddenly.

Lyn started.

From the depths of the forest the sound came again, and now he heard it clearly.

It was a sound that made him shiver.

It came from the distance, like a long-drawn moan of pain, rising and falling, and dying away like a sob.

"My hat!" breathed Lyn. "Was that what you heard, Bobo?"

"Naam, Bwana," muttered the Kikuyu. "Yes, lord."

"That's a human cry," said Lyn. "One of the patrol hurt, perhaps. Follow me, Bobo!"

Without a second's delay, the leader of the Popolaki Patrol plunged into the forest, forcing a rapid way through the thick lianas.

Bobolobo did not hesitate. He seized his shield and spears, and, leaving the cooking-pot where it lay, heedless of what happened to it, he followed his master through the forest.

. . . . . .

Zirafi ben Said, the slave-trader of the Bahr-el-Gazelle, smiled grimly as he looked on the figure stretched at his feet.

In the open glade the fierce sun beat down on unsheltered baked earth, and on the face, black as the ace of spades, that was turned up towards the pitiless visage of the Arab.

Four stakes were driven into the earth, and to the stakes the wrists and ankles of the black man were securely tied with grass rope.

"Dog of a kafir!" said Zirafi ben Said. "I leave you here to die. You will not die soon."

The bound man, though of the pygmy bushman race, evidently understood the Arabic.

His black eyes gleamed up at the slave-trader.

But his glance turned from Zirafi to another Arab, who was moving along, stopping with a calabash in his hand.

From the calabash dripped honey.

Honey, too, was smeared on the black face of the bushman.

"Hasten, Bou Hamid!" snapped Zirafi ben Said.

"Effendi, it is done," said Bou Hamid.

He poured the last of the honey upon an earthy mound, at a little distance from the prisoner, and stirred the earth with the tip of his sandal.

From a crack came swarming the inhabitants of the mound, for it was an anthill of the terrible soldier-ants.

The trail of honey lay from the prisoner to the dwelling of the soldier-ants. And in a few moments a swarm of ants were crawling along the trail towards the helpless black stretched between the stakes.

A cruel grin curved the lips of Zirafi ben Said.

Many eyes were watching the scene, as well as the cruel eyes of the Arab slave-trader.

Halting in the glade was a long line of blacks—twenty men or more, of various tribes of the Congo basin.

Their hands were shackled, and a long, thick grass-rope fastened them one to another.

Zirafi ben Said was on his way north with his collection of "black ivory," bought from various chiefs in the wild lands on the Belgian side of Tanganyika.

Several tribes were represented in that hapless crew of captives, but the man who lay stretched between the stakes was the only bushman.

On the earth, at a little distance, lay a form that did not stir—that of an Arab in turban and burnouse. There was a spreading blot of crimson on his torn burnouse. As he lay the haft of a knife could be seen sticking out above the folds of stained linen.

There had been three Arabs in the party, but only two of them would go onward when the march was resumed. A blow of a stick had been followed by the snatching of a knife, and the bushman's swift vengeance. And now

Mpoko, the bushman, was stretched out for punishment.

Mpoko was doomed to the torture well known in Central Africa—of being torn and devoured piecemeal by the soldier-ants.

The bushman, small as he was in stature—scarcely over four feet—was strong and muscular, his limbs like masses of knotted muscles. As the ants began to crawl along the trail of honey he exerted his strength on the ropes that held him.

But he was bound with cruel care, and the stakes were driven deep into the earth. He could scarcely stir.

His eyes turned wildly on the trail of honey and the creeping ants. Then he looked up again at the cruel visage that stared down.

"Dog of a kafir," repeated Zirafi, "I leave you to the ants!"

The bushman showed his white teeth in a snarl.

"O man," he said, speaking in Swaheli, "leave me to the Small Ones! But I have slain Ashmet."

"Kafir dog!" repeated Zirafi.

And he turned away and gave the signal to march.

The tall Arab, his white linen garments glimmering against the dense green of the tropical forest, led the way.

A curse in Arabic, and a slashing of the whip, drove the string of blacks after him, and Bou Hamid brought up the rear with a curse or a blow of the whip ready for any wretch who lagged.

The bushman's rolling eyes followed them as they disappeared by a narrow path in the forest.

Mpoko was left alone—alone, save for the Small Ones, who crept and crept by the trail of honey, and drew nearer and nearer to the doomed bushman.

The first of the swarm soon reached him. A sharp and bitter pain, like that of pincers, warned him that the first of the soldier-ants had found the prey the slave-trader had left.

The bite was followed by another and another.

Mpoko writhed in his bonds. and his black face sweated great drops. Over his helpless limbs the ants crawled, biting at first in dozens, then in scores, then in hundreds. And ere long they would be crawling in thousands.

From the bushman's lips came a long, wailing cry. It was the first sound of pain that had been forced from him.

He lay in sweltering heat, the fierce sun blazing down on him. The grass-ropes bit his limbs cruelly, and he was parched with thirst. But these things he did not heed.

He heeded the jaws of the soldier-ants—the tiny but terrible creatures that in a night may pick white the bones of a horse.

Hours, perhaps, the torture would last, but in the end there would be nothing left of the Congo bushman save the skeleton glistening in the sun.

Cry after cry pealed from his lips.

Sometimes it faded away into silence as he lay almost swooning, and then again the sharp pain roused him and he cried again, and his wailing echoed eerily through the forest.

And then suddenly came a sound of heavy crashing, and he knew that someone was approaching the sun-scorched glade.

Whether it was Simba, the lion, or Fisi, the hyena, or Ndovu, the elephant, the bushman little cared, so long as the newcomer put him out of his pain.

"Good heavens!"

Mpoko started and shuddered.

It was not a beast of the forest that came—it was a man, and a white man!

He shuddered with the revulsion of feeling—the hope that was born in his breast, as he heard that startled voice in English.

A white Bwana—not a man, but a boy—was at his side, staring down at him in amazement and horror and rage. Following him from the forest into the burning light of the open glade came a Kikuyu warrior, in black-and-white monkey-skins, shield on arm, and spear in hand.

"Bobo!" shouted Lyn Strong. "Quick!"

"Bwana, it is a bushman," said Bobo-

lobo, with an eye of disdain on the dwarf stretched between the stakes.

"Quick, cut him loose!" snapped Lyn.

With a bunch of grass in his hand, Lyn was already brushing the soldier-ants from the black limbs of the bushman.

Bobo stooped, and with the cutting edge of his spear sliced through the grass ropes that fastened Mpoko to the stakes.

The bushman rolled free.

CHAPTER 2.

The Patrol Takes a Hand!

"LYN'S late!"

Pip Parker, of the Popolaki Patrol, made that remark.

The sun was setting, and with the sunset came a breath of coolness.

Four members of the Popolaki Patrol met by the giant baobab which was the agreed meeting-place of the patrol.

They came in tired and unsuccessful from the trail. Not a man of the party had discovered the spoor of the man-eater. Simba, eater of goats and black babies, had vanished into the depths of the forest, and the patrol had hunted him in vain.

One by one they dropped, tired, at the camp.

Fatty Page was the first to arrive. Fatty was the son of the storekeeper of Masumpwe. Fatty was a keen Scout, as keen as any man in the patrol, but he was fat, and he was a little lazy, and he was hungry. Fatty was always ready for supper before the other fellows.

Pip Parker was the next. Dr. Parker's son was named Henry James Julian, but he was never called anything but Pip, perhaps because he was the smallest member. Pip was suspected by his comrades of putting elevators into his mosquito boots. Sometimes early houseboys would see him in the shamba at the doctor's house doing earnest physical jerks in the cool of the dawn, and there were marks on the wall of his room where he measured himself anxiously every day.

Next to arrive at the rendezvous was Smut the Dutchman. Smut threw his rifle against the baobob and pitched down to rest without a word. Smut was a fellow of few words, with a good temper and a cheery grin. He was the son of a Cape Dutchman who had come up by way of the Zambesi and the Great Lakes, to try coffee-planting in British East.

Last of the four was Stacpoole, the dandy of the Popolaki Patrol. He was the nephew of a commissioner, and was better off in the way of cash than all the rest of the patrol put together. But cash counted for nothing in the Popolaki Patrol. After a day in the bush, Cecil Stacpoole looked as neat and clean as when he had broken camp that morning.

Fatty was already at supper.

If he had not found the spoor of Simba, he had found guinea-fowl, and he had brought in plenty of supper. By the time Stacpoole lounged elegantly in, Fatty had cooked and was eating.

"Where's Lyn, you fellows?" asked Stacpoole.

"Not come in yet," yawned Pip. "Lyn's late! Jolly late! First time our mighty chief's been late!"

"Holy smoke! If he's found Simba, he——"

"Lyn would put paid to Simba if he found him," said Fatty Page, with his mouth full. "Strong is all serene. Sit down to grub, you chaps. No good waiting."

"Bobo's with him," remarked Pip. "He's all right with that Kikuyu along with him."

Stacpoole nodded and sat down on a log. He had come in hungry, like the rest, but he was in no hurry to eat. He watched Fatty Page with an air of detached curiosity.

"Where are you putting it all, Fatty?" he asked.

"Oh, come off!" answered Fatty, with a grunt. "I can tell you this is cooking."

"We ought to have brought a cookboy

along," remarked Stacpoole. "Bobo's cookin' is vile. And the cheeky ass turns up his nose at cookin', too."

Pip chuckled.

"Bobo's a descendant of the jolly old Masai," he said. "Bobo's a pukka warrior. If the Mzungu hadn't come to this country, Bobo would be cutting off heads and sticking them over his hut. Bobo doesn't really think much of the Mzungu."

"Except Lyn Strong," said Stacpoole, with a faint trace of a sneer.

Little Pip looked at the tall, slim, elegant youth lounging on the log.

"Lyn saved him from a crocodile once," he said quietly. "That's why Bobo sticks to him like glue. Bobo's a good boy."

Stacpoole yawned.

"Pile in, you fellows," said Fatty Page. "I keep telling you it's no good waiting for Strong. He won't want us to wait. Fact is, I couldn't wait. I came in famishing."

"You're generally famishin', old bean," remarked Stacpoole. "Well, you'll be scoffin' the lot if we don't chip in. Here goes."

"Lots and lots!" said Fatty. "Help yourselves, dear old beans."

The four Scouts ate their supper while the sun sank lower behind the forest and disappeared.

The cooking-fire that Fatty had lighted, between three stones in the native manner, danced and flickered against the gloom of the surrounding trees.

Strange lights and shadows moved and lurked among the thick trunks and heavy branches and the masses of hanging lianas.

Sitting by the glowing camp-fire, the four Scouts talked of the day's tracking, excepting Smut, who seldom talked. But every now and then their glances wandered round at the blackness of the forest, and they wondered where their leader was, and what delayed him.

"Here he comes!" exclaimed Pip Parker at last, in a tone of great relief.

Lyn came out of the circling gloom into the gloom of the firelight.

Following him came Bobolobo, and following Bobolobo came a dwarf figure that shambled along slowly.

"You're late, Strong," said Stacpoole.

"Not my fault," said Lyn cheerfully. "I had to slacken down for Mpoko—he can hardly walk."

"Who the merry dooce is Mpoko?"

"Here he is!"

The bushman shambled into the light of the camp-fire, and the Scouts stared at him curiously.

Mpoko was clad in a dingy loincloth and his bare black limbs showed clearly the innumerable wounds left by the soldier-ants.

"A jolly old bushman!" said Pip.

"Where on earth did you pick up that specimen, Strong?" drawled Stacpoole. "And what the merry dooce are you goin' to do with him?"

"I'm going to feed him, to begin with," said Lyn. "Bobo, give food to the small one."

"Na'am, Bwana," said Bobo.

"You fellows have missed Simba?" asked Lyn.

"Yes, and it seems that you've missed him, too, and found an unwashed bushman," yawned Stacpoole.

"Go easy, he understands English," said Lyn, "and these bushmen are touchy. He killed an Arab to-day, for beating him."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Stacpoole.

"You're taking him in as a prisoner?" asked Pip.

Lyn shook his head.

"No fear; the man he killed was one of Zirafi ben Said's gang of slave-traders from up north."

There was a chorus of surprise from the Scouts.

"Zirafi here, in British territory!" exclaimed Stacpoole incredulously. "Your friend, the bushman, has been pullin' your leg!"

"I'll tell you——"

"Supper first, dear old bean," said Fatty Page anxiously. "You must be frightfully hungry. Sit down, old thing, and eat. I can jolly well tell you that this chop isn't like Bobo's cooking."

Lyn laughed.

"You're full of good ideas, Fatty," he said. "I'll talk while I eat. We haven't got a lot of time to waste."

"What's on?" asked Pip eagerly, "If you've found the spoor of that jolly old man-eater, and we can follow him to his den——"

"The man-eater can wait," said Lyn. "We're going to follow the spoor of Zirafi ben Said; that is, if you fellows are game."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Fatty.

"I fancy we're game for anythin'," drawled Stacpoole. "The Popolaki Patrol never backs out!"

"Hear, hear!" chorused the Scouts.

"Well, I know you're game, of course," said Lyn, eating while he talked. "But this is a job a bit outside our usual run, a bit thicker than tracking out a Kuke who's been stealing chickens; or hunting a wild pig who's been rooting up a shamba—or even tracking a man-eating lion. Zirafi is rather more dangerous than Simba, I fancy."

"But what——" asked Pip.

"Zirafi, as I make out from the bushman, has been buying slaves from the chiefs on the Congo side," explained Lyn. "Prisoners of war mostly, taken in tribal fighting. He's marching them north to sell in the Bahr-el-Gazelle, or perhaps among the Touaregs—goodness knows. Anyhow, he's got them; and among them he picked up Mpoko. You know the nature of the bushman—all teeth and claws. The other niggers took the stick quietly—but Mpoko snatched a knife and dug it into one of the Arabs."

"More power to his elbow!" said Fatty.

"And Zirafi left him tied up for the soldier-ants," went on Lyn. "You know that trick—it's common enough along the Congo."

"And you found him?"

"That's it! And here he is. He's rather damaged by the ants, and I had to slow down coming in; that's made me late."

"And we're following Zirafi?" asked Stacpoole, with a deep breath, and a gleam in his eyes. He picked up his rifle and examined it as he spoke. Stacpoole was a dandy; and he had some ways that made him the least liked member of the Popolaki patrol; but he was game to the backbone, and the gleam in his eyes told them that he welcomed a tussle with an enemy more dangerous than the beasts of the forest.

"That's the big idea," said Lyn Strong. "We're going to set free the whole gang of slaves, and if Zirafi gives trouble, we're going to give him a lesson. You fellows are on?"

"What-ho!" chuckled Fatty Page.

The Scouts lost no time in preparing for the march.

Mpoko rose to his feet, his dark, shining eyes seeking Lyn's. Man as he was, the dwarf was the smallest of all; shorter even than Pip. He looked a strange, wild figure in the firelight.

"O Master, Mpoko come!" he said.

Lyn shook his head.

"You stop here and rest, Mpoko," he said kindly. "Camp here and wait till we come back. To-morrow we'll start you for your home and your tribe. Now sleep!"

The bushman hesitated, looked from face to face; and then made a sign of obedience. He curled up by the fire as the Scouts started, and was asleep almost before they were out of sight.

Behind the Scouts, as they trod in single file, the firelight flickered and danced, and died away into darkness. Bobolobo took the head of the little column now, treading on through the gloom without a pause, and the Scouts followed in silence. They had had a long day; but they had rested, and they were hardened to fatigue. There was no pause in the march, till they reached the far-off glade where Zirafi ben Said had left Mpoko tied up for the soldier-ants. From that point the track of the slave-trader and his string of blacks led away northward; and the least skilful of the Popolaki Patrol could have followed it easily, even in the gloom of night.

CHAPTER 3.
A Lesson for Zirafi

DAWN was breaking in the African forest.

Zirafi ben Said looked out of his tent with a scowling brow.

The blacks, awakened by the whip and the guttural cursing in Arabic from Bou Hamid, were squatted, with dull faces, devouring the native cakes that formed their only fare, with vessels of water. The long grass-rope still held them together, but Bou Hamid had freed their hands for feeding, and he waited impatiently for them to finish.

Zirafi scowled at them, and scowled at the surrounding forest. It was to avoid other dangers that he was taking a short cut across British territory; but he was not easy in his mind on ground where the British flag flew.

The slave-trader started, and caught his breath as a figure stepped from the trees and walked towards the camp.

Bou Hamid, ceasing to curse the squatting blacks, stared at the newcomer, and moved swiftly towards the tree against which he had leaned his rifle.

Lyn took no heed of him. He walked on directly towards the slave-trader.

"Salaam, Effendi!" said Zirafi between his teeth.

Lyn did not return the greeting. He looked steadily in the dark, bitter face of the Arab.

"You're Zirafi ben Said?" he asked.

"I am Zirafi!"

"The slave-trader from the Bahr-el-Gazelle?"

Zirafi shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I suppose you know you're breaking every law in Africa," said Lyn.

"In the forest a man is a law to himself," said Zirafi. "Go your way in peace, boy, or I may be tempted to sell a white slave among the Touaregs."

"The Touaregs would find me rather a handful, I think, if you got me so far!" said Lyn, with a grin. "You slave-trading dog, let those niggers loose this minute! I'm not alone here—there are four rifles looking at you from the bush."

Zirafi glared round him. He could see no sign of the four rifles; the Popolaki Patrol were deep in cover.

"Effendi," said Zirafi softly, "you lie in the way of the Feringhees. I think, Effendi, that you will not live to tell the police-askaris where to look for Zirafi ben Said."

He made a sign to Bou Hamid, who had half-raised his rifle, and was waiting only for a sign.

The rifle leaped to a level.

Crack—ack!

Two shots sounded almost as one from the thick bush. Bou Hamid gave a fearful yell, and spun over, his rifle, still undischarged, falling to the ground.

Zirafi's teeth were drawn back in a snarl, and his eyes burned under his knitted brows. His hand grasped convulsively at his scimitar. Lyn was not touching a weapon. He stood and looked coolly at the slave-trader, while Bou Hamid writhed and groaned with a bullet through his leg, and another through his shoulder. Both Fatty Page and Pip Parker had "got" him.

"Are you giving in, you scoundrel?" asked Lyn quietly. "Draw that sword, and you fall riddled with bullets."

"By Shaitin!" hissed Zirafi. "You have the upper hand now, Feringhee! But remember Zirafi—remember——"

"You're going to remember, you scoundrel," answered Lyn. "Bobo!"

Bobolobo came out of the bush. The four Scouts followed him into view.

"Disarm that scoundrel, Bobo!"

Zirafi ben Said stood shaking with rage, as the Kikuyu jerked away his scimitar, his jewelled dagger, and his long-barrelled pistol.

Lyn pointed to the slaves.

"Cut them loose, Zirafi!" he said.

Under the threatening spear of the Kikuyu, Zirafi ben Said moved among the slaves, and freed them from the grass-rope. The blacks, amazed, not understanding what was passing, scrambled to their feet, looking wildly round them. Lyn Strong called to them,

and waved his hand to the forest, and the blacks understood the gesture. For some moments they hesitated, eyeing Zirafi with fear; and then, with a sudden scamper, they broke for the forest, and disappeared in every direction.

"Now seize that scoundrel!" said Lyn.

And Zirafi, collared unceremoniously by the scouts, was flung to the ground, and Bobo picked up the whip that had been dropped by Bou Hamid.

The sinewy arm of Bobo rose and fell, and every time it fell a sounding blow rang on the Arab slave-trader. Blow after blow with all the force of the gun-bearer's strong arm, till the forest rang with the wild yells of Zirafi, and he gasped, and writhed, and squirmed, and shrieked for mercy. What he had so often and so mercilessly inflicted on the victims of his greed was now falling to Zirafi's own share, and not till fifty strokes had fallen did Lyn give the Kikuyu the sign to stop.

Zirafi lay writhing like a wounded snake, his eyes glaring up at Lyn with the glare of a demon.

"O Feringhee, you shall remember this!" he hissed.

"O grandfather of five hundred swine," answered Lyn, "it is for you to remember that if I find you on British territory again, I will take you to the commissioner, who will hang you on a tree."

He turned to the grinning patrol.

"We're through here," he said. "Beat it!"

And the Scouts marched, and as they disappeared into the forest, the groans of Bou Hamid, and the yelling curses of Zirafi ben Said followed the Popolaki Patrol.

CHAPTER 4.
In the African Forest!

THE Popolaki Patrol were in high feather.

They sat round the camp-fire in the clearing, in the heart of the Mbiri Forest, eating a late breakfast.

Generally, when they were on safari the Popolaki scouts broke their fast at dawn, and were on the trail before the sun was over the tree-tops. But after the events of last night they were naturally a bit later.

Nevertheless, they were not thinking of resting during the day.

Though when noon came the tropical heat would force them to knock off for a spell, it took a lot to disturb the high spirits of the Popolaki Patrol. A small spot of bother never did that.

They had left Masumpwe four days ago to track down the man-eating lion that terrorised the district. They had not found "Simba" yet. And they were not going back to Masumpwe till they had put "paid" to Simba! So far, they had not been lucky.

Still, they were in high feather. If they had not found Simba, the lion, they had found Zirafi, defeated him, and released the slaves. And that was an exploit of which Lyn Strong and his comrades might well be proud.

Lyn's tanned face was bright and cheery. He sat on a log, finishing his breakfast, with a bunch of juicy plantains. Fatty Page was still busy with the guinea-fowl stew, left over from supper. Fatty believed in putting away a solid meal before going on the march. Pip Parker and Smut were eating dhurra cakes and bananas. Stacpoole was dealing delicately with a mango. He was a little distressed at the juice getting on his slim fingers, and he wiped them very carefully with cambric handkerchief.

Bobolobo was cleaning Lyn's rifle. On a blanket, at a little distance, lay Mpoko.

Bobo glanced sometimes at the bushman, with disapproval and disfavour in his glance. The proud Kikuyu, tall and strong, had a lofty contempt for the dwarf race of the bushmen.

But Mpoko was not heeding the Kikuyu.

His eyes, as he lay, were fixed on Lyn.

Mpoko was not handsome. He was,

in fact, extremely ugly. The pygmy bushmen of Central Africa are not a beautiful race. But there was a soft expression on Mpoko's face that made it almost pleasant to look upon. Fierceness or sullenness was his habitual expression. But there was no trace of either now. Mpoko's black skin showed many signs where the soldier-ants had bitten him, and the bushman, fierce and sullen as he might be, was not ungrateful. Lyn had saved him from death by torture, and Mpoko was thinking of it as he lay watching the handsome, tanned face of the patrol-leader.

Lyn Strong rose from the log and stretched himself.

"Time we got a move on!" he remarked.

"Give a fellow a chance," said Fatty Page, with his mouth full. "You don't want to start on a trail hungry, old bean."

"You don't want to load more than you can carry, old scout," answered Lyn. "We're hunting Simba; but if Simba caught sight of you, Fatty, I believe he would start hunting us. You'd tempt him."

"And you'd last him about a month, Fatty, and keep him out of mischief!" chuckled Pip Parker.

Fatty grunted.

"Well, there's something of me," he remarked. "You wouldn't last a mosquito five minutes, Pip!"

Pip sniffed.

"Well, I'm not as broad as I'm long," he said.

"You wouldn't be very broad if you were!" retorted Fatty. "About a yard."

"Look here, you fat duffer——"

Pip was rather touchy about his inches.

"Order!" said Lyn. "Don't you fellows begin ragging! Chuck it, Fatty! We can't roll you along when we start, you know. Ready, Bobo?"

"Na'am, Bwana!" answered Bobolobo. "Yes, lord!"

"What are you goin' to do with the jolly old bushman, Lyn?" drawled Stacpoole. "Take him home and keep him for a beauty show?"

The Scouts chuckled.

"Well, I suppose he'll trek for home," said Lyn. "The rest of Zirafi's prisoners were jolly glad to show their heels. I suppose this chap belongs to some tribe in the Upper Congo."

He crossed over to where the bushman was lying.

Mpoko rose to his feet.

"We're breaking camp now, Mpoko," said Lyn.

Boy as he was, he towered over the little bushman. But, strong as he was, he would have been an infant in the bushman's muscular hands.

Mpoko's dark eyes looked up at him.

"Me, Mpoko, with Bwana!" he said.

"Eh, what?" The Bwana stared at him. "Don't you want to get home?"

Mpoko shook his head.

Lyn looked perplexed. He had had little to do with bushmen, but he had heard the hunters talk of that strange race. Implacable and relentless in revenge for an injury, but with a long memory for a kind or friendly action.

"Me mtumwa—slave—with Bwana!" said Mpoko. "Me serve Mzungu—white man—long time before. Me cook!"

"Cook?" repeated Lyn. "I am already served by the Kikuyu, and it is not written that I should have two servants. Let there be peace, and you shall have food and a knife and seek your home by the Congo."

Mpoko shook his fuzzy head.

He did not speak again, and the Scouts prepared for the trail. A bag of food and a long Kikuyu knife were bestowed on the bushman, and he said no word. His eyes followed Lyn when the Scouts took the trail and disappeared into the forest.

The leader of the Popolaki Patrol glanced back and saw the little, muscular figure still standing there, motionless, gazing.

He waved his hand, but the bushman made no sign. He stood like a statue,

gazing after the Scouts, and in a few moments more he was lost to sight.

. . . . .

"Simba!"

Bobo breathed the word.

Noon had come; the fierce noon-tide of equatorial Africa, when man and beast and bird sink into rest and silence.

It was like an oven in the Mbiri forest.

Great trees, a hundred feet high, locked their branches high above. Lesser trees, growing among the giants, interlaced their foliage below the upper canopy. It was like a roof of green far above the heads of the scouts, shutting off the blaze of the vertical sun, but not its heat. Only here and there a bright ray came gleaming through some interstice in the foliage; but the heat shimmered everywhere. And with the aching heat was the dimness of a cathedral.

Lyn Strong was looking for a place for the noontide camp, where the Popolaki Patrol would rest till the fiercest heat was over. For hours the Scouts had been hunting for the spoor of the man-eater, but hunting in vain. And then suddenly, softly, Bobo, the gun-bearer, breathed the word. The Scouts were fatigued, ready to tumble over with the heat and exertion of trailing through the jungle forest. But at that whisper from Bobo they forgot heat and fatigue, and each man of the patrol straightened up, with glinting eyes, and grasped his rifle.

"The lion?" repeated Pip.

"Na'am! Simba!" said the Kikuyu.

In the drowsy forest there was no sound, save the buzzing of countless insects that whirled in the filtering rays from above.

Lyn looked round him swiftly, and then doubtfully at the Kikuyu.

"You're sure, Bobo?"

"My eyes see, Bwana!" said the Kikuyu, and with his spear, he pointed to a mark in the earth.

Lyn dropped on his knees and examined it.

Keen Scout as he was, he would have missed it; but Bobolobo had the eyes of an eagle for the faintest sign.

Lyn's eyes flashed.

"Look out, you fellows!" he said. "It's Simba's sign—he's trodden here, and not long ago."

"The Terrible One goes to sleep," said Bobo. "Bwana, he lies in the brush, and his eyes are closed."

The Scouts drew together, their rifles ready, their eyes on the alert. It was the sign of a lion that Bobo had found, and they hoped it was the sign of the man-eater they were hunting. But in the thick brush was not a favourable spot for finding him. The terrible beast might have been within ten paces of them, unseen and unheard. It was creepy to feel that perhaps they were within reach of his spring; and that, at any moment, a sinuous body might come hurtling through the air towards them.

"Follow the track, Bobo," said Lyn; and the Kikuyu led the way.

That the lion had passed the spot, not long since, was certain. Again and again sign of his tread was picked up. That he had lain down to sleep in some shady spot was equally certain; but he was not likely to remain asleep while enemies approached.

Bobo stopped suddenly, his sinewy arm, with his spear in his hand, stretched out before him.

Through the brush there was a glimpse of something yellowish that stirred.

"Simba!" whispered Bobo.

There came a deep, menacing growl, that thrilled the heart of the Scouts of Masumpwe.

The lion, disturbed from his midday sleep, was up and watching, within six or seven feet of the Kikuyu's spearhead.

Bang!

The sudden roar of Stacpoole's rifle came with an effect of thunder in the stillness of the tropical forest.

A fearful roar answered it, and fol-

lowing the roar came the spring of the lion.

"You ass!" panted Lyn.

Stacpoole, anxious to bag the lion, had fired too soon. A volley might have stretched the great beast on the earth; but Stackpoole's bullet had grazed his huge neck, irritating without injuring him. The Scouts leaped away into the brush, as the great body was launched through the air, and the lion came down on the spot where they had been gathered, roaring and tearing up the earth with his great claws.

They had a full sight of him now—a huge beast with a tawny mane, nearly ten feet long from muzzle to tail. It was the man-eater!

The Scouts scrambled quickly out of reach through the tangled brush. Bobolobo, who had no time to jump clear, swung himself up to a branch overhead with the activity of a monkey.

Roar after roar pealed from the lion, awakening every echo of the forest.

"Shoot!" shouted Lyn.

But at the first crack of a rifle the lion leaped away again, and vanished into the brush.

Crashing of the brushwood was heard, as the great animal fled.

Bobolobo dropped from the trees.

"After him!" exclaimed Stacpoole. He was running forward; but Lyn caught him by the arm.

"Hold on, you duffer!"

"Do you want to let him get clear?" exclaimed Stacpoole impatiently.

"Hold on, I tell you! And hold your fire next time till I give the word," said Lyn gruffly. "We might have had him then—you spoiled it by blazing away in a hurry——"

"Oh, rot!" muttered Stacpoole.

"Rot or not, keep back, and follow your leader!" snapped Lyn.

Stacpoole compressed his lips; but he obeyed. There had always been a latent hostility between Stacpoole and the patrol-leader of the Popolaki Scouts. Stacpoole could never quite forget that he was the nephew of the Commissioner; and that Lyn was the son of a hunter. The Commissioner was a great gun; and Grant Strong, the hunter, a nobody. That had nothing to do with scouting; but the dandy of Popolaki never seemed quite to realise that.

"Get on, Bobo!" muttered Lyn.

The Kikuyu led the pursuit, the Scouts trailing after him. Ahead of them, the crashing of the brush, as the lion leaped away in flight, reached their ears, and guided them. The heat was overpowering; the Scouts streaming with perspiration, but they hardly noticed it. Now that they were at close quarters with Simba, they were not thinking of rest.

But the crashing died away in the distance.

The lion was in full flight, and he threaded his way through the jungle at amazing speed. With all their efforts, the Scouts had no chance of keeping pace with him.

But they kept on doggedly.

There was silence round them now; and they slackened their pace, and proceeded with caution. For the silence might mean that the lion was far off; or it might mean that he had stopped and was crouching under some bush ready for them to come up.

Bobo stopped at last, on the high bank of a dry ravine. Here the trees fell away, and the ground was clearer, and the sun came uninterrupted from above, in a blaze of burning heat. Bobo pointed with his spear down the steep side of the ravine.

"O Bwana, Simba has leaped into the fumbi," he said, "and on the stones my eyes see nothing."

"Keep on!" said Lyn.

The Scouts descended the stony slope of the watercourse. It was completely dried up; not a vestige of water remaining among the stones and dried mud. And on the stones and the baked earth, there was no sign to be picked up of Simba.

"We've lost him!" grunted Pip.

"All your fault, Stacpoole, you duffer!" grunted Fatty Page.

"Rot!" snapped Stacpoole.

"No good crying over spilt milk," said Lyn cheerily. "We'll camp in the fumbi for a rest; and then separate and hunt for the brute's spoor. We're bound to find him before dark."

On the shady side of the fumbi the Scouts camped, glad to stretch their tired limbs on the earth. While the other fellows were resting, Fatty Page travelled slowly and methodically through a bunch of bananas.

Bobo stood watching, his eyes fixed on the brush that clothed the upper edge of the fumbi, warily and suspiciously. Lyn called to him at last.

"What do your eyes see, O Bobo?"

"My eyes see nothing, Bwana; but my ears hear!" answered the Kikuyu. "He-that-treads-softly moves in the jungle."

Lyn jumped up.

"Not the lion?"

"Siyo, Bwana! No, lord!" said the gun-bearer. "But my ears hear."

Lyn listened intently. There was no breath of wind stirring; but from the brush on the edge of the ravine came a faint rustling.

"Lo! Kumbe!" ejeculated the Kikuyu suddenly, pointing with his spear. "Look, lord! It is the Small One!"

From the brush a little black face suddenly looked out, and two flashing, keen eyes scanned the depths of the fumbi. Lyn uttered an exclamation. It was the face of Mpoko, the bushman.

It vanished the next moment, and the rustle was heard no more.

"My hat," exclaimed Lyn, "that giddy bushman has been following us through the forest!"

Pip Parker chuckled.

"He's taken a fancy to you, Lyn. You're not going to get shut of that beautiful one!"

"More likely lookin' for somethin' to steal," said Stacpoole. "These bushmen are bigger thieves than the Kikuyu, which is sayin' a lot."

"Oh, rubbish!" said Pip. "I believe he's quite a decent little chap."

Pip had taken rather a liking to Mpoko; for the excellent reason that the bushman was much smaller than nimself. When Pip had stood beside Mpoko, he had felt quite tall, which made him feel good.

"Well, he's gone now," said Lyn.

CHAPTER 5.
At Close Quarters!

IT was still hot, but the blaze of noontide had passed when the patrol took up the trail again.

Pip Parker and Smut went up the ravine, and Fatty Page and Stacpoole went down. Lyn Strong and Bobolobo clambered up the stony farther side, to hunt for signs farther afield.

In which direction the man-eater had gone they could not tell; but all the Scouts were hoping to strike his spoor before long. And within half an hour Lyn and Bobo fell in with a forest path, where the tracks of many animals were to be seen.

Among the tracks was the spoor of a lion, though whether it was that of the man-eater of Masumpwe they had to guess. The well-trodden path evidently led to a drinking-place, and it was likely enough that the man-eater, after his noonday nap, was heading for water.

Bobo's keen eyes searched the trodden track suspiciously.

"O Bwana, black men have trodden here," he said.

"Native hunters," said Lyn.

"Na'am, Bwana. But the tracks are old, one-two-three-days," said the Kikuyu.

The Scout and the gun-bearer pressed on through the forest. The track wound onward among the thick trees and brush, shut in on either side by an almost impenetrable green wall.

Llianas, thick as a man's arm, hung from the branches above, and Bobo's

long Kikuyu knife slashed a way through them. The animals that used the path were accustomed to creeping under them. All kinds of tracks were to be picked up—the lion's, the hyena's, the antelope's, and others. The path was well-worn, and had probably existed for ages.

A shining gleam came through the trees ahead. It was the shining of water in the sun. They were drawing near to the drinking-place of the wild beasts that had trodden the track.

There was a sudden cry from Bobolobo.

The Kikuyu, spear in hand, was treading the track about six paces in advance of the Bwana, who followed with his rifle at the ready.

Suddenly the earth opened under the Kikuyu's feet, and Bobo vanished from Lyn's sight, in the midst of a smashing and crashing.

"Bobo!" gasped Lyn.

He started forward, and stopped on the edge of the pit into which the Kikuyu had tumbled.

The pit was about four feet wide, and had been dug deep in the centre of the path. The opening had been cunningly concealed with twigs and dead leaves—so cunningly that even the piercing eye of the Kikuyu had not detected it.

It was a game-pit of a native hunter.

Lyn stared down into it, his face white.

"Bobo!" he panted.

The dusky face of the Kikuyu looked up. To Lyn's immense relief he looked unhurt.

Lyn had feared that it might be a lion-pit, in which sharp-pointed stakes would have been planted at the bottom, to pierce the lion as he fell.

If that had been the case, nothing could have saved the Kikuyu from being impaled.

But it was only a game-pit; and Lyn panted with relief as he saw that Bobo was unharmed, save for the fall.

"You're not hurt, Bobo?"

"Bwana, it is nothing!" answered Bobo, from below, but his dusky face was full of distress. "Lo, Bwana, your servant is a great fool! I, a hunter of the Kikuyu, to fall into a pit like a foolish Mzungu that knows not the forest! Bwana, it is fitting that you should leave so foolish a one to die."

"Fathead!" was Lyn's reply.

Bobo grinned. That reply showed him that his lord was not angry with him for his clumsiness.

"O Bwana, I am ashamed!" he said. "The black men would laugh if this was told at Masumpwe!"

"Never mind about that now," said Lyn. "We've got to get you out of that hole, Bobo."

He looked round in his perplexity. Bobo, as he stood in the deep pit, was far out of his reach—his head was six feet below the top. The sides were perpendicular, and offered no hold for a monkey.

"How the thump am I going to get you out, Bobo?" growled Lyn.

"If the Bwana will make a rope of llianas, and lower it to this foolish one——"

"Good!"

Lyn drew his hunting-knife, and turned away from the pit.

There were plenty of thick llianas close at hand, and Lyn slashed them down to make a rope.

He stood his rifle against a tree while he was cutting the llianas. For the moment he had forgotten Simba; and he had no expectation of falling in with the lion till he reached the drinking-place, which was still some little distance ahead.

Lyn stuck his knife back in his belt, and plaited the thick creepers together with swift, active fingers.

The rope was soon finished, and he carried it to the edge of the game-pit.

He was about to lower it, when the faintest of faint sounds behind him made him suddenly spin round, his heart leaping.

Faint as the sound was, he knew the soft pad of a wild beast's foot.

"Oh!" gasped Lyn.

A deep, blood-curdling growl sounded horribly in his ears.

In the jungle path, within a dozen feet of him, stood the man-eater.

The huge lion, padding along to the drinking-place, had come suddenly in sight of the hunter.

He stopped, crouching, and fixed his shining, yellowish eyes on the almost petrified Lyn.

"Good heavens!" breathed Lyn.

His teeth came hard together.

The lion, for the moment, was motionless. He lay crouched, his burning eyes fixed on the boy.

Lyn stood still, on the edge of the pit.

He was unarmed; his rifle was standing where he had left it, against the trunk of a baobab, a dozen feet away. Only his knife remained to him—of little more use than a toothpick against so fearful an enemy at close quarters.

He was caught napping. The idea had been in his mind that the lion had gone on to the drinking-place. But evidently the hunters had been ahead of their quarry. Simba had been sleeping through the hot hours, in some lair in the brush, and the hunters had passed him unknowing. Now he had wakened, and was going along the path to the water. And Lyn, on the edge of the pit, stood directly in his path—unarmed.

The Scout breathed hard and deep.

Not for a second did he lose his head or his nerve. But in that fearful moment, he knew how unlikely it was that he would ever see Masumpwe again, or greet his father when Grant Strong returned from safari.

He stood with his eyes on the lion's, waiting for the spring. He knew that the spring would come instantly if he made a movement to reach his rifle. His hand was on his knife; all his nerves tensely strung.

There was a groan from the Kikuyu at the bottom of the pit. He had heard the growl of the man-eather, and he knew the danger in which his lord was standing.

"O Bwana!" came the Kikuyu's voice. "O Bwana-wangu! Why do you not fire at him-who-speaks-with-the-terrible-voice?"

"My rifle's out of reach!" muttered Lyn, over his shoulder.

"Ole wangu! Ole wangu!" groaned the Kikuyu.

"Give me your spear, Bobo!" breathed Lyn, still watching the lion, his back to the pit, and not daring to turn his head. "Your spear, Bobo! Chapu! Chapu! Quick!"

The Kikuyu reached up the spear; Lyn, groping behind him with one hand, grasped it.

He drew it up, grasped the shaft, the keen point towards the crouching lion. It was a better weapon than the knife; but little enough likely to stop the leap of the man-eater.

The crouching brute was lashing his sides with his tail now, his eyes burning fiercer and fiercer. A few hours since, the lion had fled from the Scouts; but he showed no sign of fear now. Savage ferocity burned in his eyes, and his tail lashed and lashed.

To Lyn, watching him, the seconds seemed centuries. At any instant the spring might come; and if he stirred, he knew that it would come at once.

Grasping the Kikuyu's spear, he stood and waited, still, tense, his eyes fixed on the man-eater's.

A deeper growl; and a shiver ran through the long, cat-like body. The next moment the lion leaped.

Lyn sprang aside with the swiftness of lightning. He barely escaped the slash of the mighty paws, as the lion came down on the very verge of the pit. He turned and thrust with the spear, and the keen blade sank deep under the lion's shoulder. With all his strength Lyn drove the broad-bladed spear; and with a terrific roar, the lion spun round

on him, and the spear was wrenched from his hand. He plunged madly into the brush, with the maddened lion roaring and clawing at his very heels.

CHAPTER 7.
Saved from the Lion!

LYN knew that it was death!

He knew it, as he scrambled madly through the tearing brush, with the lion clawing after him. A slash of a paw barely missed him, tearing a strip from his shirt, and the blood ran down his arm. He dodged round the the trunk of a baobab, and for a moment was clear. He leaped into the forest path again, and ran for his rifle. It was the only chance; but he know that it was no chance—that he would be torn down before he could reach the rifle.

The lion, with the spear still sticking in his side, streaming with blood and maddened with pain, crouched for the last deadly spring. A second more——

Something leaped from the brush; Lyn had a fleeting impression of a monkey falling from a branch. But the tiny figure that leaped was not that of a monkey. A long Kikuyu knife flashed in the sun that filtered through the foliage. Lyn, untouched by the terrible claws behind, reached the rifle, grasped it, and turned.

He gave a cry.

"Mpoko!"

It was Mpoko the bushman that had leaped on the lion, and driven the two-foot knife deep into the tawny throat.

The man-eater, spluttering and choking with blood, turned on his new enemy.

Bang!

The rifle was at Lyn's shoulder in a flash. The bullet crashed on the tawny body, barely in time to save the bushman.

Mpoko leaped out of reach of the lashing claws.

The lion sprang, fell short, and rolled on his side. The bullet had torn through the fierce heart.

A long and terrible shudder ran through the sinuous body, and the lion lay still. Simba was slain. The man-eater of Masumpwe was dead. Lyn shivered as he looked at the terrible beast, terrible even in death. He could scarcely believe that the danger had passed, that the lion was dead, and that he was living.

"Mpoko!" he stammered. "Mpoko! You little trump, you've saved my life!"

Mpoko grinned.

"How did you come here, Mpoko?"

"Me follow Bwana!" said the bushman, with a grin that showed a large set of flashing white teeth; and then, in Swahili: "O Bwana, is it not written that Mpoko should serve you?"

"Bwana, wangu!" came the Kikuyu's voice from the pit.

"All serene now, Bobo!" called back Lyn. "Simba is dead, and Mpoko has killed him."

He picked up the rope of llianas and lowered it into the game-pit. Bobolobo came clambering out.

The Kikuyu looked at the dead lion with awe in his look. Then his eyes turned on the little bushman.

Mpoko faced him with sullen defiance in his black face. His grasp closed on the long knife that streamed with the blood of Simba.

"Mpoko saved my life, Bobo!" said Lyn quietly. "Simba would have had me in another moment, when Mpoko jumped on him from the bush."

But there was no hostility in the Kikuyu's look now. He stepped towards Mpoko, and as he approached him he spat twice which, among the Kikuyu tribes, is a sign of the deepest respect and esteem.

And Mpoko, understanding, dropped the knife.

"O Small One!" said Bobolobo in a trembling voice.

"O Kikuyu!" said Mpoko.

And Bobolobo spat again, and the bushman, not to be outdone in politeness, spat also.

"O Small One, you have saved the Bwana from Simba, while this foolish one lay in the pit like a trapped hyena!" said Bobo. "O Slayer of Simba, Bobolobo is your brother!"

"O splendid and handsome Kikuyu, your words sing like the birds of the forest in the ears of Mpoko!" said the bushman.

And they spat again and clasped hands.

Lyn chuckled.

And the Kikuyu and the bushman, on the friendliest terms now, set to work skinning the lion.

. . . . . .

"My only hat!" drawled Stacpoole, as Lyn came into camp in the fumbi. "You've picked up that beauty spot again."

Mpoko and Bobolobo followed Lyn into camp. Bobolobo was carrying the skin of the man-eater.

"Great pip!" yelled Fatty Page. "You've got the lion!"

"Ach! Good!" said Smut.

"We've all had rotten luck!" said Pip Parker. "And you've bagged the jolly old lion while we were rooting around getting bitten by mosquitoes. Some fellows have all the luck."

"He jolly nearly bagged me," said Lyn, "and would have done it quite if Mpoko hadn't butted in. The bushman saved my life."

"Good old bushman!" said Pip. "He isn't lovely to look at, but from now on he's a man and a brother!"

"What are you goin' to do with him?" drawled Stacpoole. "Keepin' him for that beauty show, as I suggested?"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Lyn. "I'm not turning him down after he's saved my life. He's going back to Masumpwe with me. We'll find room for him somehow at home. I dare say he can help in the shamba; and he says he can cook."

"Me cook!" said Mpoko, grinning, with a flash of teeth. "Me plenty filthy good cook!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat! I hope his cookin's better than his English, if he's goin' to cook for this patrol!" yawned Stacpoole.

"Me cook for Mzungu long time before," said Mpoko. "Mzungu say me splendid dirty filthy cook!"

The Scouts yelled. Mpoko grinned widely, showing every tooth in his head, evidently pleased at having cause so much merriment, though he was unaware of its cause.

"Well, let's see him cook," said Fatty Page, becoming serious as he touched on a serious subject. "I've brought in plenty for supper——"

And Mpoko set to work, and the scent that rose from the cooking-pot made the Scouts' mouths water. And when the supper was eaten they realised that Mpoko was a valuable addition to the patrol.

When the Popolaki Patrol trailed homeward the following morning carrying the man-eater's skin as evidence of their successful trek, Mpoko trailed behind with Bobolobo, and they talked to one another politely in that politest of all languages, Swahili. Lyn caught a fragment of their talk.

"O handsome and splendid Kikuyu!"

"O Small One, with the courage of many lions——"

And the Bwana chuckled.

CHAPTER 6.
The Shot!

"STOP!"

Lyn Strong shouted out the word.

It was not often that Lyn was angry; seldom indeed that such a note of sharp command was heard in his voice.

Stacpoole stared round in surprise, and an angry flush came into his cheeks.

The patrol were on the march through the dusky depths of the Mbiri Forest, following a narrow track among the giant trees hung with immense creepers.

Bobolobo was in the lead, testing the

path as he went with his spear; then came the five Scouts in single file; and in the rear Mpoko carrying the cooking-pots and other impedimenta.

The Scouts were on their homeward march.

They moved slowly along the forest track, for the tropical heat was intense, and scarce a breath of air stirred among the thick trees and underwoods. Monkeys clambered on the branches that overhung the path, peering down with bright eyes and puckered little faces from the foliage.

Stacpoole had lifted his rifle to take a pot-shot at a monkey swinging on a branch beside the track.

Fatty Page came next in the file, and Fatty gave a grunt of disapproval, but did not speak. But Lyn, from the rear of the file, came running forward, shouting to Stacpoole as he came.

"Stop!"

Stacpoole's finger was on the trigger, but he paused in sheer astonishment and stared at his patrol-leader.

"What the thump——" he began.

Lyn grasped the barrel of his rifle and forced it down. The column came to a halt.

"Stop that, Stacpoole!" snapped Lyn. "You're too fond of blazing away with that rifle!"

"I suppose I can take a pot-shot at a monk if I like!"

"Well, you can't!" said Lyn. "What do you want to kill the poor little beggar for? Let him alone!"

Stacpoole breathed hard, and his eyes gleamed as they met Lyn's.

Stacpoole's face was set and savage.

"I'm goin' to take that pot-shot!" he said coolly.

"You're not!" said Lyn.

"What the dooce business is it of yours?"

Stacpoole's voice was rising. It was from sheer thoughtlessness that he had taken aim at the harmless little colobus monkey. But now he was determined to take the shot, if only to show Lyn Strong that he could do as he chose.

The little black-and-white monkey was still swinging on the branch in the leisurely way of the colobus monkey. He was blinking at the Scouts with mild interest, evidently quite unaware of his danger.

"Shut up, Stacpoole!" said Pip. "Who's leader of this jolly old patrol? Cheese it, old bean!"

"Yes, cheese it and let's get on!" urged Fatty Page. "I'm getting hungry!"

Bobolobo had stopped, and was looking back. Mpoko had stopped too, with a clatter of cooking-pots. The two natives looked on in silence at the group of Scouts in the narrow path.

"Get on!" repeated Lyn.

"I'm not gettin' on yet!" drawled Stacpoole. "I'm goin' to take a shot at that monk!"

Lyn set his lips.

"If you can't be trusted with a rifle, Stacpoole, it will be taken away from you!" he said.

Stacpoole's eyes blazed.

"Who's goin' to take it?" he sneered.

"I am, unless you give me your word not to use it without orders!"

"For goodness' sake, Stacpoole," exclaimed Pip Parker impatiently, "stop playing the goat!"

Stacpoole did not heed him. His eyes were fixed on Lyn Strong with angry defiance.

"Do you think I'm a Kikuyu, like your confounded gun-bearer, to take orders from you!" he said.

"I mean what I say!" answered Lyn. "Yesterday you shot the head off a parrot to show off your shooting! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself!"

"I'm goin' to please myself about that!" drawled Stacpoole.

"Look here, you fathead——"

At this moment the colobus monkey, as if tired of inspecting these strange visitors to his haunts, swung himself away into the underwoods.

In an instant Stacpoole swung the rifle up and fired. The action was so swift that Lyn had no time to catch the

barrel again and deflect it. The bullet crashed away through the jungle.

There was not a chance in a hundred of hitting the vanishing monkey. It was out of pure bravado that Stacpoole had fired.

But following the shot there came a long, wild howl from the dense mass of vegetation beside the path. It was a cry of pain—the cry of some living creature stricken to death—and it sounded terribly like a human cry.

Stacpoole gave a start.

He had missed the colobus monkey, he knew that; but the bullet had found a billet in the dense jungle.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lyn.

The Scouts stood stock-still in horror. There was a sound of a fall, followed by a low moaning.

"My hat!" said Pip, with a deep breath. "You've done it now, you fathead! You've potted some native in the bush!"

"A—a native!" Stacpoole's face was white as chalk now. "I—I—— Good heavens! How was I to know there was anyone in the bush?"

He dropped the butt of his rifle to the earth. The hand that held the weapon trembled.

Lyn turned from him and plunged away through the lianas and the rope-like ficus creepers that hung from the trees. After him the Scouts hurried. Stacpoole came last, white with horror. The low, moaning sound guided them; but it ceased suddenly. Plunging through the jungle, Lyn reached an open space by a great muhugu-tree, where a body lay extended on the ground.

He gave a gasp of relief.

"A gorilla!"

The gorilla lay dead by the muhugu-tree. A stream of blood ran over the rough wiry hair.

Stacpoole looked down on the body and panted with relief. The sight was not a pleasant one, but the thought that his reckless shot had killed a human being had thrilled him with horror.

"Only a monkey!" he said, with an attempt at flippancy.

"It might have been a nigger for all you knew!" growled Pip.

"Well, it wasn't a nigger," sneered Stacpoole, "and gorillas are dangerous beasts, and the more of them that are wiped out the better."

"They're not dangerous if they're let alone!" snapped Pip.

Lyn was not speaking. He was bending over the rough, hairy body, still now in death, though its moaning, so human in its note, still seemed to ring in his ears. His face was dark with anger.

"Well, it's dead," said Fatty Page. "Let's get on, for goodness' sake. I'm getting famished."

Lyn turned on the dandy of the patrol. His eyes were gleaming.

"Yes, let's get on!" he said. "The sooner we're out of this the better for all our sakes!"

"Are you afraid of a dead ape?" sneered Stacpoole.

"Don't be a fool! You've killed the female gorilla, and the male can't be far away! If you'd ever been near a male gorilla in a rage in thick jungle you'd know what it means. If we all get as far as the ziwa alive we shall be lucky."

"Oh, rot!" said Stacpoole uneasily.

But he cast a quick glance round him as he spoke. He had never encountered an enraged gorilla; but he had heard enough about the giant ape to have an idea what it would mean.

"My hat!" muttered Pip. "You duffer, Stacpoole——"

"I suppose we can shoot the brute if it turns up!" said Stacpoole, with a carelessness he did not feel.

"You can suppose what you like, my fathead, but get on!" growled Lyn. "I won't take away your rifle—you may need it badly before we get to camp. Move on, you fellows!"

The Scouts plunged back to the forest path, where Bobolobo and Mpoko were waiting.

"Get on, Bobo!" called out Lyn,

"Haraka! We've got to get out of this jungle quick!"

"O Bwana——" began Bobo.

"That shot killed a female gorilla!" said Lyn.

Bobo waited for no more. He hurried along the path, and the Scouts followed him.

The leisurely march was leisurely no longer. The Kikuyu set the pace, and the pace was swift.

Stacpoole's face wore a sneer, but he hurried with the rest. All the Scouts, in fact, were well aware of their danger.

The path was narrow, walled on either side by thick jungle and massive trees. An attack, if it came, would come without warning; and there was little hope for anyone upon whom the grip of a gorilla's hairy arms closed.

Suddenly from the silence behind came a sound—a yell so full of rage and grief that it thrilled the hearts of the Scouts as they heard it.

They knew what it was—the yell of the male gorilla who had found his slaughtered mate.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Pip.

Bobolobo looked back.

"Harka! Bwana!" he called. "Hasten, lord! The Terrible One of the Forest seeks blood!"

Bobo was almost running now. The Scouts followed him at a trot. In the rear came Mpoko, with clattering pots, alarm in his black face. Yell on yell sounded far behind, awakening every echo of the tropical forest. There was something hideous, half-human in the shrill yelling of the gorilla.

But the yelling suddenly stopped. The Scouts, panting and dripping with perspiration, hurried on after the Kikuyu. They knew that the gorilla was seeking the enemy that had slain his mate, and they hoped to be far enough away before he got scent of them. Once the giant brute scented them, and understood to whom he owed his bereavement, it meant a fight to the death in a thick jungle, where all the advantage was on the side of the gorilla. And the ape, once in pursuit, would cover the ground with a swiftness they could never hope to equal.

"Look out!" yelled Pip.

There was a crashing in the branches. From the foliage a hideous figure dropped into the path not a dozen paces behind the Scouts.

"Shoot!" shouted Lyn.

The Scouts swung round, their rifles up.

The gorilla stood in the forest path in full view. He was a gigantic brute, six feet high, though his stooping attitude made him look less. Thick, wiry hair covered the huge body. The face, black as a negro's, was smooth; the eyes gleamed red. The face looked more like that of some bestial human savage than that of an animal. The red eyes glared at the Scouts, flaming with rage. Evidently the gorilla knew to whom he owed the loss of his mate, though his fury was directed against the whole party, not the particular slayer.

For an instant he stood there glaring; and then, as the rifles cracked, he leaped away into the jungle. The branches cracked and crashed under his weight as he sought cover.

Perhaps the numbers of his enemies had daunted him. But that he was gone, not one of the Scouts believed for a moment. The bullets whizzed away harmlessly through the jungle as he disappeared.

"Get on!" shouted Lyn.

The Scouts ran along the path.

Crashing in the jungle accompanied them. The gorilla was keeping pace. Every moment the Scouts expected to see him leap out into the path and land with clawing, hairy arms on one of their number.

But now the jungle was thinning. A gleam of water showed ahead, shining in the sunlight. It was the lake at last—the "ziwa" for which the patrol were heading.

At a little distance from the edge of the forest lake the jungle fell away, and there was an open space.

Never had the Popolaki Patrol been so glad to get into the open.

They raced across the open space towards the lake.

On the edge of the water the Popolaki Patrol halted, breathless, swimming in perspiration.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Fatty Page, fanning himself with a broad leaf. "Oh, jiminy! I'm glad we're out of that!"

"Safe now, dear men!" drawled Stacpoole half-contemptuously. "By gad! What would they say in Masumpwe? We came on safari to hunt a man-eatin' lion, and we're runnin' away from a monkey!"

"I only wish we had a chance of running away!" snapped Lyn. "We've got to camp here! I shall not sleep to-night."

Stacpoole shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall," he yawned—"and soundly! I'm tired!"

"What about building a boma?" asked Pip, with an uneasy look back at the jungle.

Lyn shook his head.

"A boma would be no use against that brute! Fires may keep him off! Even a gorilla will not pass the fires as a rule. But we've got to keep our eyes peeled to-night."

Bobolobo and the bushman gathered wood swiftly to build a circle of fires round the camp. Stacks of wood were placed within the circle to replenish the fires during the night.

The night fell with tropical suddenness. The red sunset had been shining on the gleaming surface of the ziwa when the Scouts reached it. Now black shadow lay on the lake, and the surrounding trees were lost in an indistinguishable mass.

In a half-circle, enclosing the camp on the shore of the ziwa, the watch-fires crackled and flamed.

Blackness fell on the vast forest.

Outside the circle of fires all was dark, and somewhere there in the gloom roamed the watchful, implacable gorilla, waiting and watching for a chance to attack.

Not till the fires were blazing and all was as safe as it could be made did the Scouts think of supper. Till then, even Fatty Page contented himself with a bunch of plantains.

Mpoko, the bushman, gathered three large stones from the lake shore to make the simple fireplace of the natives, and built among them the cooking-fire. From the cooking pot slung over the fire came an appetising scent that made Fatty's mouth water.

By the lake shore, circled by watch-fires, the Scouts sat down to supper, and while they ate many an anxious glance was cast towards the dense blackness beyond the fires. Once or twice a hyena came snuffing out of the jungle with green eyes scintillating in the firelight, and skulked away again, unheeded by the Scouts. It was of the gorilla they were thinking, of the terrible beast more dangerous than the lion or the rhinoceros, lurking in the darkness, sleepless and implacable, thirsting for vengeance. There was likely to be little sleep that night in the camp of the Popolaki Patrol.

CHAPTER 8.

The Attack in the Night!

"I'M turnin' in!"

Stacpoole yawned as he spoke.

Fatty Page, who had supped not wisely but too well, was already dozing, though he had no intention of sleeping. Fatty, indeed intended to keep awake all night, but though the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak.

The rest were alert.

Lyn, who had the responsibility for the lives of his comrades on his young shoulders, was most alert of all. Not for a second did he mean to close his eyes. And Pip Parker and Smut were, for the present at least, wakeful and watchful too.

Stacpoole did not look sleepy. As a matter of fact, it was on his mind that he had brought this deadly and unnecessary peril on the patrol. For the gorilla of the African forest, terrible brute as he is, only demands to be let

alone, and will seldom or never make an attack save in revenge for an injury or in self-defence. But, enraged and exasperated by the killing of his mate, the gorilla was a more dangerous and ruthless enemy than the man-eating lion whom the Scouts had trailed and killed. But it was not Stacpoole's way to admit a fault. He chose to take the view that Lyn was exaggerating the peril.

"Turn in if you like!" said Lyn curtly. "I'm keeping watch."

"We've seen nothin' of the brute since we camped. It's getting on for midnight now. I fancy that monk's fast asleep long ago."

"Rot!" said Lyn.

Stacpoole shrugged his shoulders. He was making light of the matter, as much to irritate his patrol-leader as anything else. He knew that all the patrol condemned his action, both for its thoughtless cruelty, and for the trouble it had caused, and he disliked the position it had placed him in. He was in a mood for a quarrel, if only to give the other fellows something else to think about.

"Well, I think you're a lot of nervy asses!" he said deliberately. "I think that——"

"You can think what you like, Stacpoole," interrupted Lyn, "but shut up and go to bed."

"Yes, shut up, old bean," said Pip. "You've played the goat and there's no getting out of that, if you jaw all night."

"Ja!" remarked Smut, with a nod.

Stacpoole flushed angrily.

But he turned away without another word, with a contemptuous smile on his face. He moved to a distance from the other fellows, and rolled out his blanket.

Silence lay around the camp by the ziwa. Lyn rose to his feet presently, and moved round the circle of fires.

Nine or ten fires were burning, at regular intervals, in the half-circle that shut in the camp against the lake shore. Every now and then, Bobo or Mpoko would replenish the fires with bundles of brushwood. Not for a moment were the flames allowed to die down. But when they were not replenishing the fires, the Kikuyu and the bushman dozed, within the ring of flames.

Lyn glanced at Stacpoole, as he passed him. The dandy of the Popolaki Patrol was stretched on his blanket, his head pillowed on his wallet, sleeping calmly. A glimmer of starlight fell on his face, and showed it, handsome and peaceful, but with a slight sneer on the well-cut lips even in slumber. Lyn did not believe that Stacpoole was sincere in making light of the danger, but certainly he was sleeping profoundly, careless of peril real or unreal. Lyn gave him a look and passed on, and came back to the spot where his comrades sat.

Fatty Page was fast asleep now, and snoring. But there was no need to awaken him. Pip Parker and Smut sat with their rifles across their knees, their eyes open. Pip was nodding a little, but the Dutchman was as wakeful as Lyn.

Lyn dropped to a seat on a log, resting the butt of his rifle between his feet, looking away towards the darkness beyond the flickering fires.

Round the camp the vast forest formed a wall of blackness. So far, there had been no sign of the gorilla. The flaming circle of fire seemed to be keeping him from approaching the camp. It was rare for any wild beast to venture to pass the fires, and Lyn began to believe that the gorilla was waiting for day.

The hours of watching passed wearily to Lyn, and he longed for morning. It seemed, after all, as if the night was to pass without alarm.

Then suddenly, breaking the silence with a shattering effect, came a wild scream in the gloom.

Lyn leaped up.

That fearful cry came from within the camp, close by the lake shore, at a little distance from the circle of fires.

It came from the spot where Stacpoole had lain down.

It was repeated—a scream of frantic terror, echoing wildly through the camp, awakening every sleeper. It was followed by a strange growling howl.

"The gorilla!"

Lyn leaped towards the spot.

The gorilla was within the camp, and he had attacked the sleeping Stacpoole.

How he had entered the camp mattered little then, he was there, and Stacpoole was struggling in his fearful grasp. With lightning speed, Lyn tore to the spot.

Cry after cry broke from Stacpoole, inarticulate cries of fear and horror.

The grasp of the immense muscular arms of the gorilla had awakened him from sleep. A hideous grinning black face was close to his own, the hot breath fanned him like steam, the hug of the enormous hairy arms crushed him.

Helpless as an infant, Stacpoole was grasped by an arm and a leg, while the gorilla's free hand was already about to tear him, when Lyn came panting up.

Lyn thrust his rifle-muzzle fairly into the black, hideous, grinning face and pulled the trigger.

There was a yell of rage from the gorilla, and, to Lyn's intense relief, he turned on its new enemy. Had the huge claw torn at Stacpoole, nothing could have saved his life. But the blaze of the rifle in his face diverted the giant ape's attention, and he pitched Stacpoole aside and turned like a tiger on Lyn.

Lyn met him with crashing rifle-butt; and Smut fired the next moment, and his bullet tore through the hairy body. The next second Bobolobo was thrusting at the ape with his spear, Mpoko stabbing at him with a Kikuyu knife.

Pip and Fatty were rushing up, rifle in hand. Foes surrounded the giant brute, and he glared from one to another in demoniac rage, screaming with fury. But the numbers, and the wounds he had received, daunted him, and he skipped suddenly away towards the lake, bullets whistling after him as he skipped. There was a splash in the shallow margin of the ziwa, and the gorilla was gone.

CHAPTER 9.

Taking the Chance!

"STACPOOLE, you're hurt?"

Lyn ran to help Stacpoole to his feet.

The dandy of Popolaki leaned heavily on his arm, shaking from head to foot. The horror of that terrible awakening in the grasp of the gorilla was still strong upon him. But he was unhurt, save for a few bruises where the terrible arms had grasped him.

"Hurt, old chap?" exclaimed Lyn.

"No."

Stacpoole was white as chalk, and his breath came in gasps.

"How the thump did the brute get into camp?" exclaimed Pip. "He never passed the fires——"

Smut, the silent one, pointed to the ziwa.

"That's it," said Fatty Page. "The brute waded along the lake; it's shallow close by the shore. Those brutes are cunning."

"You should have kept with us near the fires, Stacpoole!" said Pip. "You're rather an ass, old bean!"

Stacpoole grinned faintly.

"More than that," he said. "I'm the prize ass—the world's prize idiot! Strong, you've saved my life!"

He shuddered.

"I should have been torn in pieces! My hat! Let's get back to the fires."

Not an eye closed in the camp for the remainder of the night. Once or twice, from the blackness, came a howl, and the Scouts knew that it was the voice of the gorilla. He had taken many wounds with him when he fled; but it was doubtful whether he was disabled.

Glad enough were the Popolaki Patrol when a glimmer of light showed on the

surface of the ziwa, heralding the dawn. The sun leaped up in the east, and it was day.

Before it was fairly light the Scouts snatched a hasty breakfast; and under the rising sun they broke camp and trekked.

It was a day's niarch to Masumpwe; and they hoped to be home by sunset. But the greater part of the day's march lay within the Mbiri Forest; and they knew that their steps would be dogged. Until they were clear of the forest, danger haunted every step.

Many times, in the hot hours of the morning, the crashing of a branch, the crackling of the canes, told of an implacable pursuer dogging them.

For some distance the forest was open, and the gorilla did not venture to approach close at hand. But towards midday the Scouts struck a track of dense jungle, traversed by a game-path scarce a foot wide; and they breathed more quickly as they entered the narrow way.

Stacpoole dropped to the rear of the file, behind Mpoko with his clattering pots.

Lyn glanced back at him.

"Don't lag behind, for goodness' sake, Stacpoole!" he called out. "If he catches one of us alone——"

"Oh, rot!" answered Stacpoole.

Lyn flushed with anger, and his eyes sparkled. But the next moment Stacpoole spoke in quite a different tone.

"Sorry, old man! Don't mind my cheek! Nature of the beast, you know."

Lyn stared at him, and laughed. The happenings of the night in the camp by the ziwa, had evidently made a difference to the lofty and self-satisfied dandy of the Popolaki Patrol.

"All serene!" said Lyn. "But, for goodness' sake, don't give that brute a chance at you."

The column wound on by the jungle path, every eye on the alert, each right hand grasping a rifle. Until the jungle was passed it was a tense time for the Scouts.

The path wound almost like a corkscrew between walls of giant elephant grass, ten feet high, with patches of thorny bush.

Stacpoole dropped farther and farther behind; it was easy to do so without his action being observed by his comrades, on the winding game-path. And when Mpoko, at the tail of the column, passed out of his sight, Stacpoole stopped.

He faced round, and waited, with a grim, set face.

That gorilla, following relentlessly on, was not far behind, he knew. That the fierce brute would take advantage of the thick cover of the jungle to creep close up to the column and make a sudden leap on one of the Scouts was only too probable. And Stacpoole had made up his mind that when the attack came it was upon him that it should fall.

It was he who had brought this danger on the patrol; and it was for him to face it.

There was a sudden rustling in the great stalks of the elephant-grass, and a hairy body leaped into view, not a dozen paces from him.

It was the gorilla; half-crouching in the jungle path, his black, glittering eyes fixed on Stacpoole, his muscular arms resting on the ground before him.

For a second that seemed an age he crouched there, still, silent, motionless; and in that second Stacpoole felt that his heart had missed a beat.

But he was cool. His rifle, clamped to his shoulder, bore steadily on the giant ape. His steady eye looked along the barrel. One shot—there would be only one shot, and, if it did not stop the gorilla, the next moment he would be torn limb from limb. Yet he was cool as ice as he took a slow and deliberate aim; after the first second, never had he been steadier, his brain clearer.

That brief pause seemed to last an age; then, with his burning eyes and clawing arms, the great ape launched himself at the Scout. His leap covered the ground with incredible swiftness;

and at the same time Stacpoole, his rifle steady as a rock, fired.

Bang!

The roar of the rifle awoke a thousand echoes in the jungle. The bullet, well-aimed, smashed through the head of the gorilla, but the impetus of the leap carried the great beast onward; and as the huge body crashed on him, Stacpoole for a moment was sick with horror, with the feeling that he had failed.

But he had not failed. It was a dead body that crashed on him, dead as it touched him; and it rolled away from Stacpoole as he fell under the shock.

There was a distant shout; the shot had been heard by his comrades. Stacpoole stood still, staring down at the body, half-hidden in the elephant-grass, scarcely able to believe he had killed it. Running feet sounded on the jungle path, running with desperate speed. Lyn Strong came panting up, the rest of the patrol breathless at his heels.

"Stacpoole——"

"All serene!"

Stacpoole turned to him.

"You lagged behind!" exclaimed Lyn. "We heard your shot—— What?"

"Look!"

Stacpoole pointed to the great hairy body, half-hidden in the elephant-grass.

Lyn stared.

"My hat! The gorilla——"

"I've had luck!" said Stacpoole. "I didn't lag behind, old bean—I stayed behind because I reckoned it was up to me. And I've had luck!"

"You've got the gorilla?" yelled Fatty Page.

Stacpoole grinned.

"I played the goat yesterday," he said, "and it was up to me! Strong, old bean, you saved my life last night, after I'd cheeked you and chivvied you, and brought the whole patrol into danger. From now on, I'm turnin' over a new leaf. Next time you catch me swankin', kindly give me the end of your boot, and I'll learn to behave!"

Lyn Strong laughed.

"I'll give you my fist instead!" he said, and held out his hand.

The patrol tramped cheerily on after that. In the forest now they were safe, and there was no need to hurry.

Twilight was falling when Lyn saw a gleam through the dense forest.

"A fire!" he said. "It's a native village, I expect."

Bobo halted, staring through the gloom to where the glow came from.

"Bwana," he said, addressing Lyn, "I go to see with my eyes the people of the village. They may be enemies."

Bob crept through the forest. The Scouts waited in silence till Bobo returned. The Kikuyu came back and bowed to Lyn.

"Lord, it is safe. The people of the village are friends. Come!"

The patrol trooped after Bobo into the native village.

The natives gathered there were harmless Baganda. Bobo, with much ceremony, introduced Lyn & Co. to the headman, who gave them a hut to sleep in.

After a supper of native corn cakes and some mysterious drink that tasted delicious, the tired youngsters turned in.

Lyn, as he rolled into his blankets, thought of the morrow when he hoped to be back in Masumpwe. But Lyn and his comrades were not destined to return to Masumpwe yet.

CHAPTER 18.

The Stolen Tusk!

N'KORO'KORO, the hunter, lay on the threshold of his hut, his black face set and unconscious, his eyes closed. There was a great bruise under his thick hair, where the butt of a spear had struck, knocking him senseless. He lay still where he had fallen, and no sound came from him. But from the wife of N'koro'koro, who stood outside the hut

in the blazing sunshine, came scream after scream that rang through the length and breadth of the native Baganda village and far into the forest beyond.

Loud and piercing rang the screams of Masinda, the wife of N'koro'koro, rousing the whole village and drawing round the hut a crowd of Baganda. And the wild screaming reached the ears of the Popolaki Patrol, resting under the green canopy of the African forest.

Lyn Strong sat up and took notice.

The Boy Scouts of Masumpwe were resting in the drowsy heat.

Fatty was fast asleep. Stacpoole was polishing his eyeglass. Pip was talking, which was one of his favourite occupations. He talked to Smut, the silent one, who replied only with a sleepy grin and an occasional "Ja" or "Ach!"

Bobo was cleaning Lyn's rifle. He was the first to hear the sounds of alarm from the adjacent village, but he gave them no heed. The screaming of a woman was an idle sound in the ears of the Kikuyu.

Lyn listened.

Scream after scream came pealing from the distance.

"Something's up," said the patrol leader of the Popolaki Scouts. "Do not your ears hear, Bobo?"

"Na'am, Bwana!" answered the Kikuyu. "My ears hear the crying of a woman. It is nothing."

"Nothing?" repeated Lyn.

"O Bwana, perhaps her husband is beating her with a whip of rhinoceros hide," said Bobo. "Or perhaps a crocodile has taken one of her small ones. Let the Bwana close his ears to this screaming."

Lyn rose to his feet.

It was probable enough that the screaming of a native woman had little cause, but he was not disposed to close his ears to it.

Fatty Page sat up and yawned.

"What a frightful row!" he remarked. "What's it about, Lyn?"

"Ask me another," said Lyn. "But I think we'd better look into it. We're law and order in this district."

"We are!" agreed Pip, with a grin. "Let's go and see."

"Let's!" said Stacpoole. "But if some coloured gentleman is administerin' correction with a rhinoceros-hide whip, I don't know whether it's the duty of a Scout to intervene in family matters."

"We'll see, anyhow," said Lyn. "Come on!"

And the Popolaki Patrol quitted their camp and started for the Baganda village on the edge of the forest.

The screaming continued without intermission.

As they approached the village the Scouts could see a great crowd of Baganda gathered before a hut, and in the midst of them the woman screaming.

The Scouts entered the Baganda village, and as they came up to the throng the general attention of the natives was turned to them, though the woman continued to scream as though her lung-power was inexhaustible.

The headman of the village came to Lyn at a sign from the patrol leader of the Popolaki Scouts.

"O Man," said Lyn, speaking in the native tongue, "who is this woman, and for what reason does she cry out in this strange manner?"

"O Bwana," answered the headman, "this woman is Masinda, the wife of N'koro'koro, the hunter, and she cries because a thief has struck down her husband, and taken from his hut a tusk of ivory."

"And is it known," asked Lyn, "who is the thief?"

"It is well known, Bwana," answered the headman, "for the thief is Kintambo, and all eyes saw him."

Kintambo was wanted for many thefts in Masumpwe and the plantations of the Popolaki River.

"And why did not the people of this village seize the robber?" asked Lyn.

The headman rolled his eyes.

"O Bwana, Kintambo is a very dangerous man," he answered. "It is well known that he is a very terrible man indeed!"

"And he has not slain N'koro'koro," said another voice. "It was only with the butt of his spear that he has driven away his senses. But he has taken the elephant tusk that was worth many dollars, and it is for this reason that Masinda complains."

Masinda was still screaming.

Lyn intervened hastily.

"Tell this woman, O'N'goko, that we will follow Kintambo, and give him over to the white man's justice," he said; "and if it be possible, we will find the tusk he has taken, and bring it back to the house of N'koro'koro."

"O Bwana, these words will be sweet to the ears of Masinda," said N'goko. "For if her husband should die under the blow of Kintambo, she may find another husband among the Baganda; but a tusk of ivory that is lost is lost for ever. I will tell her the Bwana's words, for, indeed, her screaming is a trouble to my ears."

And the Bwana's words being repeated to Masinda, the hunter's wife took comfort and ceased to scream; and being comforted, she proceeded to give her attention to the unfortunate man who still lay senseless on the threshold of his hut.

Lyn sent Mpoko on to Masumpwe with a message for the parents of the Scouts, saying that the patrol would not be back home for a day or so. Lyn thought that the people of Masumpwe would be anxious about their safety, and it was as well to let them know.

Lyn's father, Grant Strong, was away in the Congo forest, so Lyn did not worry so much about his father, but it was the other fellows' people he had to consider.

Mpoko protested at not being allowed to come with the patrol on the hunt for the outcast Baganda, but he went off on his errand.

Lyn & Co. made hurried preparations for departure, and after asking which way the robber had gone, set off into the forest to track him down.

CHAPTER 11.
The Mysterious Foe!

CRACK!

"Look out!" shouted Lyn.

"Great Scott!"

"Who the thump——"

The broad-brimmed hat spun on the head of Lyn Strong. Suddenly, swiftly, the bullet had come from the bush, followed by the ring of the rifle.

Instantly the Scouts flung themselves on their faces.

They were following a narrow bush-path in the forest, a couple of miles from the Baganda village.

Into that path many eyes had seen the fugitive, Kintambo, disappear, and the Scouts followed the path, watching for sign to tell them whether the thief had left it and taken to the untrodden forest.

And then came the shot, startling and surprising the Popolaki Patrol more than it alarmed them.

There was a bullet-hole through the brim of Lyn's hat. The lead had whizzed within an inch of his head.

Lying in the grass, their rifles extended before them, the Scouts watched for the enemy ahead.

But there came no sound from him, whoever he was, no movement. Deep silence followed the ring of the rifle as it died away.

"What the thump!" said Pip.

"A white man," said Lyn. "But why he should fire on us is a mystery. It's not Kintambo. He has no rifle, and most likely would not know how to use one. If it had been a spear ——"

He broke off.

The happening was amazing. If it was a white man who had fired it was

inexplicable why he had pulled trigger on the Boy Scouts of Masumpwe.

Lyn waited for a few minutes. But there was no sign from the man who had fired from the bush ahead.

"Keep in cover," said Lyn.

He rose to his feet, staring towards the narrow walls of high bush that closed in the path ahead on either side. Those thick walls of greenery hid the man with the rifle.

"Ho, there!" shouted Lyn. "Who are you? Why did you fire? We are friends, if you are a white man!"

There was no answer.

"Gone, perhaps!" murmured Pip.

Crack!

Lyn muttered an exclamation as the bullet came. It grazed his shoulder, tearing a rent in his shirt.

He dropped at once into cover again.

"You fathead!" muttered Pip. "You might have bagged that one in the crumpet. Lie low, you ass!"

Lyn set his lips.

"I can't make it out, unless the man's mad!" he muttered. "He's in cover ahead, watching the path. He's there to stop us. Goodness knows why!"

"A confederate of Kintambo?" suggested Fatty.

"Looks like it. And yet——" Lyn shook his head. "It's no good. I can't make it out. But we've got to get to the bottom of this, and teach him manners, whatever his game is. Bobo!"

The Kikuyu's eyes gleamed.

"O Bwana, let this Kikuyu creep like a leopard through the bush," he said, in a whisper. "For I will come upon the unseen one as silently as a snake, and slay him with my spear."

"You will not slay him, Bobo," said Lyn. "But you will seize him with your hands and hold him fast, that he may not use his rifle."

"My ears hear, Bwana," said the Kikuyu.

And from the path the native crept on hands and knees into the almost impenetrable bush.

The Scouts waited.

To rush the position of the unseen rifleman was asking for death for at least two or three of the party if the man chose to shoot to kill. Hidden in thick bush ahead, his rifle commanded the open path.

But the Kikuyu, accustomed to worming his way through the thickets, could approach the rifleman from another direction, as silently, as he said, as a snake.

Bobolobo vanished into the jungle, and after he had disappeared no sound came from him.

But the Scouts knew that he was making a detour through the bush, and that he would come on the rifleman from behind.

They listened intently.

But no sound reached them, either from the Kikuyu, or from the man who had fired on them.

Lyn wondered as he waited.

Both the bullets had gone very close to him, yet neither had struck him. And he wondered whether they had been intended to hit, or whether the rifleman was merely trying to frighten back the patrol.

The latter, he thought, was more likely, for the shooting down of a member of the Popolaki Patrol would have raised a storm, and the murderer could hardly have hoped to escape the fierce pursuit that would have been made for him. Not only the Scouts, but the Government Askaris would have combed the forests for the assassin.

Long minutes passed.

The silence lay heavily on the tropical forest, broken only by the buzzing of innumerable insects, buzzing and whirling in the shafts of sunlight that came through the canopy of foliage overhead. Over the narrow path the branches met and interlaced, and even at noon it was dusky there. Now the dusk was deep, for the sun was setting in the west, sinking towards the far lands of the Congo.

The Scouts waited patiently.

The silence was suddenly broken.

There was a shout, a sound of struggling and scuffling, and the crashing of thickets.

Lyn leaped to his feet.

"Come on!" he panted.

"Bobo's got him!" chuckled Pip.

Evidently the Kikuyu had crept on the unseen man and seized him by surprise. And the sound of furious struggling showed that the man was resisting desperately.

Lyn raced up the bush-path, his comrades at his heels.

The rifleman's cover, in a thick, thorny bush, was only twenty yards from the spot where the Scouts had halted.

The bush was swaying and crashing as the Kikuyu and the hidden enemy struggled within it. But, swift as Lyn Strong was, the sound of the struggle ceased before he reached the spot.

He heard a groan and a heavy fall, then a rustle, and there was silence as he reached the spot and plunged into the bush.

"Bobo!" he panted.

He almost stumbled over the Kikuyu.

Bobolobo lay on the ground, without motion—by his side a rifle, which the unseen must have dropped. But of the rifleman there was no sign. It was plain that he had fled into the jungle after striking down the Kikuyu.

"Bobo!"

Lyn dropped on his knees beside his faithful friend. For a terrible moment he feared that Bobo had been slain, and repented his order to the Kikuyu not to use his spear.

But a groan from Bobo showed that he was still living.

His black eyes opened, and stared up at Lyn. His hand went to his head. He had been stunned for the moment by a heavy blow.

"O Bwana!" panted Bobo.

The Scouts came up with a rush, trampling in the thicket. The enemy was gone, leaving behind him his rifle. Broken twigs and trampled bush showed the way he had fled into the jungle.

"He's got away!" exclaimed Pip.

Bobo rubbed his bruised head. He had had a severe blow, but the head of the Kikuyu was hard. He gave the Bwana a reproachful look.

"Thank Heaven you live, Bobo!" panted Lyn. "I feared——"

"O Bwana, had I been permitted to use my spear, the Mzungu would now have been with the ghosts!" said Bobo.

"A Mzungu—a white man!" exclaimed Lyn.

"Na'am, Bwana! Yes, lord!" said the Kikuyu. "It was indeed a white man, and I came on him silently from behind as he watched the path with his rifle in his hands. And I seized him, as my lord bade me, and he turned on me like a leopard, dropping his rifle. But, behold, he was but a small man, and my hands were too strong for him."

"But he got away!" said Stacpoole.

"It is true," said Bobo, "for suddenly he drew from his belt a small gun and struck the Kikuyu with the butt, and then my eyes did not see him any more."

Lyn gritted his teeth.

"The scoundrel! But he can't be far ahead—and we'll get him! We'll give Kintambo a rest, you fellows, while we get after this rascal."

"Likely enough to find them together, I fancy," said Stacpoole.

"Follow me!" said Lyn.

And he plunged into the jungle in pursuit of the man who had fled, and his comrades followed him fast.

CHAPTER 12.
Hunted Down!

NIGHT lay black and dense on the African forest.

A myriad brilliant stars scintillated in the sky, but hardly a gleam of starlight reached the dark aisles of the forest through the massive canopy of branches and foliage

Dark as it was, the Popolaki Patrol had not camped.

They were weary, but angry and determined. Bobolobo, who seemed able to see like a cat in the dark, led the patrol by a game-path, and the five white Scouts trailed after him, their rifles under their arms.

The man who had fled after striking down the Kikuyu had been lost in the jungle. For some distance the Scouts had followed his trampled track in the bush, and then it had vanished.

But they were determined not to rest till they had found him, if finding him was humanly possible.

But as they tramped by the game-path, following the dim form of Bobolobo, they realised how unlikely they were to find the man they sought unless they were favoured by fortune. But there was a chance, for at night the man would camp, and if he camped he certainly would light a fire to scare away the wild beasts—for in the Mbiri forest lion and leopard and hyena prowled and howled in the hours of darkness. There was a chance—and the Scouts hoped for the best.

Bobo halted suddenly and turned back to the patrol.

"O Bwana!" he breathed.

Lyn's eyes gleamed.

"What is it, Bobo?"

"My eyes see light, Bwana," answered the Kikuyu. "Lo, there is a fire in the forest!"

"Good luck!" murmured Pip.

"Lead on!" said Lyn.

The Kikuyu pressed on, and the Scouts followed him, forgetful now of fatigue.

The game-path they were following, trodden by the feet of innumerable wild animals, evidently led to water, and by the water was a likely spot to choose for a camp.

And that the Kikuyu was not mistaken was soon proved, for soon all the Scouts could see the dancing reflections of a fire amid the darkness of the trees.

Silently, their rifles ready, the Popolaki Patrol pushed on.

The game-path ended on the bank of a little stream that murmured softly under the dark trees. At a little distance from the path—well out of the way of beasts that might come to drink—the camp-fire burned.

Lyn made his comrades a sign to halt, and they scanned the camp before emerging into the radius of light from the fire.

A hut built of branches and leaves stood there, backed against a huge tree that rose to a height of a hundred feet amid the other forest giants. It was such a shelter as might be thrown up in an hour, and was evidently of recent construction. Before it the fire burned a few paces from the opening of the hut.

No one was to be seen; whoever had camped there was in the interior of the hut and out of sight.

But, whoever he was, the Scouts had him now, if they wanted him. For the flimsy hut was no protection against bullets, and a volley would have searched it through and through.

"We've got him!" murmured Fatty Page.

"If it's him!" said Pip.

"Look!" said Lyn.

As the Scouts gazed at the hut, a man emerged from the opening and lifted an armful of sticks from a stack of firewood to replenish the fire.

He was a man of slight but wiry build, clad in cotton shirt and shorts, with a revolver in his belt.

Lyn touched the Kikuyu's arm.

"Look with your eyes, Bobo," he said. "Is that the Mzungu with whom you fought in the bush?"

The Kikuyu's eyes were flashing fire, and his grasp was convulsive on his spear.

"O Bwana, that is the Mzungu whom I found crouching like a hyena by the path, and who struck me down with his little gun." he answered.

"Good!" said Lyn.

He signed to the patrol, and the Scouts advanced towards the camp. The white man who was building the fire had not glanced towards them, and was not yet aware of their presence.

But he became aware of it suddenly as they advanced. The firewood dropped from his hands, and he grasped the revolver in his belt.

Lyn's voice rang out sharply.

"Let that gun alone, or you're a dead man!"

The man glared at him savagely across the fire. His hand still gripped the revolver, half-drawn. But the rifles of the Scouts were looking at him, and he did not venture to draw the weapon. Slowly his fingers relinquished it.

He stood with clenched hands, his narrow eyes glinting, his thin lips drawn back in a snarl from teeth discoloured by tobacco. The Scouts heard his quick, hard breathing as they advanced.

"What do you want?" he snarled. "Who are you—and what do you want with me? I guess a man's camp is his own, ain't it?"

Lyn pointed to the hut.

"Are you alone here?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"Keep your paw away from the revolver," said Lyn quietly. "I fancy you know what we want, my man."

"You've got me beat!"

The Scouts eyed him curiously. His language and his nasal voice told them that he was an American. A white trader of the roughest class was what he looked.

"O Bwana," said the Kikuyu, "this is the Mzungu who struck me down with his little gun, and it is in my mind to slay him with my spear."

"Say, you got me guessing!" said the man, staring at Bobo. "I guess I've never seen you before. Say, what's this crowd, anyhow?"

"We're the Boy Scouts of Masumpwe," answered Lyn. "And we came out from Masumpwe to hunt for a Baganda thief named Kintambo. And we were fired on in tracking him—and you are the man who fired."

"Guess again," said the trader coolly. "I've sure never seen your outfit before."

"O speaker with a false tongue," exclaimed Bobo. "Did not my hands seize you in the bush, and did not my eyes see you?"

"I reckon your nigger's making a mistake, young man," drawled the American. "I've never seen him before. Why the thunder do you reckon I'd want to fire on you?"

"Who are you?" asked Lyn.

"I guess I ain't ashamed of my name," answered the trader. "You can call me Eben Hackett, and you'll get there all right. I guess I'm a trader, and fairly well-known from the Congo to Zanzibar. And I guess if you start anything here in my camp, I'll put in a word with the Commissioner, and you'll be sorry for yourselves."

"We'll chance that," said Lyn. "I'm taking my Kikuyu's word that you are the man who fired on us. Who's in that hut?"

"Nobody! I've told you I'm alone here."

"Tell us another, old bean," said Pip derisively. "Haven't we told you we're Scouts, and anybody but a blind man could see a native's trail round your camp-fire."

Hackett started, and his sharp eyes flashed round him at the earth before his hut. The print of his own boots was repeated in many places there, and among the boot-tracks were the prints of a naked foot. The Popolaki Scouts had discerned them at once.

Lyn stepped towards the hut.

"Look out!" yelled Stacpoole.

From the opening of the hut bounded a tall, powerful Baganda, shield on arm and spear in hand. Lyn leaped back from the flashing spear, and at the same moment Bobolobo bounded forward. The Kikuyu's spear crossed that of the Baganda, and the next moment Bobolobo and Kintambo were fighting furiously.

CHAPTER 13.

The Secret of the Tusk!

"OH, my hat!" panted Pip.

"Stop!" shouted Lyn. "Kintambo, lay down your spear, or we will shoot you down like a hyena!"

The Baganda did not heed.

He was a big, powerful man, as brawny and muscular as Bobo, and his face, black as tar, blazed with fierce rage, his eyes burned and glittered. His attack was fierce and vengeful, and even Bobo, a mighty man with the spear, was driven back a few paces.

But he rallied, taking the fierce slashes of the Baganda's spear on his strong shield of rhinoceros hide, and slashing back with mighty blows.

And the Scouts standing round, rifle in hand, hesitated to fire, for the two natives leaped and dodged and circled, changing their positions swiftly and incessantly, and it was not easy to pull trigger on the Baganda without danger of hitting the Kikuyu.

The Scouts watched the fierce struggle almost spellbound.

Lyn raised his rifle and lowered it again. The Baganda was an outcast and a thief, wanted for many robberies on the plantations and in the native villages. And it was clear that he would not allow himself to be taken alive if he could help it

The two natives, the brown and the black, circled round one another, with movements so swift that they could scarcely be followed by the eye.

There came a howl of triumph from the Baganda. His spear had touched hte brown shoulder of the Kikuyu, and the blood flowed. Lyn caught his breath.

But it was barely a scratch, from the cutting edge of the broad blade of the spear; Bobo warded with his shield in time.

He leaped at the Baganda, his eyes blazing. There was a crash as shield met shield; a crash as spear struck spear. For a second the fierce combatants were breast to breast, then they leaped apart again, and Bobo, as he leaped, caught his foot in a trailing root and staggered.

With a yell of ferocious triumph the Baganda was upon him, slashing with his spear.

But Bobo twisted, snake-like, and the deadly slash grazed him, and his own spear struck at the same moment.

"Oh!" panted Lyn.

With one groan the Baganda fell.

Bobolobo stood panting, leaning on his reddened spear. The fierce fight had left even the brawny Kikuyu breathless. At his feet lay the outcast Baganda, the spear gripped in his hand —still!

Bobolobo turned to the Scouts. His eyes gleamed, and his brown face was flushed with triumph.

"O Bwana!" he exclaimed. "Many times have I dressed myself in monkey-skins to follow my lord on safari, but never have I fought so terrible a fight as this. And is it not true, lord, that the arm of Bobolobo is strong, and that his spear is terrible?"

"It is true, O brave Bolo!" answered Lyn; but his face was overcast as he looked at the Baganda. For it was a prisoner he had sought to take away to justice, and it was a dead man that lay at the feet of the triumphant Kikuyu.

Lyn turned to the trader with a grim brow.

"You scoundrel!" he said between his teeth. "A better man than you has died fighting, but you shall go to the prison that waits for you. Bind his hands."

The American trader shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess you're wasting time," he drawled. "What have you got agin me? I fired on you in the bush to frighten you off—I guess the lead would have got home if I'd wanted. You was close behind the nigger, and I gave him a chance to run."

"And the tusk he stole from the house of N'koro'koro?" said Lyn. "Where is that? Search him, Bobo."

The trader's eyes glittered. He was

powerless in the midst of the Scouts, but he made an effort to resist. The effort was in vain; his arms were dragged behind him and bound, and from a leathern wallet that hung to his belt the Kikuyu drew a tusk.

He handed it to Lyn.

The Scout glanced at it. It was not a large tusk, and it was yellow with age. Its market value could not have been more than a few pounds, and Lyn was puzzled. It was strange enough that even a lawless and unscrupulous ruffian, as Hackett evidently was, should have leagued with a native thief for so small a plunder. But as he looked at the tusk Lyn saw that there were markings on it, cut into the ivory with a sharp knife. The graven marks were old, and, unless they were some sort of native ornamentation, they had no meaning to Lyn's eyes.

The American trader panted hoarsely.

"Give me that tusk!" he said. "I own up—I set the Baganda to take it from N'koro'koro. I'd have bought it if the nigger would have sold it, and given him more than its value, too. But he wouldn't part, and I had to have the tusk. Give it to me—I tell you I'll pay the nigger for it, all that he asks."

Lyn stared at him.

"This tusk belongs to N'koro'koro, the hunter," he answered, "and to him it will be given back."

"I tell you it's no value to that nigger," snarled Hackett. "But it's worth a fortune to the man who can read what's carved on it. Give me that tusk, and I guess I've a thousand dollars in my belt that you can share."

"That's enough," said Lyn curtly. "Bind him to a tree, Bobo, and when the morning comes he will march with us, a prisoner. Not a word more, you scoundrel; do you think you can bribe a patrol of British Scouts?"

"I guess——"

"Hold your tongue, or the Kikuyu shall gag you."

And the trader snarled and was silent. Lyn placed the carved tusk in his wallet, the trader's eyes following it wolfishly. And a strong cord bound him to a tree, to keep him in security while the Scouts of Masumpwe slept round the camp-fire.

CHAPTER 14.

A Tale of Treasure!

"OLE-WANGU!" murmured N'koro'koro, the Baganda hunter.

He sat on a stone by the doorway of his hut in the Bagando village, rocking himself to and fro.

In the morning sunshine, N'koro'koro sat by his door and looked away towards the vast forest that surrounded the village, and rocked himself and mourned.

"Ole-Wangu! Woe is me!" murmured the Baganda.

Masinda, his wife, looked from the hut. There was angry scorn in the face of the Baganda woman.

"O man," she said in the native tongue, "do you sit and mourn like a woman? Will the thief bring back the tusk because you cry out at your door? Take your shield and your fighting-spear and follow Kintambo into the forest."

"Peace, woman!" said N'koro'koro. "It is well known in all the country between the Popolaki river and the Great Mountain that Kintambo is a very terrible man, and if I follow him into the forest it is not he who will be slain."

Masinda gave a scoffing laugh, and withdrew into the hut.

N'koro'koro, left alone, resumed his mourning.

But his lamentation was interrupted by the sight of a safari that emerged from the shades of the forest and wound on its way by the path to the village.

N'koro'koro rose to his feet, shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared at the newcomers.

Five white men, or, rather, boys,

came into his sight—the Boy Scout patrol of Masumpwe. With them marched a gigantic Kikuyu and a white man with a hard, seared face and ragged beard, whose hands were bound behind his back.

"Kumbe!" said the hunter. "It is the Bwana Strong and his safari, and they bring the trader Hackett a prisoner. Now, what may this mean?"

Masinda looked from the house again.

"Perhaps they bring back the tusk that was taken by Kintambo," she said, "for yesterday the Bwana came to the village while you lay senseless from the blow that Kintambo gave you, and he said that he would follow the thief in the forest. And perhaps——"

"Peace, woman!" said the hunter.

He advanced to meet the Scouts as they reached the village, and a crowd of the Baganda inhabitants gathered around.

The safari came to a halt; and Lyn beckoned to N'koro'koro to approach.

The hunter came up hopefully.

"O man," said Lyn, speaking in Swahili, "yesterday a tusk was taken from your house by Kintambo, the thief, who struck you down with the shaft of his spear. Is it not so?"

"It is true, O Bwana!" said the hunter.

"And if your eyes should see the tusk again, would you know it, for tusks are much alike?" said Lyn.

"There is no tusk like the yellow tusk that was taken by the thief Kintambo, Bwana," answered the hunter, "for on this tusk there are strange markings, cut with a knife by the hand of one who is now with the ghosts."

"That settles it, old bean!" said Pip Parker.

Lyn nodded.

"O hunter," he said, "we followed Kintambo in the forest, and we found that he had given the tusk to a Mzungu —the white man whom you see with us now, and whose hands are bound. And Kintambo was slain in a fight with my gun-bearer, Bobolobo; and the Mzungu is a prisoner, to be taken to Masumpwe and given up to the white man's justice."

"Truly Bobolobo is a brave and terrible man," said the hunter, glancing at the Kikuyu, "for Kintambo was the most terrible fighting-man in all the tribes of the Baganda."

Bobo grinned complacently.

"It is true, O man!" he said. "In all the country from the great Nyanza to the Big Water there is no man so brave and terrible as I, Bobolobo."

"Blessed is he that bloweth his own trumpet!" murmured Pip; and the Scouts grinned.

"And it is good to hear that Kintambo is slain," went on N'koro'koro. "But the tusk——"

Lyn Strong groped in his wallet and drew out an elephant's tusk yellow with age.

He held it out to the Baganda.

"Is that the tusk, O man?" he asked.

The hunter clutched it eagerly.

"It is the tusk," he said, "for I know it by the strange markings, O Bwana, which tell a secret to my eyes."

"Take it!" said Lyn, and he handed the tusk to the Baganda.

There was a muttered curse from Hackett, the American trader. His deep-set, wolfish eyes followed the yellow tusk as it was transferred.

"Shut up, you!" snapped Fatty Page.

"I guess you're mad, the whole crowd of you!" muttered the trader. "I tell you that tusk is worth a fortune."

"That concerns only the owner," answered Lyn.

"I tell you there's a secret marked on it—and that nigger will never get the benefit of it!" snarled Hackett. "I tell you that tusk is the clue to a treasure that would make us all rich."

"Cheese it!" said Lyn.

"You durned fool——"

Hackett broke off suddenly as Bobo raised his spear and the broad blade glittered under his startled eyes.

"Dog!" said Bobo. "It is not fitting that such words should be spoken to

the Bwana! Lord, let me slay this insolent man!"

"Keep that durned nigger off!" yelled Hackett in alarm.

Lyn laughed.

"Put down your spear, Bobo!" he said. "And you, Hackett, hold your tongue. March, you fellows!"

The patrol marched, the trader cursing under his breath as N'koro'koro took the precious tusk back into his hut. The Baganda village was left behind, and the Scouts followed a path through the forest, northward towards the Popolaki river.

* * * * *

Night lay dark on the African forest.

In a deep glade, shadowed by mighty trees, the camp-fire of the Popolaki Scouts burned brightly.

Round the camp-fire the Scouts were gathered to supper.

With them sat Hackett, the trader, his hands released from their bonds for the present. But the eye of Bobo was on him, and the Kikuyu's spear was ready if he attempted to escape.

Hackett ate his supper in sullen silence. The Scouts chatted cheerily as they ate, excepting Smut, the Dutch-

Hackett eyed the cheery young faces round him with lowering brows.

man.

The loss of the yellow tusk, with its strange markings, had evidently been a heavy blow to the greedy trader. That could not have been on account of its value as ivory, which was not more than a few pounds. Evidently the trader attached a strange value to the tusk on account of the mysterious markings that were engraved on it. And the Scouts were rather curious on the subject, though it certainly had not occurred to them to keep possession of the tusk, even if it was a clue to a treasure.

"There's a chance yet!" said Hackett, breaking his long silence, and looking at Lyn Strong, half-appealingly, half-savagely. "If you knew the value of that tusk——"

"It would make no difference to us," said Lyn, with a curl of the lip. "Do you think we are thieves like yourself?"

"It's worth a fortune! Do you think that nigger will be able to use it?" snarled Hackett. "He dare not go in search of the ivory!"

"The ivory?" repeated Lyn.

"Ivory enough to make a rich man of every guy here!" said Hackett.

Stacpoole yawned.

"Let's hear about it," he said. "I'm quite interested in that jolly old tusk. If you're not gammonin', Hackett, tell us where its value comes in."

The trader hesitated.

It was obvious that he did not desire to reveal the secret of the tusk, and at the same time he hoped to work on feelings of greed, to obtain the help of the Scouts in regaining possession of it.

"I guess I'll put you wise," he said at last. "Go on with me, and make your fortunes! I guess, with a party like this, I'd find the ivory—enough to load a dozen mules, too."

"My hat!" said Fatty Page.

"That nigger, N'koro'koro, was gun-bearer, years ago, in a safari in the Upper Congo country," said Hackett slowly. "They was hunting ivory, and they found it. Stacks of it! They found the 'elephants' cemetery' that the natives talk about so much."

"We've all heard of that," said Lyn, with a smile. "But no man has ever seen it!"

"That safari saw it," answered Hackett surlily. "There was two white men and a dozen native porters. They found the elephants' cemetery, where the ivory lies as thick as fleas in a native hut. They loaded themselves with all they could carry, and beat it for home. But they was cut up by a tribe of cannibals, and nearly every man killed and eaten. One porter got away wounded."

He paused, crammed tobacco in his mouth, and chewed. He seemed reluctant to tell more, and for some minutes he sat silent, chewing tobacco,

and ejecting streams of tobacco-juice into the sputtering fire.

"Is that the lot?" yawned Stacpoole at last.

"Nope!" grunted Hackett.

And, making up his mind to it, the trader resumed:

"N'koro'koro, like I said, was gun-bearer; but he had fallen sick, and was left behind in a native village, so he never saw the elephants' cemetery. He was joined, at the place where he'd been left, by the wounded man who got away. That man brought the yellow tusk with him. He had cut the markings on it to guide him back to the place some other time. But he died in the native village of his wounds, and N'koro'koro kept the tusk."

He ejected tobacco-juice again.

"That nigger keeps the tusk," he went on. "He ain't the pluck to try again for the ivory. I guess it couldn't be done, either, without a strong and well-armed safari. But he sticks to the tusk. I guess when I heard the story I made up my mind to get hold of it. I offered that nigger as much as fifty pounds in English money for the tusk, and he wouldn't part. That was why I got the Baganda, Kintambo, to knock him on the head and get it for me."

He glanced round at the interested faces of the Scouts.

"That nigger, N'koro'koro, won't part with the tusk," he said. "But what's to stop you guys taking it? Go in with me, and let us——"

"That's enough!" said Lyn.

"It's a tall story, but it may be true," remarked Pip. "I'd like to have that jolly old tusk."

"Same here," said Stacpoole.

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Page. "But if the man won't sell it——"

"What's the matter with getting it off him?" demanded Hackett.

Lyn laughed.

"Lots!" he answered. "If the tusk and its secret are of any value, they don't belong to us, but to the Baganda hunter!"

"Aw, talk sense!" growled Hackett.

"That's sense enough for this patrol, old bean!" grinned Pip.

The trader muttered a curse.

"You're letting a fortune go——" he began again. He was interrupted by a sudden shout from Bobo, who leaped up and grasped his spear.

"Simba!"

"A lion!" exclaimed Lyn, and in an instant his rifle was in his hand.

From the bush, not ten yards from the camp-fire, a terrible head emerged—that of a huge, black-maned lion, whose glaring eyes were fixed on the Scouts. The brightness of the fire seemed to daunt him, and he remained half-hidden by the bush, glaring, a deep growl pealing from his cavernous throat.

"Shoot!" shouted Lyn.

Five rifles roared out at once. There was a deep-toned roar from Simba, and the terrible head darted back into the bush. The Scouts fired into the bush after him, and another roar answered. Then came a wild clawing and rustling, as the wounded beast fled into the blackness of the forest.

"He's gone!" said Lyn, lowering his rifle.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Pip.

"What——"

"So has the Yank!"

Lyn spun round.

The prisoner's place was empty.

The trader had seized his opportunity, while the attention of the Scouts had been fixed on the lion. He had had only a few moments, but he had made the best of them. The Scouts looked for him, but they looked in vain. The trader had vanished into the forest, and the darkness of the night swallowed him up.

CHAPTER 15.

Too Late!

LYN STRONG set his teeth.

The trader was gone. Pursuit, in the darkness of the tangled forest, was hopeless.

"What's the trouble, Lyn?" asked Pip, staring at the patrol leader's troubled face. "The fellow's a rogue; but it's not very important to round him up. He will get what he deserves some other time."

"I was not thinking of that," said Lyn. "But——"

"But what?" asked Fatty.

"I was thinking of N'koro'koro. That villain is determined to get hold of the yellow tusk, and now he has escaped, I can't help thinking that he may make for the Baganda village."

"He's unarmed," said Stacpoole, shaking his head.

"I know. But——"

Lyn's brows contracted.

The Scouts looked at one another. They had had a hard day's march, and they wanted rest. But they were ready to trek back if the patrol leader gave the order.

"If he makes for the Baganda village, we might catch him there," said Pip. "But——"

"Not likely," said Stacpoole. "What could an unarmed man do?"

"He is a desperate rascal!" said Lyn, "and he would not stop short of anything to get hold of the tusk." He paused, irresolute. "Look here, you fellows! It's not worth a night march for the whole patrol; but I'll go back with Bobo. Turn in. And we'll rejoin you here to-morrow."

"We're ready to march, if you give the word!" said Fatty Page, though he cast a longing glance at his blanket.

"Ja, ja!" said Smut.

Lyn shook his head.

"It's not necessary. I'll trek back with Bobo. You're ready, Bobo?"

"O Bwana, this Kikuyu always ready to follow his lord!" answered Bobo.

"Come, then!"

And, leaving the rest of the patrol in camp, Lyn and the Kikuyu struck into the forest, and were soon lost to sight.

Many a long mile had the Popolaki patrol marched that day, by forest and jungle, and the Baganda village was a great distance behind them.

The return march meant that Lyn and the Kikuyu would be on foot all night, for they could scarcely hope to reach the village before morning.

Mile after of shadowy wood and jungle glided by them. Of the escaped trader they saw and heard nothing.

If he had headed for the Baganda village, he was ahead of them on the same path; and he could not, Lyn thought, be very far ahead. But there was no sign of him to be picked up by Bobo's keen eyes and ears.

The night was growing old, and drawing towards dawn, when they reached at last the neighbourhood of the village.

Here the forest was less thick and tangled, and the glitter of the stars filtered through the foliage. They were approaching the clearing where the village lay. Lyn became conscious of a sound in the silence of the night—a faint sound afar, that grew louder and shriller.

It was a sound of wailing, and it came from the direction of the village. He touched Bobo on the arm.

"What is that sound, Bobo?" he asked.

"Lord, it is the wailing of a woman!" answered the Kikuyu.

Lyn had no doubt of it.

"Push on!" he said.

And they hurried their steps.

In the clearing, when they emerged from the dark forest, the light of the stars fell brightly, and all things were clear to their eyes.

The Baganda village, which at that hour should have been plunged in slumber, was stirring, and there was a sound of many voices. Above the buzz of voices rose the wailing of Masinda, the wife of N'koro'koro.

Lyn hurried into the village, the Kikuyu following him. They had nc doubt now that the trader had been there. He had lost no time after escaping from the Scouts' camp. He had, indeed, no time to lose, for this was his last chance of obtaining possession of the yellow tusk before he was hunted out of Uganda.

Masinda was not to be seen. The wailing came from within the house of N'koro'koro. And Lyn knew the death-chant of the Baganda. The head-man of the village greeted him as he hurried up.

"What has happened, O N'goko?" exclaimed Lyn, speaking in the native tongue.

"O'Bwana, N'koro'koro, the hunter, is slain!" answered the head-man.

"Slain?" repeated Lyn. "By whom, O'N'goko?"

His teeth came hard together. There was no doubt now that the trader had been there.

"By the Mzungu who this morning marched with the Bwana with bonds upon his limbs," answered the head-man.

"But how?"

"The Mzungu came to the door of N'koro'koro—in the light of the stars, it is but a short time since," said the head-man. "He called the hunter to his door and N'koro'koro came, awakened, from sleep. And some others, who were also awakened, heard their talk. The Mzungu demanded the yellow tusk, even the same tusk that was stolen by Kintambo, and which the Bwana brought back to N'koro'koro. And the hunter took his spear to drive him away, and others took their spears to help. But the Mzungu, who is a very terrible man, tore the spear from the hand of N'koro'koro and slew him with it."

Lyn gritted his teeth.

"Then he seized the tusk, which N'koro'koro carried in his girdle, and fled," continued the head-man; "and when the light comes the young men will follow him with spear and shield, and slay him in the forest even as he had slain the hunter. At dawn of day there will be many Baganda following the shedder of blood."

Lyn drew a deep breath.

His suspicion had been well-founded. The escaped trader had headed direct for the house of N'koro'koro. and he had obtained the tusk at the cost of the hunter's life. Lyn had come too late to save the hunter, though he had been hard on the heels of the desperate adventurer.

"O N'goko," said Lyn, "this Mzungu shall be hunted like the wild beasts of the forest, and he shall be tied with cords, and given up to the white man's justice, and he shall be hanged on a tree for the deed he has done in this place."

"It is good, O Bwana," said the head-man.

Lyn turned to the Kikuyu.

"Bobo, your eyes must find the spoor of the man who has fled," he said.

"My eyes shall find it, Bwana," said the Kikuyu.

From the east came a faint touch of rosy light in the sky. Day was at hand.

In the dawning light, Lyn and the Kikuyu plunged into the forest.

CHAPTER 16.

Tracked Down!

NOON had come, and the heat in the forest was breathless.

The thick boughs and foliage intercepted the blaze of the sun, and in the aisles of the forest it was dusky; but the shade did not shut off the heat.

Lyn's face was streaming with perspiration, and heat and fatigue were heavy upon him. But he was not thinking of rest. Even the fugitive, with blood on his hands and death behind him, was likely to rest in the fierce heat of noon. But no thought of rest was in the Scout's mind.

Bobolobo, his keen eyes on the ground, was leading the way by a dusky bush-path, many miles from the Baganda village. Traces of the fugitive, that would have escaped most eyes, had not escaped those of the Kikuyu.

Bobo came to a stop at last.

He stood scanning the ground, the trees, the bushes, round him, with keen, scintillating eyes. Lyn halted and watched him.

He knew that Hackett would anticipate pursuit—that he would leave as little trace as possible. But he had great faith in the powers of the Kikuyu.

But Bobo seemed at a loss now.

Lyn leaned on a tree, glad of a brief respite from the toil of the trail. So far, the pursuit had led them westward, which Lyn had expected, for he had had no doubt that Hackett would be seeking to escape out of Uganda into the wild Congo country.

"Kumbe!" exclaimed Bobo suddenly.

And he signed to his master.

"He has passed this way?" exclaimed Lyn, hurrying to the Kikuyu.

"Na'am, Bwana!" said Bobo. "Yes, my lord! It is here that he has left the path, and gone into the forest where there is no path. For he must be very weary, lord, and he has sought a safe place where he may close his eyes till the heat of noon be past."

"But where?" said Lyn.

Bobo grinned, and pointed to a thorny bush with his spear. Lyn uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

On one of the sharp thorns was a fragment of cotton. It had been torn from the cotton shirt of the trader as he passed.

"Good!" exclaimed Lyn. "Push on, Bobo."

The Kikuyu led the way into the thick, tangled forest from the bush-path. Progress was slow now.

Here and there a broken twig, a trodden creeper, told that a man had passed that way not long before. But the traces were few and faint, and the fugitive had doubled and dodged among the giant trees, the thorny bushes, the hanging vines, to baffle a tracker who might follow.

Many times Bobo failed to find a trace of the winding way, and had to try back, losing precious minutes; but always he picked up sign again, and the pursuers kept on.

In the dense tropical forest the heat was stifling, and myriads of insects buzzed and stung. But the Scout and the Kikuyu kept on steadily, untiringly.

The way was ascending now, on the slope of a hill clothed in thick forest and jungle.

The way was more difficult now. The forest was thinning on the rocky soil, and it was possible to see to some distance between the trees. The fugitive had been able to push on without coming in contact with tree or bush, and the hard ground held no trace.

When Bobolobo halted again Lyn feared that he had lost the track. The Kikuyu's head was bent, as if to listen.

Lyn listened, too; but no sound came to him save the incessant buzzing of insects.

"Do your ears hear nothing, O Bwana?" asked the Kikuyu, at last.

"Nothing, Bobo," answered Lyn. "Tell me, O Bobo, do your ears hear the footsteps of the Mzungu?"

"My ears hear the sound of water, Bwana."

And the Kikuyu turned a little from the way he had been following, and hurried on a new direction.

Lyn followed him.

As they advanced the murmuring sound of falling water became clear to their ears.

Lyn did not need to ask the Kikuyu why he headed in that direction, with no sign to guide him. For the fugitive must have been in need of water, and there was little doubt that he had headed for it.

From the forest, the Scout and the Kikuyu came on the rugged bank of a rocky water-course, or fumbi.

At this point the hillside was steep, and a tiny stream came cascading down a ravine that was not more than five or six feet wide. Overhead, the sun shone down, unshaded by branches, and the water gleamed and sparkled like gold as it fell.

Gladly Lyn plunged his burning face into the cool water and drank deeply. Then he refilled his watercan, and the Kikuyu followed his example.

But only a few moments were lost. Then the Kikuyu was searching the

rocky banks of the little forest torrent for sign.

In several places by the water were signs of the feet of wild animals that had come to drink. And at last, amid the trail of paws, the Kikuyu pointed out the heel-mark of a boot.

"One whose feet are covered has trodden here, O Bwana!" he said.

Lyn nodded.

"He was here—and not long ago," he said. "But——"

They searched with eager eyes. But there was no sign to be found. Save for that heel-mark, and another which Bobo picked up closer to the water, there was no trace of the fugitive.

The eyes of the Scout and the Kikuyu met.

Both knew what the trader must have done; he had gone by the narrow ravine, treading in the shallow, falling stream. But whether he had gone up or down stream, there was no way of guessing.

"Let us each take one way, Bobo," said Lyn. "You go down the water, and I will go up."

"Na'am, Bwana! But let my lord watch with his eyes, and listen with his ears, for the Mzungu has a Baganda spear, and he is a very wicked man!" said the Kikuyu.

Lyn smiled.

"I will take care," he said, "and do you also take care, Bobo, and if you find the trader, take him if you can, and slay him if he resists."

And they parted, the Kikuyu descending the ravine, and Lyn ascending, and in a few moment they were lost to each other's sight.

The ravine was steep, the thin stream of water falling from rock to rock like a series of rough steps, worn smooth where the water flowed. Lyn Strong ascended slowly, his rifle ready, his eyes well about him. At any point, he knew, the cunning trader might have clambered out of the ravine on either side and taken to the forest again.

Or in such a perilous spot he might turn at bay—for he had taken with him, in his flight, the spear with which he had slain N'koro'koro. And Lyn watched not only for sign but for the sudden thrust of a spear from behind a rock or a clump of bush.

With the water washing round his boots, sometimes as high as his knees, Lyn climbed on up the steep fumbi, watchful as a leopard.

And a haggard man who lay, worn down with heat and fatigue, in the shelter of a flowering bush on the steep bank, raised his head and listened.

His sunken eyes burned as he heard the sound of the tramping boots on the rocks and stones in the washing water.

He rose to his knees and grasped the spear that lay beside him, and peered through the bush.

Lyn, ascending the fumbi, was not six yards from him. And the sunken eyes of the trader gleamed at him.

Had Hackett had a rifle in his hands, nothing could have saved the life of the patrol-leader of the Popolaki Scouts. But with the Baganda spear in his grasp, Hackett waited for him to draw nearer.

He was run down—but only by a single foe. And a thrust of the spear would relieve him of that enemy, and supply him with the firearms he needed.

Hackett's lips were drawn back from his tobacco-stained teeth in a savage snarl. He was hardly sorry that Lyn had tracked him down, when he saw that the Scout was alone. Grasping the spear, crouching behind the bush, he waited for the Scout to draw within reach of a deadly thrust.

But he did not count on the watchfulness of the Scout. Lyn drew nearer, but the slight swaying of the bush as Hackett lifted his arm to aim the spear was enough to warn him. He stopped and leapt to the further side of the ravine.

The thrusting spear gleamed out in the sun, but the thrust fell short a foot or more.

Crack!

Lyn fired into the bush, not so much in the hope of hitting the man he could not see, as to warn the Kikuyu that the quarry was found.

The report of the rifle rolled away with a thousand echoes through the silent forest.

The next instant the spear came whizzing, and Lyn barely caught it with his rifle and turned it aside, barely in time to save the broad blade from transfixing him. The spear slid by him and dropped in the water, and Lyn staggered for a moment on the smooth rock. Before he could lift his rifle again the trader came leaping on him from the bank like a leopard, and he was in the ruffian's grasp.

The leap, and the height of his assailant, hurled Lyn from his foothold, and he fell on his back, the trader sprawling over him. His rifle dropped from his hands as he grasped at his foe.

"My turn now!" hissed Hackett.

Lyn was under him, on his back in the shallow water. The rough hands of the trader were on his throat.

The Scout fought desperately.

He was at a terrible disadvantage, and there was no mercy in the savage, haggard face that glared down at him.

The grip on his throat, which he vainly strove to tear away, was forcing his head beneath the shallow water. Again and again he struggled up, and again and again the trader forced him down.

With every ounce of his strength and determination, Lyn Strong fought for his life. But he was fighting in vain, and the haggard eyes of his enemy burned with ruthless triumph.

There was a splashing in the torrent below.

But in the desperate fierceness of the struggle, neither heeded it. Both Lyn and his savage enemy were straining every nerve, every muscle, in the fearful struggle—the one to kill, and the other to live.

And neither knew that a newcomer was clambering desperately up the steep ravine till the figure of the Kikuyu loomed over them, and a broad-bladed spear flashed in the sun.

The deadly grip on Lyn's throat relaxed.

Half-choked, exhausted, his senses reeling, Lyn gasped for air. Something wet and warm drenched him as he lay. His throat was free now, and he could breathe, and the crushing weight of the trader rolled from him. The helping hand of the Kikuyu dragged him to his feet.

"O Bwana, this Kikuyu was in time!" panted Bobo. "My ears heard your rifle, lord, and I came——"

There was a dripping of crimson on the broad blade of the Kikuyu's spear.

Lyn glanced round with dizzy eyes, for the enemy had almost slain him. Hackett the trader lay on the rocks half in the water, that reddened as it flowed. Only one thrust had Bobo given with his spear, but it was enough.

. . . . .

"O Masinda!" said Lyn Strong. He stood before the house of N'koro'koro in the Baganda village. In his hand was the yellow tusk with the strange markings, and Masinda saw it as she looked from the doorway.

"O Masinda," said Lyn. "The Mzungu who slew N'koro'koro has been slain by the spear of a Kikuyu, and, behold, I have brought back to you the tusk that was taken from the hunter."

And he held out the yellow tusk.

"O Bwana!" said Masinda. "These are good words! For my heart is heavy for N'koro'koro, though it is true that very often he beat me with the whip of rhinoceros-hide. Also did I urge him many times to sell the tusk, but he was an obstinate man, and would not hear with his ears."

"Now the tusk is yours, Masinda, and you may sell it to whom you will!" said Lyn.

"O Bwana, to whom shall I sell the tusk, for the traders are thieves, and

they will say that it is yellow, and of little worth," said Masinda. "Also will they say that it is of small value because of the markings upon it, which seemed to be of so much worth to N'koro'koro, who was a very obstinate man."

"It is true," said Lyn.

He had hoped to comfort the widow of N'koro'koro by the return of the stolen tusk.

"But the Bwana, being a Mzungu of Ungereza, is one of great honour," continued Masinda. "And perhaps he will buy the tusk, and give a just price."

Lyn smiled.

"O Masinda," he said, "the value of this tusk in the traders' market is a hundred silver rupees."

"Let the Bwana give me one hundred silver rupees, and I shall be content," said Masinda, "for well I know that a Muhindi trader would not give me half so much."

"It is true," said Lyn. "But——" He paused. "Masinda, if you desire that I should buy this tusk, I will give you, not one hundred, but two hundred rupees for it."

"O Bwana, these words are sweeter to my ears than the singing of the birds in the spring-time!" said Masinda.

And Lyn paid over the two hundred rupees and left the Baganda village with the yellow tusk in his wallet.

Lyn and the Kikuyu rejoined the patrol at the camp, and the next day they were home at Masumpwe.

The yellow tusk, with its strange markings, for which two lives had been lost, was Lyn's.

Many times Lyn handled it, and traced the strange markings that were engraved on the ivory, and wondered what they meant, and whether he would, some day in the future, read their secret, and whether, in truth, they had a secret to tell. And often, as he looked at the tusk, his thoughts dwelt on a treasure-hunt in the wild land of the Congo.

CHAPTER 17.

The Sole Survivor!

LYN STRONG climbed to the roof of the banda, and shaded his eyes with his hand as he looked away to the west.

Every day, sometimes twice or thrice in the day, Lyn clambered on that corrugated iron roof to stare away through the brilliant sunshine of Uganda, towards the mysterious heart of Africa.

Beyond the crowded wattle huts of the native town of Masumpwe lay a lava-strewn plain; beyond that, the dark shades of the vast Mbiri Forest.

And beyond the forest, unknown Africa stretching away into the vast unexplored regions of the Congo.

Lyn's boyish face was clouded, as he stood perched rather precariously on the slanting roof. Only the familiar scene that met his eyes every day met them now.

Not a sign of a dusty safari coming up the long white road that ran by the Popolaki River.

Weeks—many weeks—had passed by since Grant Strong, hunter and guide, had gone on safari in the Congo country.

In a month, he should have returned home, but twice that period had passed and Lyn's father had not come back, not even a stray porter from the safari had reappeared in the streets of Masumpwe.

Lyn was accustomed to his father's long absences. He had a busy life of his own at the bungalow by the Popolaki River.

There was the shamba to be cultivated and kept in order, there were fruits and vegetables to be taken to the market at Masumpwe for sale, and there were his duties as patrol-leader of the Popolaki Patrol.

But he was anxious now.

He had come back from the hunting of man-killers in the Mbiri Forest, expecting to find his father at home. But Grant Strong had not come, and there was no news of him.

The fear had been growing in his mind for a long time that some disaster had happened to the safari, and that his father had vanished for ever in the unknown parts of the Congo country.

"Bwana!"

Lyn looked down.

Bobolobo was weeding in the shamba. Bobo had discarded the gorgeous dress of monkey-skins that he wore on safari; his shield and his fighting-spears were stacked in the banda. He wore the cotton kanzu of the civilised native when he was at home, and his reluctant brown hands wielded the hoe instead of the spear.

"Lord," said Bobo persuasively, "the Bwana M'Kubwa?" asked Bobo, looking up at the boy on the roof.

Lyn shook his head.

In the language of the Kikuyu, Lyn was the Bwana, the Lord, and his father was the Bwana M'Kubwa, the elder Lord.

"Lord," said Bobopersuasively, "the Bwana M'Kubwa is lost in the forests of the Great River, and it is fitting that the Bwana and Bobolobo should seek him."

Lyn smiled faintly.

Every day the gun-bearer gave him the same advice.

Bobolobo was faithfully attached to the Bwana M'Kubwa, but Lyn could not help suspecting that the Kikuyu was anxious to exchange the kanzu for the warrior's dress of monkey-skins, the hoe for the fighting-spear.

"O Bobo," answered Lyn, "we cannot go to seek the Bwana M'Kubwa, for it is the order of my father that I await his return."

Grant Strong had gone as guide to a party of big-game shooters, and if the party had disappeared for ever in the dark depths of Africa, it would not be the first time, by many a one, that such a disaster had happened.

That was Grant Strong's dangerous trade, and he took the risks as a matter of course. But it was always on the cards that he might take the risks once too often.

Gladly enough Lyn would have trekked into the west in search of his father's safari. But it was against his father's orders, and he could not go—not, at all events, unless he received some news of disaster.

He shook his head again.

Bobolobo returned to his hoeing.

From the bungalow came a little figure, Mpoko, the bushman. He came across towards the banda.

Mpoko had come to Masumpwe with Lyn, and he was now a fixture at the bungalow by the river.

"O Bwana!" said Mpoko.

Lyn Strong glanced down again, and smiled.

The little bushman wore a white cotton kanzu like Bobo, and a scarlet fez that he had bought in the Indian bazaar at Masumpwe.

"What is it, Mpoko?" asked Lyn.

"Plenty dirty splendid filthy chop, Bwana!" said Mpoko.

In his own Wambuti language, or in Swahili, Mpoko was quite eloquent. But his English was strange and exotic.

"Palmoil chop, Bwana!" said Mpoko. "Fine dirty filthy chop, all ready for Bwana."

Lyn laughed.

"Right-ho," he answered.

He was about to descend from the roof of the banda, but he gave one more glance along the white road that uncurled like a ribbon before his eyes.

"My hat!" he exclaimed suddenly.

A new figure appeared on the road, that of a tired and dusty native who plodded on towards the bungalow, drooping with fatigue.

Far off as the man was, Lyn recognised him.

"Jumba!" he exclaimed.

It was one of the porters that had gone with Grant Strong's safari.

Lyn felt a contraction at his heart.

The porter was alone; there was no sign of his companions, no sign of his master.

Lyn made a flying leap from the roof of the banda, and landed in the shamba. He crossed the shamba to the gate at a rapid run, heedless of flower-beds and vegetable-beds.

He tore out into the road towards the slow figure of the porter.

He reached him, panting for breath, and Jumba came to a halt. He stood unsteadily, evidently worn out with fatigue.

Lyn caught his shoulder in his anxiety and excitement.

"Where is your master, Jumba?" he asked, speaking in Swahili, a language that came as easily to him as his own.

"O Bwana," said the porter falteringly, "the safari is lost, and I Jumba alone have returned to tell."

Lyn almost staggered.

The sight of Jumba, crawling wearily and alone up the long white road, had crystallised the fear that had long been in his heart.

"My father?" he panted. "Tell me!"

"The safari is lost!" repeated Jumba. "The porters are slain by the Black Ones of the Great River; and the Mzungu also are slain. The Bwana M'Kubwa is a prisoner of the Black Ones; and I, Jumba, alone have escaped."

"My father—a prisoner?"

Lyn felt his heart beat again.

"Where did this happen, Jumba?"

"In the country of the Great River, many days journey!" said the porter. "In the country of the Chief Mofolongo. All are slain excepting the Bwana M'Kubwa; and the Chief Mofolongo has spared his life because of the great magic; but he is a captive in the houses of the Black Ones, and on the day of sacrifice he will die like the other Mzungu."

Lyn stood still and quiet for a moment.

The safari was lost; the game-hunters and the black porters were slain. But his father lived—a prisoner in the hands of the black cannibals of the Congo.

"O Jumba," said Lyn at last, "go you to the house; and you shall have food and drink and rest, and many rupees for bringing me this news of the Bwana M'Kubwa."

He turned, and ran back to the bungalow, followed more slowly by the limping native.

Lyn burst like a tornado into the shamba.

"Bobo!" he shouted.

"Na'am, Bwana!" said the Kikuyu. "Yes, lord!"

"Get ready for the trail! We start in an hour—to seek my father! We trek to the Congo!"

The Kikuyu's eyes danced.

"O Bwana, my ears hear you!" he said.

Mpoko gave an anxious squeak.

"Me too!" he exclaimed. "Me Mpoko with Bwana! Me carry filthy cooking-pots—me make dirty chop for Bwana."

"You too, Mpoko!" said Lyn.

And he ran into the house, to make his preparations for the safari.

CHAPTER 18.
Loyal Comrades!

"WHAT the thump——" exclaimed Pip Parker.

Pip jumped off his pony at the garden gate, and came into the shamba, and stared at Bobolobo.

Bobo was a changed Bobo.

No longer were his brawny limbs encased in the cotton kanzu. Bobo was clad in the black-and-white monkey-skins, the dress that was the pride of his heart. On his left arm was the shield of rhinoceros hide; in his left hand two throwing spears; in his right his long spear, and Bobo was brandishing the spear, the steel tip flashing in the sunlight. The brown face of the Kikuyu was alight with excitement.

"What's this game, Bobo?" demanded Pip.

The Kikuyu ceased to brandish the spear, and turned round and gave Dr. Parker's son a rather sheepish look.

"Lord, I follow the Bwana to the Congo!" he said.

"Oh, my hat! Where's the Bwana?"

"The Bwana prepares for the safari," Bobo pointed to the bungalow.

Pip went up the path to the house, between the rows of eucalyptus trees.

"Lyn, old bean!" he shouted.

"Trot in, Pip!" called back Lyn.

Lyn Strong was busy. He was packing for the safari; and as Pip came in his hands were full of cartridges. He gave Pip a nod.

"I looked in," said Pip. "They're saying in Masumpwe that a Baganda porter has got back from your father's safari."

"I've seen him," answered Lyn. "It was Jumba. The safari has been cut up on the Congo, and my father is a prisoner among the Lukuli."

"And you're going——"

"At once!"

Pip whistled.

"This is a job for the Scouts," he said. "You're going to call up the patrol, Lyn."

Lyn shook his head.

"No; the Popolaki Patrol can't go far afield, Pip; and—and——"

"And they wouldn't be likely to come back if they did?"

"That's it! I'm bound to go—but I couldn't take the fellows into the Lukuli country. I fancy their people would have something to say about it, too!" said Lyn, with a faint smile.

"Look here, Lyn, you're not going on your own. Smut and Fatty and Stacpoole would all be glad to join up."

"I'm not going to ask them. It wouldn't be cricket."

"Look here, fathead——"

"Nothing doing, Pip! I'm going on this safari with Bobo and Mpoko. We've got three hundred miles to trek; and we shall be away for weeks, even if we have luck and don't leave our bones in Mofolongo's town. This isn't a job for the Scouts."

"Well, jolly well see about that," said Pip. "When are you starting?"

"Half an hour! Bobo's got into his war-paint, and Mpoko is packing food. I've got these things to put together."

Pip Parker did not stop to answer. He hurried out of the house, ran through the shamba to the gate, and threw himself on his pony.

The clatter of hoofs rang back from the road.

Lyn smiled; and went on with his packing.

The patrol-leader of the Popolaki Patrol would have been glad enough to take his comrades along with him, on that perilous expedition into the heart of unknown Africa; more than glad. But though he did not hesitate a moment on his own account, he knew that all the chances were that he would never return from the country of the cannibal Lukuli of the Congo; and he had no right to drag his comrades into such fearful peril.

He had no doubt that Pip had gone to ask his father for leave to join the safari; but he had no expectation that Dr. Parker would grant permission.

He was not losing a moment.

Mpoko was soon ready with his pack of stores and his copper cooking pot; Bobo was ready; and the bungalow was locked up.

Lyn was glad to get started.

He avoided the road through Masumpwe, and followed a path that led direct to the Mbiri Forest.

Lyn swung steadily, almost cheerily, on his way.

Grant Strong was still living, a prisoner in the hands of a cannibal chief; and Lyn was determined either to save him, or to perish under the spears of the Lukuli.

The sun was dipping towards the hills when Lyn entered the dusky shades of the Mbiri Forest.

By a narrow path, the safari tramped on, deeper and deeper into the forest.

Masumpwe, and the plantations and shambas on the Popolaki River, were far behind now.

As the shadows of falling night came more thickly, the howl of wild beasts came from the jungle on either side of the track, unheeded by Lyn and his two followers.

A hyena crossed their path, glared at them for a moment with bright, greenish eyes, and plunged into the thickets again as Bobo made a thrust with his spear.

Not till long after darkness had fallen did Lyn give the word to stop.

In a little clearing in the dense forest the safari camped; and Mpoko lighted the camp-fire, to cook the supper, and to scare away prowling beasts with the flames.

The little bushman grinned over the cooking-pot. Mpoko was as proud of his cooking as Bobo of his monkey-skins and his fighting-spears.

"Plenty good filthy chop, Bwana," said Mpoko.

Lyn smiled.

From the silence of the forest came a dull, echoing sound.

Lyn bent his head to listen.

Thud, thud, thud!

"What is that, Bobo?" asked Lyn.

"O Bwana, it is the footstep of a swift horse!" said the Kikuyu. "It is the tread of a horse that follows from Masumpwe."

Lyn stepped away from the fire, and stood looking back along the dark jungle path.

The sound of the horse's hoofs grew clearer and clearer, echoing in the deep silence of the forest. He could hear the jingle of harness now.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

From the darkness of the narrow path a horseman dashed up into the circle of light from the fire, and drew rein.

"Pip!" exclaimed Lyn, as the doctor's son dismounted.

Another horseman came thudding up from the darkness. Fatty Page jumped off his horse.

"Here we are again!" he grinned.

"You silly ass, Lyn!" exclaimed Pip. "We'd never have found you but for the light of the fire."

"But what——"

"We're coming," explained Pip. "I've asked my governor, and Fatty's asked his, and they think it's up to us. I galloped round to tell the fellows; but Stacpoole's away, and Smut's wanted on the coffee plantation, and can't come. But we're coming—ain't we, Fatty?"

"You bet!" said Fatty.

"But——" said Lyn dubiously.

"Oh, cut it out!" said Pip. "Think we're going to let you fool around the cannibals on your own? Not likely!"

Fatty Page gave an appreciative sniff, his eyes on the cooking-pot.

"That smells good," he said. "Mpoko's some cook, Lyn. It was a lucky day when you picked up Little Tich."

"Look here, you fellows——" said Lyn gravely.

"The horses will find their way home," said Pip. "We had to ride to catch you up, you fathead."

He took his pack from his pony, turned him round, and, with a smart smack, sent him galloping off back along the jungle path. Fatty Page followed his example.

"That settles it," said Pip cheerfully. "What?"

"We're going into fearful danger," said Lyn. "I don't feel that I ought to let you come."

"How are you going to stop us?" grinned Pip. "I'll jolly well punch your nose if you try. I know that."

Lyn laughed.

"Well, a wilful man must have his way, I suppose," he said. "I'm jolly glad to have you, of course."

"That's better."

"How long is that grub going to be, Mpoko?" asked Fatty Page.

"Plenty filthy chop all ready, sar," answered the bushman.

And the Popolaki Scouts sat down round the camp-fire to supper.

CHAPTER 19.
In the Jungle!

"HOT!" said Fatty Page, mopping his perspiring brow.

The heat was intense in the tropical jungle.

"Warm!" said Pip.

Many days and nights had passed since the Scouts had left Masumpwe behind.

The Scouts were far from the country they knew. Once the Uganda border was left behind they had plunged into the unknown. The Lukuli country was not even marked on a map, though it was an extensive territory. The lands of many tribes had to be crossed before the country of the Chief Mofolongo was reached. Generally, the Scouts found the natives friendly or indifferent, though on two or three occasions they had needed their rifles to ensure a safe passage.

Mpoko was the guide now. Mpoko was a native of the Congo country, and he knew where the chief town of Mofolongo lay on a branch of the Great River.

Day by day the little safari marched on, by shadowy forest or sickly jungle, wading shallow streams, swimming deep rivers, clambering over lava-strewn hills.

Now the safari was following a narrow path, shut in on either side by rank walls of elephant grass, so narrow that the grass on either side brushed them as they passed.

The grass, ten or twelve feet high, almost met over their heads, leaving only a strip of burning, blue sky.

Myriads of insects buzzed and hummed in the heat. But the Popolaki Scouts were hardened to mosquitoes.

Lyn had gone ahead to pick out a camp for noonday. More slowly the safari tramped on behind.

"Hot," repeated Fatty.

"You'll lose some of your weight at this rate, old man," said Pip.

"Think so?" asked Fatty.

"Bet on it! You've lost nearly a ton already."

"Fathead!"

Pip chuckled. Pip was small and thin, which was rather a sore point with him; but it made marching easier. Fatty was the best customer at his father's store in Masumpwe, and he had more weight to carry than was comfortable on safari.

"Like me to roll you along, old bean?" asked Pip.

Smack!

Pip jumped.

"You chump! What are you up to?" he yelled.

"Sorry!" said Fatty affably. "I took you for a mosquito."

Pip Parker came to a halt, and laid down his rifle. He gave his plump comrade a glare of wrath.

"Where will you have it?" he demanded.

"My dear old chap, mustn't hit below the belt!" said Fatty.

"Who's going to hit below the belt, ass?"

"Well you can't reach over it, you know."

That was too much for Pip. He demonstrated at once that he could hit above the belt by landing a small but extremely hard fist on Fatty Page's plump chin.

"Ow!" gasped Fatty.

The next moment Fatty made a rush at him. He grasped the diminutive Pip, and they crashed into the elephant grass. The tall stalks swayed and parted under their weight, and they rolled in the jungle beside the path.

At that moment there was a shrill, startled yell. The two Scouts, rolling into the grass, had crashed on a figure that was crouched there—the figure of a native in a grass loin-cloth, with a spear clutched in his black hand.

"Great Scott!" panted Fatty.

"Look out!" gasped Pip.

The Scouts released one another, the dispute instantly forgotten. They leaped up, staring with startled eyes

at the man they had inadvertently knocked over, and who lay sprawling and gasping.

They had left their rifles in the bush-path. But Pip was swift to act; he sprang on the sprawling native, tore the spear from his hand, and presented the point to the bare black chest.

The native, about to spring up, sank back again as the sharp point of the spear cut his black skin; and he lay on his elbow, his dark, rolling eyes gleaming up at the Boy Scout.

"Keep there, you blighter!" panted Pip. "Fatty, the rifles—quick; the jungle may be full of them!"

Fatty leaped for the rifles. Bobolobo reached the spot with a spring, and his spear flashed over the fallen man.

"Hold on, Bobo!" exclaimed Pip. "Don't kill him! Hold on, I tell you!"

Bobolobo reluctantly stayed the thrust.

"Is he a Lukuli, Bobo?" asked Pip.

Bobolobo shook his head.

"We are yet far from the Lukuli country, master. This is a man from the north country—from the land of the Nile. He is a Dinka."

Pip whistled.

"What is he doing here, then? He seems to be alone! He was spying on us. Ask him what he does here, Bobo."

"I will speak to the son of a jackal," said Bobo, and he addressed the crouching native in Swahili, receiving only a sullen stare in reply.

"Mpoko, try him in your lingo," said Pip.

The little bushman came forward. He spoke to the native in Wambuti; but received only the same sullen stare.

"He knows not the tongue, lord," said Bobo.

Mpoko grinned, and took the long bush-knife from his girdle. He knelt beside the native, and placed the razor-like edge to the black throat. His eyes gleamed fiercely down at the Dinka.

"Me makum speak," said Mpoko. And, with a steady hand, he pressed the sharp blade into the black skin.

The Dinka began to speak volubly.

Fatty and Pip, rifle in hand, were keeping a sharp look-out. But there was no sign of other enemies at hand.

A change came over the black face of Mpoko. His eyes rolled and glittered. What the Dinka was saying in a strange tongue seemed to affect the Bushman strangely.

"What does he say, Mpoko?" exclaimed Pip impatiently.

Mpoko showed his flashing white teeth.

"He say he belong to Zirafi ben Said, the slave-trader! Zirafi is here with many men."

"Oh, crumbs!" muttered Pip. "What rotten luck to run into that gang! Zirafi hasn't forgotten how we thrashed him that day in the Mbiri Forest."

"He say Zirafi know we come, and sent out to watch!" said Mpoko. "He sent out many men, and give order to kill!"

"Lord," said Bobo, "it is fitting that the man should die."

Pip shook his head.

"Bind his hands, Bobo, and let's get on and rejoin Lyn. If Lyn falls into the hands of Zirafi——" Pip turned pale at the thought.

"Look out!" gasped Fatty.

The Dinka had been watching for a chance. With a sudden spring, with the swiftness of lightning, he leaped to his feet and sprang away into the jungle.

Swift as he was, Bobo was as swift. Like a flash of light his spear flew through the air. There was a choking cry, and the Dinka fell forward on his face.

He did not stir again. Pip shuddered.

"Come!" he said.

Pip and Fatty hurried up the bush-path with Mpoko. The Kikuyu wiped his spear on the grass and followed. From the distance, far ahead in the jungle, came the sudden crack of a rifle.

"Lyn!" breathed Pip.

Bobo shot ahead, running like a deer. With set faces and beating hearts the others tore after him.

CHAPTER 20.
Zirafi's Vengeance!

"BISMILLAH! We meet again, Feringhee!"

Zirafi ben Said, the Arab slave-trader, grinned as he spoke. Lyn Strong gripped his rifle.

Lyn had pitched on a spot for camping on the edge of the jungle, where a great muguhu-tree grew by the margin of a shallow creek. He had thrown himself down to rest for a few minutes in the shade of the tree, when the Arab stepped from behind a mass of thorny bushes.

Zirafi was not alone; there were four of his men with him—savage, brown-faced ruffians, half Arab and half negro.

Lyn was on his feet in a twinkling, rifle in hand. He stared blankly at the slave-trader. Of all the enemies he looked for in the heart of Africa, Zirafi was the least expected. He had supposed that the slave-trader was far away in the Behr-el-Gazelle by that time. It was weeks since they had met in the Mbiri Forest, when the Popolaki Patrol had released the string of slaves and given Zirafi twenty blows of the kourbash.

Zirafi rapped out an order to his men in Arabic, and they made a move towards Lyn.

The rifle leaped to Lyn's shoulder.

The boy pulled trigger instantly, and the nearest ruffian rolled over at his feet.

The next instant he was in the grasp of the rest, and borne to the ground.

He struggled fiercely.

But his struggles were hopeless. The three brawny ruffians pinned him to the ground; his arms were dragged behind him, and his wrists bound together with a strip of linen

Then he was dragged to his feet.

"Dog of a kafir!" said Zirafi, between his teeth. "Unbeliever, and the son of unbelievers! For days I have known that you were in this country—my spies have watched you. Dog! From yonder bush I watched you come, and had I intended that you should die quickly, you would have fallen to my pistol! But you have beaten me like a dog, and for that you shall die slowly. You shall die like a slave under the bastinado!"

Lyn set his teeth hard.

Zirafi spoke to his men in Arabic, and the boy was stretched on the ground on his face. A foot planted on his back pinned him there, and one of the ruffians drew off his boots. Another was cutting a flexible cane in the thicket. His feet were drawn up on either side of a stick planted in the ground, and tied so that the bare soles were turned upward. For the torture of the bastinado is beating on the soles of the feet—one of the most savage forms of punishment known to the cruel East.

Zirafi watched with the eyes on an exulting demon.

He made a sign to the man with the cane, and the blows began to fall.

Lash, lash, lash!

The Arab made a furious gesture, and the blows fell faster. In spite of himself, a long cry of pain broke from Lyn.

As it sounded like music in the savage ears of Zirafi, a figure in black-and-white monkey-skins appeared at the opening of the jungle path.

Bobolobo gave one look and leaped on the scene.

His spear flashed in the sunlight and was driven deep into the neck of the ruffian who held the cane.

With a gasping cry the man reeled and fell beside Lyn, drenching the grass with his blood.

"Bismillah!" gasped Zirafi.

Like a tiger Bobolobo swung round at the others. His spear, dripping red, was driven into the throat of the

nearest ruffian, and the third man leaped back, panting with fear, and striving to parry the spear with the barrel of a rifle.

Zirafi grasped a long-barrelled pistol from his girdle, his savage face working with fury. But from the jungle path into the clearing round the muhugu-tree came Fatty Page and Pip, and close behind them Mpoko. Zirafi gave them one wild glance, turned, and fled into the bush.

Fatty Page and Pip fired after him together; but the slave-trader was already in cover, and running for his life. A yell of rage answered the shots, and Zirafi ben Said was gone.

Fatty and Pip ran to Lyn. Bobolobo had already accounted for his enemy; the slaver dropped on the earth, under the Kikuyu's spear, and twice again Bobolobo drove the broad blade home. Mpoko, passing him, vanished into the bush in pursuit of Zirafi.

"Lyn, old man!" panted Fatty.

"Oh, Lyn, old chap!" said Pip, with a break in his voice.

In a few seconds Lyn was released from his bonds. He sat up, his back to the muhugu, his face white and drawn. But he contrived to smile at his anxious comrades.

"All serene!" he gasped. "You fellows came in time! They were giving me the bastinado—my hat! It hurts!" He shivered with pain. A dozen blows had fallen on the soles of his feet, and already they were swelling. "By gum! If I meet that hound Zirafi again——"

Mpoko came back from the bush, with savage disappointment in his face. Zirafi had escaped.

"We've got to get on!" said Lyn. "Zirafi may have a crowd with him. He would not be slave-trading in this country without a strong force. We've got to beat it." He made an effort to rise, but sank back again with a gasp of pain. He could not stand on his swollen feet.

"O Bwana," said Bobolobo, "I will carry my lord on my back, as I carried him when he was a m'toto m'changa."

Lyn grinned.

"Go it, then, Bobo!" he said.

The brawny Kikuyu lifted Lyn to his back as if the sturdy Scot had still been a m'toto m'changa—a little child. The safari plunged across the shallow creek, and into the dark shades of the forest beyond, and as they went they listened for the sound of pursuit, which they knew could not be long in coming.

CHAPTER 21.
In Dire Peril!

"KIMYA!" whispered Bobolobo. In moments of stress Bobo forgot his English.

But if Bobolobo's companions had not understood the Swahili word for silence, they would have understood the gesture of his lifted hand and the tense look on his brown face in the dimness.

Night lay on the Central African forest.

Bright stars were in the sky, but scarce a gleam penetrated through the masses of foliage to the earth below.

Almost at a snail's pace the tired safari trod on a winding way among the giant trunks and branches, draped with fig-vine, that hung like ropes.

But as Bobo whispered "Kimya!" they stopped in their tracks.

From the silence of the forest the Kikuyu's keen ears had caught a sound that was not the rustling of a lion in the brake or the stealthy tread of a hyena.

Mpoko, the bushman, who was in the lead, looked back with glinting eyes into the gloom. Pip Parker and Fatty Page grasped their rifles.

"What is it, Bobo?" whispered Lyn Strong.

"Mwarabu!" breathed Bobo.

"The Arabs?"

"Yes, lord," breathed Bobolobo.

Lyn gritted his teeth.

Lyn was still being carried on the brawny shoulders of the Kikuyu.

"Put me down, Bobo!" he whispered.

Softly, silently, the Kikuyu lowered Lyn to the earth. He could not stand on his swollen, bandaged feet, but he sat with his rifle in his grip, his eyes gleaming over it.

He would have been glad to see the evil, swarthy face of Zirafi ben Said, the slave-trader, before the muzzle of his rifle. But he made no sound. If Zirafi was in the forest he was not alone. There were only five in the safari—Bobo and Mpoko and the three Popolaki Scouts—Lyn, Pip and Fatty. And they had no chance against a swarm of savage slave-hunters from the Behr-el-Gazelle.

For long, weary hours the safari had pushed on, under cover of night, hoping to get clear of Zirafi's pursuit.

The Arab would not spare himself or his men in the chase, but Lyn did not want to meet the savage slave-dealer yet. Much as he would have liked to pull trigger on Zirafi, not a second must be wasted while his father's life was in deadly peril.

He would gladly have avoided trouble on his way, much as he would have liked to pull trigger on Zirafi ben Said.

In silence and darkness they waited and listened. A long march in the hot day, followed by a long march in the night, had tired the little safari. They were glad to rest.

From the cane-brake came a soft rustle.

Nothing could be seen but faintly stirring shadows. But whoever it was that trod in the jungly forest, he was treading close by the halted safari.

The three Scouts scarcely breathed.

Then, as if to resolve all doubts, there came a muttering of voices from the night.

There were two men in the darkness, and they were speaking in Arabic—the mongrel Arabic of the Sudan.

The Scouts could not distinguish the words, but they could make out the language, and they knew beyond doubt that the speakers were two of Zirafi's men.

The muttering died away.

From the darkness of the bush came a white glimmer. It was the glimmer of an Arab's burnous as he came through the thickets into the space under the trees where the safari crouched.

The man stepped clear of the bush, and another followed him.

It was evident that the Arabs had not seen them yet.

Evidently they were two of Zirafi's men—two out of several score who were hunting through the forest for a trace of the escaping safari. They had come close without knowing it.

Bobolobo's hand closed hard on his spear-shaft—so hard that his brown knuckles showed white. The black paw of Mpoko was closed on the handle of his long bush-knife—the two-foot knife which he used as a sword.

A tense second of silence—a second that seemed a century long. Then from one of the Arabs as he peered broke a sudden startled exclamation.

"Bismillah!"

He had caught sight of the still figures in the blackness under the great tree.

The word had barely dropped from his lips when Bobolobo moved with a movement swift as the leap of a lion. Following the slave-hunter's exclamation came a gurgling groan—as the broad-bladed spear of the Kikuyu was driven through the burnous and the breast behind it. The second man started back and leaped away into the bush—and after him, with the speed of a deer, leaped Mpoko, the long knife in his hand, his lips drawn back in a snarl, his white teeth flashing.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Pip.

The Kikuyu's spear flashed and dripped red as it was lifted and driven a second time through the huddled figure that had fallen at Bobolobo's feet. The slave-hunter did not stir.

Bobo wiped his spear on a broad leaf.

"O Bwana, this son of a jackal will never carry news to Zirafi!" he said, with a soft chuckle. "It was written that this Mwarabu should die and not live!"

Lyn did not speak.

He was listening to the crashing in the jungle as the second Arab fled, with the small bushman like a tiger on his track.

The crashing died away.

"If that merchant gets clear we shall have the whole gang down on us, Lyn!" said Pip. "Rotten luck to fall in with Zirafi and his crowd here. But we'll make some of the beggars hop."

"Mpoko will get him!" said Fatty Page hopefully.

Lyn listened tensely.

The sound of the flight and the pursuit had died away; the silence of the vast Congo forest lay round the safari.

If the Arab spy escaped it was probably the end of the safari. The whole troop of slave-hunters could not be far away. Lyn's heart beat painfully as he listened. With his father a prisoner in the Lukuli country—a prisoner of the cannibals—there was no one to save him if his son could not save him. If the spy escaped to tell Zirafi where to look for the safari——

There was a rustle in the bush.

A grinning black face looked from the shadows. Mpoko the bushman rejoined his companions.

"O Small One," said Bobolobo, "let my eyes see your knife."

Mpoko, grinning and showing every gleaming tooth in his head, held up the long Kikuyu knife.

It dripped crimson.

"O Bwana," said Bobolobo, grining, "One-who-ran-like-a-coward has perished under the knife I gave the Small One!"

And Mpoko grinned again.

"Let's go on!" said Lyn. "We've had a close shave, but we may dodge those scoundrels now! Zirafi's lost two of his spies, at any rate. We've got a chance now to get clear."

And Bobo lifted the chief of the Popolaki Scouts on his brawny shoulders again, and the safari trekked on, wearily but hopefully, through the darkness of the Congo forest.

CHAPTER 22.
In Hiding!

DAWN glimmered over the forest, faint light filtering through the arched and tangled branches. With the gleam of day the safari came to a halt. Even the iron-limbed Kikuyu and the wiry bushman were weary, and Pip and Fatty could scarcely place one foot before another. But it was not only from weariness that the safari halted. In the daylight it was necessary to find concealment, for they could hardly hope that they were as yet out of the radius of Zirafi's search. Mpoko, born to the wiles of the African bush, found the hiding-place for the hunted safari.

He stopped under a great tree and pointed upward with a stubby black thumb.

"Big filthy tree," said Mpoko. "This dirty party plenty hide high-high."

"O, Small One," said Bobolobo, "it is not fitting that the Bwana should hide in a tree like a monkey!"

"Monkey hide high-high, hyena no catchum!" said the bushman.

"That's true," said Lyn Strong, with a smile. "It's a good idea—plenty of room above, you fellows. We've got to keep out of sight during the daylight."

Pip leaned on his rifle with aching limbs, and stared rather dismally up at the dome of branches and foliage.

"Good wheeze!" he said. "But how're we getting up, old bean? You can't climb with your gammy tootsies."

"Plenty filthy liana!" said Mpoko.

"That's so," said Fatty Page. "We can pull you up, Lyn. I suppose we've got to lie doggo."

"No doubt about that," answered Lyn. "Zirafi will be combing the forest for us, and we've got no chance

if that crowd get at us; they'll be a dozen to one. We've got to steer clear of Arabs."

"I'd rather put a bullet through Zirafi!" growled Pip.

"Same here; but I don't care twopence for Zirafi so long as we get through to the Lukuli country. It's my father I'm thinking of," said Lyn.

"Right, old chap! I hate hiding from a sneaking slave-driver; but we'll find another chance of settling accounts with Zirafi later on. It's a go!" said Pip.

"O Bwana, is it your will to climb the tree?" asked Bobo.

"Yes; get a move on."

Bobo laid down his shield and his fighting-spears. He liked the idea of hiding in the tree like a monkey no more than the scouts did; it touched the pride of the Kikuyu. But the command of the Bwana was law to Bobo.

Mpoko, active as an ape. clambered into the tree, taking with him his pack and his cooking-pots. He grinned down from a mighty branch, his little black face looking not unlike that of a monkey peering from the foliage.

"Fine big filthy tree!" he announced. "Plenty-plenty room for dirty old safari!"

With active fingers the little bushman twisted rope-like lianas, and let down the improvised rope from the branch.

Bobo fastened it under Lyn's armpits.

Then he clambered into the tree after Mpoko, and joined the bushman on the horizontal branch.

Pip and Fatty watched his ascent rather breathlessly. The branch where the two natives straddled was twenty feet from the ground. Lyn turned round at the end of the rope as they pulled.

But the twisted lianas were strong, and there was no danger of a break. In a few minutes the patrol-leader of the Popolaki Scouts was swung up to the branch.

Bobo grasped him and lifted him on the branch, and helped him crawl along to the trunk.

The trunk of the great tree was more than ten feet in diameter. At twenty feet from the ground five or six great branches jutted out in various directions, mingling with the branches of the surrounding trees. Where they joined the trunk they made a kind of natural floor, where there was plenty of room to find refuge.

Bobo laid Lyn down there close to the trunk. Meanwhile, Pip and Fatty were clambering up the trunk.

In a few minutes they joined their leader.

Bobo remained with them. Mpoko slid down the liana rope and proceeded to stir up grass and herbage where the safari had trodden, removing as far as possible the "spoor" left by the party.

Then he clambered up again.

The liana rope was pulled up and stowed in a hollow of the great trunk above.

Lyn peered down from the tree. The safari was safely hidden; no one passing under the branches was able to see them so long as they kept back to the upper trunk. But Mpoko, with the cunning of a bushman, was making assurance doubly sure by dragging lianas, ficus vine and other creepers round the hiding-place. The creepers, suspended from higher branches, hung like a screen round the safari.

"Safe here!" grunted Pip, as he stretched his limbs. "Thank goodness for a rest! I don't think I could have kept on much longer."

"Same here!" said Fatty. "We can get some sleep."

"Don't snore!" grinned Pip.

"Who snores?" demanded Fatty warmly.

"You do, old fat bean, like a grampus!"

"Look here, you little ass——"

"Look here, you fat duffer——"

"Shut up, you two," said Lyn. "We don't want Zirafi to come along and hear you ragging. Kimya's the word!"

Pip chuckled sleepily and closed his eyes. Fatty Page was equally tired and sleepy, but he was also hungry. He proceeded to deal with a bunch of plantains before he went to sleep. Bobo stretched his brawny limbs and slept, after making his lord as comfortable as he could. Mpoko curled himself up like a hedgehog.

Fatty nodded over the plantains. He dropped off to sleep at last with his bunch unfinished. The safari were weary to the bone.

But it was not easy for Lyn to sleep. The pain in his feet was keen. The soles were swollen from the bastinado. But he slept at last, and there was silence in the camp twenty feet above the ground.

The sun rose higher, burning heat streaming down on the tropical forest. The beasts that had prowled in the thickets in the hours of darkness retired to their lairs. Innumerable monkeys chattered and clambered in the trees; parrots cackled and chattered to one another. From the higher branches monkeys crept and blinked at the sleeping safari, and scuttled away again. The Scouts slept on.

CHAPTER 23.
At Close Quarters!

"BY gum, it's hot!" breathed Fatty Page.

The long, hot hours in the hiding-place in the great tree were weary.

The safari slept till past noon, and they awakened to feel as if they were in an oven.

In the confined space, circled by the screening creepers, the Scouts were safe, but they were not in comfort.

Now that they had rested they were eager to stretch their limbs, but it was impossible to leave the hiding-place till the fall of night.

Nothing had been seen or heard of the Arabs; possibly they were far away. But at any turn of the forest aisles the safari might have marched into their enemies had they resumed their route. They had to wait for the fall of darkness, but it was weary waiting.

"Beastly hot!" murmured Fatty, wiping the streaming perspiration from his plump face and slaughtering about twenty flies as he did so.

"You're melting away, old fat bean," said Pip, with a chuckle. "I'll bet you don't weigh more than twenty stone by this time."

"Well, you never weighed more than twenty ounces!" retorted Fatty. "I say, I'm fearfully hungry!"

"The poor chap's only eaten about three hundred plantains," said Pip. "He must be famished!"

"Plantains are all very well, but a fellow wants food!" said Fatty, munching a dhurra cake. "I'm not grousing, Lyn, old man! But I shall be jolly glad when we get clear of these Arabs and get a square meal."

Lyn smiled.

"Mpoko can't set up the cooking-pots here, old bean," he said. "We've got to grin and bear it for a bit. Where's Mpoko?"

Mpoko crawled back among the branches. He brought back with him a ripe cluster of bananas he had gathered in the forest. Mpoko travelled from tree to tree like a monkey, without setting foot to earth. The Scouts feasted on bananas, and laid down to rest again. But they could sleep no longer, and the hot hours passed wearily.

Once, from a far distance, the sound of a shot was heard. Probably it was a signal of the slave-hunters. It was far away; but it showed that the enemy were still in the forest.

There was nothing for it but to wait for night; and the Scouts waited with what patience they could.

The long hot day drew to its close at last.

The cackling of the parrots, the chattering of the monkeys quieted. The twilight of the forest deepened into

darkness. With nightfall came a breath of coolness.

Lyn stirred at last.

"Time to move," he said.

From the shadows below came a rustling; but it was only a hyena, whose eyes glittered for a moment ere he vanished.

The liana rope swung Lyn to the earth again, and his comrades followed. Once more Lyn was mounted on the brawny shoulders of the Kikuyu.

With Mpoko in the lead, picking his way through the forest as if he could see like a cat in the dark, the safari resumed the march.

"It's good to be moving again, anyhow!" murmured Pip, as he tramped along with his rifle on his shoulder. "Still feeling hungry, Fatty?"

"Famished!" said Fatty.

"Think you could tackle a tin of corned beef?"

Fatty Page halted eagerly.

"Yes, rather! You bet, old man!"

"Then I'm sorry I didn't bring one from Masumpwe!" said Pip affably.

"Why, you—you—you——" gasped Fatty.

"Kimya!" whispered Bobolobo; and Fatty Page, with a great effort, refrained from telling Pip what he thought of him.

In silence and shadow, the safari tramped on. How Mpoko found a way through the trackless forest even Bobo did not know; but the little bushman never paused.

His tiny figure skipped on tirelessly ahead, and Bobo followed with the Bwana on his shoulders; and Pip and Fatty trailed behind. The way lay now by a narrow game-path that seemed endless.

Mpoko halted suddenly, and stepped silently back. In the darkness only the gleam of his eyes could be seen.

"O Small One, why do you stop?" whispered Bobo.

"Moto!" breathed the bushman.

"A fire?" muttered Lyn.

"Big filthy fire in forest, Bwana."

Lyn stared round him.

The forest was shrouded in darkness; but now his eyes detected a flickering gleam that came at moments among the black shadows. There was a fire burning in the forest somewhere at hand; and it could only be a camp-fire.

"The Arabs!" muttered Pip.

Fatty Page suppressed a groan. It was not the danger that troubled him; but the square meal to which he was looking forward seemed farther off than ever.

The safari was following a narrow path shut in on either side by impenetrable cane-brake. The path had been trodden by innumerable feet of lions, leopards, hyenas, and countless animals. It was hardly more than a foot wide, and the canes shut it in like walls, penetrable only to a slashing bush-knife.

"Keep on!" said Lyn at last. "We're not turning back if we can help it. We've no time to lose. Keep on—and quiet!"

Mpoko crept on again. Silently the safari crept after him.

Now the darkness was broken by more and more dancing flickers, that came like arrows in the gloom.

The bright gleam of the fire caught the eyes of the Scouts at last. The game-path ended at a great clearing in the forest; and in the midst of the clearing the camp-fire burned. Near it stood a tent; and round it stood or lolled more than twenty figures—in the burnous of the Arab. It was the camp of Zirafi ben Said.

The tall figure of the sheik himself could be seen, standing at the opening of the tent, his arms folded on his breast, and a black scowl on his aquiline face.

"My hat!" breathed Pip.

Lyn stared at the Arab camp.

The group of slave-hunters was about fifty yards distant. Late as the hour was, they had not yet turned in to sleep, though several recumbent figures could be seen round the fire. Zirafi, standing before the tent, was

casting savage glances towards the encircling forest, and the glitter of his eyes showed in the firelight.

Lyn gritted his teeth.

The Arab camp lay direct in the path of the safari. To emerge into the open clearing was to be seen by the slave-hunters, and instantly attacked.

But it was bitter to turn back, and lose long hours winding through the forest to avoid the slave-hunters' camp.

"O Bwana!" whispered Bobolobo.

"Speak!" said Lyn.

"It will not be long before the Mwarabu closes his eyes!" said Bobo, "and then, Bwana, we may steal by as silently as the jackal."

Mpoko nodded his dusky head.

"That's the idea!" said Pip. "We should lose hours going round them, and we shouldn't be clear of them by dawn."

"Wait here!" said Lyn.

And the safari remained where they were in the cover of the jungle, at the end of the path.

Lyn lay on the ground, watching the camp-fire and the Arabs gathered round it. Not one of the savage crew was looking in the direction of the safari; they had no suspicion that the Scouts were at hand.

Several of the Arabs lay down round the fire. It was not likely to be long before they all slept. It was midnight now. No doubt a man would be left on watch; but there would be a good chance, at least, for the safari to creep round the edge of the great clearing and pass unseen.

It was the keen eyes of Zirafi that were most to be dreaded. But the sheik himself was very unlikely to keep watch.

The Scouts waited.

More and more of the Arabs lay down round the fire. But Zirafi ben Said still stood where he was, staring round with savage eyes at the forest.

In the fire light his face could be clearly seen, and its expression told of ferocious anger and disappointment. Through a long burning day he had hunted for those he hated, and hunted in vain. There was no sign of sleep in the dark, bitter face of the Arab.

He moved at last, and the Scouts hoped to see him pass into his tent.

But he did not enter the tent. He came towards the camp-fire, and spoke with some of his men.

Then, to the surprise of the watching Scouts, he left the camp. He came in a direct line towards the opening of the path in the jungle.

Pip caught his breath.

"He's seen us!" he breathed.

Fatty gripped his rifle.

"I'll get him, Lyn——"

"Stop! A shot will bring the whole crew on us," muttered Lyn. "Not a sound! Lie low!"

The Scouts waited with beating hearts. Zirafi was advancing slowly towards the opening of the path where they lay in cover.

Obviously, he did not know that they were there. He would never have advanced towards them so unguardedly had he had the faintest suspicion.

But it was clear that he intended to enter the path, and as soon as he did so he could not fail to discover them.

Lyn set his lips hard. Bitter hate and baffled vengeance kept the sheik from sleep, but why he was coming to the jungle path Lyn could not fathom. But suddenly, from the silence behind, came a sound on the path—the soft patter of naked feet.

Then Lyn understood. Some scouting spy of the slave-hunters was returning to the camp by that path, doubtless at an appointed hour, and Zirafi, restless and anxious for news of his foes, was coming to meet him to learn what he had to tell.

Lyn's heart throbbed.

It was too late to retreat now without giving the alarm. There was a foe behind, as well as foes in front. If the safari fled along the path they had to run into the man who was coming from the forest.

The Scouts stared at one another tensely.

The pattering footsteps coming up the path from behind sounded nearer; and in front Zirafi was drawing close to them. Bobolobo, grasping his spear, stole back along the path to meet the man who was coming.

He disappeared in the blackness of the jungle.

But Zirafi was close now.

Mpoko had his long Kikuyu knife in his hand. His eyes glittered over it.

"Me killum!" he breathed.

But Lyn shook his head. Bobolobo might account for the man on the path in silence. But the killing of Zirafi meant the alarm to the whole camp. Many of the Arabs were watching him as he strode towards the jungle. He could not be slain unseen and unheard.

From the blackness of the jungle path came the sound of a soft fall, and a faint groan.

Bobolobo had accounted for the man who was coming from the forest.

Zirafi was almost at the opening of the jungle path now.

Lyn touched the bushman's arm.

"Seize him!" he breathed. "Harm him not—his life will answer for ours! But see that he does not get away, Mpoko!"

The bushman understood. Pip and Fatty laid down their rifles. They stood ready to back up the bushman. There was a sudden startled exclamation from Zirafi, and he came to a stop—not six feet from the crouching figures in the jungle.

As he stopped the little figure of the bushman leaped, and the tall Arab went headlong to the ground under the impact of the tiny muscular figure. Pip and Fatty were on him the next second. Zirafi, yelling with rage, struggled with the three. Lyn, heedless of the pain in his swollen feet, crawled to the spot where they struggled.

There was a howl of startled excitement from the Arab camp. The whole wild crew started towards the scene.

"O Zirafi," said Lyn, his voice cool and clear even in that moment of breathless danger, "order your men to fall back and you shall live—on the word of a white man! Let them advance and you die under the knife of a bushman!"

Mpoko's knife was at the sheik's throat. His gleaming eyes told how eager he was to use it. For a moment—a moment in which his life trembled in the balance—Zirafi hesitated, overcome with rage. But the keen edge of the knife was already eating into his flesh, and he quailed. He shouted desperately an order in Arabic to the slave-hunters, who were crowding up, and they halted.

Zirafi staggered to his feet, Pip and Fatty gripping either arm, Mpoko pressing the keen knife to the Arab's breast. Scarce twenty feet distant the wild crew of slave-hunters had halted at the desperately yelled order of their sheik. From the jungle came Bobolobo, with blood on his spear. And the point of the dripping spear touched Zirafi between the shoulders, penetrating the skin. A shiver ran through the savage Arab. His life hung on a thread—and life was dear. Again he shouted in Arabic to his men, and the savage crew fell farther back.

"Tell them to go back to the fire, O Zirafi," said Lyn quietly, "and if they not obey their eyes will look at your death."

Zirafi shouted again. The Arabs, muttering and staring, fell back, as far as the camp-fire, where they stopped, still staring at the strange scene.

"It is well, Zirafi," said Lyn. "You live!"

The Arab turned his eyes on him, choking with rage.

"O dog of a kafir, you shall die in a thousand torments for this!" he muttered hoarsely.

"It is you, father of a herd of swine, who will die if I give the word," answered Lyn contemptuously. "Bobo, bind his hands."

The slave-hunter quivered with rage,

But he dared not resist, and his hands were drawn behind him, and his wrists bound fast together. The Kikuyu took away his scimitar and his long-barrelled ivory-mounted pistol, and tossed them into the jungle.

"O accursed Feringhee," hissed Zirafi, "release me and you shall go your way in peace!"

Lyn laughed scornfully.

"I have said that you shall live, Zirafi, and the word of a white man is his bond!" he answered. "But your life answers for our safety. You march with the safari."

"I will take no step!" hissed Zirafi, his face black with passion. "Take the hands of these slaves from me, or I order my men to fall on."

Lyn smiled grimly.

"That is in your power, Zirafi," he answered. "Call on those sons of pigs and jackals if you desire. Bobo, if a man yonder makes a step this way, drive your spear through the heart of that son of a dog!"

"Na-am, Bwana!" grinned Bobolobo. "Yes, lord! My spear that has drunk blood this night is still thirsty."

The spear-point bit into the Arab's back. A single thrust of Bobo's sinewy arm, and the slave-hunter would have been impaled. And Zirafi did not call to his men to fall on. The order choked in his savage throat.

"You will not speak," said Lyn. "Live, then—to march with the safari till we are far beyond pursuit! Let a man in your band follow us, and he shall find your body on the path. Let a shot be fired and you, Zirafi, shall die, and not live!"

Zirafi said no word. His bitter rage choked him. The Arabs, clustering round the camp-fire, staring at the scene, made no movement. They waited for an order from their sheik, and they knew why Zirafi gave no order.

"March!" said Lyn.

Lyn was swung again on the broad shoulders of the Kikuyu. Pip and Fatty both held to the rope that bound the sheik, and Pip held a knife to his ribs, ready for a thrust if Zirafi made an attempt to escape, or to call on his men. Mpoko led the way, and the little safari moved on across the clearing.

Then the cluster of Arabs stirred. The firelight glimmered on lifting barrels.

But Zirafi, with the knife at his ribs, gave a hoarse shout—a savage order to his men. The lifting rifles fell again; the Arabs remained clustered at the fire; and the safari, marching on across the wide clearing, disappeared into the forest on the other side.

Muttering curses in Arabic, hissing like a snake in his rage, Zirafi ben Said marched with the safari; and the darkness of the Congo forest swallowed the safari and the sheik from the sight of the slave-hunters.

CHAPTER 24.

Simba!

"HAYA!" snapped Bobo.

Crack!

The bamboo came down across the broad shoulders of Zirafi ben Said.

"Haya!" repeated Bobo, which, being translated, means "Get a move on!"

Zirafi, scowling like a demon, got a move on.

Lyn, marching ahead of the safari, as it toiled across the burning, rock-strewn plain, looked back.

He grinned, and his grin was reflected on the faces of Fatty and Pip.

The Scouts had left behind, several days ago, the forest where they had encountered Zirafi and his troop of Arab slave-hunters.

The way lay now by a lava-strewn plain, unsheltered from the burning rays of the sun of Central Africa.

Ahead lay a range of hills, barring the horizon, split by a narrow opening, for which the safari was heading.

Beyond the hills lay the Lukuli country, where Lyn's father was a prisoner in the hands of Mofolongo, the chief.

The Scouts were drawing near to their destination at last. They were many a long day's march from their home in Uganda.

Zirafi, the slave-dealer, marched with the safari, still held as a hostage by the Scouts.

His men were far behind.

But sometimes, glancing back, the Scouts had a glimpse of a glittering spear-point, or a glimmering white turban among the masses of lava that strewed the burning plain.

They were well aware that the slave-hunters were following the track of the safari at a safe distance.

That distant pursuit, however, mattered little to them, so long as the sheik was in their hands.

Zirafi knew, and his men knew, that if they approached within shot the sheik's life would pay the forfeit. And Zirafi was even more anxious than the Scouts that his men should not come to close quarters.

Since dawn on this blazing day the Scouts had marched across the lava-strewn plain, scorching under the rays of the African sun. The shelter of the hills was still far off, and they did not make the usual halt for noon.

And Mpoko, the cook, tired of carrying his cooking-pots, had slung them on the Arab sheik, which was not only a burden for Zirafi, but an insult to his pride and dignity.

Zirafi had halted, pouring out a stream of curses in eloquent Arabic. But the stream was interrupted by Bobo's bamboo, which cracked like a pistol-shot across the shoulders of the sheik.

Zirafi tramped on, with cooking-pots clattering.

The Arab's black eyes turned on Lyn's grinning face with a glare of hatred and malevolence.

"O dog of a kafir," said Zirafi, between his yellow teeth, "am I a slave, to carry the cooking-pots of a bush-man?"

Lyn laughed.

"Get on!" he said. "You've got yourself to thank for this, Zirafi. We should have turned you loose long ago if your men hadn't been following us. So long as they follow you must grin and bear it. Mpoko was your slave once, now you are Mpoko's slave, and you carry his cooking-pots. Shut up and march!"

The safari swung on towards the hills, winding among the great masses of rock that strewed the plain.

Fatty Page mopped his streaming brow with a drenched handkerchief.

"It's hot!" he murmured.

"What do you expect on the jolly old Equator?" yawned Pip. "But, by gum, I shall be glad to get into the shade! What price sitting under a palm-tree and sipping lemon-squash, Fatty?"

"Oh, don't!" groaned Fatty.

That delightful vision was positively painful in the arid plain burning with heat and thirst.

"Blow the sun!" said Fatty. "Blow the dust! Blow all Africa!"

"Blow the whole jolly universe, if you like," said Pip generously. "I told you you shouldn't have come on this safari, Fatty. You've got too much weight to carry."

"Fathead!"

"You're melting away under our eyes, old fat bean," said Pip. "Bet you two to one that when you take your boots off to-night you'll find them full of tallow."

"You silly ass!" gasped Fatty; and he aimed a kick at Pip, which the smallest of the Popolaki Scouts easily dodged.

"Kumbe!" ejaculated Bobo suddenly. "Behold!"

His eyes were on Lyn.

Lyn, marching ahead of the safari, had come to a sudden stop. He was about to turn the base of a great mass

of ragged lava when he stopped and leaped back towards his comrades.

"What——" began Pip.

He did not need to finish the question.

From beyond the ragged edge of the lava mass came a deep, echoing roar.

"Simba!" shouted Bobo.

"Oh, my hat! A lion!"

"Look out!" shouted Lyn.

The Scouts grasped their rifles.

At the same moment the lion leaped into view. The great brute had been lying in the shade of the lava, in the heat of the day, half-asleep and silent, and Lyn had almost stumbled on him. With flaming eyes and bristling mane, the lion glared at the safari—a huge brute, gaunt and hungry.

"Scatter!" yelled Lyn.

The lion had dropped not a dozen feet away, and was springing again, straight at the group of startled Scouts. Had the brute been fed, he would probably have slunk away among the rocks. But he was hungry, and to the hungry lion the safari meant food.

The Scouts leaped away in different directions. In an instant the safari was scattered.

The leaping brute came thudding down, but the Scouts had dodged the leap in time. Lyn and Pip and Fatty, Bobo and Mpoko and Zirafi, had leaped in various directions. On the ground lay the cooking-pots that Zirafi had flung down in his haste.

A deep-chested roar peeled from the disappointed brute.

He crouched on the earth, glaring round with burning eyes at the scattered figures among the rocks, evidently in doubt upon which to turn his special attention.

Lyn, at a score of yards distance, clamped his rifle to his shoulder and took aim.

The crack of the rifle was followed by a fearful roar from Simbo. There was a spurt of blood from the gaunt ribs.

The lion turned on Lyn.

Crack, crack! came from Pip and Fatty, and both bullets struck the lion as he leaped.

He thudded down short in his leap, growling horribly. Crouching on his stomach, his tail lashing his gaunt ribs, he glared round with eyes of fire at his enemies.

Crack-ack-ack! came from the three rifles, and the lion's roar pealed far and wide. He made a wild rush towards Fatty, and the fat Scout scrambled over a ridge of lava to get out of his way—his foot slipped, and he rolled on his side, panting.

A moment more and the lion would have been upon him. But Bobolobo was leaping forward with thrusting spear, and the broad blade drove deep into Simba's throat.

The roar was changed to a choking gurgle, and the great brute fell upon his side. Mpoko leaped in and drove his long Kikuyu knife into the heaving flank.

Fatty Page scrambled up, gasping.

"Oh, crikey!" he spluttered. "I—I thought I was a goner! Oh, scissors!"

"The Terrible One of the desert is slain!" said Bobolobo.

Fatty shivered as he looked at the great carcass, stretched out now with scarce a quiver in the huge muscles. Mpoko drew out his knife and wiped the long blade on the lion's hide. Then he stared round anxiously among the rocks. The little bushman was the first to think of Zirafi.

"Bwana," he ejaculated, "that dirty Arab he lib for run!"

"Zirafi!" exclaimed Lyn.

"Bolted!" said Pip.

Lyn scrambled to the summit of a high rock and stared round him, his rifle ready.

But Zirafi was gone.

The sheik had taken advantage of the struggle with the lion to make his escape.

In which direction he had gone Lyn could easily guess—back to join his men, who were tracking the safari. But the scattered rocks and lava ridges gave him ample cover, and he was lost to sight.

Lyn set his teeth.

Had the fleeing sheik been in view he would have fired on him without hesitation. But Zirafi was only too well aware of that, and he was crouching among the rocks as he fled to rejoin his men.

Lyn descended from the rock. His brow was black.

"He's got clear?" asked Pip.

"Yes. It's nobody's fault—we couldn't watch him while we were handling Simba. But now——"

"This dirty bushman he go after!" said Mpoko. "He go killum dirty Arab, Bwana?"

Lyn shook his head.

"His men are behind us—we've got to get on! It's quick march now, you fellows. If they come on us in this open plain, we're done for. Beat it!"

And the safari hurried on, under the broiling sun, towards the distant line of hills, leaving Simbo where he had fallen; and as they marched they heard the howls and yelps of the hyenas that crept out of the rocks and disputed and snarled over their prey.

CHAPTER 25.

The Fight in the Pass!

LYN STRONG halted on a rocky ridge, and looked back. The hills were closer now, but the gap for which the safari was heading was still three or four miles distant over rising, rugged ground. In the long line of steep, stony hills only that one gap was visible, a narrow fissure left by some ancient convulsion of Nature. It was all new country to the Uganda Scouts, but Mpoko, a native of the Congo country, was the guide now, and according to the bushman the narrow hill-gap led into the land of the Chief Mofolongo. But Lyn Strong was not thinking now of the land beyond the dark hills, but of the enemy behind. Zirafi had escaped, and before this he had rejoined his men, who had hung for days on the track of the safari. Now the slave-hunters would be no longer hanging on the trail, far in the rear, but pressing on as fast as they could cover the ground, led by the shiek, athirst for vengeance. Standing on the ridge, Lyn surveyed the lava-strewn plain behind.

Here and there, among the scattered rocks, glittered a spear, and white turban and burnous glimmered in the sun.

The slave-hunters were in easy view now, and pressing on fast. Lyn watched the dim figures in the dusty distance; there were no fewer than fifteen or twenty of them in all. Something whizzed by him as he stood, and pinged on a rock near at hand. The report followed more slowly from the distance. The Arabs were getting within rifle range.

"Forward!" said Lyn.

The pursuers were gaining ground.

Lyn's face was set as he pushed on with the safari. He was limping, for his feet had not yet wholly recovered from the bastinado of a few days before. He was able to march with his comrades, but they were going at a trot now, and it told severely on the patrol-leader of the Popolaki Scouts.

"They're gaining!" said Pip quietly.

Lyn nodded.

"We shall beat them to the hills," he said, "and then, I fancy, we'll teach Zirafi a lesson he won't forget in a hurry. It was rotten luck his getting away from us, but——"

"He's saved us, so far," said Pip. "Those rotters could have caught up with us any time the last three days. They kept off because Zirafi's life was in our hands. But we'll beat them yet."

Lyn limped on.

There was no doubt that the Arabs, led by Zirafi, were gaining fast. Any of the savage crew who could not keep the pace in the hot sunshine fell behind, that was all. But the safari had to accommodate its pace to the slowest of the party, and that was Lyn, limping on his aching feet.

But the hill-gap was drawing nearer and nearer now.

Whiz! Ping! Ping!

Lead spattered on the rocks round the safari.

The shooting was wild; the bullets did not pass within yards of the Scouts. The distance was as yet too great. But the slave-hunters were fast drawing nearer.

The trot of the safari had slackened to a walk again. Lyn stumbled on resolutely, his teeth set, but he could not cover the ground quickly.

"O Bwana," said Bobolobo at last, "it is fitting that I should carry my lord, whose feet are sore!"

Lyn hesitated.

"Better, old man!" said Pip. "We shall get along faster! Phew, that went close!" he added, as a bullet grazed the brim of his hat.

Lyn stopped.

"Be it as you say, O Bobo!" he said.

In a moment the Kikuyu swung the Boy Scout up to his brawny shoulders and swung onward with his burden.

The pace quickened now.

Bobo strode on, as if Lyn had been an infant on his shoulders; Pip and Fatty had to break into a trot at intervals to keep pace with the long strides of the Kikuyu. Behind came the dwarf bushman, running, with clattering pots and calabashes.

The steep hills were towering before them now. Bare savage slopes of sun-baked rock led up to the hills, impassable save in the only place where the narrow gap opened.

From the distance the gap looked like a mere slit, but it widened as the labouring safari approached it. But even in the widest place it was not more than a dozen feet. On either side the walls of rock were almost perpendicular, and great boulders and heaps of stones strewed the way. The Scouts panted into the shade of the gap at last, panting with relief to be out of the glare of the sun. The heat in the narrow pass was like that of an oven, but they were sheltered now from the sun glare. The way was still ascending steeply.

"Here we are at last!" gasped Fatty Page.

The narrow pass wound before them, riving the range of stony hills. Here and there the rocky walls approached one another, leaving a four-foot gap.

Lyn's eyes were keenly about him. From the plain behind came the sound of a shout. The Arabs were near enough now for the safari to hear their voices. They had seen the safari disappear into the gap, and were pressing on fast to corner them there.

"Halt!" said Lyn.

He slipped from the shoulders of the Kikuyu.

There was a glitter in the eyes of the patrol-leader of Popolaki that boded ill to the savage crew that were following on his track.

The Scouts had passed through a narrow neck, not three feet wide, shut in by high perpendicular rocks. Beyond, the pass opened out wider.

"We stop here," said Lyn grimly. "We've got a quarter of an hour at least before they get this far. We shall be ready for them."

"What-ho!" grinned Pip.

Fatty Page fanned himself with his hat.

"Good egg!" he gasped. "I think I'd rather scrap with all the Arabs in Africa than take another step."

It did not take Lyn long to make his dispositions. His keen eye had picked out the strength of the position at a glance.

Pip was posted on a high ledge up the rocky side of the pass, overlooking the narrow bottleneck by which the pursuers had to come. There was room on the ledge for Pip to lie down, with his magazine-rifle before him, well covered from fire from the pass twenty feet below him. Pip grinned over his rifle as he waited. Pip was a good shot, and he did not think that many of the slave-hunters would get past him.

Fatty Page climbed to a jutting rock on the other side of the pass, where a bunch of thorn-bushes growing in a crevice gave him cover.

Meanwhile, Bobolobo and Mpoko rolled heavy boulders into the narrow way, forming a breastwork high enough

to stop a rush of the Arabs. The rugged boulders were piled from one side to the other to a height of six feet. Openings were left in the breastwork for rifles, and behind the screen of rocks Lyn waited with the two natives.

By that time the footsteps and voices of the slave-hunters could be clearly heard, close at hand, in the winding defile.

A swarthy ruffian in dusty turban and soiled burnous appeared in sight, coming up the narrow pass at a run.

Not a sound greeted him. Pip and Fatty held their fire, though the Arab's life was theirs for the taking, till Lyn should give the word. And Lyn made no sign yet.

After the leading Arab more and more of the dusty figures appeared in the narrow way.

A dozen men were in the defile, and the foremost of them had reached the barrier of rocks, and, evidently taking it for a natural obstacle, was about to clamber over it when Lyn shouted:

"Fire!"

He pulled trigger as he spoke, and the Arab in the lead tumbled back from the breastwork with a bullet through his heart.

The next second Pip and Fatty were shooting from above.

Bullets rained on the slave-hunters blocked in the narrow pass. Wild yells and shrieks rose from them in a deafening and hideous din.

Evidently the crew of slave-hunters had not dreamed that the safari would stop. Their only fear had been that the Scouts might elude them in the recesses of the hills, and they had pushed on breathlessly, hard and fast, urged on by the savage voice of Zirafi ben Said, thirsting for vengeance. The sudden blaze of rifle-fire took the slave-hunters utterly by surprise. Well-aimed bullets tore through turban and burnous, and dusky, yelling desperadoes reeled right and left.

Some of them rushed on with fierce yells, to clamber over the breastwork of rocks, and Pip and Fatty from above picked them off like partridges. Lyn fired steadily through the loopholes in the rocky screen before him, his fire sweeping the narrow pass.

Bobo and Mpoko crouched by his side, with spear and knife ready if a slave-hunter succeeded in clambering over. Only one desperate ruffian, escaping the raining bullets by a miracle, flung himself across the barrier, and Bobolobo met him with thrusting spear, and hurled him back a dead man.

The voice of Zirafi ben Said was heard, screaming with rage, yelling to his men to press on. But the enraged voice ceased suddenly as Pip's rifle cracked from the ledge, and Zirafi spun over and fell.

For several minutes it was as if pandemonium had been let loose in that narrow pass in the hills. Then one or two of the Arabs vanished, running for their lives, back the way they had come; a couple of wounded men, one of them Zirafi, crawled away. The fight was over.

CHAPTER 26.

The Land of the Cannibals!

"OUR win!" chuckled Pip.

He came clambering down from the ledge, perspiring and grinning.

Lyn looked over the rock barrier. His face was grim. It was not a pleasant sight that met his gaze. But he had pity to waste on the savage ruffians who had fallen. There was many a black village in the Congo country where the natives would sleep in peace because Zirafi ben Said's slave-hunting crew had been wiped out.

"I fancy we're done with Zirafi now," said Lyn grimly.

"I fancy so," chuckled Pip. "I know I got him; he crawled away, but he was hard hit. He's got something to remind him of the Popolaki Scouts, if he pulls through."

"We're done with them," said Fatty. "Not more than two got away without being hit—and I fancy they won't stop

running for some time. We're done with the jolly old Arabs."

"Get on!" said Lyn.

The safari resumed its march.

All hearts were lighter now. Before them lay the perils of the Lukuli country, peopled by an untamed, almost unknown, tribe of cannibals, in the heart of the Belgian Congo. But the peril behind them was at an end. Of all Zirafi's numerous troop, probably only six or seven stragglers remained, and the sheik himself was sorely wounded. The Scouts were finished with the slave-hunters.

They marched on slowly but steadily, through the narrow pass as the sun sank before them towards the distant Atlantic. In the sunset the summit of the pass was traversed, and the way sloped before them down to the Lukuli country.

The pass gradually widened into a valley, the slopes clothed with tropical vegetation. A tiny rivulet, leaping from the hills, ran at their feet now, broadening into a stream in the valley below. It was sheer joy to the safari to plunge their burning faces into the water and drink deep of it.

As the valley widened, the hills falling away on either side, the Scouts had a view of the lower country before them. Red in the sunset, Lukuli lay stretched before their eyes.

Beyond the hills was forest and jungle, the river gleaming here and there from the thick green. From where they stood the Scouts could see across the forests, and, far in the distance, in a loop of the river, was a dark mass, on which Lyn fixed his eyes.

"Mpoko!"

The bushman came up to him and pointed with a black finger to the distant loop of the Lukuli river, far away across the belt of forest and jungle.

"Lukuli, Bwana!" he said.

"That is the town of Mofolongo?" asked Lyn.

"Big town of chief Mofolongo," said Mpoko. "Big, filthy town, sar."

Lyn gazed steadily at the distant spot. The town of Mofolongo was too far off for even the shapes of the houses and streets to be made out. But, allowing for the distance, it was a large town. It was likely that the inhabitants were numbered by hundreds—perhaps by thousands. There, in the chief's hut, his father was a prisoner—awaiting the day of sacrifice.

Lyn's heart beat faster at the thought. At the same time something of the hopelessness of his enterprise came heavily upon his mind. Grant Strong was there a prisoner, and his son had come from far Uganda to save him—to save him from the black chief at whose order thousands of black warriors would grasp their spears. By what miracle could he hope to succeed in that terrible task?

He unslung his field-glasses and fixed them on the distant town of Mofolongo.

The place rushed into clearness, though still tiny, toy-like in the distance. The town was laid out in regular streets of huts, all radiating from a common centre, like the spokes of a wheel. In the centre was a larger hut—or, rather, a collection of huts joined together. That was evidently the house of the chief Mofolongo, occupying the centre of the central square. And in one of the huts of the chief's wattle palace Grant Strong was a prisoner.

Tiny, midge-like in the distance, Lyn made out moving forms in the street—tiny figures in the maize fields that surrounded the town. The latter were women, working in the fields, for the Central African native, like the savage all the world over, disdains labour, and leaves such servile things to his womenfolk.

Here and there, among the fields of Indian corn, were large patches of uncleared Jungle.

Lyn lowered his glasses, his face sombre.

"Let's have a peep, old bean," said Pip Parker.

Lyn handed the glasses to Pip, who surveyed the Lukuli town curiously and passed the glasses on to Fatty. Fatty

stared at the distant town and shook his head.

"Looks a big proposition, old man," he remarked.

Lyn smiled faintly.

It was madness; he knew that it was madness to dream of rescuing his father from the midst of countless swarms of savages. He did not think of faltering, he did not dream of turning back. But he knew that, unless a miracle helped him, it was only death that he could find in the town of Mofolongo.

The sun dipped behind the forests; the brief tropical twilight wrapped the wild land of Lukuli in shadow.

"We camp here," said Lyn.

His face was dark and thoughtful. He had left his home in Uganda to find his father, to save him or to die with him. It was heavy on his mind that he had allowed two members of the Popolaki Patrol to come with him to certain death. True, Pip and Fatty had refused to take "No" for an answer. But now that they were in sight of Lukuli—in sight of death—Lyn was determined that his comrades should go no farther.

The Scouts camped by the stream in the valley. There was no sign of inhabitants anywhere at hand—a wide, uninhabited tract had to be crossed to reach the first village of the Lukuli. But the Scouts did not venture to light a fire so near to the enemy's country. Mpoko was unable to set up his cooking-pots. There were bananas and plantains and mangoes in the valley to be had for the gathering, and Bobo brought armfuls of fruit into the camp.

Not only for cooking, but for warmth the Scouts missed their camp-fire, for the burning heat of day was followed by the cold of night. But a fire on the hillside might have been seen from afar, and it was not to be thought of.

The Scouts wrapped themselves as warmly as they could in their blankets and slept, taking watch by turns.

But there was no alarm in the night. Zirafi and his crew evidently were done with, and they had no further pursuit to fear from the slave-hunters. And at Lukuli their coming was unknown.

It was not easy for Lyn to sleep. He was thinking of the morrow, and the impossible task before him. But he slept at last.

With dawn the Scouts were active again. Fatty Page's face was sombre and serious over breakfast. He was not thinking, like Lyn, of the perils before the safari. A vegetarian diet made Fatty sad and serious, and he was thinking of the fleshpots of Egypt.

"Now, you fellows," said Lyn, when breakfast was over, "we part here!"

Pip grinned.

"Think again, old bean," he suggested.

Fatty forgot the fleshpots of Egypt for a moment.

"Fathead!" he said. "I jolly well knew what you had in your mind. Cut it out."

"My dear chap," said Lyn quietly, "I'm going on—it's my duty to go on; but it isn't yours. You've seen for yourself what we've got to face—it's a bigger proposition even than I thought when I first heard the news that my father's safari had been cut up by the cannibals. I'm going on; but I know, and you know, that there isn't a dog's chance. You've got to turn back here."

"Rats!" said Pip.

"And many of them," said Fatty.

"Well, look here, I'm your patrol-leader, and I order you back!" said Lyn.

"I'm deaf on that side of my head," explained Pip cheerfully. "I can only hear orders to go ahead."

"Look here, you ass——"

"The Popolaki Patrol never backs out!" said Fatty reproachfully. "You know that's our jolly old motto, Lyn."

"Yes; but——"

"Chuck it!" said Pip decisively.

"But——" persisted Lyn.

"You butt like a billy-goat, old bean! Chuck it! Bobolobo, are you going to leave the Bwana?" asked Pip.

"It is fitting that Bobo should die with his lord," answered the Kikuyu calmly.

"What about you, Mpoko?"

Mpoko grinned with a flash of white teeth.

"This filthy bushman he stick along Bwana," he said. "This dirty Mpoko lib for die all same Kikuyu."

Pip rose and stretched himself.

"Me for Lukuli," he said.

And he started. Fatty Page grinned and followed. Lyn stood with a troubled and perplexed face.

"O Bwana!" said the Kikuyu. "It is written that we go to death in the town of Mofolongo, where the Bwana M'Kubwa lies in the hands of the black ones. It is fitting that we should die with the Bwana and Bwana M'Kubwa."

And Bobo picked up his shield and his fighting-spears. Lyn glanced after Pip and Fatty, and gave the order to march. And the safari wound on down the hillside into the forests of Lukuli.

CHAPTER 27.

The Mark of Death!

"BRING forth the Mzungu!" said Mofolongo the chief, speaking in the Lukuli language, which is the first cousin to the Swahili and other Bantu tongues. "Bring the White One before my eyes!"

Mofolongo the chief sat in the carved ebony chair in the great square of the town before his huts—the chair in which generations of the chiefs of Lukuli had sat to administer justice, to condemn prisoners to death or the torture, or to hold council with lesser chiefs.

A fine figure of a man was Mofolongo, the son of Kimboobwe; six feet high, broad and strong and sinewy, his massive form clothed in spotted leopard-skins. Black as the ace of spades was the face of Mofolongo, and his heart perhaps blacker.

For many days' march along the banks of the Lukuli River to the mighty Congo Mofolongo's rule extended, and all men feared him.

But Mofolongo feared no man—neither the surrounding tribes nor the white Belgians in their forts far away.

It is doubtful if he even knew that his realm was included in the region which is called the Belgian Congo. And though he had heard of the English, he did not fear them, for their territories lay far from Lukuli.

If there was one man for whom Mofolongo felt a tincture of something like fear, it was M'luki-M'luki, the witch-doctor, and chief of the witch-doctors—for M'luki-M'luki knew the ways of devils and ghosts, and commanded them to obey his will—at least, so the Lukuli believed.

At Mofolongo's command a number of the spearmen who encircled his chair of state moved off to one of the huts of the palace, and entered it.

Mofolongo, sitting massive and mighty in his drapery of leopard-skins, waited.

Before the chief stood M'luki-M'luki, and he waited, too, with a cruel grin on his wizened face that showed his toothless gums.

Old and shrivelled and wizened and small was the devil-doctor, shrunken in his grass kilt, with his necklaces and armlets and anklets of human bones.

From the hut that the guards had entered they emerged, bringing with them the Mzungu—the white man.

Tall and brown and lean, clad in the tatters of a khaki shirt and shorts, Grant Strong walked in the midst of the guards—his head erect, his eyes calm and clear.

They brought him before the chair of state, and the eyes of Mofolongo fixed on him.

The hunter of Uganda returned his gaze with unflinching eyes.

"O Mzungu, slayer of many of my people, you who came unbidden into the land of Lukuli," he said, "the day of sacrifice draws near."

"I slew not your people until they attacked me, O Mofolongo!" answered Strong. "I came in peace with my safari to shoot lions who prey on the little black ones of your villages. It

your wisdom you should greet me as a friend, O Mofolongo."

The chief's black face twisted sardonically.

"It is not good for the Mzungu to come," he said, "for where one white man treads others will follow till they are as many as the reeds in the waters of the Great River. It is written that the white man who treads the paths of the Lukuli country shall die, and not live!"

"All things are in the hands of God!" said the white man. "Have I asked you for mercy, O Mofolongo?"

"The Mzungu has a great heart," said the chief. "He has the courage of many lions. By his powerful magic he slew many of my soldiers; and it is because of that that his life has been spared, when the other Mzungu were slain. He is spared for the day of the great sacrifice, and his courage will pass into the hearts of my soldiers when they eat him."

Grant Strong did not flinch.

Day by day, night by night, a prisoner among the cannibals, he had waited for his doom; and he did not fear it now that it was at hand.

"Did you send for me to tell me this, O Mofolongo?" he asked in a tone of indifference.

"I sent for you that M'luki-M'luki may place the mark of sacrifice on your breast, as is the custom," answered the chief. "On the third day after the mark is made you will be with the ghosts, O Mzungu."

Grinning like some evil ape, his necklaces of bones clattering and jingling as he moved, the devil-doctor approached the tall white man.

On either side brawny black hands grasped Grant Strong; and it was well for M'luki-M'luki that they did so, for it was in the mind of the hunter to dash the shrivelled skeleton of a man to death with one blow of his heavy fist.

In the witch-doctor's claw-like hand was a stick of charcoal. With the charcoal he drew the sign of death on the chest of the white man, where the torn khaki shirt left it bare.

"For three days, O Mzungu, you live in the house of the chief," he croaked. "On the third day you are delivered to me, M'luki-M'luki, to die in my house in the jungle!"

"On the third day, M'luki-M'luki will come, and you shall follow him to his house in the jungle, where you shall die, O Mzungu!" said Mofolongo. "And there shall be a feast when you are slain. Take him away!"

Grant Strong drew a deep breath.

In the hands of the black soldiers Grant Strong was led back to the prison hut. From the door of the guarded hut he looked out at the bright African sunlight—the sunlight that streamed down, though he knew it not, upon Lyn Strong and the Popolaki Scouts, trailing down the jungly hillside into the land of the Lukuli.

CHAPTER 25.
Mpoko's Mission!

LYN STRONG lay along the thick branch, buried in foliage, sixty feet from the ground, and looked on the town of Lukuli.

The town lay in a loop of the Lukuli River, surrounded by fields of Indian corn, and except on the side where the river flowed, circled by the dense Central African forest.

The wide streets, shaded by trees, the long lines of wattle houses, the chief's huts in the central square, were clear to the Scout's eyes in the bright sunlight.

Round the chief's huts lounged the guards of Mofolongo the chief—two score of brawny spearmen with shield and fighting-spear.

In the streets and in the maize fields Lyn could discern innumerable figures —natives by the hundred.

His face was dark and grim as he looked.

His eyes lingered on the collection of huts in the centre of the African town

that formed the palace of the Chief Mofolongo.

In one of those huts his father was a prisoner unless—— But Lyn drove the thought from his mind that perhaps Grant Strong had already fallen a victim to the savage cannibals of the Congo.

At the foot of the great tree stood his comrades.

From the edge of the forest Lyn Strong looked on the task that lay before him—and his heart was not light.

Long he lay on the high branch scanning the town; but he swung himself down from the tree at last and rejoined his comrades.

Pip and Fatty gave him questioning looks.

"We're up against it now, old bean!" said Pip.

"We're going on?" asked Fatty.

Lyn shook his head.

"It's death to show ourselves," he said. "We must wait here for night. And then——"

He broke off.

"O Bwana," said Bobolobo, "we have come to die with the Bwana M'Kubwa, and this night we shall be with the ghosts."

"There's a chance—after dark," muttered Lyn. "My father must be in one of the huts guarded by Mofolongo's soldiers. You fellows will wait for me here, and if I do not come back you'll know there's nothing to be done, and you must clear off at once. There's a chance——"

He broke off again. He knew how little chance there was of finding Grant Strong and helping him to escape in a town populated like a beehive. But he had come there to take the chance, such as it was.

"Lord," said Mpoko.

Lyn glanced at the little bushman.

"Speak, Mpoko!" he said.

"Lord, this dirty bushman sabby this place," said Mpoko. "One time before this Mpoko he go into town of Mofolongo. Now this time, this bushman he go and see with his eyes."

"O Small One," said Bobo, "you will die under the spears of the Lukuli!"

Mpoko shook his head.

"No killum Mpoko," he said. "This bushman he very cunning. Me sabby plenty."

"But——" said Lyn doubtfully.

"This bushman, he go," said Mpoko. "Me findum Bwana M'Kubwa where he lib, sar. Me come back tell Bwana. No killum this bushman—Mpoko sabby Lukuli."

"My hat!" said Pip. "It's a good idea, Lyn! If Mpoko thinks he could go among them safely——"

"Me plenty safe among Lukuli," said the bushman confidently. "Me trade ivory with Lukuli long time before."

"It's the big idea," said Fatty Page. "Mpoko can find out for us whether your father is kept a prisoner, and if—if——"

Lyn winced.

"If he's still alive," he said quietly.

"Well, yes, old chap," said Fatty. "We've got to look at the facts, you know. If Mpoko can scout in Mofolongo's town we shall know where we stand."

"That's so," assented Lyn. "But—if they suspected for a moment that he had come to spy on them——"

"Why should they?" said Pip. "They don't know we're here—they don't know there's a white man within two hundred miles. Little Tich says he's traded ivory with them long ago, and he can talk ivory to them."

"The Small One's words are wise, O Bwana," said Bobolobo. "Let the Small One go among the Lukuli and see with his eyes and hear with his ears."

"You shall go, Mpoko!" said Lyn, "and if you bring me news of my father I will never forget what you have done. Go—and we will await you here till the sun is gone."

A moment more and the little bushman disappeared into the forest.

Lyn compressed his lips.

It went against the grain to allow the devoted Mpoko to take the risk of scout-

ing among the Lukuli. But if he came back with news it might mean all the difference between failure and success.

"He'll get through all right, old chap," said Pip. "Mpoko's as sharp as they make them. The Lukuli won't get much change out of him."

Lyn nodded.

He clambered into the tall tree again, crawled out on the high branch, and watched the town and the surrounding fields.

A tiny figure emerged from the forest and followed a path among the fields of Indian corn towards the town.

The dwarf bushman, scarce four feet high, looked tiny in the distance as Lyn watched him.

Smaller and smaller Mpoko grew to his eyes as he padded on towards the town of Mofolongo.

Hundreds of women were working in the fields, and many of them lifted their heads to glance at the bushman as he passed.

The distance was too great for Lyn to hear, but he saw Mpoko exchange greetings with some of them who were near the path he was following.

Close by the town a group of Lukuli, with spears in their hands, stopped the bushman.

Lyn's heart throbbed.

He watched with painful intentness, in the dread expectation of seeing Mpoko fall transfixed by the Lukuli spears.

But after some minutes of palaver the group opened and Mpoko passed through and continued on his way to the town.

Lyn breathed again.

So far the bushman had made good his words that he could go among the Lukuli unsuspected.

Lyn's keen eyes still followed the tiny figure till it disappeared among the first huts of the town.

Among the wattle buildings it vanished from sight, and Lyn, though he strained his eyes to aching, could see Mpoko no more.

CHAPTER 29.

In the City of Mofolongo!

GRANT STRONG, the hunter of Uganda, rose from the heap of reed mats on which his long, lean limbs were stretched.

There was a babble of voices outside the chief's hut, and it reached the ears of the prisoner of Mofolongo.

He stepped to the doorway of the prison hut.

Outside, the burning African sunlight fell, with blinding heat. In the bright sunlight many of the people of Lukuli had gathered in the wide, open space before the chief's huts, which was the public meeting-place of the town of Mofolongo.

As Grant Strong stepped into the aperture that formed the doorway of his hut, two broad-bladed spears were crossed before him, and two black faces grinned at him.

Night and day the hut was watched till the hour should come for the prisoner to be handed over to M'luki-M'luki, the witch-doctor, for torture and death.

"The Mzungu must not pass!" said one of the soldiers in the Lukuli tongue, which is very like Swahili, a language that the hunter spoke as his own.

"O soldier!" said Strong. "My ears hear many voices. Is it for me that the people gather before the chief's huts?"

"It is not for the Mzungu," answered the soldier, "for it was but yesterday that the mark of death was placed on the Mzungu's breast, and for two days more he will live in the huts of the chief. For by custom he-that-is-to-die lives for three days after the mark of death has been placed upon him by the finger of M'luki-M'luki."

Lyn's father was aware of that. One day had elapsed of the last three days of grace. For two days yet his life was as safe in the chief's huts as in his own home on the banks of the Popolaki River in Uganda. But he had wondered if the commotion meant some new barbarous ceremony of the witch-doctor in which he was to take part.

"Then why do the people gather before the huts of the chief, soldier?" asked Strong.

"It is because one comes to speak with Mofolongo," answered the soldier. "A Small-One-of-the-Forest has come."

Grant Strong looked out from the doorway across the broad blades of the spears that held him back.

The visit of a Small-One-of-the-Forest had little interest for him; but he was glad of any interruption to the dreary monotony of captivity, and the thoughts of what awaited him in the hut of M'luki-M'luki in the jungle on the third day.

Conducted by a brawny Lukuli, a little bushman met his sight.

The little man, though full-grown, was but four feet high. He wore a ragged loin-cloth and a tattered red fez.

The latter was an uncommon, if not unknown adornment for a bushman, and it showed that the dwarf had been in the country of white men where there were Indian bazaars.

Grant Strong had met many bushmen in his life as a hunter and guide of safaris, but he had never seen Mpoko before.

So Mpoko was a complete stranger to him, and it did not cross the hunter's mind that the Small One's presence had anything to do with him. He stood in the opening of his hut, watching with idle interest, little dreaming what the bushman's visit meant for him.

And that, had he only known it, helped to save his life. The faintest sign of recognition on his part would almost certainly have sent the little bushman to his death—and destroyed his one slim chance of rescue.

Mpoko stood before the hut of the chief waiting till it should please the mighty Mofolongo to give him audience.

The armed men stood round him.

Mofolongo was in no hurry to grant audience. And when he granted it, it was quite likely that he would disdain to listen to a bushman, and would order his guards to run their spears through him; or, if he happened to be in a ferocious mood, would call for his torturers and order the Small One to be skinned or burned. The moods of a Central African potentate are very uncertain.

But the Small One stood with perfect calmness, undisturbed. Life is cheap in the heart of Africa, and where death lurks in every bush life is lightly held.

The eyes of Mpoko as he stood wandered incessantly, roving in search of all that they could see. That his life might be numbered by minutes, he knew; but if he lived to return to his lord he desired to have news to carry to the Bwana.

Not by the slightest start, not by a quiver of an eyelash did Mpoko betray emotion at the sight of a lean, brown-faced white man standing in the doorway of one of the chief's huts.

But his gaze fixed intently, piercingly on Grant Strong.

In the lean, bronzed features of the hunter there was a fleeting resemblance to the handsome, boyish face of Lyn—resemblance enough to show that they were father and son.

Mpoko knew that he was looking on the face of the man to seek whom the safari had set out from Masumpwe in far Uganda.

But his face betrayed nothing.

The barest hint that he came to the aid of the prisoner meant instant death to the little bushman.

After that one long, steady look his eyes turned away from Grant Strong, and he did not glance at him again.

For more than an hour Mpoko waited before the chief's huts, with the spearmen round him, awaiting the pleasure of Mofolongo.

Numbers of the idle natives gathered round, and some of them spoke civil words to the bushman, and others jeered him mockingly for his small stature.

The Lukuli were a brawny race, and the smallest of them towered over the bushman; and the soldiers of the chief's guard were a couple of feet taller than Mpoko.

But Mpoko answered civil words and rough badinage with the same imperturbable good-humour. It was a proof of his self-control, for the bushmen are a fierce and touchy race, quick to take offence. But Mpoko's thoughts were buried deep, and his little black face wore a cheery grin.

There was a crash from the chief's drummer, and the crowd in the open place bent their heads as Mofolongo stepped from his hut.

The mighty chief of the Lukuli, clad in leopard-skins, made an imposing figure.

At the crash of the drum Grant Strong looked out of his hut again, a careless witness of the scene that followed.

The tall, powerful chief stared down at the little bushman, and a grin passed over his hard, cruel face. There was something flattering to his own mighty strength in the smallness of the bushman.

He sat down in the ebony chair of state before his hut, and the soldiers led Mpoko towards him.

Mpoko fell on his face and crawled to the feet of the chief. At a distance of three yards the soldiers stopped him.

Mofolongo's gaze was bent on him with amused disdain.

"O Small-One-of-the-Forest," he said, "why do you come to the City of Mofolongo?"

"I come that my eyes may gaze upon the great Chief Mofolongo, before whom all other chiefs tremble and bow the knee!" answered Mpoko. "Also, I come to speak to the great Mofolongo of ivory."

A gleam came into the chief's eyes at the mention of ivory.

"Speak!" he said. "My ears hear."

He spoke in Lukuli, and Mpoko in Swahili, but both were perfectly understood by the white man standing within hearing at the door of his hut.

"O Mofolongo," said the dwarf, "in the land of the Biribi there is a valley where the elephants die, and in that valley there is much ivory. I, Mpoko, have seen it with my eyes."

Mofolongo bent a little forward in his chair of state, his eyes glittering greedily.

Grant Strong looked curiously at the bushman. The story of the "elephants' cemetery" is told in Africa from the Red Sea to the Atlantic! Many are the natives who claim to know where lies the valley where the elephants go to die, and where the ivory lies as thick as fallen leaves in the forest after a tornado.

Grant Strong had heard the story many times, but he had never believed it. But he came near believing it now. For a man who came to Mofolongo with a lie on his lips was asking for torture and death.

"O Small One," said Mofolongo, "you have seen this with your eyes?"

"I have seen it with my eyes, O Great One!" said Mpoko. "And the ivory where the elephants die is so great that a thousand of your strongest soldiers could not carry it away in seven days!"

"I have heard this tale before," said Mofolongo. "Many have told me this tale, O Small-One-of-the-Forest. Why do you come to me with this story of ivory?"

"The Biribi are fierce and strong," said Mpoko. "I, Mpoko, fear the spears of the Biribi. But the great Mofolongo fears nobody. If Mofolongo will send his soldiers with me, I will guide them to the valley where the elephants die, and the Biribi will run and hide in the bush. And for my service Mofolongo will give me as much ivory as three men may carry on their backs; but if there remains not so much ivory as will load five hundred men, he shall give me nothing, and he shall call me a liar and punish me as a liar deserves."

"You speak well, O Small One!" said Mofolongo. "But if you speak falsely you shall be skinned alive, and your dying shall last a whole day."

"Let it be so," said the bushman.

"How many days' journey lies this

valley in the country of the Biribi?" asked Mofolongo.

"Five days' journey from this city," said Mpoko. "The way lies by the forest of the black ghosts, and by the waters of the Great River."

Mofolongo considered.

"On the second day there is sacrifice and feast in this city," he said; "on the third day, O Small One, my soldiers shall march into the country of the Biribi, and I will march with my soldiers, and you shall be the guide. And if we find the ivory in the valley where the elephants die you shall receive so much as three men may carry on their backs. And if we do not find it you shall die slowly under the hands of Lutolimi the skinner."

"Let it be so, O Mofolongo, the Great and Terrible One!" said Mpoko.

Mofolongo turned to Kalugu, his chief counsellor.

"Kalungu, let the Small One be given a hut, and let food and drink be given him, and let him live safely in the shadow of the chief's palace," he said.

"O Mofolongo, my ears hear you!" answered Kalugu.

And Mpoko rose to his feet and backed out of the royal presence, and the soldiers took him away, and he was given a hut and food and drink. And as he went, his eyes lingered for a second on the white man staring at him, but only for a second, with no sign of recognition or interest. And Mpoko sat in his hut in the shadow of the chief's palace, and ate and drank. And Grant Strong threw himself wearily on his bed of reed mats. And on the edge of the forest, with anxious hearts, Lyn and his comrades waited and watched.

CHAPTER 30.

Mpoko's Warning!

MPOKO had eaten and drunk his fill of the good food placed before him by the slaves of Mofolongo the chief. They gave him palm oil chop, and yams, and flesh of goats, and a native drink that was like njoho of Eastern Africa, and roasted cakes of maize. Mpoko ate with a good appetite, though inwardly, while his face was smiling and grateful, he mocked the Lukuli. After he had finished his meal he sat in the doorway of the hut that had been given him by the order of the chief, and looked out into the great square of the city, with the long, wide streets radiating from it like the spokes of a wheel. And his little black face was calm and contented.

Many of the idlers of the city who had watched his interview with the great chief would have come to the hut to talk to him, and especially to hear of the valley of ivory. But the soldiers drove them back with their broad-bladed spears.

It was Mofolongo's order that no man of the city should speak to the bushman lest he should tell of the valley of ivory, the secret that was for Mofolongo alone.

While the slaves served him with food and drink, Chako, the captain of the guards, remained with him, and when they were gone Chako stepped out of the hut. But when Mpoko sat in the doorway looking out at the town in the sinking sun, Chako spoke to him, leaning on his long spear.

"O Small One," said Chako, eyeing the bushman curiously, "is it a true tale that your lips have told to the chief!"

"It is a true tale, soldier!" answered Mpoko.

"And your eyes have seen the ivory in the place where the elephants die?" said the soldier incredulously.

"My eyes have seen it."

"For if you deceive Mofolongo your death will be terrible," said Chako. "The wrath of Mofolongo is more fearful than the fierceness of Simba or of Fisi."

"Why should I come to Mofolongo with a lie?" said Mpoko composedly. "If there is no ivory how am I served

by telling the Terrible One a tale that is not true?"

"You speak well," said Chako; and he withdrew and left the bushman to sit on the reed mat and watch the busy life of the town. But when he passed near again the bushman called to him, and the soldier stopped.

"O soldier," said Mpoko, "the Great One spoke of sacrifice and feast in this city on the second day. Is it permitted that this humble one remain to witness this great sight?"

"Surely," said Chako.

"For this is a great city," said Mpoko, "and the feasting of a mighty chief like Mofolongo must be splendid and magnificent. It is worth many days' journey to look on the magnificence of Mofolongo."

"Your eyes see no such sights in your huts in the jungle," said Chako, with a smile.

"It is true, soldier, for the bushmen are poor, and we do not dwell in great cities like the Lukuli. And will there be one-that-dies at the feasting of Mofolongo?"

"There will be a Mzungu that dies," answered Chako. "A white man who is a prisoner in the chief's huts, even close to this place. He came to this country with a safari from the land of the Mzungu, and all others were slain and only this man spared because of his great magic. He slew so many of the Lukuli that he was reserved for sacrifice, and when he is eaten his courage will pass into the hearts of the Lukuli."

"It will be a great sight," said Mpoko, "and when he is led forth to die on the second day, soldier, where will death come to him? In the great place of the city, under the eyes of all the Lukuli?"

Chako shook his head.

"O bushman, you know not the customs of the Lukuli," he said. "The Mzungo will be given to Mluki-Mluki, the witch-doctor, who will take him to his house in the jungle and there slay him by the terrible tortures known to Mluki-Mluki. And none may see his death save only Mluki-Mluki and his slaves. But when he is dead his meat will make the feast of Mofolongo and his chief warriors."

"I have heard of Mluki-Mluki, and his name is terrible," said the bushman. "He is the lord of all the ghosts and devils, and the winds blow and the rain comes when he gives the order."

"You speak true, bushman."

"And if it is permitted my eyes would see the house of Mluki-Mluki in the jungle," said the bushman.

Chako laughed.

"There is no man, not even a soldier like myself, who dares go near the house of Mluki-Mluki," he answered. "It is not permitted, bushman; it would be death."

"Then I will be content to let my ears hear," said Mpoko. "Where lies the house of Mluki-Mluki, O brave and noble soldier?"

Chako pointed with his spear.

Between the forest and the town, in the midst of the maize fields, was a large patch of uncleared jungle.

To the eye it looked inpenetrable—a moss of thick tropical growth, the trees laced together by lianas and ficus vine.

"There lies the house of Mluki-Mluki," said Chako. "There dwells the Wise One with his slaves, and there he talks with the ghosts who carry out his orders. But it is death to enter the jungle that hides the house of Mluki-Mluki."

"In all the lands of the Great River," said the bushman, "they speak of the wisdom and the terrible power of Mluki-Mluki. It is said that he speaks all the tongues that are known to men."

"He speaks many tongues," said Chako.

"Also the tongue of the white men, of the Mzungu?" asked Mpoko.

"No, he speaks not the tongue of the Mzungu, for when he has spoken to the white man who is to die he has spoken to him in his own tongue, and when the white man has spoken in his own

tongue Mluki-Mluki's ears could not hear him."

"Is there none in this city that speaks the tongue of the Mzungu?" asked Mpoko.

"There is none in the city," answered the soldier. "Neither the tongue of the English, nor the tongue of the Frenchesi."

"They are barbarous tongues," said Mpoko. "But the language of the Lukuli is like the murmur of running waters."

"You speak well, bushman."

And Chako lounged away again. Mpoko sat long in silence, looking out into the city. But presently, as he sat, he began to sing.

He sang in a cracked voice that was not musical to the ear. Some of the Lukuli soldiers looked towards him, and laughed.

Chako walked over to the hut.

"O bushman, do you sing the songs of the bush tribes?" he asked.

"I sing the song of my tribe," answered Mpoko. "It is not beautiful, like the songs of the Lukuli, as I know well, O handsome soldier."

"Indeed, it is like the cry of the hyena seeking for food!" said Chako, laughing. "But sing if it be your will, O Small One."

And he walked away and stood laughing with his companions, while the bushman sang in his cracked voice, in the English tongue—the best English that poor Mpoko knew.

The words that he sang bore no meaning to the ears of the Lukuli soldiers. But to the ears of the imprisoned white man in the hut near at hand they bore a meaning that made Grant Strong start from his bed of reeds and listen with amazed face and straining ears.

For this was the song of the bushman:

"O white man,
Listen to Mpoko.
This filthy bushman he come to watch the black ones.
The Bwana waits in forest;
With the Bwana wait two filthy white ones and a dirty Kikuyu.
O white man, if your ears hear, you lib for make this bushman sabby.
Me go talkum to little Bwana;
Me tellum Bwana M'Kubwa no lib for die.
Me Mpoko good filthy fellow;
Me fine dirty cook for Bwana Lyn Strong.
You hear me, you sing out."

And Mpoko, having sung that remarkable song, fell into silence and waited.

Chako and the soldiers laughed.

But a few minutes later they started and stared at the prisoner's hut, for Grant Strong's deep voice was raised in singing.

Chako strode to the hut.

"O Mzungu," he said grinning, "do you sing because you are joyful? Or do you sing because you hear the singing of the bushman?"

"Soldier," answered Grant Strong, "I sing to let the Lukuli know that a brave man does not fear death."

"You speak well, O Mzungu," said Chako; and he went back to his comrades.

And the hunter sang in English:

"O bushman,
My ears hear you, and my heart is light.
I will sing no more lest these dogs suspect."

The hunter was silent.

And Mpoko did not sing again. He had warned Grant Strong that his son was at hand, and put him on his guard for an attempt at rescue. It was all that he could do—more than Lyn would have dared to hope that he could do. But the bushman was cunning—more cunning than the brawny Lukuli, who looked on his diminutive stature with derision.

The sun sank lower towards the far

Atlantic. Darkness fell on the city of Mofolongo.

While darkness lay on the City, and before the moon rose over the forest, a tiny figure slipped away in the shadows, among the wattle houses.

All Lukuli had seen Mpoko when he came. But no man saw him when he went.

When the moon came up and glimmered over the town and the maize fields, and the waters of the Lukuli river, it glimmered also on a tiny figure plunging into the shadows of the forest.

* * * *

Lyn Strong stood in the shadows on the edge of the forest, and his face was pale and troubled, his heart heavy.

The sun was gone, sunk below the forests of the Congo; darkness enwrapped the land of the Lukuli. The long, long weary day was at an end.

Mpoko had not yet returned. Again and again Lyn blamed himself for having allowed the little bushman to scout in the city of Mofolongo. Once there had come the sound of drums from the town, booming far across fields and forest. And he feared that the drumbeat might mean that a prisoner had been taken, or that a spy had been slain.

"Mpoko will pull through, Lyn," said Pip Parker. "I'm betting on the bushman. He's got more brains in his little finger than a Lukuli has in his napper."

"If they have killed him——" muttered Lyn.

"O Bwana," said Bobolobo, "the small one is as cunning as many monkeys, and with his great cunning he will close the eyes of the Lukuli."

"Never say die!" said Fatty Page. "Anyhow, we've got to wait here till midnight. We couldn't make a move before then."

Lyn moved about restlessly in the shadows.

The long minutes passed slowly.

If only Mpoko returned in safety, if he brought news of the Bwana M'Kubwa, there was a chance yet of success. It was a remote chance; but Lyn had come there to take remote chances. That night he was resolved he would penetrate into the city and seek his father under cover of darkness. But if Mpoko brought him news of the prisoner, it would make his task easier—it might make it successful. And news from the city would resolve a doubt that tortured the patrol-leader of the Popolaki Scouts—he would know whether Grant Strong yet lived, if Mpoko returned.

The moon came up over the dim forest, and faint light glimmered down on the little safari. There was a rustle in the thickets, and Bobo grasped his spear.

A little figure emerged into the glimmer of light.

"Mpoko!" exclaimed Lyn, with intense relief.

Mpoko grinned.

"Me all right!" he said.

"You have news?" asked Lyn.

His heart beat hard. The news that he longed and dreaded to hear was on the bushman's tongue. He was to know now whether his father still lived in the town of Mofolongo.

"Lord, me see the Bwana M'Kubwa," said Mpoko.

Lyn caught his breath.

"He lives—my father!"

"Plenty live, sir—he live in hut, plenty soldier round about," said Mpoko. "Me tellum Bwana here."

"You've spoken to him?" exclaimed Lyn.

Mpoko told his tale succinctly. The three Scouts and Bobo listened with rapt attention.

"My hat!" said Pip, with a deep breath. "Little Tich takes the cake, and no jolly old error. You're a real prize-packet, Mpoko."

"My father lives!" muttered Lyn. A weight was taken from his heart. "We

have time, if it is still two days to the sacrifice. To-night——"

"Listen with your ears, O Bwana," Bobo interrupted. "When my lord's father is taken to the house of the witch-doctor for death, the soldiers of Mofolongo will no longer be round about him. We are but five, lord, and the soldiers are many as the reeds of the Great River. But in the house of Mluki-Mluki there will be none but the witch-doctor and his slaves. Let us wait, lord, till the second day."

"My hat!" exclaimed Pip. "Bobo's got the big idea! Blessed if it doesn't look like a sporting chance, after all."

Lyn's eyes glistened.

"Bobo, your words are wise, and my ears hear you," he said. "We will hide in the forest for yet one day, and on the second day we will enter the house of Mluki-Mluki and slay him, when my father is in his hands."

"Good egg!" chuckled Pip.

"And afterwards——" said Fatty.

"The future's on the knees of the gods!" said Pip. "We shall have a sporting chance of getting away—and we came here to take long chances. Anyhow, it's the big idea."

Every heart in the safari was lighter now. The waiting would be weary; but at last there was a hope of success to speed the lagging hours.

"Once my father's free, and with us," said Lyn—"once we get that far, we'll contrive the rest somehow." He dropped his hand on the little bushman's shoulder. "Mpoko, you've done well! You're a jewel!"

Mpoko grinned, showing every flashing white tooth in his head.

"Yes, sar! This filthy bushman he plenty clever dirty old johnny!" he said complacently.

The safari camped that night in deep cover in the dense forest. And in the prison hut in the native city Grant Strong slept surrounded by the guards of Mofolongo. But the sleep of father and son was broken, anxiety mingling with hope in the hearts of the Bwana and the Bwana M'Kubwa.

CHAPTER 31.
The Wise One of the Lukuli!

MOFOLONGO, the chief, was angry.

Deep wrath wrinkled his brow and gleamed from his eyes; and there was the silence of fear round the chief of the Lukuli.

The town in the loop of the Lukuli River, in the heart of the wild Congo country, baked under the blaze of the African sun.

In that hot hour of the afternoon it was customary for the Lukuli people to lie in the shade; and even the women did not work in the fields of Indian corn while the sun hung like a ball of red copper over the town and the surrounding forests.

But for once the City of Lukuli was wakeful and active in that hot and drowsy hour, and the natives thronged in the wide streets that radiated from the central square.

Before the royal huts in the square stood Mofolongo, a magnificent figure in leopard-skins, with golden necklaces and anklets.

Round him stood his guards—brawny spearmen, with shield and fighting-spear—and Chako, the captain of the guards, stood before Mofolongo with bowed head and troubled face.

From one of the huts of the wattled palace Grant Strong looked out, carelessly wondering what was toward.

Little cared the hunter of Uganda for the wrath that caused a thrill of terror to pass through a city populated like a beehive.

For this was his last day, and on the morrow he was to die under the tortures of Mluki-Mluki, the witch-doctor, in his house in the jungle—for the morrow was the third day since the mark of sacrifice had been placed on his breast.

But Mofolongo's wrath was not directed towards the doomed hunter. He did not glance at the hut where Grant Strong stood.

His baleful glare was fixed on the trembling Chako.

Chako had often faced the leaping lion, the spears of the Biribi, the guns of the white Belgians, without fear. But the wrathful countenance of Mofolongo turned the blood to water in his veins.

"O soldier!" said Mofolongo, in his deep voice and the Lukuli tongue, "on the day that has passed there came to this city a Small-One-of-the-Forest, with a tale of the ivory that lies in a valley of the Biribi country. Where is the Small One?"

Grant Strong started a little.

He had wondered whether Mpoko, the bushman, had remained in the city, after conveying to him the message that his son was at hand with intent to rescue him.

He could guess now that the dwarf had fled secretly from the city when his task was done, and rejoined Lyn Strong and his comrades, who lay in cover in the encircling forest.

He smiled grimly.

Mpoko had been given a hut in the shadow of the royal palace. But the hut was empty now, and in the city they had searched in vain for the bushman.

If Mofolongo's wrath fell upon his guards, and death walked abroad in the city under the burning sun, little cared the hunter who was doomed to a death of torment.

Chako licked his dry lips.

"Speak, O fool!" said Mofolongo. "Am I to ask my questions twice, because your ears do not hear? Where is the Small One who told me the tale of ivory?"

"O Great and Terrible One, he is fled!" answered Chako, finding his voice at last.

"And are my soldiers' feet weighed with lead that they cannot pursue a Small One and bring him back to the city?"

"O Mighty One, the soldiers have sought for him, but the Small Ones of the forest are cunning, and it is their custom to pass from branch to branch in the manner of the monkeys, and thus leave no trace that a man's eyes may see," answered Chako.

Mofolongo set his thick lips.

All the greed of his savage nature had been roused by Mpoko's tale of heaps of ivory, and he had given commands that the people of Lukuli should be kept back from the bushman's hut, that his tale might be told to no other ears.

But he had not commanded that the bushman should be kept a prisoner, not deeming that the dwarf had any motive for leaving the city, where he had come of his own accord with his tale of ivory.

Now the bushman was gone—he had stolen away in the darkness of the night; and Mofolongo was as puzzled as angry.

He stood silent for some moments—a silence that was fraught with terror to the soldiers waiting for him to speak.

He was capable of ordering the instant execution of the whole body of guards who had been on duty during the night—never fewer than fifty men. And the savage gleaming of his eyes told that death was in his thoughts.

But when he spoke it was not to call for the slayers or the torturers. Some sense of justice, perhaps, existed in the breast of the savage potentate of the Congo. And he had thought of another way.

"Send for Mluki-Mluki!" he commanded.

And a swift runner started at once for the house of the witch-doctor, buried from sight in the patch of jungle halfway from the city to the surrounding forest.

And there was a chorus of relief from the men who had stood in terror of death.

"Mluki-Mluki, the Wise One, will find the bushman; Mluki-Mluki, who talks with the ghosts and the devils, will ask them to give the Small One into the hands of Mofolongo! Mluki-Mluki is very wise, and knows all things."

Mofolongo made a gesture for silence.

He sat down in the carved ebony chair of state before his huts, and slaves lifted over him the umbrella of palm leaves to shade him from the sun, and fanned him with fans of coloured feathers.

From the jungle in the distance came the tap of a drum, which was the signal that Mluki-Mluki was coming.

The witch-doctor came slowly up the scorching street, his necklaces of human bones rattling round him as he walked—a wizened, shrivelled old man, in whose black, cunning face the wickedness of all the ages seemed to be compressed.

He stopped at last before Mofolongo, and bent his head. But he did not fall on his face, as was the custom among the Lukuli. For Mluki-Mluki was a great man, almost as feared in the city as Mofolongo himself.

"O Mofolongo, my eyes see you," said Mluki-Mluki.

"Mluki-Mluki, I have sent for you because of your great wisdom, it being well known that all things are known to you," said Mofolongo. "Tell me, O talker with ghosts and devils, where is the Small One that has fled from my city?"

Mluki-Mluki stood silent for some moments. All eyes were fixed on him.

Of the Small One, of whither he had fled, the witch-doctor knew nothing. He had not even heard of his coming. Often was the Wise One put to such a test; but as often as the test was put the cunning of the pretender saved him from exposure.

He closed his eyes, and the look on the surrounding faces was full of awe—for when Mluki-Mluki closed his eyes he saw things in the dark that were invisible to all others—or so the Lukuli believed.

"O Mofolongo," said the Wise One, after that one moment's pause to collect his thoughts and his cunning, "my eyes see the Small One! He runs in the forest like a jackal, fearful of the anger of Mofolongo."

"And who shall find him, Mluki-Mluki?" asked the chief.

"Let Mofolongo send for his chief hunter, Tofobo, and command him to find the Small One!" said Mluki-Mluki. "Tofobo shall find him in the forest before the sun has gone down to the country of the Frenchesi. He shall not fail to find him, for I shall send a very powerful ghost to walk in his footsteps and guide him to the Small One."

Mofolongo's face cleared.

"You speak well, O Wise One!" he said.

"And if Tofobo does not bring the Small One back into the city it will be because he is a traitor and has permitted him to escape," continued Mluki-Mluki. "And if that be so, then Tofobo must die under the hands of the skinners; for if the Small One escapes his hands, his will be the blame."

"O Mluki-Mluki," said Mofolongo, "my ears hear you! Tofobo shall seek the Small One; and if he fail to bring him to my hands, Tofobo shall die under the hands of the skinners. It is well said."

And Mluki-Mluki backed out of the Royal presence; and Tofobo, the chief's principal hunter, was called. And Tofobo heard cheerfully the order to seek the Small One in the forest. For if a powerful ghost was to walk in his footsteps and guide him, how could he fail? And he knew that he was not a traitor, and would not permit the Small One to escape once he had found him. So he did not fear death at the hands of the skinners for failure. And Tofobo took his wicker shield and his fighting spears and walked out of the city and entered the forest.

And in his house in the jungle, where he dwelt amid bones and the smell of death, Mluki-Mluki chuckled at the simplicity of the Lukuli; for whether Tofobo succeeded or failed, his words were still the words of wisdom; for his would be the credit of success, and Tofobo's the blame of failure.

CHAPTER 32.
Tracked Down!

LYN STRONG wiped the perspiration from his brow and looked up at the leafy screen over his head. Light glimmered through the green and told him that it was yet day; and yet it seemed to him that endless time had passed in the hiding-place in the forest close to the city of the Lukuli. Endless, endless seemed the weary hours of waiting.

It was a safe hiding-place—or so, at least, it seemed—that the cunning Bobololo had found for the Bwana and his comrades.

There was a deep rift in the earth among the trees, half-hidden by trailing roots and clambering creepers. It was, perhaps, six feet wide and ten or twelve feet long, six or seven feet deep. Over it Bobo, the Kikuyu, had drawn branches and lianas and great ropes of the ficus vine, forming a thick, green roof that completely hid the cavity from sight.

Under that green roof, hidden from all eyes, the Popolaki Scouts lay in cover with Bobo and Mpoko.

For they were very near to the city, on the edge of the great forest of the Congo, and it was necessary to keep their presence secret from any wandering hunter or idler who might stray into the forest.

The burning heat of the Central African day was more terrible there than in the open air above. They lay and baked and sipped luke-warm water and waited for the long, long hours to pass.

For not until night could they dare to approach the house of Mluki-Mluki, where Grant Strong was to be taken the next day for his death.

Long, long and weary were the hours of that burning day.

But not a word of complaint passed the lips of the Uganda Scouts, or of their native companions. So long as they were safe from discovery by the Lukuli they had a chance to succeed in their mission—to save Lyn's father from the knives of the torturers. And it was for that that the little safari had trekked from far Uganda.

Even Fatty Page did not grouse, though the fattest Scout of the Patrol felt the heat more than his comrades. He lay and perspired, and did not even feel energetic enough to hurl a banana at Pip when that playful youth warned him that he was running into tallow.

The sun, at long last, was sloping down in the west towards the Lower Congo and the far Atlantic. But the sunlight still glimmered through the vast masses of foliage that shaded the forest and through the leafy screen of the hidden rift. Night was long in coming.

The endless day burned on. Few words were exchanged, and those in whispers; for if enemies passed, though eyes could not see, ears might hear.

Soon it would be twilight—the brief twilight of Central Africa. And then the dark—and release and activity.

Dimmer and dimmer the faces were growing in the hidden lair. Very dimly now the Scouts saw one another; and Mpoko's black face was grown invisible, the brown face of the Kikuyu almost so.

And then suddenly, silently Bobolobo started to his feet, his tall head almost touching the screen above.

His eyes gleamed in the deep dusk.

At the same moment little Mpoko leaped up as suddenly and silently, and his black paw closed on the long Kikuyu knife that Bobo had given him in token of friendship.

The keen ears of the natives had detected a sound.

The three Scouts listened intently.

Deep silence lay on the forest.

A long minute passed—a tense minute. Then Lyn whispered, barely audibly:

"What do your ears hear, Bobo?"

"O Bwana, my ears hear the soft tread of one-that-walks-like-the-hyena," breathed the Kikuyu.

"One that seeks us, Bobo?"

The Kikuyu made a sign of assent and a sign of silence. The Scouts almost held their breath.

Now a soft sound came to their ears. It was the velvety tread of a naked foot that trod with stealthy caution; and they knew that it was the tread of a hunter who knew himself to be near his prey.

Lyn grasped his rifle, but released it again. A single shot would tell the whole city of the Lukuli that white men were at hand. He changed his grasp to his hunting knife.

For the stealthy tread of the hunter, though it hinted of discovery of the hiding-place, told also that the hunter came alone. It was not a war-party of the Lukuli; it was a single spy—and a single man might be dealt with safely and in silence with good fortune.

The stealthy tread stopped at the edge of the rift where the leafy roof covered the opening. And they knew that the unseen hunter was aware that the rift was there, and that it was intentionally covered from sight. For his footsteps stopped at the edge, when another step would have brought him crashing through the leafy roof.

There was silence, followed by a low laugh; then came a voice speaking in the Lukuli tongue, which was sufficiently like Swahili for all the safari to understand what was said.

"O Small One," came the voice, "if you are hiding in the ground like a forest rat, know that Tofobo, Mofolongo's hunter, has found you!"

Eye met eye in the deep dusk of the hiding-place. In those tense moments thoughts moved swiftly, and they all understood.

Tofobo had been sent to track down the bushman who had fled from the city of Mofolongo, and the keen hunter had traced him with wonderful skill. For it was because of his great skill that Tofobo was the principal hunter of Mofolongo and the chief of all his hunters. And doubtless Tofobo knew of the existence of that rift in the earth, and when he found it covered from sight guessed that a fugitive was concealed there.

But it was clear also that Tofobo did not know that the bushman had companions. Mpoko had come alone to the city, and alone he had fled, and it was alone that Tofobo expected to find him.

The voice went on, in tones of triumph:

"O Small One that burrows in the earth like a rat, come forth and let the eyes of Tofobo see you."

Mpoko did not speak or stir.

But his eyes met Bobolobo's, and a sign passed between the two natives, and they understood one another. And Lyn and Fatty and Pip lay silent, still, well knowing that this matter was better left in the hands of the bushman and the Kikuyu.

"If your ears hear me, O Small and Cunning One, let my eyes see you!" pursued Tofobo, "for it is the command of Mofolongo that you return to the city in my hands. And you cannot escape me, O bushman, for Mluki-Mluki has sent a powerful ghost to walk in my footsteps and guide me to you, and even Ngai is not powerful enough to dispute the will of the Wise One who talks with ghosts and devils. Also, I have seen the traces of your feet where they have walked, O Small One, and the brown leaves where you have clung to the trees in the manner of the monkeys. And I know this place from of old, O Cunning One, for it was dug by my orders many moons ago, to trap Simba, the lion, who ate the children of the Lukuli. And now, lo! It is covered with branches and leaves for a place of hiding."

The hunter paused.

"O hunter of Mofolongo," said Mpoko, speaking at last, in the Swahili tongue, "it was written that you should find me, for a man may escape the eyes of a lion and the scent of a jackal, but the skill of Tofobo, the hunter, he cannot escape."

Tofobo chuckled.

"You speak well, O bushman!" he said. "And now, with my great skill and cunning, I have found you, for I am a great and cunning hunter, also I am helped by the powerful ghost that Mluki-Mluki has sent to walk in my footsteps. Let my eyes see you, O Small One that flees and hides, for you cannot escape me now."

Mpoko reached up and pulled aside a portion of the leafy screen over his head. The dimming light glimmered into the pit, and Tofobo the hunter looked down and saw the bushman with his eyes.

He grinned triumphantly.

"O Small One," he said, "take hold of my spear-shaft with your hand and I will draw you from your hole like a captured beast. But first throw down that long knife from your girdle, for well I know that the bushmen are treacherous and strike swiftly. And if you do not obey I will drive my spear through your arms, so that you cannot use your knife."

Mpoko dropped the Kikuyu knife to the ground. His spear lay at his feet and he had no other weapon.

"Now I will help you to come to me, O Small One," said the hunter, and he stretched down the long shaft of his spear for Mpoko to take hold.

Mpoko grasped the spear-shaft, and with Tofobo's help from above he clambered out of the pit.

"It is well, O bushman," said Tofobo, "for if you anger me my wrath is as terrible as my skill is great. Now I will bind your hands with a rope of grass, also I will lead you with a rope to the city, lest you escape me, like a monkey in the trees. For that you will flee I know well, knowing that you have angered Mofolongo, and that his wrath is death."

"In all things I obey you, O Tofobo," said the bushman, "for my fear of you is very great."

And he held out his hands for the cord.

And Tofobo, the hunter, as he wound the grass cord round the bushman's wrists, heard and saw nothing of Bobolobo, never dreaming that others were hidden in the covered rift. And Mpoko had cunningly moved, so that the hunter's back was to the pit.

And Bobolobo, silent as a creeping leopard, and as merciless, at that moment—for did not the life of the Bwana hang by a thread?—crept along the sunken pit, spear in hand, closer and closer to the Lukuli hunter.

And as Tofobo, the hunter, knotted the grass cord on the bushman's wrists the sinewy arm of the Kikuyu was lifted and the spear whizzed through the air, as unerring as a bullet from a rifle.

"O Small One——" the Lukuli hunter was saying, in a voice of mockery, when the sharp spear struck him and passed through his brawny body, and he fell without another word or sound, staring wildly at the grinning face of the bushman.

CHAPTER 33.

The House of the Witch-Doctor!

LYN shivered, as if he had felt a chill, in the midst of the baking African heat.

Fatty Page and Pip looked at one another, but did not speak.

War in the Central African bush was merciless; life for one was death for another.

The lives of the whole safari had hung on the spear of Bobolobo, and Bobo had not failed them.

The three Scouts remained in the sunken pit, hearing the rustling sounds as Bobo dragged the slain hunter away into the thickets.

At a distance from the hiding-place Tofobo, the chief's hunter, was left where, later, the jackals found him.

Bobo returned to the hiding-place. The brief twilight was deepening to darkness. In the gathering gloom the Kikuyu and the bushman exchanged a grin.

"O Small One with the cunning of

many serpents, it is well done!" said the Kikuyu.

"O handsome Kikuyu with the strong and mighty arm, the thrust of your spear is more terrible than the spring of Simba!" said Mpoko.

Lyn Strong clambered out of the hidden pit.

Fatty Page and Pip followed him. Now that darkness was closing in it was safe for the safari to leave their concealment.

"My hat!" said Fatty. "I'm glad to be out of that! Some oven!"

"You're melting away under our eyes, old fat bean," said Pip. "At this rate you won't weigh more than a ton by the time we get back to Masumpwe."

Lyn glanced round.

Save for a dark, wet patch on the earth, there was no sign remaining of Tofobo the hunter.

"Thank goodness for night!" said Lyn. "By gum, I'm glad to stretch my legs a little!"

"What-ho!" said Pip.

Darkness fell like a velvety black cloak on the dense forest. With the darkness came relief from the baking heat. There was a cool breath among the trees and thickets.

The safari moved away from the spot. They moved to the edge of the forest, on the side towards the city of Mofolongo. Following them came the sound of the growling and snarling of jackals, dying away into silence at last.

Keeping in cover of the screening vines, Lyn Strong looked out of the forest across the wide fields of Indian corn towards the city.

Lights were gleaming here and there, and the stars glimmered on the broad bosom of the Lukuli River beyond.

The stars shone, too, on the patch of untamed jungle half-way to the city, where, as they knew from Mpoko, was the dwelling of Mluki-Mluki, the witch-doctor.

It was an extensive patch, left wild and uncleared in the midst of the cultivated fields, and covering several acres, as wild and untamed as the forest in which the Scouts stood.

Lyn's eyes were fixed on it.

The jungle was the objective of the Popolaki Scouts as soon as the city of the Lukuli was buried in slumber.

There were still many hours to wait, but in the darkness and coolness of night the waiting was not so weary.

From the city, floating on the night wind, came the sound of the beating of many drums, beating time to a native dance. The Lukuli were dancing in the great square before the chief's huts, and the tom-toms droned, the cymbals clashed incessantly for a long time. On the morrow they would be dancing at the great feast, when the prisoner would be eaten if the Scouts had not saved him.

Slowly the shadowy hours passed, and the beating of drums ceased in the city, the glimmering lights died out, and all was silent save the whispering of the trees and the murmuring of the river.

But it was not till midnight that the safari stirred from the forest.

Silent as the city was, still as it looked, Lyn knew from what Mpoko had reported that the chief's guards watched through the night, and that the hut where Grant Strong lay was surrounded by armed and wakeful men. And he knew that the rescue of the prisoner where he lay was impossible, and that the attempt could only bring death to the rescuers. From that desperate and final attempt he had been saved by the information the bushman had brought.

"Get a move on!" said Lyn at last.

And the Scouts trailed out of the forest, with Mpoko in the lead to guide, and Bobo in the watchful rear, spear in hand.

By a winding path among the fields of Indian corn Mpoko led the way, a way he had already traversed.

The safari stepped after him, silently and swiftly.

Swiftly they traversed the star-lit fields, and reached the edge of the

jungle where the witch-doctor's house lay.

Like a wall of green, trees, interlaced with thick winding creepers, barred the way, impenetrable to the eye.

But in one spot a narrow bush-path opened, the way by which Mluki-Mluki was accustomed to reach his hidden house; a path so narrow that only one man could pass at a time, shut in between high walls of gigantic elephant grass twelve feet high.

At the opening of the path Mpoko stopped.

All was silent and still, there was no sound from the hidden house in the jungle. There was no need for Mluki-Mluki and his slaves to watch; the terror of the witch-doctor was a more than sufficient guard against all black men, and in the Lukuli country there were no white men.

"Why do you stop, Mpoko?" whispered Lyn.

The little bushman looked up at him, and his face was strange. A struggle seemed to be going on within Mpoko.

"You do not fear, O Small One?" asked Lyn.

Mpoko licked his lips.

"This dirty bushman he plenty brave old johnny," he said, in his curious English. "No fear filthy Lukuli."

"Then what——"

"O Bwana," murmured Bobolobo, "the magic of the Wise One of the Lukuli is terribly strong, and it is the magic of Mluki-Mluki that the Small One fears. I, Bobo, also fear greatly."

Lyn smiled faintly.

He had forgotten that the two natives shared, to a large extent at least, the superstition of the Lukuli. To the Scouts, Mluki-Mluki was a bloodthirsty impostor, a cunning trickster, and nothing more; but to the bushmen and the Kikuyu he was the Wise One, the Terrible One, the lord of ghosts and devils.

Material dangers they did not fear, but the ghosts and devils that haunted the jungle of the witch-doctor they dreaded with a great dread.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Pip. "Is that the trouble? Don't worry about the jolly old witch-doctor, Mpoko, we're going to put paid to him."

"This filthy bushman he so sabby sar!" said Mpoko. And his eyes lingered in fear on the shadowy path.

"I mean to say, Mluki-Mluki is a jolly old spoofer, and I'm ready to eat all his ghosts and devils, without salt or pepper!" said Pip.

"O Small One," said Lyn, more seriously. "Mluki-Mluki is a great liar and deceiver, and there are no ghosts or devils in this jungle, this being a lie that the witch-doctor tells to the foolish Lukuli."

"O Bwana," murmured Bobolobo, "it is well known that in the forests there are many devils and ghosts, both great and small, and over these Mluki-Mluki has great power."

"It is true, lord!" said Mpoko in Swahili. "And it is well known in all the country of the Great River that when Mluki-Mluki waves his hand the storm ghosts rage in the forest, and tear up the tallest trees."

"Then if you fear the power of this lying witch-doctor you shall go back to the forest and await me there, both you and Bobolobo," said Lyn.

The two natives looked at one another, and both shook their heads. They dreaded the supernatural powers of Mluki-Mluki, but their devotion to the Bwana was stronger than their fear.

"O Bwana," said Bobo, "my ears do not hear you."

"Let us go on, then," said Lyn, "and let your ears hear this: all things are in the hands of Ngai, who is more powerful than the wisest witch-doctor, and Ngai is on the side of all who do their duty. Let us go on."

"It is well said, Bwana!" said Bobo. "For the eye of Ngai sees all things from the clouds. And it is well known that if a stone be cast on the bank of a river in the name of

Ngai that river shall be safely crossed."

And Bobolobo looked round in the starlight, picked up a stone and cast it at the entrance of the jungle path.

And Mpoko's clouded face cleared, and he led the way on without another pause.

The three Scouts were careful not to smile as they followed. For in the belief of the simple natives the casting of the stone propitiated the favour of Ngai, who watched all things from the clouds on the summit of Mount Kenya; and the favour of Ngai was stronger than the magic of the most powerful witch-doctor.

The safari wound into the jungle by the narrow path.

The rough elephant-grass brushed them on either side; but they were careful not to make the slightest rustle that might have reached keen ears.

So cunningly was the house of Mluki-Mluki concealed that the path wound in the jungle like a corkscrew, and more than twice the necessary distance had to be covered before the safari reached the clearing in the heart of the jungle where the house stood.

Surrounded by jungle and tall trees, there was an open space of about a quarter of an acre, where the house was built by a bubbling spring.

The house was low, of wattled walls and roof, extending over a good space, being a collection of many huts joined together by wattled passages.

It lay dark and silent before the eyes of the Scouts.

In front of the principal hut stood a great square mass of lava rock, the natural colour of which was strangely stained. They did not need telling that this was the stone of sacrifice, on which the victim lay bound, to suffer under the knife of Mluki-Mluki. Many and many a victim had perished there by torture of the witch-doctor.

Lyn breathed hard.

"Keep in cover!" he muttered. "Everything depends now on the Lukuli knowing nothing of our presence. If that old fiend gave the alarm we should have a thousand spearmen on us on the tap of a drum."

"O Bwana," whispered Bobolobo, "I hear the sound of one that stirs in his sleep."

"Cover!" breathed Fatty.

Stealthily as creeping leopards they crept into the tall elephant-grass beside the bush-path, and lay silent.

From the direction of the house came a sound of padding footsteps and a clicking of bones.

Someone was stirring in the stillness of the night, and the rattle of dead men's bones told that it was the witch-doctor.

Lyn peered through the thick elephant-grass.

In the starlight that fell into the clearing before the hut he made out a wizened face and a shrivelled form, decorated with hideous paint and strings of bones.

It was Mluki-Mluki, the Wise One.

Perhaps some faint sound, some rustle of the elephant-grass, had reached him in the uneasy sleep of age. The starlight caught his eyes as he peered, and they gleamed like carbuncles. Suddenly, swiftly, he came towards the bush-path across the clearing.

The rattling of his necklaces of human bones rang in the ears of the Scouts as they crouched in the darkness and silence, fearing that the witch-doctor would hear the beating of their hearts.

The witch-doctor stepped into the bush-path, and the rattle of bones ceased, as he stood still, with bent head, and listened. In all hearts the Wise One inspired fear; yet in his own heart must have been constant dread, for he knew that many hated him as much as they feared him.

Only a thin screen of tall stalks of elephant grass separated him from the crouching safari. And they made no sound, though the beating of their

own hearts was in their own ears like the sound of drums.

And then the bones clicked again as the witch-doctor moved and his naked feet padded back to the huts.

Lyn peered from the grass.

He saw the old wretch peering and sniffing for some moments, and then he disappeared into the hut whence he had emerged.

Whatever he had feared or suspected, his suspicions were set at rest. The magic of the Wise One had not warned him that foes were crouching close at hand—that death had been nearer to him than to the prisoner in the chief's hut.

CHAPTER 34.
The Day of Death!

DAY dawned on the Congo country, and wakened the teeming life in the great forests stretching from the Lukuli River to the mighty waters of the Congo. And in the new day there was bustle and excitement in the city of Mofolongo, chief of the Lukuli.

For it was the day of sacrifice, and that day Grant Strong, the captive white man, was to die under the tortures of Mluki-Mluki, and to be eaten by Mofolongo and his chiefs, that his great courage might pass into their hearts, and make them more terrible in war.

The hunter of Uganda wakened with the dawn, in his hut in the shadow of Mofolongo's palace.

Many of the soldiers looked in on him, to see his face, and to judge whether the courage of the white man had failed him, now that the day of death had come.

But in the lean, bronzed face of the white man they saw no sign of fear.

For long weeks Grant Strong had been a prisoner in the shadow of death; but Mofolongo and his soldiers had never seen his courage falter. But many brave men had faltered, when the mark of death was placed on them, and they knew that they were to be taken to the fatal house of Mluki-Mluki.

Chako, the captain of the guards, stood in the doorway of the prisoner's hut, while the slaves brought in breakfast for the hunter.

And Chako smiled with approval as he saw Grant Strong eat with a good appetite.

When the meal was over and the slaves were gone, Chako spoke to the prisoner, and he spoke with respect.

"O Mzungu," he said, "it is known to you that the day of sacrifice has come?"

"It is known to me," answered Grant Strong indifferently.

There was no indifference in his heart, but the pride of race held him erect and calm under the eyes of the black men.

"And does not your blood turn to water at the thought of Mluki-Mluki and his terrible tortures?" asked the soldier.

"O soldier, the blood of a white man of Ungereza does not turn to water in the presence of death."

Chako nodded. He had heard of Ungereza, the little island across the great waters, whence the conquering race who feared neither man nor ghost, and whose footsteps could not be turned back by the most terrible perils.

The white man stood in the doorway of the hut, and looked out into the sunshine.

In the sunny hours of the morning the people of the city were gathering in great crowds.

From every long street that led into the central square they came in swarms, and the square buzzed like a beehive.

All eyes were turned on the prison hut; and when the white man was seen in the doorway all eyes fixed on the tall, erect figure in ragged khaki, and

the bronzed, unmoved face. And there was a deep murmur along the Lukuli, like the sound of the wind in the forest.

With steady eyes Grant Strong looked out on the swarm.

Not a trace of emotion was to be seen in his steady face; his eyes seemed indifferent. But he was thinking—of his home on the banks of the Popolaki river in far Uganda; of the shady streets of Masumpwe that he would never tread again; and of his son, who had come so far to save him, and who could not save him. He remembered the words of Mpoko, who had come as a spy into the city of Mofolongo; and his gaze lifted from the swarming crowd and passed to the forest that circled the city beyond the maize-fields.

He had been glad and proud to hear that his son had come into the country of the Lukuli, to attempt to save him. Yet what could the boy have hoped to do amid the countless swarms of black fighting-men?

He was proud of his son, but he was glad, with a deep gladness, that Lyn had not attempted to enter the city to seek for him. For the boy could only have come to his death; and his last hours were bitter enough without that.

He wondered, as he stood, whether Lyn's eyes were watching from the forest; and he feared that the boy would see the procession when it started for the house of Mluki-Mluki. He dreaded some desperate attempt that would be death to Lyn—a useless death that could not help him. And he felt an impatience for the scene to be over, for when it was over the boy would leave the country of the Lukuli, and his life would be safe.

He made a stride forward, and two broad-bladed spears crossed in front of him.

"O Mzungu," said a soldier, "are you impatient for death?"

"Is death so pleasant that one should await it with joy?" answered Strong. "Soldier, where is that son of a jackal, the coward Mofolongo, who hides from my eyes because he fears to look on a brave man, being himself a coward whose blood is like water?"

The soldiers trembled at the words.

"O Man," said one of the guards, "speak not these terrible words in so loud a voice, or Mofolongo will hear with his ears."

"Let him hear with his ears," answered Strong. "Let him hear words of scorn, that are fitting for the ears of a slave like Mofolongo!"

He spoke with a loud, clear voice, and many of the gathered Lukuli heard him and trembled, and looked on one another with terrified looks.

The hunter's voice reached the hut of the great chief, and Mofolongo stepped forth, magnificent in leopard-skins and golden necklaces.

At the sight of the chief there was deadly silence. His face was contorted with rage.

He strode towards the hut of the prisoner, and stood facing Grant Strong, who eyed him calmly. In his hand was a stabbing-spear, and his brawny grasp was almost convulsive upon it.

"O Man," said Mofolongo, his voice trembling with fury, "what words are these that my ears hear?"

"They are words that the Lukuli do not dare to speak!" answered the white man. "But I, being a man of Ungereza, in which country there are no cowards, speak them to your teeth, O Mofolongo! And I do not fear the spear you hold in your hand, for it is well known to me that you dare not strike with it, for your hand is weak and your arm is feeble, being the hand and arm of a great coward!"

The chief of the Lukuli shook with rage. The hand that held the spear was lifted, and the bright blade gleamed before the eyes of the white man. And Grant Strong looked on it and laughed contemptuously.

But the chief did not strike.

"O Mofolongo," said the white man tauntingly, "behold, you lift the spear, but your courage fails, and you dare not strike! Go from before my eyes, O Mofolongo, and run with the jackals in the forest, for they are fitting companions for so feeble a coward!"

"O man," said Mofolongo, in a choking voice, "it is well known to the Lukuli, who are my people, also to the Biribi, who are my enemies, that Mofolongo is no coward, but a great and terrible chief in war! And well I know that you tempt me to strike you dead with my spear, that you may escape the tortures of Mluki-Mluki. For you are aware, O false white man with a lying tongue, that on the stone of sacrifice you will lie under the knife of Mluki-Mluki from noon till the hour when the sun goes to sleep in the country of the Frenchesi. But I, Mofolongo, am no fool, O false white man, and by my hand you shall not escape the death by torture!"

And the chief, grinding his teeth, lowered the spear.

The hunter laughed aloud.

"O people of the Lukuli," he called out, in a voice that rang across the crowded square, "look with your eyes on this man Mofolongo, who is no chief and warrior, but a jackal that walks in leopard-skins like a chief, with the heart of a coward."

A spasm of rage contracted the face of Mofolongo, and again the stabbing-spear was half raised. But he lowered it again, and turned to the awe-stricken crowd.

"O people of the Lukuli," he said, "your ears hear the words of this false white man. But it is well known to you that I, Mofolongo, am terrible in war. Is it not well known to you?"

"It is well known, O Mofolongo!" came a terrified chorus. "To all the people of Lukuli it is indeed well known."

"Where is the chief Latukali, who was a great chief among the Biribi?" demanded Mofolongo.

"He is with the ghosts, and his city lies in ashes!" answered the chorus.

"Where is the king of the Kiwa country?" continued Mofolongo.

"He is with the ghosts, and his city lies in ashes!" chanted the throng.

"Where are the white Belgian people who built the fort in the land where the Lukuli waters join to the Great River?"

"They are with the ghosts, and the fort lies in ashes!"

"Where are the Frenchesi, who came to the Great River with many men and many guns?"

"They are with the ghosts, O Mofolongo, and their guns are dead under the waters of the Great River!"

Mofolongo turned, with a swagger, towards the white man.

"Your ears hear, O false-speaking Mzungu!" he said. "O cunning one, your ears have heard the testimony of the Lukuli?"

"My ears have heard the howling of jackals!" answered the white man contemptuously.

Mofolongo turned from him, lest in his anger he should drive the spear to the white man's heart, and thus save him from the torture. For well he knew that quick death was the greatest boon that could fall to the lot of the destined victim of the witch-doctor.

Grant Strong shrugged his shoulders. And then to him came Chako and several of the guards, and they bound his arms behind him with grass rope.

"Do you bind me because the Lukuli fear one man without weapons in his hands, soldier?" asked Strong.

"Mzungu, your arms are bound with cords because it is common for one that is to die to rush on the spears, and so seek to escape the torture," answered Chako, "and that is not the will of Mofolongo."

And Grant Strong stood with bound arms; while, from the distance, the drone of a drum announced that Mluki-Mluki was prepared to receive the victim. And then the white man was led forth, walking with erect head

between two tall soldiers; and in his heart he prayed that his son's eyes were not looking from the distant forest.

Drums beat with a deafening din in the city of the Lukuli. All the chief's drummers were present, and they beat incessantly, and the din rolled far from the city, over the waters of the river, as far as the mighty Congo that rolled its broad flood beyond the forest. And mingled with the droning of the drums sounded the shouts and yells of the Lukuli, swarming round the procession, all eager to catch a glimpse of the man that was doomed to die.

At the head of the procession walked Mofolongo, magnificent in leopard-skins, shield on arm and spear in hand; and with him walked the lesser chiefs. Then came the soldiers of the guard, and in their midst the prisoner with bound arms. And behind marched many soldiers; and round, in swarming crowds, the Lukuli, men and women and children.

And there were many murmurs of approval from those who watched the tall white man, marching with a steady stride to look on death.

The Lukuli were a fighting people, and they admired courage. They were accustomed to howl with derision when a doomed man showed signs of fear, to mock at him if he begged for mercy; but as they looked at Grant Strong they said to one another:

"Kumbe! This Mzungu has the heart of Simba the lion, and he knows not fear. The ears of Mluki-Mluki will not hear him cry under the knife."

From the long street the procession entered the wide path across the maize fields, towards the jungle-hidden house of the witch-doctor.

With beating of drums, with shouting and yelling, the swarm of black men marched, and in the midst of the horde walked the white man, his head erect, his bronzed face expressionless.

And so they came to the jungle that hid the house of the ju-ju man, and on the edge of the jungle, where the narrow path wound away towards the hidden house, stood Mluki-Mluki and his slaves, ready to receive the man who was doomed.

The witch-doctor, his wizened face streaked with yellow paint, his necklaces of human bones rattling and clicking, grinned like a savage gnome at the white man. The ranks of the soldiers opened out, and Grant Strong was pushed forward towards the witch-doctor, and the four slaves of Mluki-Mluki received him from the soldiers.

"O Wise One," said Mofolongo, "your eyes see the Mzungu who is delivered into your hands for the torture."

"My eyes see him, O Mofolongo," answered the witch-doctor.

"Let him not die swiftly, O Wise One!" said the chief, his eyes gleaming at the hunter. "It is the custom that the victim shall die slowly, even from the hour of noon till the sun goes down to the country of the Frenchesi. And if he shall die even more slowly, it will be well done."

"The tortures of Mluki-Mluki are terrible," said the witch-doctor, "and yet many hours shall pass before the Mzungu is with the ghosts. And he shall not die until Usiku, the Night, covers all with his black mantle."

"It is well said, O Wise One," answered Mofolongo, "for he has spoken words that have roused my anger, and it is not my will that he should die easily."

And he stepped back, and the prisoner was led into the jungle path by the slaves of the witch-doctor.

With a rattling of bones, Mluki-Mluki followed, and they disappeared from the gaze of the crowd.

Then Mofolongo and his soldiers marched back into the city, and the crowds dispersed, to rest in the heat of the day—not to gather again till nightfall, when there would be great feasting, and the slain Mzungu would be eaten by the great chief and the lesser chiefs.

By the winding jungle-path the slaves led Grant Strong, two of them grasping his bound arms, one walking before and one behind. And after them followed the witch-doctor, his painted face grinning with the glee of anticipated cruelty.

They reached the clearing in the centre of the jungle, where the huts stood, and where the lava rock lay, that was used as a stone of sacrifice.

Grant Strong gazed at it, and in the stains that darkened its surface he read its terrible history. And, in spite of his courage and his iron nerve, a shudder ran through his sinewy limbs.

From the witch-doctor came a hideous cackle.

"O white man," he said, "your blood turns to water and your knees are weak at the sight of the stone of death!"

Strong looked at him contemptuously.

"O foul and mischievous monkey," he answered, "I have looked on death many times, and I do not fear it. But the sight of you fills my heart with a great sickness, for you are foul to look upon."

Mluki-Mluki showed his toothless gums, grinning in his rage. He snarled an order to the four powerful blacks who served him, and they grasped the white man and stretched him on the stone of sacrifice.

Ropes were passed over him, binding him there, his face upturned to the glare of the African sun.

The four slaves, savage wretches with cruel eyes, trained to help the ju-ju man in the exercise of his cruelties, stood back, looking on with anticipation. And Mluki-Mluki, taking a large knife from one of his assistants, stepped to the stone of sacrifice and looked down with scintillating eyes at the man stretched there.

And then, from the jungle that surrounded the clearing, there was a whizzing sound, and a spear flew with the swiftness of light and struck the witch-doctor full in the breast. And, with one choking groan, Mluki-Mluki fell, and died by the side of the stone of sacrifice.

CHAPTER 35.

Saved!

LYN had been watching.

From the moment that the procession left the city the eyes of Lyn Strong and his comrades had been upon it, from the cover of the thick jungle that surrounded the house of the devil-doctor.

And when his eyes fell upon his father, walking erect and calm in the midst of swarming enemies, Lyn's heart beat almost to suffocation.

Pip grasped his arm as he made a movement.

"Steady on, old man!" whispered Pip.

Lyn nodded.

"O Bwana, the time it not yet," breathed Bobolobo. "One sound now will bring death to all of us, and the Bwana M'Kubwa will perish also."

"Wait, old man!" muttered Fatty Page.

It was a tense moment. Within a score of yards of the hidden safari the Lukuli swarmed in hundreds, and had the savages dreamed that they were there countless numbers would have overwhelmed them instantly.

Lyn set his teeth hard.

From the thickness of the jungle he watched, his heart throbbing, but without sound or motion, and he saw his father handed over to the slaves of the witch-doctor and taken into the narrow jungle-path.

And then he saw the soldiers and the people march back to the city, and he breathed more freely.

In the house of Mluki-Mluki were only the witch-doctor and his four slaves—and with them the scouts could deal. Yet it was needful to use the greatest caution, for a shout or a ringing shot would have alarmed the

Lukuli and told them that enemies were in their land.

Lyn Strong breathed hard and deep.

"Come!" he said.

And the safari emerged from cover and followed the winding path through the jungle, out of sight of Mluki-Mluki and his slaves on the winding way ahead.

And so they came to the clearing before the house of the witch-doctor, and saw Grant Strong stretched on the stone of sacrifice and the slaves standing and Mluki-Mluki with the knife of torture in his claw.

Lyn grasped his rifle convulsively.

Bobo touched his arm.

"Kimya!" he breathed. "Silence, O Bwana, for the sound of the rifle will tell the Lukuli that we are nere! But the spear of Bobolobo is silent, and yet it carries death."

"You are right, Bobo!" breathed Lyn. "Slay me that demon with your spear, and you others, when Mluki-Mluki falls, rush on the slaves and kill them before they can give the alarm!"

"You bet!" breathed Pip; and Fatty Page nodded.

Mpoko bared his long Kikuyu knife and grinned, with a flash of white teeth.

Bobolobo lifted his spear and aimed with care, and like a flash of light it flew, and its broad blade was buried deep in the breast of the devil-doctor.

As Mluki-Mluki crumpled down beside the stone of sacrifice the four slaves stared at him in the stupor of surprise. Mluki-Mluki, the Wise One, the talker with ghosts and devils, lay dead before their eyes, slain by a spear—yet in all the land of the Lukuli there was no man who dared to lift his hand against the Wise and Terrible One. And as they stared stupefied at the crumpled figure by the lava rock, there came a sudden rush, and the enemy were upon them.

The spear of Bobolobo, the knife of Mpoko, struck swiftly, and two crashing rifle-butts struck at the same moment. There was no time for the torturers to shout an alarm or to tap the signal on a drum—the attack was too swift and sudden for that, and the torturers were as silent as Mluki-Mluki, their master.

Lyn leaped towards the lava rock.

"Father!"

His knife was in his hand, and he slashed through the cords that bound Grant Strong to the stone of sacrifice.

Grant Strong stared at his son like a man in a dream.

"Lyn!" he said, and his voice was a husky whisper.

"Father!"

Grant Strong drew himself from the rock. His face, unmoved under the eyes of the Lukuli, expressionless in the presence of death, was working with emotion.

"Lyn!" he breathed. "You—here!" He grasped the boy's hand in silence. It was some moments before he could speak again. "Lyn! The bushman told me you had come, but I never dreamed ——"

"O Bwana M'Kubwa," said Bobolobo, "my eyes see you, and my heart sings like the waters of the Popolaki river in the reeds!"

"Heaven bless you, Lyn!" said the hunter. "And you, too, my brave and faithful Bobo! O Small One, my eyes see you, and I know well that you have done much to bring this about."

Mpoko grinned.

"This filthy bushman he clever dirty old johnny!" he said complacently.

Grant Strong smiled, and he shook hands with Pip and Fatty.

"I won't try to thank you, lads," he said. "I would never have allowed you to come; but you are here, and you have saved me from a fearful death."

"The Popolaki Patrol never backs out, sir," said Pip.

"No fear!" said Fatty emphatically.

"And the magic of the Wise One has not saved him from the spear of a Kikuyu," said Bobo, spurning the carcase of Mluki-Mluki with his foot, "for indeed it is true that the eye of Ngai has watched us from the summit of the great mountain that lies towards the

rising sun, and by the will of Ngai the power of the Wise One has broken like a reed."

"These words are the words of truth, O brave Kikuyu," said Mpoko.

"And the power of Mofolongo shall not harm us, O Bwana M'Kubwa," said the Kikuyu, "for we will hide in the house of Mluki-Mluki until Usiku the Night covers all the earth with darkness, and then we will steal away into the forest, and we shall live and not die."

"It is well said, O brave Bobo!" answered Grant Strong.

And when Bobo and Mpoko had dragged the bodies of the witch-doctor and the torturers away into the jungle, the safari sat in the shade of the house of Mluki-Mluki, and the father and son had much to say to one another while they waited for the burning hours of the day to pass.

And in the adjacent city the Lukuli prepared for the feast, and Mofolongo, standing before his huts, listened with his ears for the cries of the white man under the torture. But the ears of Mofolongo heard nothing.

The drone of the drums came incessantly.

The sun was setting over the forests of the Congo, in a bed of crimson and purple. Already in the deep forest the shadows were dense. But the wide fields of Indian corn that surrounded the city of the Lukuli were still bathed in light.

In the fields no one was to be seen.

The Lukuli were gathered in the great square of the city, where a fire burned before the huts of Mofolongo.

The square swarmed with black humanity, their numbers increasing every moment by crowds pouring in from the long streets.

In his ebony chair of state sat Mofolongo, magnificent in leopard skins and golden necklaces.

Round him were gathered lesser chiefs of the Lukuli, and in long ranks stood the soldiers, spear and shield in hand.

The steady ranks of the soldiers kept back the swarming crowds—hundreds and hundreds of them—for all the city had gathered for the great feast.

The chief's drummers beat incessantly on the drums, and the air throbbed with the unending drone.

From where he sat Mofolongo looked down a long street of grass houses to the open fields, and at a distance across the fields he saw the jungle that surrounded the house of the witch-doctor.

More and more impatient grew the countenance of Mofolongo. For Mluki-Mluki was late, and the chief called at last to Chako, the captain of the guards.

"O Chako!"

The brawny black soldier advanced.

"O Mofolongo, my ears hear you!" he said.

"Mluki-Mluki, the Wise One, does not come," said Mofolongo. "It is not fitting that a chief should wait, even for a wise man who talks with ghosts and devils. It is now many hours since the white man was delivered to Mluki-Mluki to be tortured and slain. But the Wise One still lingers in his house in the jungle."

"It is true, O Mofolongo," answered Chako, "and long ere this time the Mzungu must be dead."

"Yet the Wise One does not come," said Mofolongo. "My eyes do not see him, neither do my ears hear his footsteps."

His eyes glinted.

Any man but Mluki-Mluki who had kept the great chief waiting would have been ordered to death under the spears of the soldiers, or under the small knives of the skinners.

But Mluki-Mluki, the Wise One, was almost as terrible as the chief himself, for he was the chief of the devil-doctors—a talker with the black ghosts of the night—and if he was angered he had but to wave his hand and the rain would fall no more on the fields of Indian corn, the spears of the hunters would be blunted, and the Lukuli river would dry up in its sources. Or so, at least, the Lukuli believed.

Even Mofolongo dared not send his soldiers to slay the witch-doctor in his

house, as often he had sent them to slay those who had offended him.

But his anger was growing.

"The Wise One grows old, and he has perhaps forgotten," said Mofolongo, "for indeed he is very, very old, and the old are foolish."

Chako listened with a troubled face. He feared the anger of Mofolongo, which was liable to turn on anyone near at hand if its just object could not be reached. But still more he feared the terrible powers of the Wise One. And he had no doubt that the hidden ghosts that served Mluki-Mluki, carried to his ears the reckless words of the chief.

"Take you a drummer, Chako, and go to the jungle that hides the house of Mluki-Mluki," said Mofolongo, "and you will tell him that I, Mofolongo, wait, and that all the people of the Lukuli wait, and that it is not fitting that so mighty a chief as I should wait. And you will tell him, Chako, that the anger of Mofolongo is terrible, even to a wise man who talks with ghosts and devils."

And Chako took one of the chief's drummers and walked down the long street to the fields; but he went with a troubled face, like a man who takes his life in his hand.

And the eyes of Mofolongo, and of all the swarming Lukuli, followed him as he walked out of the city into the maize fields that were red in the sunset.

Their eyes followed him by the narrow field-paths till he reached the edge of the circle of jungle that hid the house of the witch-doctor.

And there, where a narrow, winding bush-path led through the jungle to the hidden house, they saw him halt; and the drummer beat on his drum, and at a gesture from Mofolongo all other drums were silent, so the tap of Chako's drummer reached all ears in the city.

And they watched for Mluki-Mluki to appear from the jungle path to talk with Chako.

But they watched in vain, for Mluki-Mluki did not appear.

CHAPTER 36.

The Answer of the Drum!

LYN STRONG set his lips.

He was watching from the jungle before the house of Mluki-Mluki.

Bobolobo lay in cover by his side, watching. And they saw Chako and the drummer leave the city of the Lukuli and advance by the field paths.

"O Bwana," murmured Bobo, "the Lukuli grow impatient, and Mofolongo has sent a soldier to see with his eyes and hear with his ears."

Lyn nodded.

"Get back to the house," he said.

He hurried by the winding bush-path to the clearing in the centre of the jungle, where the huts stood.

In the hut of Mluki-Mluki, Grant Strong sat, with Pip and Fatty. Mpoko squatted at the door.

They waited longingly for the fall of night.

As yet no man in the city of the Lukuli dreamed that Mluki-Mluki and his torturers had been slain, and that Grant Strong was a free man, among those who had trekked from far Uganda to save him.

But not till darkness covered the face of the earth could the hunter and the Scouts venture to leave their cover.

Grant Strong rose quickly to his feet as his son came hurrying into the clearing before the huts.

"What is it, Lyn?" he asked quietly.

"A soldier and a drummer are coming from the city," answered Lyn. "It must be a message for Mluki-Mluki."

Grant Strong nodded.

"They expected to see the brute before this," he said. "The feast was fixed for nightfall. Mofolongo is growing impatient."

Pip and Fatty picked up their rifles. If the final tussle was coming, the Popolaki Scouts were ready. And Bobolobo slipped his shield on his arm and grasped his fighting-spears.

Well they knew that in seeking Grant Strong in the wild land of the Lukuli they had walked with death dog-

ging their footsteps. And if the finish had come they were not afraid.

"If the brutes would have waited another half-hour," said Pip. "But I rather thought it was too much luck to expect."

"We'll make some of them hop, anyhow!" said Fatty Page.

Grant Strong made a gesture.

"We may have time yet," he said. "They dare not enter the jungle—they fear too much the spells of the witch-doctor. Not unless they learn that he is killed, and that I have friends here who have saved me. Listen!"

From the direction of the city the throbbing of drums died away. In the silence that followed, the tapping of Chako's drummer was clearly heard.

The Scouts listened tensely.

Chako was giving the signal that he was there, awaiting word with the witch-doctor, as was the custom.

If Mluki-Mluki did not go to meet him——

What would happen then?

If the witch-doctor did not appear, and did not answer, surely the suspicions of the Lukuli would be roused?

Tap, tap, tap, tap! came from the drum.

Grant Strong gritted his teeth.

"That is not merely a signal—it is a message," he said. "They are tapping out a message to Mluki-Mluki. If there is no answer——"

Lyn drew a deep breath.

It was yet half an hour to dark, and flight was impossible. Hundreds of eyes would have been upon them at once.

Yet if no answer was given to the drummer, the Lukuli could not fail to divine that something had happened to the witch-doctor in his hidden house; that the prisoner, though delivered bound into his hands, had somehow turned the tables on him.

Fortune had favoured the Popolaki Patrol since they had set out from far Uganda to save Grant Strong. But it seemed that fortune was failing them at last.

Then in the dead silence that lay on the group before the witch-doctor's hut the low chuckle of Mpoko was heard.

All glanced at the little bushman.

He had picked up a drum from the hut, and his little black face grinned at the Scouts.

"What are you about to do, O Mpoko?" asked Grant Strong.

"This filthy bushman he sabby, sar," answered Mpoko. "He sabby drum talk, sabby plenty Lukuli drum talk."

"My hat!" breathed Pip.

"O Bwana," said Bobo, "have I not said many times that the Small One has the cunning of many serpents?"

"Speak with the drum, O Small One!" said Grant Strong, and Mpoko tapped out an answer on the skin of the witch-doctor's drum.

The tapping across the jungle ceased as Chako listened to the drum-taps from the witch-doctor's house.

Lyn and his comrades stood silent. They knew that all depended now on the message that Mpoko was tapping out on the witch-doctor's drum. Tap, tap, tap! beat the stick in the little bushman's hand, slow taps and swift taps, telling their own tale to the ears that listened beyond the jungle.

Mpoko ceased.

The Scouts listened with strained attention.

From the distance, where Chako stood, came swift tap-tapping in reply. Then there was silence.

Mpoko chuckled softly.

"What have you said, O Small One, in the drum-talk of the Lukuli?" asked Grant Strong at last.

"This dirty bushman he talk same Mluki-Mluki," grinned Mpoko. "This bushman he clever old johnny. Yes, sar. Me say——" Mpoko's English failed him, and he went on in Swahili: "I have talked, O Bwana, with the tongue of Mluki-Mluki, and I have said to the messenger of Mofolongo that I have had speech with the ghosts that give me counsel, and that the ghosts command that the feast shall not take place until the moon rises, lest a curse fall

upon the Lukuli, by the great power of the white man's magic."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Fatty Page. "Mean to say you could tap all that out on a drum?"

"Easy-easy, sar!" said the bushman.

Grant Strong smiled grimly.

It was such a message as Mluki-Mluki might have given; it was not likely to rouse the suspicions of Mofolongo. It was common enough for a feast or a ceremony to be postponed when the omens were not favourable.

"You think it will satisfy them, father?" asked Lyn.

"I think so," answered the hunter.

He spoke to Bobo, who clambered into a tall tree close by the witch-doctor's hut, whence he could spy across the jungle to the city.

In a few minutes Bobo came slithering down with a grinning face.

"O Bwana M'Kubwa, the soldier and the drummer walk back to the city," he said. "They carry the message to Mofolongo."

The sun sank deeper behind the forests of the Congo. Dark shadows rolled from the east.

From the city came no sound; the drums were silent. Evidently the supposed message from the Wise One had satisfied the Lukuli and their chief.

Darkness at last fell, a velvety blackness that lay like a pall on the forest and the plain and the crowded city.

And in the darkness the hidden ones at the witch-doctor's house stirred. It was but an hour ere the moon rose, and by moonrise they hoped to be far away.

By the winding path they left the jungle and entered the fields that lay between it and the forest. In daylight, or by moonlight, they must have been seen from the city, but in the thick darkness they flitted silent and unseen.

The great forest received them at last, and with deep relief they plunged into the darkness of the trees.

When the moon rose and glimmered down on the city of the Lukuli, the safari were far away, treading a game-path through the forest, their faces set towards the east. And no man among the Lukuli knew of their going.

CHAPTER 37.

The Pursuit!

THE face of Mofolongo, chief of the Lukuli, was wrinkled with anger. The glinting of his eyes spread terror round him, and the lesser chiefs exchanged uneasy glances, and the soldiers were troubled.

For the moon was high, and poured down a stream of silver radiance on the city, and still Mluki-Mluki, the witch-doctor, did not come, and still the feast was delayed.

Mluki-Mluki was powerful and wise and dreaded, but Mofolongo, after all, was the great chief of the tribe, and even with the dreaded devil-doctor there was a limit to his patience. At last he called Chako to him again, and the captain of the guards came with a fearful and troubled face. For there was death in the savage eyes of Mofolongo, and it was clear that ere long his rage would find some victim.

"O Chako, tell me again what message Mluki-Mluki gave by the voice of his drum," said the chief.

"O Mofolongo, the Wise One said that he had talked with the ghosts, and that there must be no feast till the moon rose, lest a curse fall upon the nation of the Lukuli," answered Chako.

"Behold the moon high in the sky, Chako, and still Mluki-Mluki does not come."

"It is true, O Mofolongo."

"Take once more a drummer, Chako, and go to Mluki-Mluki," said the chief, "and tell him that there are other wise men in this land, and that my anger is great and terrible, and that it is in my mind to make Kimbe-Kimbe the chief of the witch-doctors in his place, and that if he does not come to me now I will send Kimbe-Kimbe to dwell in his house and with him many young men

with spears to slay Mluki-Mluki and his torturers."

Chako trembled.

"O Mofolongo, I will go to Mluki-Mluki and speak these fearful words," he said. "He will slay me. But who am I that I should not die if it be the will of Mofolongo?"

"You say well, soldier," answered the chief.

And again Chako took a drummer and went out to the jungle that hid the house of the witch-doctor, and all eyes followed him in the bright moonlight.

In the brightness of the moon the earth was almost as light as by day, and hundred of eyes were on Chako when he halted on the edge of the jungle, and all ears listened to the tap of the drummer's drum.

But this time there came no answer from the house of the witch-doctor.

The drum tapped and tapped, but only its own echo replied, and at last the tapping ceased.

Mofolongo, listening, ground his teeth with rage. This was, so far as he could see, audacious defiance on the part of the witch-doctor, and designed to make him look a small man in the eyes of his people.

He glanced round at the grim and troubled faces of his soldiers. It was in his mind that if he ordered them to go with their spears and slay the ju-ju man in his house they would fear to obey, though disobedience was death. All other orders they would obey, even to the slaying of kith and kin, but the Wise One they dared not touch. And he knew that if Mluki-Mluki was to die, it was his own hand that must strike the blow.

He called to a slave who brought him his war shield and the fighting-spear with which he had slain the chief of the Biribi in battle.

Without a word, but with his face working with rage, Mofolongo took shield and spear, and strode down the long street.

All eyes followed him, and a murmur ran through the crowded Lukuli, like the wind in the forest.

"Mofolonga goes to slay the Wise One!"

And the Lukuli waited with beating hearts for the result.

Mofolongo strode up the path to the witch-doctor's house, but his heart, in spite of his fury, was heavy in his breast.

For, like the rest of the Lukuli, he feared the magic of the devil-doctor, and the shadows of the jungle were haunted, to his eyes, by strange shapes and peering eyes of ghostly creatures, the unearthly helpers of Mluki-Mluki.

He came at last into the clearing before the witch-doctor's huts, where the great lava rock—the stone of sacrifice—lay glimmering in the moonlight.

But there was no victim stretched on the stone of sacrifice, and of Mluki-Mluki and his torturers he saw nothing. He stopped before the huts and called out with a loud voice:

"O Mluki-Mluki, come forth and let my eyes see you, for I, Mofolongo, have come hither to slay you with my spear."

There was no answer; a deathly silence reigned in the house and in the surrounding jungle.

He waited long, and then, with desperate courage, he entered the hut of the witch-doctor.

He found it empty, and, in surprise and alarm, he searched the other huts. But the four slaves of Mluki-Mluki, the torturers who helped him in his fearful work, were not to be seen; neither was there a sign of Grant Strong, the white man who had been handed over to Mluki-Mluki to die.

And then a suspicion of the truth came to Mofolongo. He glared about him with searching eyes, and in the brilliant light of the moon he read many tracks in the clearing, and he knew that he was looking at the tracks of white men—for he knew that white men covered their feet and did not walk with naked soles like the Lukuli.

A spasm of rage shook him from head to foot.

White men had been there, other than

Grant Strong. They had come and gone, and they had taken the doomed man away with them. And it was easy to guess that they had slain Mluki-Mluki and his torturers. That was why the witch-doctor had been silent—because his voice had been silenced for ever. The magic of Mluki-Mluki had not been strong enough to save him from the white men—neither him nor his slaves.

Choking with rage, Mofolongo strode away by the bush-path again and came into sight of his people.

"O Lukuli, I have seen the footsteps of the Mzungu in the house of Mluki-Mluki!" he said. "The white men have come and they have slain the Wise One and taken away the one who was to die. Let my soldiers take spear and shield and follow me, and let them know that if the Mzungu escapes alive from this land my terrible wrath shall be quenched in blood!"

And with spear and shield the Lukuli streamed out of the city by the hundred, to follow through the forest the track of the fugitives who fled towards the rising sun.

CHAPTER 38.

From the Jaws of Death!

THE hot wind blew down from the slopes of the low, sandy hills, burning and stinging the faces of the safari.

They faced it with bent heads, panting for breath, and tramped steadily on with weary limbs and aching eyes.

For a night and the greater part of a day the safari had pushed on without a halt. They dared not halt, when any moment might bring fierce black faces into view behind.

But at last Grant Strong halted.

"We have a breathing-space," said the hunter. "We are weary, and we are hungry. Mpoko, light the cooking-fire."

Mpoko's eyes grew wide with wonder, but he obeyed at once. In a small open space in the jungle he gathered sticks and lighted the cooking-fire—and the smoke of it rolled over the jungle—a sure guide to the eyes of the Lukuli. For the fierce wind from the hills caught it and blew it in a straight line back towards the faces of the pursuers.

But the Scouts were glad to rest their aching limbs, and to eat and drink. They sat and sipped tepid water from their cans, and ate the roasted plantains that Mpoko served out. And the rest and the food brought new life and energy to them.

For half an hour the halt lasted, and by that time they could hear the Lukuli in the jungle behind them, calling to one another as they leaped and darted among the tall elephant grass and thorny bushes.

Grant Strong rose to his feet.

"March!" he said.

Weary but refreshed, the safari marched. Grant Strong signed to Bobo to lead the way, and after the giant Kikuyu, Lyn and Pip and Fatty trailed on. Mpoko was about to tread out the embers of the cooking-fire, but the hunter's hand restrained him.

"Leave it burning," he said.

Mpoko stared blankly, for it was second nature with the bushman to tread out every spark lest a jungle fire should follow. But he bowed his head and obeyed, and at a sign from the hunter followed the safari.

Lyn looked back, but Grant Strong was now hidden in the jungle behind.

His heart was heavy with anxiety and doubt, but he had his orders, and he obeyed them. The safari tramped steadily on.

Then at last came a pattering of footsteps behind, and Grant Strong came rapidly up.

There was a grim, almost terrible expression on the face of the hunter.

"Push on!" he said.

They swung on up the slope, the fierce, hot wind searing their faces. But they had no hope now of escaping the Lukuli. For the half-hour's halt had brought the savages too near, and only a miracle could prevent them overtaking the fugitives. And when they came

the odds would be hundreds to one, and there was no hope.

"Halt!" said Grant Strong suddenly.

"O Bwana," said Bobo, "I see that it is your will that we should die under the spears of the Lukuli."

"O foolish Kikuyu," answered the hunter, "look back, and tell me what your eyes see in the Lukuli land."

The safari faced round. Behind them, on the lower slopes of the hill, was a rolling mass of smoke, with sparks and tongues of flame darting through it.

Lyn gasped.

"The jungle's on fire!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Pip.

And then the safari understood.

Not a wisp of smoke, not a single spark, came towards them. For the fierce wind that had tormented them so long stood their friend now. It tore past them, beating back the fire in the faces of their pursuers. Between them and the Lukuli the jungle was burning, and in the faces of their foes was a roaring furnace.

"Oh, my hat!" stuttered Fatty. "That was the game, was it?"

Lyn caught his breath as he stared back at the burning jungle.

Dry as tinder, after many days without rain, the elephant grass caught the flames, and right and left the fire spread with terrible swiftness. Back in the faces of the Lukuli it went, driven by the wind, in masses of smoke and pillars of flames.

No living man could pass that fiery barrier; indeed, it was only by the swiftest flight back the way they had come, that the Lukuli could hope to save themselves from being engulfed by the flames. And not all of them, swift as they might be, could escape, for the fire was swift, driven by the wind, and the safari knew that already many of the fighting-men of Mofolongo must be perishing.

Grant Strong drew a deep breath.

"It was a terrible resource," he said, "but life is dear, and it was not written that a Mzungu should roast on the cooking-fire of Mofolongo. Forward!"

And the safari swung on, safe now from the pursuit of the Lukuli.

Many perils still lay about the safari, for the way lay through wild and untamed lands. But day by day they drew nearer to home, and at last the forest ways grew familiar to their eyes, and they crossed into the British land of Uganda, and at length they trod once more the shady streets of Masumpwe.

THE END.

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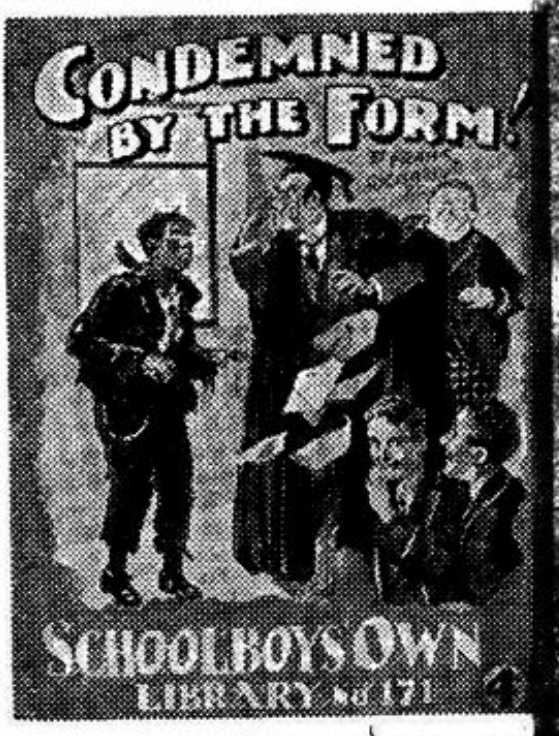

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