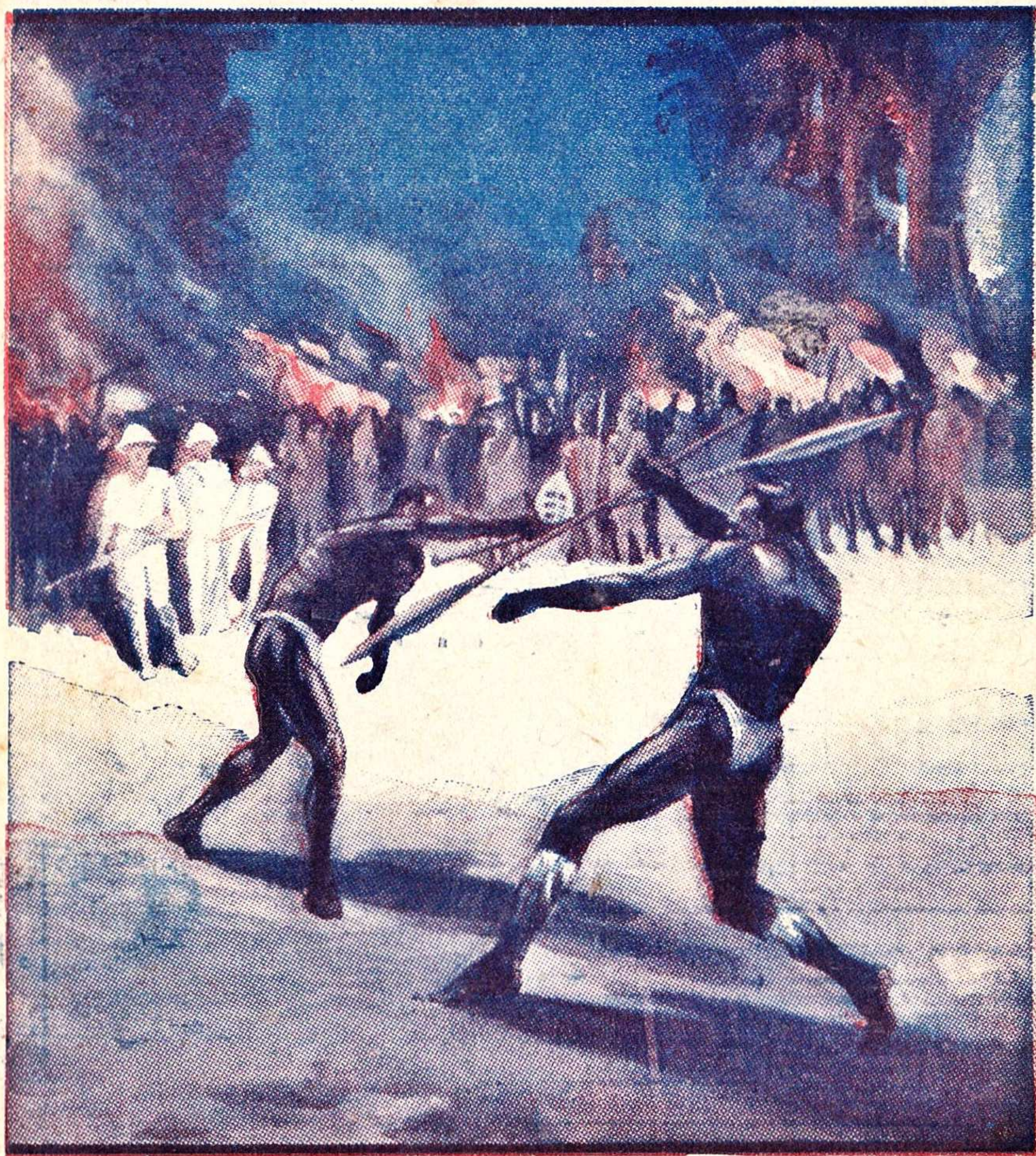


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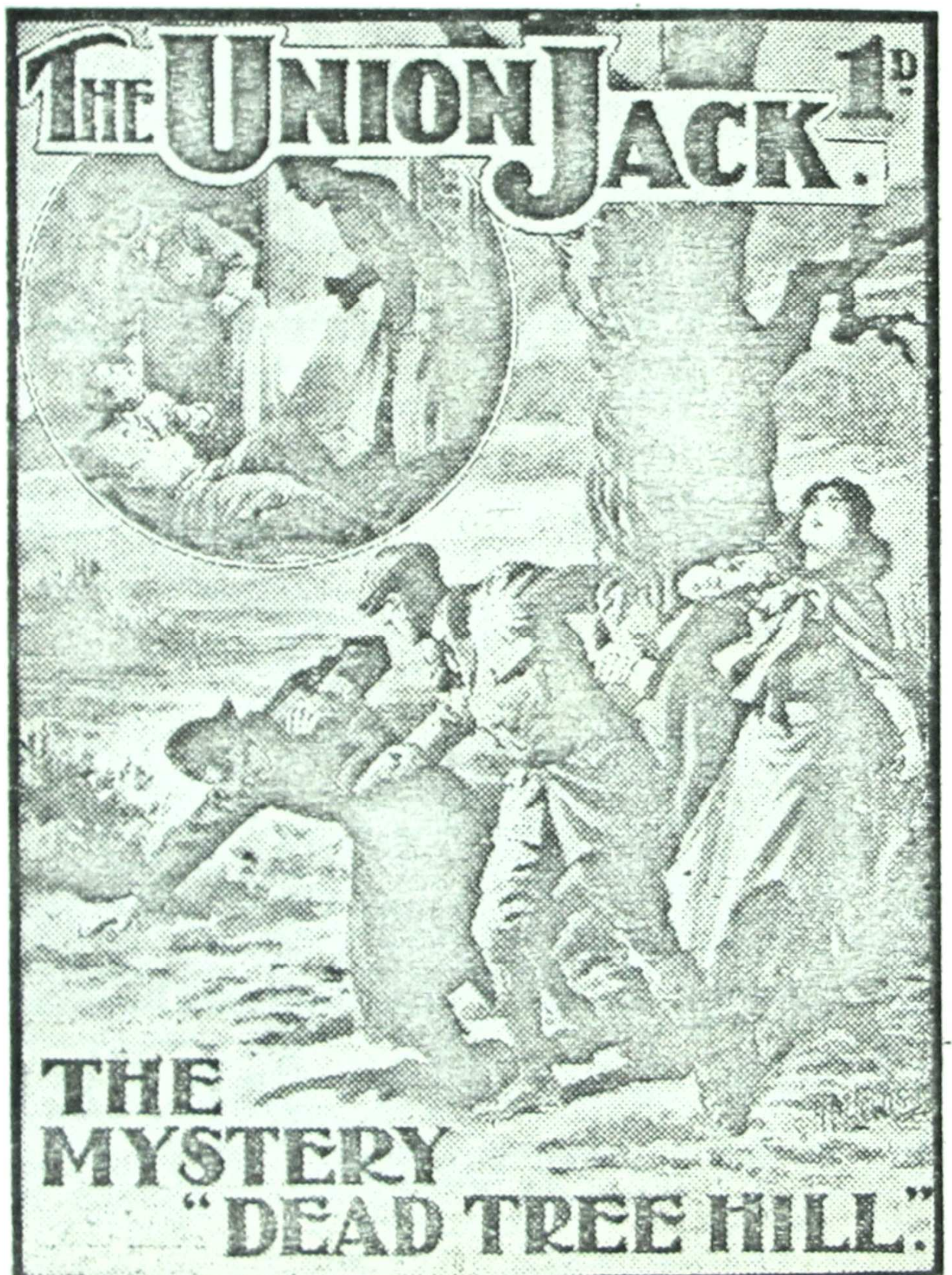
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THE IVORY SEEKERS!

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by the Author of "The Manor House Mystery," "The House With the Double Moat," "The Sheriff of Blazing Gulch," etc.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH THE GUV'NOR AND I JOURNEY TO NAIROBI, AND MEET A LAUGUID INDIVIDUAL ANSWERING TO THE NAME OF DORRIE—HE LAYS A HEAP GOOD PROPOSITION BEFORE US—AND WE DECIDE TO GO UP COUNTRY TO KUTANALAND.

OF course, we had no business in Mombasa at all, really. We didn't want to be there. It was just a question of necessity. The old schooner slung us ashore, as it were, and left us there—practically on our uppers.

You see, the guv'nor and I had been torpedoed. I don't mean that, exactly, though. A chap can't be torpedoed, can he? At least, there wouldn't be much left of him afterwards if he was! And the guv'nor and I were quite whole.

Mr. Nelson Lee and I, Nipper (with a capital "N," don't forget), had been out to India in connection with some criminal affair which I don't intend to go into this trip. Some other time, perhaps, I'll spin the yarn. It's a good 'un.

At present I'm going to set down what happened in Africa. In case you don't know it, Mombasa is an important seaport on the coast of British East Africa, and its population, I believe, is something like thirty thousand, mostly natives, of course. There are two fine harbours, and the pier at Kilindini is connected with the Uganda Railway.

But I'm off the track; this isn't a guide-book.

Well, that's the long and the short of it. Nelson Lee and I were in Mombasa, without luggage, and rather infuriated. The weather, of course, was hot. It generally is out there. As I mentioned before, we had no desire to be in Mombasa; it was simply a matter of "couldn't help it."

While our ship had been calmly walking across the Indian Ocean we had encountered a German submarine. The liner wasn't armed, or there might have been a different ending to that encounter. This happened before the Government awoke to the fact that all ocean-going ships ought to be armed.

Of course, we got a torpedo slap amidships, and that caused trouble. How that infernal submarine found its way into the Indian Ocean puzzled me, but it was there right enough. I expect it's in a different place now!

Nelson Lee and I found ourselves in one of the big lifeboats with about twenty other people. Everybody was saved, let me add. The German rotters weren't able to gloat over the number of innocent people they'd murdered.

A blow came on; it wasn't exactly a storm, but it separated our boat from the rest, and we were finally picked up by an old trading schooner. This vessel took us down to Mombasa, and there we stopped for a bit.

It would be a week or more before a ship came along which would take us home. We'd lost all our luggage and clothes, and were thundering wild. Still, it wasn't any good making a song

about it, and so we kept as cheerful as possible.

The gov'nor, of course, was able to get all the money he wanted, after a little amount of formality. And it was while he was engaged upon this pleasant task—the task of getting hold of some money, I mean—that he made an interesting discovery. He told me about it when he returned to the hotel.

"You know Lord Dorrimore, don't you, Nipper?" he asked.

"Of course, I do. One of your best pals, gov'nor."

"He's here, young 'un."

"Oh, I say, that's ripping!" I exclaimed delightedly. "I'm just busting to see somebody fresh—somebody we know, I mean. Why didn't you bring him along with you, sir?"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"You're a bit too speedy for me, Nipper," he said. "When I said 'here,' I meant that Dorrimore's in British East Africa. By what I can hear, he's loafing about Nairobi, fed up with the world in general and himself in particular. I've a good mind to run up to Nairobi, and give the old bounder a surprise."

"What about getting home?" I asked.

"Oh, we can afford to waste a week or two," said Lee. "After all, Nairobi's only about two hundred and eighty miles away—and there's a first-class railway, don't forget. I'm for doing the trip. What do you say?"

"Any old thing," I replied cheerfully. "We've been torpedoed, and landed in this fix, so it doesn't matter a brass button when we get home. And I should certainly like to see Lord Dorrimore again."

And so we travelled to Nairobi, on the Uganda Railway. It's a decent town, and is the capital of the province of Ukamba, and—I believe—the administrative centre of the British East Africa Protectorate. And we found quite a crowd of Europeans there—Britishers, for the most part.

We arrived in the evening of an extra-hot day, and I was pleased that we'd decided to come. I'd never been to Nairobi before, and I'm always keen to see fresh places. That's one of my weaknesses.

Well, to cut it short—because I'm anxious to get to the real business—we

ran Dorrimore to earth at the Wanderers' Hotel. His lordship, let me add, was a man of about forty-five, although he looked younger. He was a "heap big" hunter, and had killed about everything there was to be killed in most parts of the word—a few samples of each variety, I mean.

And, naturally, when a fellow is hunting all the year round, he sometimes gets fed-up. As it happened, we didn't have to send our cards in to Dorrimore. We found him sprawling in a hammock, which was slung between two of the veranda-posts of the hotel. He was lying on his back, with a cigarette in his mouth, and was apparently doing his level best to gaze into heaven. At all events, he was staring at the sky dreamily and languidly, just beyond the roof of the verandah.

He didn't take any notice of the airily-clad couple who halted before the hammock. That same airily-clad couple, however, grinned and glanced at one another. Then the gov'nor gently delivered a tap with the toe of his shoe upon the bulging under portion of the hammock.

Lord Dorrimore looked then—and he looked fiercely, too.

"Of all the infernal impudence——"

He stopped abruptly, and gasped. Then he jerked himself out of the hammock with the agility of a monkey. Next second he was wringing the gov'nor's hand, and slapping my back with unnecessary force.

"Great Scott! It's Lee—good old Lee!" he roared delightedly. "And Nipper, too! What on earth are you fellows doing here? I thought you were in that hole of a London, stewin' away at your rotten detective cases! This is rippin'! My dear chaps, I'm overjoyed to meet you again!"

His pleasure was as obvious as the day, and Nelson Lee chuckled.

"Surprise you, eh?"

"Surprise me!" echoed Lord Dorrimore. "I'm not sure that I'm not dreamin', even now. I was going to slaughter the ruffian who kicked me just now. But, my dear old Lee, if you booted me clean out of the hammock I should not have minded a scrap! I need buckin' up, in fact. Gad! This is great!"

We all sat down in deck chairs.

"You see, Dorrie, it's this way," said the gov'nor, lighting a cigarette. "We oughtn't to be up here at all."

"Ought or not, you're here—and that's good enough," said Dorrie cheerfully.

Nelson Lee told him how our ship had met with disaster, and how we'd been carted to Mombasa.

"And you came up to Nairobi just to see me?" asked his lordship.

"Yes. You ought to feel flattered."

"By Jove! I should say I do!" declared Dorrimore. "It was jolly of you, Lee. In fact, you've arrived just in time to save me from a horrid fate. I was sickenin' for a dose of melancholy."

"Anything the matter?" asked Nelson Lee, smiling.

"Oh, I'm tired of rottin' about," said Dorrie. "That's just it, Lee. I'm fed up to the neck with hangin' round, doin' nothing. They wouldn't have me in the Army—wouldn't look at me! Just because two of my fingers got chewed away by a frisky lioness—and because I'm over the age. Unadulterated piffle, I call it!"

He plaintively showed us his right hand. Two fingers were missing, but the hand looked businesslike, nevertheless.

"I told 'em I could shoot as straight as any man livin'," went on his lordship warmly. "But I was declined with thanks. I'd been so cocksure of gettin' into the fun that I was stunned for a bit. And I've been loafin' about for months past; I've been bored to tears. Thank goodness, you've come, Lee."

"I don't mean to stay long——"

"Rot!" said Dorrie. "You're goin' to stay—— Oh, we won't talk about that. And Nipper, here. The young rascal's looking as saucy as ever he did, an' fit for any old adventure that happens along."

I grinned, and before I could speak our companion slapped his knee.

"Any old adventure, I said!" he cried, his eyes glittering. "By Jove! you're the very man for the job, Lee! I've been looking about for a man for weeks an' weeks, and now you've dropped along. You'll have to come!"

"Come where?" smiled the gov'nor.

"Up country—to Kutaland!"

"Where's that?" I asked eagerly.

Dorrie waved his hand vaguely to-

wards the back of the house though Kutaland was just round the corner.

"Up," he said—"up through the bush."

"Well, that's lucid, anyhow," I remarked. "But what do we want to go there for, anyhow? Just to see the manly figures of the natives?"

Lord Dorrimore's eyes gleamed with inward excitement.

"No, you young fathead," he said. "We're after ivory!"

"Ivory?"

"Tons of it," said Dorrie. "All ready to fetch!"

"After the elephants are killed!" chuckled the gov'nor. "I know your game, old man. You want me to go elephant-shooting. Sorry, but it can't be done. A trip like that would take six months——"

"My dear old professor, you're right off the rails!" said Dorrie calmly. "The ivory's all killed—it's stacked in piles, ready to be fetched away! All we've got to do is to—to lay hold of it."

Nelson Lee grinned.

"None of your tricks," he said. "You're just trying to make the bait as palatable as possible. You want to lure me on, and once I'm fairly out in the bush, you'll keep me in the wilds for months on end."

"I never knew such a chap for arguin'," sighed his lordship. "You were always a beggar to convince, Lee. Look here, I'd better spin the yarn fully. It's only short, anyhow. Did you ever meet Dick Spalding?"

"Never heard of him."

"The Honourable Richard Augustus Wellborne Spalding—that was his full name—a pretty tough mouthful, too," said Dorrie. "Well, old Dick was a great pal of mine; we went on huntin' trips together scores of times. When the war broke out he was up in the Kutana country, after ivory. It's a wonderful country for sport, you know. Well, Dick found piles of ivory—had an amazing run of luck, in fact. But he was compelled to leave the whole job lot up there, and scoot for his life."

"Why? Couldn't he bring the stuff with him?" asked the gov'nor.

"You see, professor," replied Dorrie, who always called Lee "professor" for some unearthly reason. "You see, it was like this. Those hogs of Germans

had been up to some rotten game—poisonin' the minds of the natives against the British. It was a regular propaganda. The Kutanas are decent niggers, on the whole, but they're liable to get troublesome. They got wind of this German poison, an' the chiefs held a heap big palaver-talky. They decided that the Huns were going to wipe us British off the map. I don't blame 'em—they didn't know any better. But it was bad for old Dick, who was up there at the time. He had to clear out—quick. And, of course, he left his ivory behind. You won't believe me, but that ivory is worth about fifteen thousand pounds!"

"Phew!" I said. "There must be a lot of it!"

"Piles an' piles," said Lord Dorriemore. "Well, Dick Spalding reached this town after months of hardship, an' found me wrestlin' with the military people—he found me ravin', in fact. And he grinned hugely when he told me that he was straight off for the brin' line. I felt like a bad boy, who's been left out of a bank holiday treat! But poor old Dick went under."

"Ah, I was expecting to hear that," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"One of the best chaps breathin', too," said Dorrie. "He went under—shot through the lungs. He was brought back in a dying condition, and I learned that he'd been winged. In a couple of days I was by his side, and just managed to have a few words with him before he went."

His lordship was silent for a few moments.

"Poor old chap, he was as cheerful as anything," he went on, after a bit. "Told me he was glad he'd done 'his bit.' Then he went on to say that the ivory he'd cached was mine for the fetchin'. I didn't care a hang about the stuff—then. And for months I never thought about it."

"And now you want to make the trip?" asked the gov'nor.

"That's it. The Kutanas are as safe as eggs now," said Dorrie. "The Germans have been in it in the neck lately, and the Kutanas, consequently, are all in favour of the British. Of course, they're really outside our administration, you know. All the same, they're friendly."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"Kutanaland's a goodish way 'up country," he said.

"Man alive," we can do the trip in less than a fortnight!" said Dorrie eagerly.

"Perhaps we could," said the gov'nor. "Then there's a fortnight for preparation, another fortnight arranging about the ivory, a stray week or two to allow for delays, and a month to get back. Why, Dorrie, the trip would cover three months, at the best!"

"Suppose it did?" growled his lordship.

"I can't afford the time."

"Rot! You're not so busy as all that," grumbled our companion. "Suppose that fool submarine had sunk you? You're lucky to be alive! You might have been shoved in a place where you couldn't do any more work at all. I tell you, Lee, you're absolutely in need of a holiday. You look positively ill!"

I grinned, and the gov'nor chuckled. He was about as healthy as a prize-fighter.

"That's just it, Dorrie," he exclaimed gravely. "I'm too ill to think of undertaking a trip—"

His lordship laughed ruefully.

"You know I was rottin'!" he said. "But, seriously, old man, you've got to come with me. And Nipper, too. What do you say, Nipper?"

"Why, we'll go!" I said promptly.

"That's the way," cried Dorrie. "What's the matter with your pig-headed gov'nor? Can't you say anything to make him change his silly mind? You two fellows have come up to Nairobi, and I'm not goin' to let you leave until you've been up to get that ivory. I can't go alone!" he added plaintively.

"Can't you get somebody else—"

"With you on the spot?" snapped Dorrie. "That's likely, isn't it? Besides, there's nobody to ask. One fellow offered to lend me his services—he got wind of the projected trip, although he didn't know what the object was."

"Well, why can't he keep you company, if you're so partial—"

"I wouldn't touch the fellow with a pitchfork—he's a Hun!"

"What's he doing here, then?"

"Well, he calls himself a Swiss," mended Dorrie. "Perhaps he is—but I don't believe it. His name's Karl

Fischer and that sounds quite Hunnish enough for me. Besides, he's a regular blackguard."

"Is he well known up here?"

"If it comes to that, he's known throughout East Africa and Uganda and the Upper Congo," admitted Lord Dorrimore. "In his way, Fischer's a first-class big-game hunter. But I don't like the man—he's a blackguard, as I said. Some little time ago I was talkin' to a Britisher about a trip into the Kutana country, and I suppose Fischer heard of it. In fact, he may smell ivory, and I'll bet my boots he's got some treacherous idea in his dirty head. The way he keeps botherin' me shows that he suspects the thing's a big venture."

His lordship turned to me.

"You're game for the trip, aren't you, Nipper?" he went on. "Remember, we're after a fifteen thousand quid prize—and it's a cert."

"Oh, I'm game!" I said, at once. "But the guv'nor—"

"The guv'nor will have to be persuaded!" said Dorrie grimly. "I've got a handy pair of fists, and if he doesn't give me a flat answer—and the right answer—I'll start business—"

"But, my dear man, give me time!" protested Lee.

"A chap like you doesn't need time!" said his lordship relentlessly. "You're famous for makin' up your mind quickly. You'll make ten times as much money out of this thing as you would in a year of your old detective rot!"

Nelson Leo chuckled.

"Oh, well, as you're so pressing," he said, thawing. "I'll think over—"

"Think over—think over!" roared Dorrimore. "That's no good to me—you might think the wrong way if you're left to yourself! Now, then, what's it to be, professor? I give you ten seconds."

This time the guv'nor laughed aloud.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "I'll humour you, you old humbug! When you first mentioned the trip, I flatly intended refusing. But you've got such a confoundedly long tongue—"

"I've been exercisin' it tremendously," grinned Dorrie. "Come inside, and have something to drink. I've got your answer, an' that's enough for the time bein'. You're both comin' along. Good men! I can promise you some sport!"

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH KARL FISCHER BUTTS IN UPON US, AND RECEIVES HIS DISMISSAL—I SMELL TREACHERY, AND THINK THINGS—WE ARE INTRODUCED TO A MOUNTAIN OF BLACKNESS NAMED UMLOSI, AND, LATER ON, WE FLOAT SERENELY INTO AN AMBUSH, AND THE SITUATION PROMISES TO BECOME UNCOMFORTABLY EXCITING.

LORD DORRIMORE had worked the thing beautifully. I, of course, was as keen as mustard on the trip. But I'd had an idea in the back of my mind that the guv'nor would jib.

Well, he had jibbed, as a matter of fact, but Dorrie simply forced his hand. And it was settled that we should go up into the Kutana country. If the journey took us three months, I shouldn't care.

We went into the hotel—quite a decent one—and drank one another's health. Incidentally, we fed our faces thoroughly, and the grub was first class. Then we went out on to the verandah again, to hold a "palaver," as Dorrie called it.

He and the guv'nor lit big cigars, and we all settled ourselves in our chairs. It was quite dark now, of course, but there were heaps of lights all about. We weren't afraid of Zeppelins here! We weren't afraid of 'em anywhere, come to that!

I felt inclined for a stroll round the town, but I didn't want to miss the jaw. So I stayed where I was. And, after all, it was very enjoyable, lolling there in the cool of the evening.

"I'm feelin' bucked up tremendously," said Lord Dorrimore, puffing at his cigar. "Tell you what, Lee, the sight of your face has done me more good than a dozen doctors could have done."

"You didn't want a doctor, anyhow," remarked the guv'nor.

"No, perhaps not. But I was bored to the dooce with everything in general," went on Dorrie. "I'd often thought about goin' after that ivory, but I didn't hanker after the trip alone. You're just the man I wanted. Nipper, of course, is a bit of make-weight, as it were."

"I'm honoured, I'm sure," I said.

"So you ought to be, young 'un," his lordship observed. "It isn't every fellow who gets the opportunity of makin' money as quickly as this—for we're all goin' equal shares, of course. That's fair!"

"Oh, no," put in Lee. "Nipper and I are just in for the fun of the thing——"

"Rot! And, anyhow, we're not going to squabble over the spoils before we've got 'em!" said Dorrie. "Now, we shall want a good handful of carriers. I can lay my fingers on a crowd of boys right at once. I think—— Oh, hang!"

"That's a funny thing to think!" I grieved.

"I believe that infernal Fischer is just comin' along!" snapped Dorrie irritably. "Dooce take the fellow! Is he going to bother me again? Hang on here a minute, you two. I'll pop along——"

"Let him come here," interrupted Lee. "I'm curious to see the fellow."

"Oh, all right!"

Dorrimore must have had good eyesight, because I couldn't see anybody for the moment. But, of course, our friend knew Fischer well by sight, and he had singled him out as he came along the street.

As I turned I saw a tall man, dressed in neat white drill, and a pith helmet, turn into the hotel entrance. He paused as he was about to enter, and looked in our direction. The lights from the windows showed us up clearly.

The stranger came along the verandah. "Good-evening, Lord Dorrimore!" he said, in good English. "I didn't know you were engaged——"

"That's all right," said Dorrie curtly. "Did you want me?"

"I wanted to tell you that I've got my boys all ready for immediate departure," said the other. "If you are thinking of going up country, my services are fully at your disposal. I can be ready——"

"Hang it, Fischer! I told you before that I didn't want you!" said Dorrie bluntly. "There's nothin' doin'. Good-evening!"

That was short and sharp and sweet, anyhow; and it was impossible to mistake his lordship's meaning.

I saw Karl Fischer bite his lip, but a glitter came into his pale blue eyes. He was fair, and had a neatly cut beard. Quite a decent-looking man, in his way, but there was something about him that wasn't pleasant. He looked German all over.

"I heard that you were after ivory," he began.

"Oh, did you?" snapped Dorrimore. "Who told you that yarn?"

"Is it not true?"

"That's not your business," said our

companion. "Look here, Fischer, you're a pesterin' nuisance, if you want to know the truth! I believe in tellin' a man the straight truth. I don't like you, and I don't want your offers of help. I'm makin' all the arrangements I want to make without you."

Fischer did not reply. He stood quite still for a moment, and then turned abruptly on his heel and left the verandah. But, before going, he gave the gov'nor and me a look of fierce anger which showed his true feelings.

"It's the only way to talk to a fellow like that!" growled Dorrimore. "Hints are waste-ful, and politeness is worse than useless. I have told him a dozen times that I didn't want him, an' yet he comes again!"

"I didn't care for his appearance," said Nelson Leo thoughtfully.

"The man's a German, if I ever saw one," said Dorrie.

"It's rather a pity you spoke so roughly," went on the detective. "He's got a certain amount of power, I suppose, and his enmity is directed against you now. He may stir up trouble——"

"Let him stir!" said his lordship. "He can't do any harm. Somehow or other, he's got wind of that ivory board, and he's naturally keen to lay his dirty fingers on it. Well, he won't. It's safely hidden away; not even the Kutanas know where it is, in fact. Poor old Dick made sure of the stuff!"

"But surely you're not suggesting that we should go up to that region without knowing where the ivory actually is?" I protested. "You say that the stuff's safely hidden away, and that the Kutanas themselves don't know where it is——"

"I'm not such a rampin' idiot as you give me credit for, Nipper," said Dorrie calmly. "You see, I know just where the ivory is stored—know the spot to half-an-inch. There's only one other man who knows it, an' I'll tell you about him in a minute or two. The ivory, you see, had to be concealed very carefully by poor Dick's boys, for at that time the Kutanas were hostile, and they would have looted the prize without a scruple. But the Kutanas don't know where the ivory is cached."

"But you do?" observed the gov'nor. Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"That ivory is exactly five miles due north-west of Zenobu," he exclaimed.

"Eat lot of good telling us that, isn't it?" I said, with the familiar ease of ad-

dress we had rapidly fallen into the habit of using. Somehow, a chap couldn't be formal and stiff with old Dorrie. "We know just about as much as we did before!"

"If you'd only give me a chance to get my chin into proper working order, you might possibly hear things," replied Dorrie calmly. "Zenobu is the chief kraal of the Kutana tribe. It's a fair-sized village, but not so advanced as the native kraals around these parts. The Kutanas, in fact, are still pretty savage when they like. But just now, by all I hear, they'll welcome us with open arms."

"And put us into the boiling-pot, perhaps," I suggested.

"You young ass! We don't cultivate cannibals out here now!" grinned Dorrie more. "You're thinking of those wild and woolly adventure tales you used to read years ago. All the same, some of these niggers can be pretty ugly when they choose. But I was talkin' about Zenobu, wasn't I?"

"Yes, and about the ivory," said the gov'nor.

"That ivory—tons of it, mind you—is all stacked away safely and securely within a roomy cavern," said Dorrie.

"The spot is just five miles north-west of Zenobu, and a chap couldn't possibly mistake it, because the cavern is placed at the base of a high juttin' rock which old Dick called Big Ben. So far as I could gather, there's no clock in it, but it's shaped something after the style of the old chap we know at Westminster."

"It's rather queer the Kutanas didn't find out that Spalding had hidden all that ivory there, in that cavern," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "A large pile of ivory, you know, can't be shoved in a little crevice like a bag full of diamonds. And, surely, they know that the cavern exists?"

Dorrie nodded.

"That's just where Dick's brains came in," he said. "He knew jolly well that that ivory would be snifled out pretty quickly, and so he chose that cavern for a special reason. The Kutana people have got a fool notion that the pinnacle of rock is 'tagati'—that it's protected by evil spirits. You wouldn't get a Kutana to go near the place for all the coloured glass beads an' brass wire in the world. They're rather partial to glass beads an' brass wire—especially the ladies! The Kutanas regard Big Ben as a kind of glorified Chamber of Hor-

rors. Wouldn't enter that cavern if nerrin' lions were after 'em!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Under those circumstances, I can understand that the ivory is safe," he said. "And this rock-pinnacle is just five miles north-west of Zenobu? You said that only one other man knew—"

"Hallo! What's that?" I asked suddenly, leaning forward.

"That twig crackin'?" asked Dorrie lazily. "Some prowlin' dog, I s'pose."

"It's a man!" I yelled. "After him!"

We were at the corner of the verandah, and on one side of us there were clumps of thick bushes. On the other side there was a kind of Oriental garden—the hotel proprietor had rather fancy notions in the gardening line. And I had distinctly seen a dim human form pass a spot where two of the bushes didn't meet. Somebody had been crouching behind the hedge—listening to our pow-wow!

The gov'nor was out of his chair in a flash, and he and I burst through the hedge in a twinkling, leaving Lord Dorrimore sitting up in his chair gasping. He wasn't quite so active as we were.

I was just in time to see a man scuttling down the garden path, towards the rear, where all was darkness. There was a fairly high fence down there, made of some thin sort of wood. And as Lee and I ran we saw our quarry jumping at the fence with surprising agility.

The gov'nor forged ahead, and I saw him leap up. The unknown man had succeeded in getting over, but Nelson Lee grabbed his hand—his left hand—as he was in the act of releasing his hold upon the fence.

It was rather curious. The fellow had escaped—we couldn't see him—but the gov'nor was hanging on to his paw like a leech.

"Jump over, Nipper!" panted Lee. "I've got him for the minute!"

Then, as I was about to jump, I heard the detective give a little exclamation of sheer astonishment. Next second a little electric torch was out of Lee's pocket, and a beam of light was playing upon the stranger's fist.

"By James!" roared Nelson Lee.

I was on the top of the fence now, and I was just about to leap over when I saw the dim figure of the unknown wriggle like an eel. He just managed to

wrenched himself free, and in a jiffy he was racing into the darkness.

And then, of course, I hopped down. But disaster came—as it always does come when a chap is in a hurry. My coat caught on a nail, or something—perhaps a piece of sharp wood—and I hung there, roaring with fury, but helpless.

The only way was to wriggle back on top of the fence. I did this after a struggle, and by that time the fugitive had vanished. It would have been idiotic to follow. And the gov'nor ordered me to get down.

"But the blighter's escaping!" I ejaculated hotly.

"My dear lad, you can't find him now," said the detective. "He's sprinted clear off, and it would be a waste of energy to—"

"What did you let him go for?" I asked indignantly.

"He wriggled—"

"But you had two hands to hold on to his one," I went on. "What the thump did you flash out your torch for? You didn't recognise him by his paw, did you?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That's exactly what I did do, young 'un!" he replied calmly.

"By Jing! What's all the merry excitement?" panted Dorrie, running up rather languidly. "You fellers havin' a game of hide-an'-seek, or what? Silly idea, laggin' away down here in this heat! It was only some fool nigger—"

"He was a European," I struck in.

"Oh, was he, by Jove!" said Dorrimore. "That's queer! Great Scott! It wasn't that pig of a Fischer, was it? He wouldn't be above spyin' if he thought he could learn anything. And we were jawin' about that infernal ivory—"

"Let's get back," said the gov'nor quietly. "I've got something to say—something rather important, Dorrie."

Lee's tone was curious, and I wondered what was the matter. We passed up the garden, with all its luxuriant growths, and regained the verandah. Then we squatted down again.

"Well, what's the trouble?" asked his lordship.

"I'm sorry, old man, but don't think Nipper and I can make the trip with you," said Nelson Lee, to my amazement. "You'll have to find—"

"Can't make the trip with me?" gasped Dorrie blankly.

"Oh, the gov'nor's joking!" I began.

"I'm not joking, Nipper!"

"Then you're mad—clean, ravin' mad!" declared Dorrimore. "Why, you promised me faithfully that you'd join in the fun! Look here, Lee! That won't do, you know!" went on his lordship protestingly. "You can't change your mind!"

"I have just made a discovery which alters the aspect of everything," cut in Nelson Lee quietly. "I'm sure you'll release me from my promise when I explain, Dorrimore. To tell you the truth, I am quite startled."

"No more than I am!" growled Dorrie. "What the dooce is your discovery?"

"Owing to Nipper's keenness, we discovered that a man was crouching behind those bushes—and that man was undoubtedly Karl Fischer!" declared Nelson Lee grimly.

"Well, that's not much of a discovery," said our companion. "I figured that out in my own head, Lee. Of course, it was Fischer!"

"You're in such a hurry, old man!" smiled the gov'nor. "When Nipper and I ran after the eavesdropper I had no suspicion of the truth, but I now know that Karl Fischer is none other than Otto Johann Ganz, a man who was very badly wanted by the British police, three years ago, for a murder of particular violence and revolting bestiality. I was engaged upon that case myself; it was one of my failures, Dorrie. Ganz eluded me completely."

Lord Dorrimore looked over at me with a surprised expression in his eyes; and I was no less astonished. Otto Johann Ganz! I remembered the case distinctly. The awful Hun had killed a well-known diamond merchant in the most shocking manner; it was about the most cold-blooded affair I had ever heard of. Ganz had sheered off with a lot of diamonds, and the gov'nor had been sent on his trail.

Owing to bad luck more than anything else, Nelson Lee had failed to capture the scoundrel. Some people seem to have an idea that the gov'nor is a kind of superhuman being, who can work miracles. He isn't. He's just a man, and now and again he has failures, just as other men have. Lee can't always be successful; but, naturally, I don't boast much about the affairs which pan out badly.

This one I'm referring to had cer-

fairly gone all wrong. Ganz had slipped completely through the gov'nor's fingers, and all efforts to trace him had been futile. Nelson Lee, of course, had been thundering wild; it wasn't nice to be beaten by a German—although the affair happened before the war broke out.

"And now, by all that was wonderful, Otto Johann Ganz had turned up in British East Africa, under the name of Karl Fischer and posing as a Swiss! I could scarcely believe the gov'nor when he made that extraordinary statement.

"Are you sure, sir?" I asked eagerly. "Why, it can't be Ganz! Fischer doesn't look a bit like that awful rotter! Besides, you didn't even see him just now, when you grabbed hold of his hand——"

"The man has altered his appearance to a remarkable extent," put in Nelson Lee quietly. "If I had been on the alert, I am sure I should have recognised his features. But I was scarcely interested, and only gave Fischer a casual glance. Remember, too, it was dusk, and the shadows were rather thick beneath this verandah. At the time I had no suspicion of the truth."

"How did you find out, then?" asked Dorrie interestedly.

"It was known that Ganz had a singular deformity of the third finger of his left hand," replied Nelson Lee. "At one time or other the finger had been smashed, and had been set badly. In consequence there was a curious lump projecting which gave the finger an ugly kink. Once seen, it would be impossible to mistake it. And as I gripped the hand which hung over the fence, I felt that curious deformity."

"By gum!" I gasped.

"In one second the whole truth forced itself upon my brain," went on the gov'nor. "I whipped out my torch, and flashed it upon the hand. That was enough; I knew that the man was Ganz, whatever he may call himself now. It was a pity he escaped, but it couldn't be helped."

"Oh, gov'nor, why didn't you let me rush after him?" I panted.

"Because your run would have been fruitless, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee.

"There is a tract of dense woodland behind this garden, and Ganz would have no difficulty whatever in finding cover. But he is in Nairobi, and I don't think

we shall have much trouble in picking up his trail."

Lord Dorrinore grunted.

"Then what the thunder do you mean by makin' me go hot and cold all over by suggestin' that you can't come up to Kutaland with me?" he asked. "You might consider a chap's feelin's, Lee!"

"My dear Dorrie, I don't see how I can undertake the trip you outlined," replied Lee evenly. "Ganz—or Fischer as he calls himself—will do his best to elude capture. He is a clever man—it would be foolish to say otherwise. And he will make tracks without delay. I'm going after him; I'm going to follow him until I get him!"

"He ain't worth it," growled Dorrie gloomily. "Under the circumstances, of course, I release you from your promise, Lee. But it's—it's rotten! You're leavin' me in the lurch. Why can't you let the hog go his own way——"

Nelson Lee shook his head decidedly.

"That won't do, Dorrie," he replied. "You don't understand this thing as I do. Ganz is one of the most vile creatures on this earth, and he—baffled me. He's not going to baffle me again. Chance has placed it in my power to make a success of a case which was, I admit, an utter failure. If I have to chase him half across the African continent I am going to capture that man and unmask him. I must, Dorrie—I simply must. If I allowed him to go now I should never lift my head up again."

"Yes, I s'pose you're right," said his lordship pessimistically. "And so our pretty little picnic's off the menu, eh? Well, I still say it's rotten. But then, these things will happen. That's the worst of you bein' a giddy policeman! Directly you spot a crook you're off after him without givin' a chap time to breathe. And if I try to knock some sense into your thick skull you're all the more obstinate!"

The gov'nor chuckled.

"I shall have to see about Ganz at once," he said. "Well, Nipper, you haven't had much to say——"

"Too fed-up!" I grunted. "I was dead nuts on that ivory!"

Then, suddenly, I started forward in my chair.

"I say! We may have to go up to the Kutana country, after all!" I burst out excitedly. "I'll bet a quid to an old boot that Ganz will make for that ivory!"

That's what he's after—he wants to lay his filthy paws on it!"

"By James! You may be right there, Nipper!" declared Nelson Lee sharply. "Of course, Ganz was behind those bushes for the purpose of spying. What were you talking about, Dorrie? What were you saying just before Nipper and I chased down the garden?"

"What about that 'tagati' cavern——"
"Of course—of course!" rasped out the gov'nor. "Dorrie, that German brute has discovered where the ivory is situated—he heard you say that it was cached in that rock pinnacle five miles beyond Zenobu——"

"Great glory!" gasped Dorrie. "He's found out the secret, then? I knew he'd sniffed out that I was after ivory, an' now he knows all the details. Why, the pig will be ahead of us if we're not careful! He's got his boys all ready to start, he said!"

This realisation was rather disconcerting—but not at all unwelcome to Lord Dorrmore and me. For it meant that we should probably have to go into Kutaland, after all. The gov'nor would be off like a shot if Ganz had taken that route.

"You were talking about another man who knows the secret?" asked Lee.

"Why, yes—old Umlosi," said Dorrie, with animation. "The old ruffian would do his best to fly into the heavens if I told him to! You see, he was with poor old Dick Spalding when the ivory was packed away, and he is in Nairobi at the present time. A faithful sort of bounder, an' because I was Dick's best friend he's like a giddy slave. Useful, too. He knows the country like a book from end to end."

"But who is the gentleman?" asked the gov'nor.

"Umlosi? Why, a Kutana chief," replied Dorrie. "I s'pose he'd call himself a member of the royal family. Big, brawny chap, with a head like a cannon ball. Rather a big pot in his own way."

"Why didn't he with his own people?" I asked.

"Oh, old Umlosi's a bit of a wanderer," said his lordship. "Talks English pretty well, although he prefers his own lingo, of course. It seems that his brother, Fatoomba, or some such crack-pot name as that, had a bit of a dust-up years ago, and cleared the old king off his throne. Fatoomba politely invited Umlosi to clear out. There was a fight

or something, and Umlosi made tracks. But he's still liked by the Kutana people, and when he goes there he's made welcome. But he and his brother don't get on well together—want to fight every minute, y'know—and so he doesn't go back to the fold very often. As a matter of fact, I believe Umlosi's the legitimate chief of the bally tribe, or—or something. Anyhow, he's a gay old bird, and will help us no end."

Of course, the discovery that Fischer was Otto Ganz, the murderer, altered things more than a bit, and it was doubtful for some little time whether the gov'nor and I would accompany Lord Dorrmore on his ivory hunt. That very night Nelson Lee made all sorts of inquiries, but Ganz (as I shall call him) had made himself decidedly scarce. And the next day was the same; the German certainly wasn't in Nairobi.

Meanwhile, of course, Dorrie was making active preparations for immediate departure, and took it for granted that everything would turn out all right.

And during the evening we were presented to Umlosi. He had brought the news that Otto Ganz had been seen travelling up country, towards Kutaland, with a large force of carriers. The German had had everything in readiness, and had marched off without delay. He was already on the move!

"Then we're going for that ivory, after all?" I asked eagerly.

"No, Nipper. We're going for—Ganz!" replied the gov'nor.

"Oh, call it any old thing you like!" grinned Dorrie delightedly. "You're all comin' along—and that's all that matters. If you trip up the Ganz merchant on the way, so much the better."

"I am after Otto Ganz," said the gov'nor quietly. "If he breaks away into the Congo region, or elsewhere—Nipper and I shall follow. If Ganz makes straight for Zenobu, we shall follow him there. Make no mistake, Dorrie—is Ganz I am centring my attentions upon."

And that was just it. The ivory hunt was a kind of secondary affair now. But I had an inkling that the ivory and Ganz were closely connected; that, by getting on the German's track, we should also carry out Dorrmore's programme.

We were jawing on the hotel verandah, and we now had time to inspect his Highness Umlosi. "His Highness" certainly fitted well, for Umlosi was a

giant of about six-feet-eight. I don't think I've seen many finer natives.

He was wearing nothing except the "moocha" round his middle, and a fine necklace of lions' claws. His skin was dark, and shone like burnished copper. Here and there I spotted long scars—the relics of past battles. Assegai-wounds, I suppose. I saw, too, that he was what the Zulus call a "Keshla." That means a ringed-man. The Kutanas had somewhat similar customs.

A ringed-man means a chap who has attained considerable dignity and power. The ring was worn on his head, and was worked up with the hair, and made of a kind of gum, polished with fat.

"Looks a pretty powerful bounder," I remarked critically.

"Oh, Umlosi's all right," said Dorrie. "He could snap you in two without an effort. Never knew such a strengthly merchant, in fact. Umlosi, you chattering monkey, these gentlemen are my friends. They are great chiefs, and they are comin' with us to Zenobu."

Umlosi parted his teeth in a welcome smile.

"I hear good words, N'kose, my father," he said, in a great, deep voice. "It is even as I should wish, for are not the chiefs, your friends, good to look upon? Thou hast already told me much of them, and my eyes are pleased by what I see."

This was a compliment, at all events.

"We are pleased to meet thee, Umlosi," said Nelson Lee gravely.

"My father, he of the shimmering eye, hast told me much of thee, O white man," said Umlosi. "Thou art even as a wizard in thine own land; thou canst find evildoers where others fail. I greet ye, Umtagati, my master."

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"That's your new name, Lee," he chuckled. "You're 'Umtagati'—the wizard."

"And as for thou," went on Umlosi, turning to me, "I shalt call thee Manzie, since thine eye is of water—"

"Don't you call my eyes watery!" I said indignantly.

"Thou mistake me," went on Umlosi gravely. "Thine eye is as the liquid water; it is deep and pure, and thou hast a mighty courage. I see deeply into thy heart, and know that thou art great in everything but body. And thou wilt grow even greater, for thy years are few."

Umlosi was a queer old bird, anyhow. I took to him at once, even though he did call me Manzie. After all, one name was as good as another. He called Dorrie "He-of-the-Shimmering-Eye" because his lordship sometimes affected a monocle.

"You are sure of your news, Umlosi?" asked the gov'nor keenly. "Ganz—or Fischer—is even now hastening towards Kutaland?"

"It is even as thou sayest, Umtagati," replied the black giant. "I know not the white man by the name of Ganz, but he is thine enemy—and therefore mine. And is he not, also, one of the race that are as the serpents and the scorpions? Is he not possessed of a heart that is even as black as a moonless, cloudy night? Wau! I am at thy service, to crush the life from this white man with the heart of a reptile!"

"That's all right, Umlosi," laughed Nelson Lee. "If we capture Ganz it will be sufficient. You needn't trouble to crush the life out of him. He'd be a bit of a job to bring home, in that state."

Umlosi looked very solemn.

"My snake tells me that the white serpent, your enemy, will never live to return to the kraals of the great white people," he said. "Neither shalt thou lay fingers on him until the land of the Kutanas is reached, and until much blood has flown." I have spoken."

"Cheerful sort of bounder, isn't it, gov'nor?" I grinned.

"Perhaps he's right, Nipper," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"Shouldn't be surprised," put in Dorrie, before I could say anything. "He's a rum card altogether. He sees things, y'know. Has dreams—or nightmare, or something. Anyhow, he generally knows what's goin' to happen long before it does."

"Oh, well, let's get busy," I said practically.

And we did get busy, too.

With Umlosi's valuable help, Dorrimore rounded up a prize collection of native carriers. These boys were all big and brawny, and had been promised good pay for their services. Then there were the stores and a thousand details to attend to.

Nelson Lee was after Otto Ganz, but he couldn't rush off right away, at a second's notice, as though we had been in England. Things had to be arranged..

Ganz had the advantage that way, for he had had his plans all cut and dried. He was already a day's march ahead of us.

"There'll be a scrap when we get to Zenobu," said Dorrie cheerfully. "Oh, it's goin' to be quite a decent scrap, too. Old Umlosi knows. I shouldn't be surprised if he told us how many poor blighters are going to be killed! Anyhow, Ganz won't touch that ivory."

We managed to make the start from Nairobi the next morning—two mornings after Ganz had cleared off. We made quite a procession, for there was quite an army of native boys, all packed up with their bundles.

The sun was blazing down terrifically, and I was glad when we plunged into the shade of the forest. But the heat was almost as bad, for in places the ground was swampy and the air dreadfully humid.

Umlosi generally stalked ahead, carrying his great assegai, and touching up some of the carriers with the flat of it when they lagged. He was a holy terror, and the boys respected him almost as much as they respected Dorrie—who was, of course, the leader of the expedition.

This isn't a travel-book, so I'm not going to describe our journey at any length. In fact, I don't think I could do it. I'm all right when it comes to excitement and brisk action; but I should get rambling and dull if I started on the description business. Besides, it wouldn't be particularly interesting.

We made splendid progress, and everything went fine. At various kraals we got news of Ganz; he'd passed up country only about thirty hours before us. But, in spite of our forced marches, we couldn't catch up with him. I expect he was well-informed as to our movements by native runners.

Many days passed, and no hitch occurred. By this time we had progressed splendidly, and were within reasonable distance of the Kutanaland country. Another week would see us over the border.

The weather, on the whole, was decent. The rainfall varies a great deal in those regions, and we were travelling in a fairly dry tract of country. The natives, negroes of many tribes, including the Bantu and Nilotic, and Masai, welcomed us at every point of our journey.

Sometimes we were passing through the tropical forest, at others, through

swamps. The swamps were rank with coarse grass and papyrus and reeds, and were rather too unhealthy for my liking. In places we saw cotton and indigo growing wild, and sugar plantations were abundant.

On the tenth day we struck the Nyza, a fairly large river flowing through the swampy regions. Here we found everything in readiness for us. Dorrie had sent runners on ahead of us, and, in consequence, there was no delay.

For, at this point, we embarked upon a number of native dug-outs—long river-craft made from great tree-trunks. They were amazingly well constructed, and proved to be excellent boats in every way. Some dug-outs are clumsy and slow, but these weren't.

Lord Dorrimore's plan was to follow the course of the Nyza for a good few miles, until a stretch of dangerous rapids were reached, which made further progress by water impossible. The river, I learned, disappeared into the earth at a point a mile below the rapids. I suppose it liked a change.

Just where the river disappeared into the face of a high cliff there was a range of hills. Our way ran through a pass between two of these hills. On the other side we should be in Kutanaland, and only three days' march from Zenobu.

I questioned Dorrie about the river, and he said that nobody knew where it disappeared to. At all events, the river didn't show itself on the other side of the hills, and so it presumably went for a ramble down into the bowels of the earth.

The rapids were rather dangerous, and, for safety's sake, Dorrie was determined to disembark about a mile above them, just where the current began to get strong. We arrived at this spot one morning, just before noon.

We were in the leading dug-out. By "we" I mean Dorrimore, Umlosi, Nelson Lee, and myself. There were about six natives also. The other dug-outs were following down behind, like a string of Thames lighters, only they were a good way apart.

"Marchin' orders again," said Dorrie languidly. "We'd better land here, I think. I don't fancy bein' caught in the rapids in a boat of this breed. They're a bit difficult to turn if the current's strong an' healthy."

He gave an order, and the dug-out headed for the left-hand bank, which

was here quite treeless—although an abundance of leafy shrubs grew alongside the water. And then something happened—something really startling.

Six or seven rifle shots rang out, and there was a whizz near my ear. At the same time one of our boys fell forward with a grunt, and toppled out of the dug-out. I stared, my heart beating wildly. That boy had either been killed or badly wounded.

"Easy—easy!" said Nelson Lee curtly. "We're ambushed, Dorrie! Better make for the other bank!"

Lord Dorrimore looked bewildered.

"But the natives are friendly—" he began.

"Natives!" cut in the gov'nor. "This is Ganz's work!"

"Good heavens!"

Another volley of shots rang out, and Dorrie woke up. A bit of his right ear was chipped off—perhaps that woke him. He gave the boys a roaring order.

"You're right, Lee!" he bellowed. "It's an ambush! That confounded German hog has waited for us here, and if we ain't careful we shall find ourselves carried down in this current—"

He paused, for at this moment there was a regular rattle of shots from our rear. The other dug-outs were being peppered, and most of them turned in at once to the nearest bank. They were allowed to do so, and I saw swarms of blacks overpowering our carriers.

But it was evidently different with our dug-out. When we approached the river bank we were met by a deadly fire. And the other side of the stream was the same; both banks were ambushed!

Lee and Dorrie were firing away with their revolvers, but there was nothing to aim at except the bushes. The enemy kept in cover the whole time. If we attempted to land—if we made a really desperate endeavour, I mean—we should simply be annihilated to a man.

"This means—going on!" said Nelson Lee, between his teeth.

"But the rapids!" gasped Dorrie. "Man alive—"

"It'll be man dead if we're not careful—the whole crowd of us dead!" went on the gov'nor. "The odds are too heavy, Dorrie. We'd better risk another half-mile, and then make a landing."

This was, in fact, the only thing to do. So, in mid-stream, our dug-out swept down towards the dangerous rapids.

And we all heard a yell of triumph from the bushes. To make matters worse, three of our boys threw themselves out of the boat and swam for shore. They were frightened out of their wits. The other hadn't a chance, for Umlosi was getting busy.

"Thou pigs and sons of pigs!" he thundered. "Thy blood is as water, and what courage thou hast would be more fitting in a mongrel dog! Ply thy paddles with what vigour thou hast, and make for the spot that is even now visible at the bend of the river. Wau! Thou art but contemptible reptiles, after all!"

Umlosi grabbed a paddle himself, and the difference was at once apparent. The dug-out edged slowly towards the river bank, although it still swept downstream at a pace which was rather too swift for my liking. Dorrie and the gov'nor, too, were using the paddles now.

But another check came. While we were straining hard, and while success was certain, I saw several puffs of light smoke. Bullets spattered round; two hit the dug-out. And, automatically, we ceased our efforts.

The river was ambushed, on both banks, right along! Ganz's men were preventing us from making a landing! The game was as clear as daylight, of course. Unable to land, we should be caught helplessly in the current, and swept down to utter destruction!

"We must get ashore!" panted Dorrie savagely. "When I meet that German hound I'll wring his filthy neck! That's what I'll do, Lee! I'll smash him—"

"Good words, N'Kose, but are they not empty?" asked Umlosi. "Thou wilt never live to meet the white serpent. We are even now caught in the treacherous current, and must continue onwards. To land is impossible. Yet, Thou-of-the-Shimmering-Eye, my snake tells me that we shall not perish. There are black times ahead. We shall be in darkness that is blacker than any that thou hast experienced. We shall live in a nightmare of perils that—"

Thou-of-the-Shimmering-Eye grunted. "Oh, dry up, Umlosi!" he exclaimed. "You and your snake get on my nerves! You talk of nightmares of peril as though this particular peril we're now in is a little picnic! You're off the track, old chap. We sha'n't live through any more perils. We're in the current now,

fair an' square. It's good-bye all round!"

Dorrie looked at the' guv'nor and me. We were all pale, I think. For, by this time, the fierce current had caught the dug-out tightly in its grip, and we were being swept down the stream to the rapids—to the hideous death Otto Ganz had prepared for us!

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH WE THINK WE'RE GOING TO DIE BUT DON'T—BUT WE COME JOLLY NEAR IT, AND OLD UMLOSI PROVES THAT HIS NOSE IS HIS STRONGEST POINT—WE SEE A GREENY-GREY PATCH IN THE DISTANCE, AND ARE DULY COMFORTED.

IN spite of the awful danger which threatened us, we were all furious. There wasn't time to feel much apprehension. Yet we felt in our hearts that this was to be the end of all things—for us.

"Oh, we mustn't worry," I said, trying to look cheerful, and failing miserably. "We might whirl through the rapids without capsizing. Never say die, you know. Our luck's sure to hold."

"If it holds like this, we're finished," grunted Dorrie. "Our brand of luck isn't the sort I like. Nipper! Besides, supposin' we get through the rapids? We shall be faced by the cheerin' prospect of buttin' into that pretty cliff!"

"Oh, stars!" I gasped. "I'd forgotten that!"

"You'll remember when you see it, young 'un," said Dorrimore grimly. "I'm sorry I've landed you chaps in this merry hole——"

"Not a word, Dorrie!" cut in the guv'nor. "We're all in the swim together. I didn't suspect Ganz of such trickery. I thought that he was doing his best to reach Kutaland without delay. He's got rid of us first; that's all. It's a pity, but I don't see——"

"I'd like to have the brute for two minutes!" growled his lordship. "Just two minutes, professor! By Jing! I'd take the keenest delight in hearin' his bones crack! I'm feelin' murderous!"

I looked at the river indignantly. There was no chance of reaching the banks now. Even if we swam for it, there would be no difference in the ultimate result. No swimmer could progress across that current. And the dug-

out was being carried down like a feather in a mill-race.

We swept round a bend, and the finish was in sight.

Dead ahead of us were the rapids, and, further on, we could see the high cliff which rose from the surface of the stream itself. A low, dark opening marked the spot where the river plunged into the very earth itself.

At the place where the river narrowed it ran with the fury of a mountain torrent. We should be swept into that opening and crushed to pulp against the rocks within. We should die in darkness, miserably, helplessly. If we threw ourselves out of the boat it would be just the same. There was no hope now.

"Wau!" grunted Umlosi. "This is a poor death to die! I, a great chief of the royal blood, to perish in such a fashion! I had dreamed of many fights, many victories. And thou, N'Kose, art by no means happy."

"Oh, I'm bubblin' with joy!" said Dorrie, with a weak, forced grin.

"Thou speakest but lightly, to conceal thy real feelings," went on the great giant. "And thou, Umtagati—thou art showing thyself to be a man of iron will; a man of courage. Even Manzie, small though he is, and poor in years, displays a coolness which fills me with reverence. I am resigned—death means not to me what it means to you. This is a great moment for us all."

Dorrie growled.

"I never did hanker for greatness," he said. "Great moments don't appeal to me, Umlosi. Whoa! This is where the band starts playin'! We're just startin' on the joy-ride in earnest!"

I was sitting in the stern of the dug-out, and could see all the others. The blacks—three of them—were crouching down, with rolling eyes, and shivering limbs. Umlosi sat as still as a statue, and about as calm. Nelson Lee and Dorrimore were in front, talking together idly.

We were waiting—waiting for the end. There was nothing to be done. And as Dorrie spoke we fairly entered upon the rapids. They stretched ahead of us a grand, awe-inspiring spectacle.

Then to my words, O white men!" said Umlosi suddenly. "This will be a death. We shall plunge into great darkness, thou and I. But I have a keener edge within my heart that death will not come to us. We shall do great

things, and the white serpent will perish!"

Umlosi's voice was a roar, but we didn't pay much heed to his words. For we were now clinging to the rough sides of the dug-out with all our hands—two each, to be exact. Every second I expected to be pitched out.

Dead ahead the swiftly-running water was broken by black rocks. They stuck far out of the water, and whirlpools of foam swirled in all directions. The roar of the rapids filled the air, and our faces were soon wet with spray.

Still further on the surface of the river became smooth again, but the current was appalling there. The stream ran between high walls of rock, and finally disappeared into the face of the towering cliff.

It was for all the world like a railway cutting, with the mouth of the tunnel just in sight.

There was no hope of deliverance, and Umlosi's words echoed bitterly in my ears. We were doomed.

Amazingly enough, we didn't capsize. The dug-out was sweeping through the rapids like a cork, tossed and tumbled, and we were clinging on with hands, knees, and feet. If we happened to strike a rock—well, we shouldn't die by drowning then! We should just be dashed to pieces.

Once there was a jarring crash, and the rough native river-craft seemed to stagger. But it was only a graze, and the next second we were rushing on again, faster than ever.

Conversation was simply out of the question. The roar of the turbulent waters was like thunder, and on all sides the foam was hissing and bubbling. Shooting the rapids in some parts of America is a ripping sport; but that was a kid's game compared to this. We were shooting to—what? Destruction? Instant death?

We didn't know, and we certainly hadn't time to think.

We just shot down, dizzy and dazed by the appalling force of the river. And then, all in a moment it seemed, we had passed the treacherous rocks. We were sweeping down the "cutting" at a terrific speed.

"Good-bye, gov'nor!" I roared, with a gulp.

"We're not dead yet, young 'un!" came Nelson Lee's reply.

It was a brave attempt at cheerfulness,

even at that awful moment. But I was not comforted, and I could feel my skin tingling all over. I was shivering, in fact—shivering with the horror of it all.

No, I wasn't afraid. I'm not a funk. But when a chap sees death yawning ahead he can't help feeling somewhat queer. But my teeth were set, and I breathed regularly and heavily.

Then—

Well, I thought the end had come. We suddenly plunged into inky darkness. We had entered the underground tunnel!

I waited, with nerves acutely stretched, for the grinding crash which, I believed, was inevitable. But no crash came. We plunged on through the darkness, the swirling waters echoing amazingly.

A roar came from Nelson Lee.

"Duck!" he shouted. "The roof's only a foot above our heads!"

"We ought to be dead by this time," exclaimed Lord Dorrimore, in a surprised voice. "There's something wrong. Mind your nappers, behind there!"

I heard a grunt from the blackness.

"Thou art using strange words. N'Kose," came Umlosi's deep voice. "Great as my knowledgo is, I have not heard the word 'napper' before. But is it not easy to guess what thou meanest? And thy head, Thou-of-the-Shimmering-Eye, is even as the egg of a bird. Were it to strike a projecting rock it would crash asunder, and thy brains would be scattered—Wow!"

We all heard a crash, and Umlosi uttered a howl. In his concern about Dorrie's head he had incautiously raised his own, with disastrous results. If his own head had been "even as the egg of a bird" he would have been brained. But Umlosi's skull was like a cricket-ball, and was capable of standing rough usage.

"We are surely in a place of devils!" growled the Kutana chief. "Were it not for thy presence, Umtagati, I should cringe with fear. But thou art with me, and thy powers are wondrous. Wau! It is even as I dreamed; we shall live. But the darkness is that of the blackest thunder-cloud!"

"The darkness will soon be dispelled, Umlosi," said Nelson Lee.

Up till now my thoughts had been riotous. My brain was confused and bewildered. We were still alive! Out of all the chaos of other thoughts, that

one fact stood out above all else. We were still alive!

It was a miracle, I thought—but it was true.

And, rapidly, my gear-box adjusted itself, and I could think clearly.

"What's—what's happened?" I gasped.

"Don't ask me," came Dorrie's amazed tones. "This place isn't the road to glory. I s'pose. We ain't all dead, are we? I'm hanged if I can get the proper size of things. Umlosi, you invisible ruffian, where are we?"

"Wau, N'Kose, thou art asking me more than I can answer," said Umlosi. "The waters run swiftly, and the air is sweet. We are saved from death. But my mind is as the great mists thou told me of—the mists which descend upon the vast kraal of thine own peoples across the great waters."

"He means a London fog!" chuckled Dorrie. "Oh, so your mind's like a November fog, Umlosi? I'm not surprised. To tell you the truth, I'm a bit mixed myself. This tunnel seems to be very obligin'. It's lettin' us go through without a hitch. Something'll happen before long, though."

Something happened at once, for as his lordship spoke, there was a gleam of bright light ahead. It came from Nelson Lee's electric torch, and played upon the dark water ahead of the dug-out.

We were travelling swiftly through a wide tunnel. The walls and roof were of smooth rock, and they glistened with moisture. The river itself looked as though it were a body of ink, for it was black and smooth. Yet the current was still swift, for we were being carried along rapidly.

The immediate danger was past, but we were quite in the dark—in a double sense—as to what lay ahead. One thing was certain; we couldn't get back. Nothing could have fought its way against the current at the exit. Here the river was becoming quieter.

An underground river!

I'd often heard of such things, but I hadn't expected to explore one myself. In our joy at finding ourselves still safe, I think we were all rather excited. Even the gov'nor showed signs of animation.

"We can't get back, Dorrie!" he cried. "But we can go on. By James! There's no telling where this river leads to!"

"We'll follow it wherever it goes—willingly," said Lord Dorrimore. "The

chances are that we shall never see daylight again. But we're alive, an' that's all that matters for the minute. Umlosi, your beastly 'snake' was right. Your instinct's a rummy box of tricks."

Umlosi looked about him solemnly. "Thy words are quaint, my father," he said. "But I gather the meaning of them. I will tell thee more. We shall meet with surprises——"

"I dare say," put in Dorrie. "You'd better stop there, you pessimistic chunk of copper! If I let you go on, you'll only tell us that we're goin' to pass through heap big perils, an' that much blood will flow. My blood can flow where it likes, so long as it keeps in my veins. Hallo, Nipper! You're still alive, then? I thought perhaps you'd tumbled over the stern!"

His lordship was looking back at me, and I grinned.

"We're having the time of our lives," I said. "If we go on at this rate we shall soon find ourselves—— Hi! Look out for your head!"

Dorrie turned, and only just ducked in time. For, quite abruptly, the roof of the tunnel became lower, and we were forced to crouch right down. So low was the roof, in fact, that there was danger of scraping our bent backs against it. It was a good job the rock was smooth.

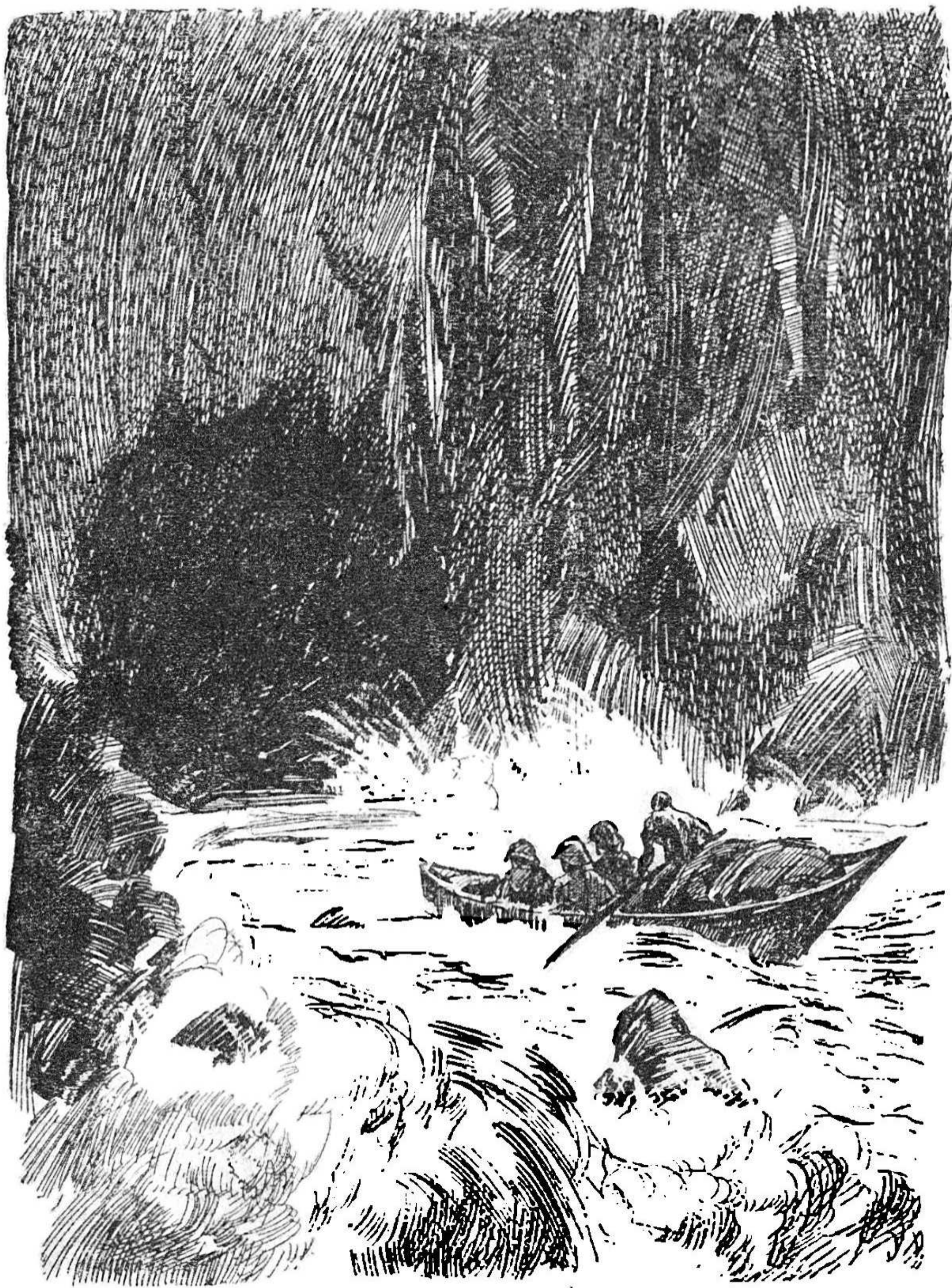
This state of affairs lasted for about five minutes. Then the gov'nor—who was in the bows—called out that we could sit up again. When we did so we found ourselves surrounded by black space. The roof had disappeared, and the very walls of the tunnel were invisible.

But when Nelson Lee turned his light from side to side, we caught glimpses of the dull walls. And we were now travelling at an easy pace; the current was losing its force.

We drifted, rather than raced, now, and we were certainly in no danger of crashing against treacherous rocks. The dug-out was easily manageable, and Umlosi was plying his paddle, and uttering terrible threats against the other blacks—who were, of course, really beneath his contempt—unless they got busy.

The boat gathered speed now, and Nelson Lee kept his eyes fixed ahead, to yell out a warning, should it be necessary. But the water became even smoother, and lay all round us, black and silent. The cavern walls were even invisible.

"Cease paddling," said the gov'nor.



... , "And our dug-out was being carried down the rapids like a feather in a mill-race."—(See p. 14.)

Slowly the dug-out drifted until it remained stationary. Nelson Lee switched his light round in all directions, and even up into the inky dome of blackness over our heads.

"Not a sign of land," said Dorrimore. "Not a sign of anything, in fact. I say, old man, we haven't found our way into the lower regions, have we? This river reminds me of the Styx. That old merchant, Dante, wrote somethin' about it, didn't he? We shall come across old Charon before long."

"Don't be a bigger ass than you can help, Dorrie!" broke in the guv'nor. "We're not in Hades yet. This body of water is evidently a great underground lake. It must be at the base of those hills we were going to cross. The river seems to have lost itself."

"And we're lost with it," I said. "My stars! Here's a pickle!"

"Never say die!" said Dorrie cheerfully. "The air's pure enough, so there must be another way out. Thank goodness you've got that torch, Lee! We should be in a worse plight than a blind man in a London fog if it wasn't for that light!"

"H'm! That battery won't last long," I put in.

"That's right—do your best to raise my spirits!" said Dorrie. "Be as cheerful as you can, Nipper! You always were a merry young bounder. Of course, the battery won't last—I know that. But if we coax it, and speak to it nicely——"

"Don't squabble over nothing!" said the guv'nor impatiently. "I've got half-a-dozen spare batteries in one of the packs—in this boat, too. We're all right as regards lighting arrangements. What do you make of this place, Dorrie?"

"Why, it's evident that the hill's hollow at the base of it," said his lordship. "I suppose this cavern is decently big. Anyhow, we can't see the sides of it now. And the river doesn't seem in any hurry to carry us to destruction."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"It's my opinion that there is no direct outlet for the water," he said. "It rushes into this cavern, and then slowly oozes through myriads of pores into the bed of the lake. The water never grows less because the river's always flowing into it. During the wet season, however, I expect this cavern is a roaring cauldron. But, as you say, Dorrie, there must be another outlet of some sort, otherwise, the air wouldn't be so pure.

And that outlet, I judge, is high up above us."

"That's good hearin'!" exclaimed Dorrimore. "We can't get at it, you mean?"

"We shall have to explore," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "The chances of escape are—slim. That's all. So don't enthuse yet awhile. We're not out of the wood by any means."

"Thou art mighty in thy wisdom, Umtagati," came from Umlosi, in deep tones. "It would be ill for us to hope too highly. But a little spirit within me tells of joys to come. We shall escape from this place of the evil ones, and we shall give shouts of great delight. I have spoken."

"An' spoken cheerfully, for once," said Dorrie. "You're breakin' out in a new line, Umlosi. Now, then, all together—pull for the shore, sailors! We'll get in there if we pull long enough!"

The old dug-out moved swiftly through the black, still water. The guv'nor's torch was flashing ahead like a motor-car's headlamp. And, suddenly, before the paddlers had got into their stride, he gave a warning shout.

"Easy!" cried Lee. "This lake's not so big, after all. I can see——"

As he spoke we jarred against something hard, and I pitched forward on to Umlosi's broad back. When we'd sorted ourselves out we found that the cavern wall was close against us. It rose, rough and jagged, into the darkness. And there were ledges and crevices everywhere.

It was like a rugged cliff, and there was no telling how far it extended. This subterranean lake possibly extended for a mile, although, as we had seen, it was not so extra broad.

As Nelson Lee leaned over the boat, in order to grab the rocks, he accidentally switched off his light. The darkness was like something solid, and the little sounds we were making echoed amazingly.

Gazing up, I waited for the guv'nor to switch the torch on again. But then, all in a moment, I gasped. High above me I saw—or thought I saw—a hazy patch of greeny-grey. It couldn't be called light, because it was so indistinct. But I clutched at the boat's side in my excitement.

"What's that—up there?" I shouted. Lee turned the light on, and the greeny-grey patch disappeared.

"No, don't switch on!" I exclaimed.

"I—I believe there's an opening, or—or something. I saw a patch of dull—"

"Nerves are queer things," said Dorrie. "You've been imagining things, young 'un!"

Nelson Lee switched off the torch, and we all gazed up.

"Wau!" muttered Umlosi. "Manzie spoke well. It is even as he said."

We all saw the curious patch of dullness now. I can't call it anything else. It wasn't light, yet, in a certain spot, the utter blackness was somehow subdued. It was grey—and visible.

"That's where the current of fresh air comes from," said Nelson Lee calmly. "Don't you understand, Dorrie? There's an outlet there, but it is probably screened by rocks. The light is there, but it is reflected. It may even be coming from a crevice no wider than an inch."

"We shall have to climb up to it," said Dorrie enthusiastically.

"We'll try, at all events."

The guv'nor gave some crisp advice, and we all shouldered the packs which had been stored in the dug-out. The bulk of our stuff, of course, was hopelessly lost. It had fallen into Ganz's hands, above the rapids.

At last we were ready, and then, with Lee in advance with the light, we commenced ascending the cavern-wall. It actually sloped backwards a trifle, and this, added to the rough nature of the rock, made it a comparatively easy task to scale it.

We mounted quickly, our hopes high. It was strenuous work, and in a very short time we were all running with perspiration. For the temperature in the cavern was by no means cold. Naturally we were huddled together, like Alpine climbers. There wasn't much danger of an accident.

The cavern wall was not high—fifty feet at the most—and in less than half-an-hour we were at the top. The roof stretched away before us, rising higher and higher towards the centre.

Just for a moment I thought that we'd had our climb for nothing: that it was impossible to progress further. Dorrie thought so, too, for he began to make a remark to the effect that he was fed up with the nether regions, and longed for a sniff of the open air.

"Not that I'm likely to get that sniff," he ended dismally.

"Oh, we're not disheartened yet, Dorrimore," said Nelson Lee. "There

seems to be a fairly wide crack just above me—a crack which slopes away towards the spot where Nipper saw the patch of reflected light. I think we can manage it."

"Good business!" exclaimed Dorrie, breathing again.

Gazing up, I saw the guv'nor flashing his light upon the crevice. It was eight feet above his head, and that climb, short though it was, looked well nigh impossible. Umlosi shifted impatiently.

"Mayhap my feet are more nimble than thine, Umtagati," he said. "I will make the attempt. Once I am at the top, it will be but the play of a child to lift ye all up by my side. Thy feet are encased in clumsy coverings of dried skin."

"You leave my boots alone, Umlosi," chuckled the guv'nor. "I wouldn't like to scale those rocks barefooted, at all events. And if I fail to reach the top, you can have a shot at it."

"Let it be so, then, Umtagati, my master," said the black giant. "Who am I to preach to thee? Thou art a wizard—"

"That's all right—let him whizz!" grinned Dorrie.

And Nelson Lee proceeded to—well, not to whizz. He started on the climb, and Dorrie held the torch. It was a ticklish piece of work, but the guv'nor's a magnificent climber, and at last he stood at the top.

"Wau! It is well!" grunted Umlosi. "Thou hast vanquished the rock!"

In less than a quarter of an hour we were all standing beside Lee, and then we wondered what the next move would be. The crevice extended for yards right into the solid rock, and sloped steeply upwards.

We laboured on slowly, for the heavy packs weighed us down, and the rocks were jagged and rough. And, although we attempted to be light-hearted, we were not really so. We knew only too well that there was a distinct possibility of finding the outlet to be nothing but a mere slit.

In that case, we should be doomed.

"Light ahead!" sang out the guv'nor.

My thoughts were scattered in a moment. We all pressed on, and in a minute we turned a corner. The rocks, and came into a wider passage. Away to the right, at the end of a long, narrow natural tunnel, we saw a dim, grey light.

We stumbled up that tunnel at express

speed, and emerged upon a wide opening. And there, at the summit of a narrow cleft—no broader than twelve inches—we saw a jagged, uneven patch of intense blue. And the sun sent a shaft of scorching light upon the dull rocks.

It was the most welcome sight I'd ever seen!

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH I JUMP FOR JOY, AND THEN GET MY ENTHUSIASM DECIDEDLY DAMPENED—AND IN WHICH WE STEAL A MARCH ON OTTO GANZ, AND ARRIVE AT ZENOBU FIRST—THEN THINGS BEGIN TO HAPPEN, AND THE SITUATION BEGINS TO LOOK REALLY SERIOUS.

HOW we got through that narrow, foot-wide cleft I never knew. We just went dotty for the moment. Even old Umlosi yelled like a hyena, completely forgetting his august dignity in the excitement.

The opening was a kind of kink in the rocks, and was almost invisible from outside. We tumbled over one another in our eagerness, and then blinked and gasped. For the moment we were quite blinded by the dazzling glare of full daylight, and couldn't see a thing.

But when we did see, we all cried out with delight and admiration.

We were standing upon a broad rock ledge, and immediately in front there was a mass of thick vegetation. Beyond this, sloping down in a long descent, was a well-wooded hill. We were, in fact, about half-way up this hill, for it towered behind us.

And, right into the distance, stretched the green forest, with patches of grass-land and glistening streams. Over towards the left a fairly good-sized kraal was visible, with tiny figures moving about with leisurely ease. It was a scene which filled us with gladness and the joy of living.

"By Jing! It's good to see!" gasped Lord Dorrimore.

"We came from the darkness, even as I dreamed, N'Kose, my father," said Umlosi solemnly. "It is a great moment, indeed! But there will be greater before the moon wanes. The white serpent, thine enemy, has defeated his own ends. Wau! He is but a poor creature, my father!"

"Ganz thinks we're all dead," said Nelson Lee. "That will give us a great advantage, Dorrie. By James, we'll be

successful, after all! I'd like to lay my hands on the scoundrel right away!"

"Have patience, dear boy—have patience!" said Dorrie. "The fact that we're alive an' kickin' ought to be enough for the minute. Nipper, you young rascal, did you ever see such a sight? That darkness down in the black hole of Calcutta was just about gettin' on my nerves! This is what I call good for the eyes. Just gaze upon that stretch of country, will you! It's—gorgeous!"

Dorrie wasn't exaggerating. The scene was beautiful in the extreme—about the finest piece of African scenery I'd ever looked upon. And, suddenly, my pent-up feelings let themselves go.

I yelled with joy, and did a cake-walk across the ledge.

"Hallo, Nipper's celebratin'!" grinned Lord Dorrimore.

Reaching the belt of thick shrub, I burst through with the intention of seeing how dense it was. My heavy cargo of luggage was on my back, but I'd forgotten it. Ordinarily, I shouldn't have been carrying a thing, of course—our carriers did that. But we'd shared the stuff out between ourselves, rather than abandon it in the boat—which, of course, was lost for ever.

Still yelling, I crashed through the bushes with a will. But then the whole world seemed to go wrong. I felt my feet skid, and I made a frantic effort to regain my balance. At the same time, my yell changed from one of joy to a roar of alarm.

My hand gripped some shoots, slipped, and I felt myself falling.

I dropped sheer—down—down—

Thousands of thoughts passed through my mind in those dreadful seconds. I was dropping to certain death, of course. What would the poor old gov'nor do? What ghastly luck! Ganz had been successful in one way, at least. Should I live for a little while after striking? Should I see the gov'nor again before I went? Of course, I should fall upon jagged rocks—

Those thoughts, and many others, flashed through my brain in three seconds—it couldn't have been longer.

Splash!

I hit something with considerable force, and my whole body tingled with the shock. Then I found my throat filled with cool, delicious water. All was confusion, but I knew that I wasn't dead. I struggled and writhed.

Then I found myself gasping and spluttering.

"Great guns!" I panted.

I had fallen into a wide, deep pool of water! Right above me was a sheer cliff, with patches of green-stuff growing at the top. Of course, I had plunged through that vegetation thinking that solid ground lay beyond. Instead, there had been a clear drop of fifty feet!

As I scrambled ashore I grinned rather feebly. I was shaking pretty badly with the shock. For a second time that day I had stared death in the face, and—once had been quite enough for me.

I sat on the bank, aching more than a little. But the water had done me good, really, and I'm not a chap to go off into a faint. I just grinned again, and this time it wasn't so feeble. After all, there was something funny in the thing.

Looking up, I saw a pale, startled face peering down upon me.

I waved.

"Are you hurt, Nipper?" came the gov'nor's anxious inquiry.

"Oh, no!" I shouted huskily. "I like this sort of thing, sir! Why don't you drop down the way I came? A bath'll do you good!"

"We thought you'd gone to your death, you reckless young rascal!"

"That's right—rail at me, just because I met with an accident," I exclaimed painfully. "Do you think I fell down here on purpose? I'm battered fearfully, gov'nor. I never thought water was so hard!"

Nelson Lee's face disappeared, and twenty minutes elapsed before I heard a crashing in the undergrowth near by. A moment later Lee and all the others burst into view. By this time I was practically all right again.

I grinned as I looked at their startled faces.

"It's all right—I'm only wet," I said cheerfully.

"There's only one thing to be done said Lord Dorrimore. "I've been thinkin' things over, an' there's only one thing to be done. Nipper's got to be chucked into the pool again—as a lesson not to act the goat. You frightened us all out of our lives, you grinnin' young villain!"

But Dorrie didn't make any attempt to carry out his threat. The gov'nor was greatly concerned at first, but I

soon showed him that I was O.K. Lee made me strip, and while my clobber hung on the line to dry, so to speak, we partook of grub.

After that, feeling mightily refreshed, we made off through the forest, with the intention of discovering our whereabouts at the nearest village. We struck a decent-sized kraal after three hours of marching, and Umlosi at once granted with satisfaction.

"My eyes tell me good news, N'Kose," he exclaimed. "This is the kraal of Raatu, but four days' march from Zenobu itself. We are even now in the land of my fathers. It is well, for have we not beaten the white serpent?"

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean that we are in Kutana-land?"

"It is even as thou sayest, Manzie, my worthy son."

"I say, that's ripping news—father!" I grinned.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie were both highly elated. We were actually in the Kutana country. Instead of being dead, we were a full forty-eight hours in advance of our time! For, had we not met with disaster—or seeming disaster—we should now have been negotiating the mountain pass.

Otto Ganz had really done us a splendid turn.

Intending to send us to a ghastly death, the German had, in reality, directed us to a short cut. We had gone underneath the hill, instead of over it! This was not only satisfactory, but positively glorious.

Of course, we'd lost a large proportion of our stores and things, but that didn't matter a jot. In another four days we should be in Zenobu, our destination. And Ganz couldn't possibly be anywhere near us as yet.

"This is simply stunnin'," declared Dorrie, with sparkling eyes. "That's what it is, Lee. That Hun blighter was to do us all in, an' he thinks we're dead, too! He thinks we're smashed to pieces in that underground river, at the time we're alive and kickin' in advance of him!"

Ganz certainly believed that we were all dead. And, consequently, we reckoned that he wouldn't be in any particular hurry to arrive at the ivory cache. The gov'nor was half-inclined to let Dorrie go on alone, so that he—the gov'nor—and I could remain and collar Ganz as soon as he showed up.

But this plan wasn't adopted. On the whole Nelson Lee considered that it would be wise to press on, and let Ganz follow us up—he'd be sure to come for the ivory, and we could catch him fair and square.

We chuckled tremendously at the situation. The German's strategy hadn't panned out at all well, but he wouldn't find this out until it was too late. For Umlosi assured us that Ganz would approach Zenobu from a totally different direction. The route we were taking was a little-known one.

This was easily explained, for the pass through the hills was rather winding, and led out into the Kutana country ten miles to the south. A much-used forest trail then led straight to Zenobu. The kraal of Raatu was only a small place, and right out of the track of things. Thus, Ganz would learn nothing of our escape, and we should arrive at the "capital" without his having heard a word of us.

Moreover, we were on a short cut. I dare say we should have been completely lost but for Umlosi's presence. The natives here very seldom saw white men, for, as I said, Raatu was tucked away in the forest, quite out of the track of things. But old Umlosi knew the chief of the village quite well.

And we were welcomed warmly. In fact, the whole village turned out to gaze upon us—men, women, and children. But for Umlosi's guidance we might have met with a very different reception. As Dorrie said, "the Kutanas are decent blacks in their way, but they're doocid uncertain!"

Well, it was getting dusk as we approached Raatu, and we didn't think it worth while to press on straight away. We should be compelled to camp within a couple of hours, and that would have meant a lot of trouble. Besides, these native chiefs are ruminy bounders, with dignities all their own. It wouldn't have been the thing to rush through Raatu without letting the chief make a fuss of us. He would have been offended—and that would have been serious for us.

And so we remained in the kraal that night. There was a proper bust-up. Feasts were organised, and we couldn't have been more feted if we'd been the King and Queen. Camp fires were lit all round, and after the grub had been disposed of, we were treated to some fancy dancing by the girls. It wasn't

bad, the show, but there was too much wiggly-woggly business for my liking. Those blacks haven't got any idea of real dancing.

Well, to cut it short—because I don't want to waste time in lengthy descriptions which aren't necessary—we started out from Raatu at dawn. Umlosi had completed a transaction with the chief of the kraal for a good supply of grub and about twenty carriers. So when we started off again we were fairly well equipped once more.

The route to Zenobu led through dense forest, and there was only a narrow track between the trees—a track no wider than a couple of feet, and practically invisible unless you were close to it. For the most part it was in dense gloom the whole time, for the tropical trees festooned overhead, and shut out the sun.

We marched in humid heat and in deep twilight. For hours at a stretch we didn't know that there was such a thing as a sun shining. But we were all as cheerful as anything, and promised Ganz a warm time when we came face to face with him.

At last, towards the evening of the fourth day, Umlosi told us that we were approaching the outskirts of Zenobu. And soon after that we sighted the palisade of the great kraal itself.

For Zenobu was rather an important place. It had fully ten thousand inhabitants, and the town was of great extent, straggling away for fully a couple of miles. For hours we had been passing through cultivated country, and many natives had greeted us with delight and excitement. White men didn't often penetrate as far into Kutaland as this. Some day, perhaps, Zenobu would be under British control; but it wasn't at present.

The natives had been greatly influenced by the German lie propaganda. They had held great conferences, and had come to the conclusion that the British were no good. But then the German disasters in East Africa had leaked through, and it had been obvious to the dullest Kutana that the Huns were a beaten crowd, as well as being a cruel, contemptible lot.

A revulsion of feeling had followed, and the Kutana negroes were ready enough to welcome a Britisher with open arms. Perhaps there were some who were still unconvinced—who still

thought that the Germans were the super-men—but we didn't consider these unenlightened individuals were worth serious thought.

There was great excitement as we marched into Zenobu. Umlosi stalked at the head of us, and he was recognised and greeted with great warmth and respect by all. This was the first time Umlosi had visited his native kraal for many moons. At least, that's what he said himself. How many moons he didn't explain.

As Dorrie had explained, he had family troubles—Umlosi, I mean. His brother, Fatoomba, was a bit of a bounder, and, to avoid trouble, Umlosi had cleared off. Not that he was at all afraid of trouble. He was a wandering sort of chap, and preferred to travel afar. But I had an idea that he was now anxious to settle down among his own people.

The old king was a wizened-up old fellow of about two-hundred-and-fifty. At least he looked it. I expect he was about ninety, really. But his face was just like wrinkled old parchment, as dry as bone, and shiny with age. He was too old to have any real say in matters, and so Fatoomba reigned supreme.

Yet in point of fact, Umlosi was two years older than Fatoomba, and was therefore the legitimate chief. But Fatoomba had tremendous power. His word was law, and it was soon evident to us that the natives feared him; they feared him far more than they would allow themselves to openly show.

The old king welcomed us as warmly as his age would allow, and all the head-men of the kraal were equally effusive. Fatoomba was gracious in the extreme, but he didn't take the slightest notice of Umlosi. Our black friend's presence was as was not to Fatoomba's liking, but didn't express any opinion.

Nothing had been heard of Ganz. Without delay, Lord Dorrimore and the rest of us journeyed to the rock pinnacle five miles beyond Zenobu. The work of shifting the ivory out of the "tagati" cavern was accomplished with much labour, for we couldn't get any of the Kutanas to enter the place. But the three blacks who were with us—the three who had come through the underground river safely—were not Kutanas, and they worked with a will.

It was a fine haul—a splendid collection of ivory. Poor old Dick Spalding must have had some tremendous sport to

secure all those superb tusks. There was quite a quantity of rhinoceros horn, too, and this was extremely valuable.

Once the stuff was out of the cavern, the Kutanas were ready enough to work. The ivory was packed into lots, and conveyed straight to Zenobu. It took quite an army of carriers to do the job. And these carriers were to accompany us to the border, where we could obtain fresh labour, and so reach civilised parts once more.

Everything went beautifully, and there wasn't a hitch. Fatoomba remained reticent, but a big feast was to take place on the night of the second day after our arrival. And it was then that disaster came.

Even Lord Dorrimore, who knew these niggers well, was taken off his guard.

While the feast was in progress there was a tremendous commotion outside, in the far distance. Then a volley of rifle shots rang out. This seemed to be a signal, for at once there was a most extraordinary scene of wild excitement and confusion. Over half the head-men of the kraal rushed about yelling like demons, and a great number of blacks produced spears from nowhere, and were soon marshalled into order.

"What's happening?" I asked, above the din.

Dorrie snapped his teeth.

"It's treachery!" he shouted. "Black treachery! By thunder, and I never suspected it! We're in a tight fix now, an' no mistake!"

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH UMLOSI TAKES A HAND, AND WE WITNESS A TERRIFIC FIGHT—THE EFFECTS OF THE FIGHT ARE FAR-REACHING, AND THE TIDE OF BATTLE IS TURNED IN OUR FAVOUR.

FOR some little time I couldn't get the hang of things.

But when I grasped the significance of the demonstration I realised that we were, indeed, in a tight fix.

Treachery!

All at once I knew why we hadn't heard of Ganz. The German rotter had learned, somehow or other, that we had escaped, and that we were in Zenobu—in possession of the ivory. And Ganz had made plans accordingly.

He had made plans—with Fatoomba!

The chief was in league with the disgusting Hun! That was the long and

shot of it. Fatoomba had welcomed us, and had feasted us; but all the time he had been scheming to turn traitor.

Ganz had influenced the chief, and Fatoomba was pro-German in his views. He regarded us as "fair game," and had simply lured us into the trap. The feast had been arranged deliberately—so that we should be unprepared at the time of the surprise attack.

Fatoomba had been 'cute, however. He had known that a large proportion of the Kutanas would turn against him and his German friend. And so the little surprise packet had been all carefully planned.

That volley of shots had just been a signal. Fatoomba's adherents had been waiting for that sign, and, in less than a minute, a terrific fight was raging. It was the chief's plan to overpower the other Kutanas before they could recover from their astonishment.

Then, I suppose, Ganz and his men would rush in, and finish the job.

But things went wrong, somehow.

The carefully-concocted scheme didn't work out in the right way.

German treachery and intrigue never was much of a success anywhere—the Huns are too clumsy in their methods—and this was no exception to the rule. For, to begin with, the enemy Kutanas soon found that the pro-British element was decidedly strong. Our party's presence in the kraal probably turned the tide in a great number of cases, and the blacks stuck to us nobly. Many men who should have turned against us re-adjusted their views at the last moment, and remained faithful.

The confusion of the first five minutes was terrific.

Fires were blazing everywhere in the great open space before Fatoomba's rather pretentious hut. The feast had been proceeding here, and Nelson Lee, Dorrie, Umlosi, and I were squatting in a semi-circle, ready for the fun.

When the signal was given we all sprang to our feet. The blacks were rushing about, looking like demons in the flickering firelight. The women and girls and children rushed off into their huts, screaming with alarm and excitement.

The great open space, now a battleground, was left to the fighters. We expected to see Otto Ganz and a powerful force of men rush up, but there was no sign of them. The cunning Hun

evidently meant to march in when the battle was practically over, when the danger was over—and when, incidentally, Dorrie and the gov'nor and I were accounted for.

Having given the signal, Ganz was waiting.

And the fight was proceeding with awful violence.

The traitors—these blacks who stuck to Fatoomba—had produced spears from hidden places, and before the others could recover from their surprise scores of them were stabbed to the heart.

The dastardly nature of the attack enraged the hot-headed niggers to a fever pitch. A great number produced weapons, and we were soon gazing upon a terrible fight. The Kutanas were fighting with reckless courage, and with an utter disregard for death. The spark had fired a regular powder-factory, so to speak.

Scores of men, having suffered for years from Fatoomba's tyranny, now turned against him. And the chief himself, having due regard for his own skin, remained in the background, roaring orders.

A number of spears came whizzing past the gov'nor and Dorrie and me. It was a wonder we weren't hit. And Dorrie, intensely excited, whipped out his revolver, and commenced blazing away.

His aim was deadly, and I saw four men drop at once. Then Nelson Lee got busy, and I followed his example. Our own lives were in danger, and we were fighting in self-defence.

But it was Umlosi who created a sensation.

Perhaps he foreaw that we were doomed—unless drastic action was taken. Once the Fatoomba party got the upper hand, we should all be massacred within ten minutes. Sheer numbers would defeat us.

And the affair was assuming an ugly aspect.

Just near us a party of traitors were simply mowing down the faithful blacks. And once the enemy broke through we should be surrounded. Then, of course, the end would come swiftly. Even if our own followers ultimately won the battle, we should have perished.

It was a moment of intense peril.

Dorrie was pale with excitement. He knew that we were doomed—unless something extraordinary happened. We couldn't retreat, even if we wanted to,

Because, in our rear, there was another party of fighters.

It was pandemonium. The cries of the fighters, the yells of the injured and dying, filled the air with ghastly sounds. And it was all the more appalling because of its unexpectedness.

Happily for us, the Kutanas were not armed with rifles. If they had been, we should have been riddled with bullets long since. And our own revolvers were doing great damage. The difficulty was in singling out the enemy. If we were not careful we should shoot down our own friends.

And then, when the aspect of things began to look hopeless, Umlosi took a hand in the game. By this time we knew that Otto Johann Ganz was waiting in the distance for the signal—the signal which would proclaim our defeat and death.

Fatoomba was ready to give that sign at the right moment. And, by all appearances, the right moment would soon arrive.

Umlosi let out a fearful roar.

"Waa! It is a good battle, this!" he thundered, his eyes glittering. "The red mists swim before my eyes, N'Kose! There will be great bloodshed!"

"Will be!" grunted Dorrie breathlessly. "I'll warrant a hundred are dead and dyin' even now! We're bein' overpowered, you chaps. No good blinkin' at the fact. This is the finish!"

Umlosi shook his head.

"Nay, my father, the finish is not yet!" he exclaimed. "Thou wilt see a rare fight ere a minute has passed. My brother, Fatoomba, is the leader of this rebellion. He is in league with thine enemy, the white serpent. Fatoomba shall die!"

"I'm just drawin' a bead on him now!" panted Dorrie.

He was levelling his revolver, and that second, the fighters swayed and Fatoomba could be seen, standing back in the firelight. Lord Dorrie had him clearly within range.

But, to my amazement, Umlosi knocked up Dorrie's revolver with his spear.

"Nay, N'Kose, use not the fire-stick!" cried the black giant.

Dorrie's bullet flew wide.

"You blithering fool, Umlosi!" roared his lordship, really angered. "I'd got him dead in line—"

"Stay thy anger, my father!" said

Umlosi. "Thy words are violent, but it matters not. Fatoomba is my brother—my half-brother, if thou wilt know the truth!"

"And you're going to spare him because of that?" cut in Nelson Lee sharply. "That won't do, Umlosi! Fatoomba must die!—The scoundrel!"

"Canst thou not let me speak my words, Umtagati?" asked Umlosi grimly. "Fatoomba shall die—by my hand! See! I am going to challenge him to mortal combat. It is a rule of my people that when those of royal blood fight, all those of meaner stations shall cease, and watch. Thus shalt thou be given a respite!"

"Good old Umlosi!" I roared.

"You'll be killed, Umlosi!" said Dorrie uneasily.

"Have no fear, N'Kose!" cried our black friend. "See! I go now!"

Umlosi's object was clear. If he challenged Fatoomba to a combat the other hostilities would cease. As he had said, it was a custom of the Kutana people to suspend all fighting if the chiefs themselves fought. Then, when one fell, the general battle would be resumed—probably with greater vigour.

If Umlosi himself fell, then, of course, the end would be swift.

But if he succeeded in killing Fatoomba there was no telling what would happen. In all probability, the mass of the blacks would rally round him in a body, and we should thus be saved.

Umlosi's scheme was a splendid one, and we understood why he had not allowed Dorrie to fire that shot.

I had been pumping away with my automatic, but now I stopped. Spears were whizzing everywhere, and the din was as great as ever. Lee had been grazed on the arm, but he didn't take any notice. And Dorrimore was bleeding in three or four places.

Then an earthquake seemed to happen. It was Umlosi who caused it. He dashed in among the fighters, using his great assegai with deadly effect. Men fell like corn before a mower. Umlosi was a host in himself, and none could touch him.

By sheer force he fought his way through the struggling mass of combatants. Then, like a charging elephant, he broke into the open.

"Fatoomba, thou traitor!" he thundered. "I challenge thee!"

We saw Fatoomba draw himself up fiercely.

"Away! Thou art an outcast, O vile Umlosi!" he cried contemptuously. "I would not demean myself by soiling my spear with thy unclean blood!"

Umlosi did not answer verbally. He sprang forward and jabbed the point of his spear into the flesh of his half-brother's shoulder. A spurt of blood came, and Fatoomba snarled with fury.

"Thou dog!" he hissed. "So shall it be, then!"

A roar of voices arose; a roar which rose from scores of throats. It swelled as it went up, and as if by magic the fighters lowered their blood-soured weapons and stood watching.

And in the firelight, surrounded by the awed, panting Kutanas, Umlosi and Fatoomba fought. They were the chiefs—the king's sons—and none other dared move whilst the combat was in progress. It was an unwritten law of the tribe.

By jingo, that was a fight, if you like! I've seen a few scraps in my time, but this fairly beat the band! Both Umlosi and Fatoomba were gigantic men, Fatoomba being, if anything, even taller than our friend. And both were armed with great spears, one thrust from which would mean certain death.

Umlosi, of course, could have killed his enemy instead of merely jabbing him in the shoulder; but that would have been a cowardly attack. And Umlosi was a man with high ideals of honour, although he was black.

Somebody threw some more wood on the fires, and they blazed up with renewed vigour. The scene was lit with lurid flashes of light, and the two fighters looked like demons as they danced to and fro.

They were both masters in the art, and just about evenly matched. The crowds of blacks gazed upon the scene with bated breath. They knew what this combat signified. If Fatoomba won it was their duty to rally round him; and if Umlosi won the same applied. Nearly every man there secretly hoped that Umlosi would kill his rival. For even Fatoomba's own followers feared him in their hearts.

For Nelson Lee and Dorrie and me it meant just everything. It was life or death. Life if Umlosi conquered, and death if he failed. That was as certain as the stars were shining above us.

And so we watched with anxious eyes. "By James, that was a near thing!"

muttered the gov'nor, as Umlosi fell back with the point of Fatoomba's spear with-in an ace of his heart. "Look here, you fellows! We'd better decide what to do if old Umlosi fails."

"He won't fail," declared Dorrie. "I trust him."

"We can't afford to leave things to chance," interjected Lee. "If he dies we're simply overwhelmed by enemies. We'd better prepare ourselves for a rush. I don't suppose it'll be much good."

"Look at that!" I roared suddenly.

Again Umlosi staggered, and this time it seemed as though all was lost. Fatoomba followed up his thrust with a harsh cry of triumph. But Umlosi recovered in the nick of time, twisted round, and knocked his opponent's spear aside just as it was about to enter his throat.

"Smart—doosed smart!" muttered Dorrie tensely.

And from that moment the combat turned in Umlosi's favour. His half-brother had expected to win, and his disappointment was so great that he commenced lunging wildly and furiously. And, once he allowed fury to take possession of him, he lost the power of lightning thrust and recovery which had characterised his fighting up till this point.

Umlosi pressed his advantage quickly and thoroughly. His spear flashed up and down in the firelight, and the clash as the two weapons constantly met was continuous. Twice in succession Umlosi jabbed, and each found its mark.

Fatoomba staggered back with two deep gashes in his flesh. But he was not yet beaten, and continued the battle with renewed vigour and recklessness. With a snarling hiss of fury and pain, he rushed upon Umlosi.

And he rushed upon—death!

For Umlosi was ready, and his great spear ripped forward like a flash of lightning. There was a dull rending thud, and then a sighing gasp. Fatoomba fell, his own spear clattering away upon the ground. He had been run clean through the heart.

In a second a great swelling roar burst out, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie and I joined in with huge gusto. We were carried away in the excitement of the moment. For the time being, at least, we were safe.

Umlosi was the victor!

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH OTTO GANZ BEGINS HIS ATTACK AND MEETS WITH A SHOCK—HE TRIES FOUL PLAY—WHICH IS NOT SURPRISING—AND ONLY MANAGES TO SEAL HIS OWN FATE BY SO DOING—THINGS GET SORTED OUT, AND WE CELEBRATE OUR TRIUMPH.

UMLOSI thought a good bit of himself, too. He knew what a hard fight it had been, and he knew that he deserved all the praise which was being bestowed upon him.

There was a hush as he raised his hand, and he then addressed the throng in his own funny lingo. He didn't say much, but it was clear by his attitude that he considered himself a heap mighty fellow!

Dorrie knew what he was saying, and grinned as he told us.

"The old rascal's tellin' his subjects that they've got to do as he tells them and ask no questions!" exclaimed his lordship. "He says that he's the reignin' chief, now, and that he's goin' to have big alterations all round. He sounds like a trade union leader speechifyin' before a meetin' of coal strikers! An', by the look of 'em, the niggers like it!"

As Dorrie ceased speaking yells of acclamation went up, and we soon knew that Umlosi was as popular as we had first supposed. Even Fatoomba's own adherents were as enthusiastic as the rest. That terrific fight had won 'em completely round.

And then, in the midst of the excitement, a man came running towards us from the main part of the kraal. He prostrated himself before Umlosi, and gabbled something.

"Waa! The white serpent has commenced his attack!" roared Umlosi, looking towards us. "Thou, my father, will be wise to prepare thyself. And thou, Umtagati—and thou, Manzie! Thy vile enemy is approaching!"

We were by Umlosi's side by this time, but he needn't have troubled to tell us. For rifle shots were ringing upon the night air, intermingled with distant cries. Otto Ganz and a large body of men were entering the kraal.

I grinned a little as I thought of it. The German, of course, thought that the bulk of the Kutanas were with him, and that he was simply marching in to put the finish on to things, as it were.

He was going to get a shock.

For there wasn't a single man who was

ready to go against us now. Umlosi's victory was a true victory in every sense of the word. Even the wounded were anxious to struggle to their feet and join in the fresh battle which threatened.

Umlosi called his head-men together and gave some rapid orders. In less than a minute there was general activity, and bodies of men were placed in favourable positions among the huts just outside the clearing. Thus, when Ganz marched in he would see the place deserted.

All the arrangements were completed with astonishing rapidity. It was about the smartest thing I'd seen, and old Umlosi would have made a fine commander in a real battle. This affair, after all, was only a scrap.

Umlosi and the gov'nor and Dorrie and I remained in a position where we could view everything comfortably; and where, too, our revolvers could get into play effectively.

The main "street" of the kraal led straight into the open space where the big fires were burning. And along this we saw a ragged body of blacks advancing. A great many of them were armed with rifles, and they were massive, coarse types of men—negroes, of course. They were certainly not Kutanas.

They reached the wide open space and entered upon it in an untidy mob. There was no attempt whatever at orderliness or method. It was quite obvious that they expected to find all trouble at an end.

And in their rear we caught sight of a white man. In an instant we recognised him as Otto Johann Ganz. There was an evil smile upon his coarse lips, and he was congratulating himself upon his victory already. I could well understand that the man was a cold-blooded murderer, and didn't blame the gov'nor for wanting to lay hands on him.

And then, all in a moment, Umlosi gave a signal. Scores of spears were flung with unerring aim, and the foremost among the invading mob fell in disorder. They crumpled up in dozens, and then all pretence was at an end.

Umlosi's men dashed out, and in less than a second a fierce fight was raging. The Kutanas were determined to annihilate these base intruders. Umlosi himself led the attack, and his great spear rose and fell ceaselessly.

Lee and Dorrie and I pumped lead for all we were worth. The ultimate result of the battle was practically a foregone conclusion. Our surprise attack had

taken Ganz's men completely off their guard, and they were demoralised.

Ganz himself stood for a moment, transfixed with dismay and fury. I could see him distinctly, and I saw his lips moving. He was roaring out German curses, I expect. But he didn't wait in that exposed condition long. With a livid face, he disappeared between two of the native huts.

"Did you see him?" I shouted excitedly.

"The coward!" grunted Lord Dorri-more. "Shouldn't be surprised if he clears off altogether——"

"He won't do that, Dorrie," put in the gov'nor grimly. "The result of this fight means everything to him, don't forget. If his men win he's all right. And I'm not certain, yet, whether we shall beat the scum."

"Man alive! They're whacked already!"

"No, they're not!" said Nelson Lee. "The surprise attack demoralised them for the moment, but they're rallying. They've got rifles, don't forget that. And once they form themselves into fighting order they'll do fearful damage."

"Look at old Umlosi!" I cried gleefully.

The new chief of the Kutanas was battling magnificently. His spear was doing the work of three ordinary men. We, of course, couldn't enter the fight at close quarters. Our revolvers were of more use than our fists. We couldn't handle spears.

"I'm worried about Umlosi," went on the gov'nor. "He cannot keep this up for long. And, once he falls, the Kutanas will lose heart. But I must admit that the fight seems to be going in our favour."

"Of course, it is!" Dorrie said. "Don't croak, you bounder!"

Nelson Lee smiled grimly, and emptied his revolver with deadly effect.

What he had said was true enough; but, as it happened, Ganz's men didn't rally. They hadn't a chance, in fact. The Kutanas were fighting at close quarters with fearful ferocity, and the invaders hadn't a chance of using their rifles.

After ten minutes it was as clear as daylight that Ganz was doomed to failure. Indeed, we expected to see the attacking party break and flee at any

moment. And it was then that the German attempted foul play.

It was impossible to win by a pitched battle, and so he tried other means.

If he could wipe us out—the gov'nor, Dorrie, and me, I mean—he might still turn the tide. That is what he thought, I know. It was a desperate thought, and wouldn't have succeeded even if he had carried it out. But he was desperate and ripe for any villainy.

He knew well enough, in fact, that if his men failed he would never get out of Kutaland alive. He would be hunted down and executed. His scheming and spying had recoiled on his own head.

The first intimation we had that anything was afoot was a bullet which droned past my ear. Dorrie, who was beside me, looked up sharply. We hadn't heard any particular shot, but this wasn't surprising. The din that was going on was deafening.

"Did you hear that, young 'un?" asked his lordship.

"Sounded like a bullet," I replied.

"It was a bullet, too!" roared Dorri-more.

"Well, what of it——"

"What of it!" he shouted. "It came from behind, Nipper!"

From behind! I started as I realised the truth of Dorrie's statement. And, even as I looked round, I heard Nelson Lee give a little sighing grunt. He fell forward on his face, and lay still.

"The gov'nor's hit!" I cried horrified.

Then, turning round, I saw the face of Otto Ganz peering out from behind a clump of bushes. I knew all then! Ganz had fired those shots, and he was firing into our backs!

In one second I went mad with rage. The gov'nor was knocked out—perhaps dead—and I didn't wait a second. Dorrie had sprang to Lee's side, and was bending over him anxiously.

The dastardly nature of this attack from the rear filled me with a fury which sent me mad. If the gov'nor hadn't been bowled over I might not have felt it so keenly. But, as it was, I didn't care a hang what happened to me.

I jerked myself to my feet and dashed straight at the spot where I had seen Ganz. He came out to meet me, and fired his revolver at point-blank range. By a miracle the bullet shot past my shoulder and didn't touch me.

Then, before he could pull the trigger again, I was upon him.

It was an insane thing to do, I suppose, but I simply couldn't help myself. If I'd had time to think, to consider, I should have hesitated before attacking the German single-handed.

But I was panting with hot, blinding rage. In one second I knew that I had made a terrible blunder. Ganz was a big man, with muscles like steel. He gave a short, hoarse laugh as I flung myself at him. His fingers clutched round my throat.

"You—you murderer!" I gasped. That was all I could say, and he didn't trouble to answer. He just dug his fingers more deeply into my flesh, and everything swam before my eyes. His coarse, leering face was like that of some devil. His teeth were bare with fury. In less than a minute, I knew I should be throttled.

Why didn't Dorrie come? Oh, what a fool I'd been to rush blindly to the attack! But, of course, Lord Dorri-more hadn't had time, and he was attending to Nelson Lee. Perhaps he hadn't seen anything as yet, although Ganz and I were in the full glare of the firelight.

Then, as my senses were reeling, and my lungs seemed on bursting point, I heard, as though from afar, a roaring bellow. It sounded like Umlosi's voice. He was in the thick of the battle, of course. He couldn't do anything to help me.

Or perhaps it was my imagination. Yes, that was it, I was getting light-headed and—

A great black form came up, and in a second the tension relaxed from my throat. The German's hands were torn away, and I reeled back drunkenly. But I was still conscious, and saw, as through a mist, all that happened.

Umlosi was there—good old Umlosi! He was gripping the Hun's arms from behind, and Ganz was as helpless as a baby in that vice-like clasp. Every second I saw things more clearly.

"Thou—pig of filth!" thundered Umlosi. "Wouldst thou choke the life from Manzie—a mere lad of few years? Thou art as vile a scoundrel as ever my fingers grasped! Thou shalt not live to fix thy talons in any other throat! Thou art going to thy brethren in the land where all is dark and wicked!"

Ganz was squealing with terror.

"You black brute!" he screamed. "You—"

He didn't get any further. Umlosi exerted all his mighty strength, and Ganz was lifted clean into the air. So great was the force that Umlosi exerted, in fact, that I heard, with a shudder of horror, the German's arms snap like carrots.

The next moment he was hurled into the air like a stone from a catapult. I have never witnessed such an extraordinary exhibition of strength. Ganz flew up, higher and higher, screaming with terror.

He performed an arc in the air, and then came down, head foremost. There was a dull, horrible crash—

Otto Ganz was killed on the spot, and I felt glad. Scoundrel though the man was, I didn't like to think of him living through that fearful ordeal. His head was smashed in by the fall, and he met with his just deserts. Nobody thought otherwise.

And Nelson Lee, I soon found, to my joy, was not badly injured. Ganz's bullet had entered his shoulder, but had not done a great amount of damage. Within a fortnight the dear old gunner was able to move about again.

The fight, of course, ended as we had anticipated. The German's black ruffians were defeated completely. And I honestly believe that Umlosi was the cause of our victory. He had inspired the Kutanas with a fierce courage, and the invaders had been expelled.

Umlosi had saved my life—there was no doubt about that. And Ganz had paid for his plotting as dearly as any man can pay.

I thanked Umlosi about twenty times, but he merely grinned and said that Ganz had been but a pitiful insect, fit only to be crushed beneath the heel. And Umlosi, too, hadn't come through the battle unhurt.

He had at least a dozen spear gauges in different parts of his body, and the next day he was looking like a freak. For Dorrie had plastered him up most thoroughly. He kept on his hands and knees, groaningly. For on no account would he allow his people to see him in that condition.

At last everything was ready for our departure from Zenobu. Lord Dorrie-

more was in the highest spirits, and Nelson Lee felt that he had done all that could be done. Ganz, the murderer, was accounted for.

Umlosi bade us farewell rather sorrowfully.

"I am sad, my masters!" he exclaimed solemnly. "Ye go out from my country into the vast regions beyond. Great changes have taken place, for am

I not the ruler of Kutanaland? But who knows? Mayhap we shall meet again. Mayhap I shall be fired with the wandering spirit, and travel afar. I bid thee farewell, O white man, and may ye have a good journey!"

And then we went, and I wondered whether we should, indeed, ever meet old Umlosi again. Somehow, I really hoped so. And, as he said himself, who knows?

THE END.

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THE LOG-CHUTE.

"**C**ATCH him? You're crazy! He's down in the valley by now." And the speaker waved his arm ruefully to the right.

Valley or anything else it might have been for all that could be seen, for the snow was whistling in blinding wreaths, driven by a howling gale. All that was visible in the smother was the little station-house on the top of Lone Pine Divide, the rough plank platform, and the snow-covered permanent way of the Canada and Rocky Mountain main line.

Melville Ruthven, trooper in that famous body, the Canadian Mounted Police, leaned from his saddle.

"How long's he been gone, Mark?" he inquired keenly of the first speaker.

"Nigh on an hour, I reckon," replied the station-agent. "After he'd dynamited the express car, Tad and his pal came in here driving the express-man and two of the train hands at pistol-point. They made 'em lay the bullion bags on the hand-car, and were off down the grade before you could say 'knife.'"

Ruthven flung himself from his steaming horse.

"We'll take another car and follow them!" he exclaimed.

"I guess not," drawled Mark Haughton. "There ain't another nearer than Cook's Ferry, and that's eighteen miles away."

Ruthven turned to his companion policeman, who had been sitting listening in his saddle.

"How's your horse, Joe?"

"Dead beat," was the curt reply.

"Ay, and so's yours by the look of it," put in the station-agent. "And it's betwixt twelve miles down the valley by road. Tad's in the valley by now, and you can bet your bottom dollar he's met up with the rest of his gang by now. They'll have brought pack-ponies with them, and by night they'll be safe up in the Black Hills."

Mel Ruthven's bronzed face was impassive as a Sphinx.

"Have you wired on for an engine?" he asked.

"Fast thing—as soon as I'd sent for you. But the beggar's too cute. He's cut the wires between here and Cook's Ferry. There ain't no engine t'other side near'n Oil Creek, and that's thirty miles back. They'll not be here for an hour in this storm, and all up-grade."

Ruthven was silent again.

"Isn't there any short cut down to the valley, Mark?" he asked, after a short pause.

Mark laughed.

"'Cept you turn yourself into a mountain goat, there ain't. Or maybe you'd like to ride down the log-chute, like a pine-trunk?"

The policeman's eyes flashed.

"Log-chute—where is it?"

The agent stared at him in amused surprise.

"Right close. Do you want to see it?"

"Yes. Got any place we can put our horses?"

"Put 'em in the goods shed, if you've a mind."

"All right. Come on, Joe!"

The path curved and dipped down the hillside. They were soon in an open and fairly level clearing. The agent walked across it.

"That's your chute!" he remarked with a wave of the hand.

You have seen the water-chute at Earl's Court? Imagine this magnified a score of times, wider, steeper, running dead straight, and white with new-fallen snow down a drop of one in four, till it grew narrow in perspective, and finally vanished in the dim distance far below.

Imagine tall, straight pine-trees on either side swaying in the bitter gale, and a canopy of chill, grey cloud overhead. Then you may have some faint idea of what the Lone Pine log-chute looked like.

Within less than ten minutes the two

police-men were ready to start on their desperate venture. From the station they had requisitioned a piece of board about ten feet long and fifteen inches broad.

This was their toboggan. To steer it, each had a couple of short, stout, pointed wooden pegs. Two cleats had been nailed across the board for them to rest their feet against, otherwise the plank was untouched.

There was no curved prow, no tiller, no brake, and it was upon this utterly inadequate sledge that they intended to risk a run which the finest tobogganist who ever raced in Switzerland would never have dreamed of attempting.

Remember, tree stumps and trunks lined either side of the narrow log-slide. A false movement on the part of the steerer, and they must crash into these at a speed rivaling that of an express train. Into the bargain, at the bottom was deep water, into which the logs had been rolled in the days when the choppers had been at work.

Ruthven laid his sledge at the top of the slope and settled himself in the front. Joe stolidly took his place behind.

"Ready!" cried Ruthven.

In an instant the daring adventurers were hurtling down the chute at an appalling speed.

THE 2nd CHAPTER.

A FEARFUL RIDE.

FASTER, and ever faster! The tall, black trunks flew by on either side like palings to the rider on a racing motor. Once a fierce jar nearly shot them both from their seats; again a loose log in the bed of the chute sent them swerving almost out of the track, and only a prodigious effort on the part of the two pairs of strong arms brought them back into their course.

The chute was three miles long, and ended with a drop of twenty feet or so into a deep pool of Snake Creek, the river down which the lumbermen had been used to raft their logs to the tidal water where the saw mills stood.

There was no other possible means of reaching the valley in time to intercept Tad Mason with three thousand pounds worth of bullion, stolen from the train which he had held up at the top of the Divide.

Two-thirds of the distance had been covered. The pace grew madder than ever.

There was less snow here, for by this time they were quite two thousand feet below the summit of the pass.

A horrible misgiving assailed Ruthven. Suppose there was no snow at the lower end of the track? Disaster then would be inevitable!

Another few moments, and the water was in sight—deep and dark under the gloomy sky, but still far below them. They were falling towards it like a stone from the sky.

Quickly Ruthven scanned the white chute which ran straight as a die to the black pool. Nothing broke its level surface.

The water seemed to spring to meet them. Ruthven held his breath for the icy plunge. Another second. Crack!

Within twenty feet of the edge, the toboggan left the track and flew high into the air. They had struck a small log hidden beneath a sprinkling of snow!

Ruthven caught one glimpse of the water beneath him, flung his arms together over his head, and dived.

Down, down into the chill blackness, with the water roaring in his ears. Then a painful struggle back to air and light.

But where was Clarke? Ah, a head rose close by! Why was he not swimming? He must be hurt. With a couple of strong strokes, Ruthven had him by the shoulder.

"Careful, old man, I'm damaged!"

"The mischief—where?" And Ruthven struck out for the bank.

"Arm," was the curt reply. Clarke never wasted a word.

"Phew! Broke—and badly!" was Mel Ruthven's comment, as, after helping his friend up the opposite bank, he examined the limb.

Within ten minutes Ruthven had the broken limb roughly but efficiently set and bound up between two stout strips of bark.

"What now?" he inquired, when at last it was over.

"See that hill?" queried Ruthven, pointing to a sugar-loaf peak half a mile up the valley.

Clarke nodded.

"Can you get as far?"

"Twice."

"Come on, then. We're ahead of them now!"

THE 3rd CHAPTER.

CLARKE'S FLUCK.

THE storm was practically over by the time the two reached the hill. Ruthven helped his chum up to a height of about a hundred feet, and posted him out of the wind in the shelter of a rock.

"You stop here, Joe, and when you see them coming up the valley wave your hat. Signal their number, and whether they have ponies. I don't reckon there'll be more than three."

Clarke nodded.

"Going to play a lone hand?"

"Yes."

Clarke said no more.

Ruthven turned, and, hurrying back down the steep slope, disappeared among the trees which grew in thick patches along both sides of the river.

The path—it was not a road—which led up the valley to the Black Hills followed the river. Ruthven's plucky stratagem had given him a long start over the train-robbers, for the spot where the log-chute struck the valley was full five miles north of the point where the railway crossed it on a tall trestle bridge.

Tad Mason, with his ill-gotten booty, would, he knew, have to let his hand-car run clean across the bridge before he could find a place suitable to unload his heavy bags of specie.

What was more, he would not have the least fear of pursuit, so would not be likely to hurry himself.

Once he was in the hills, which he could easily reach before night, he would be absolutely safe from pursuit.

Mel, striding rapidly through the pine-trunks, chuckled softly to himself as he thought of the train-robber's surprise when he found himself cut off!

All the same, the policeman was very well aware that he had a pretty tough contract before him. Three to one are long odds if it comes to a fight. Mel, however, had no notion of needless bloodshed. Already he had formed his plan.

Keeping along the far side of the path from the river, he walked half a mile or so in search of a spot suitable for his purpose.

Having found it, he moved back from the path to a clearing, whence, though he himself was hidden from anyone coming north along the path, he could plainly see Clarke.

The snowstorm was quite over now, and a pale afternoon sun shone on the unbroken whiteness.

Five minutes he waited with his eyes on the distant figure perched high on the shoulder of the hill, but hidden from the sight of anyone approaching from the south by a natural parapet of piled-up boulders.

Then suddenly Clarke raised his hat above his head. Ruthven responded to show that he saw. Using the flag-wagging code, with his hat as flag, Clarke began to spell out a message:

"Five of them. Two pack-ponies," were the words.

Ruthven pursed up his lips in an inaudible whistle.

"Holy smoke, that's a bit thick!" he muttered; then turned sharply on his heel and hurried back to the road, where he set to work with great rapidity.

First he took out a revolver, of which weapons he carried two, from its holster and tied it firmly to a tree-trunk a few yards from the road, on the near side. Next he fastened a stout piece of twine to its trigger, and carried the cord under a fallen log to the roadside.

Jumping nimbly across the path, so as to leave no suspicious footfalls in the new-fallen snow, he pulled the line down till it was hidden under the snow, and fastened it tightly to another tree. Having accomplished this to his satisfaction, he moved a few yards up the path between it and the river, and carefully concealed himself behind a large snow-covered boulder.

Here he waited patiently, his second pistol tight in his right hand.

The sun was dropping behind the mountains, and though the month was April, it was freezing sharply. Presently, through the clear air, came the crunch of feet breaking through the crust of the snow.

Nearer and nearer they came, and presently around the curve beyond appeared the nose of a pony, then the man leading it, then a second pony, also led; then three men, all afoot.

Ruthven gave a sigh of relief. The odds were heavy, certainly, but not so heavy as if the marauders had been mounted. He waited with every nerve at tightest stretch.

What a long time they were! They seemed to move like snails. What if the leader happened to notice the string, or if the cord had got frozen and failed to pull the trigger?

These, and a score of other disquieting ideas passed through Ruthven's brain.

(Continued overleaf.)

Now they were near enough for him to see their faces plainly.

Ah, that was Tad Mason—the tall, lean mountaineer, who walked last, and every now and then cast a sharp glance back over his shoulder. Instantly he never dreamed that he could possibly have headed him. Well, that was so much to the good, for, in a case like this, surprise is everything.

The first pony was only a few steps from the thin, straight line which marked the path of the string across the track.

Ruthven held his breath. Next instant a slight tumble, a sharp report, down went the unlucky animal floundering in the snow.

"Hands up! You're covered"

Ruthven's voice rang out hard and clear, and the robbers, who had every one been staring into the wood to their right, jerked their eyes round to find themselves facing the black muzzle of the policeman's heavy 44-calibre Colt.

Four pairs of hands went up like lightning, the fifth man—it was Tad Mason himself—hesitated.

"Quick!" shouted Ruthven.

For answer, the man flung up his right hand with a pistol in it. Ruthven's hat flew from his head, and, at the same instant, the report of his own heavy weapon rang out.

Tad Mason's pistol fell from his nerve-

less hand, and, with a fierce cry of rage and pain, he spun round and fell in a heap, shot clean through the shoulder.

Even then it was nip and tuck for a moment or two. The four other desperadoes, scowling and muttering, showed signs of fight. Had Ruthven quailed or faltered for the least fraction of a second, a volley would have been the instant result. Instead, he stepped up as quietly as though on parade, but with his pistol so steady that each of the robbers felt that he was looking into the very eyes of death.

"Jim Cross, stand out!" he ordered the first man. The fellow stepped forward. "Drop your pistol and knife!"

Sulkily Jim obeyed. Ruthven put his foot on the weapons, and then, making Jim stand back again, treated each of the others in the same way.

He had hardly completed the disarmament before Joe Clarke appeared on the scene. A rare smile crossed his stolid face.

"Bluffed 'em out, Mel?"

"Raised them out of their boots, old chap!" Ruthven answered. "March—you beggars!"

With Tad on the unburt pony, and the other four robbers carrying the specie between them, the two policemen herded their captives back to Lone Pine through the twilight.

THE END.

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