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BY S. CLARKE HOOK.

BEGIN NOW! JUST STARTING!

A Rattling Serial Story of
Adventure in the Congo.

— By —

CHARLES HAMILTON.

JACQUES LOUVOIS, who is taking his niece, MARIE, to Nkoto Pool, on the Congo, is attacked by cannibals.

SIDNEY LISLE, a game-hunter, comes to their rescue, and finds that the chief of the attackers is Bernard Burke, an old chum. Sidney persists in defending the two against his friend, and eventually gets them away to Nkoto Pool, where Marie's uncle takes her to the house of Ludwig Hellendorf, a Belgian.

Guarded!

HELLENDORF was not the only one at the bungalow who longed for night. Marie watched with impatience the sun slowly sinking in the west beyond the shining Congo.

She had quite decided. To remain in the house of Hellendorf was impossible. Her uncle, evidently in league with the Belgian, would not help her. There only remained Sidney Lisle. And upon him she gladly relied.

The room she was in had a door opening upon the veranda. There were two other doors, opening, the first upon the stairs, the second into her bed-room. By either of the latter it would be impossible to escape unseen. It was only by means of the veranda that she could attempt to quit the bungalow.

But at sunset she noticed with uneasiness that two or three negroes were lounging upon the veranda, and when darkness fell they were still there.

She waited. The night advanced, hour followed hour; but she could still hear the negroes upon the veranda. And a chill went to her heart as the thought occurred to her suddenly—had they been placed there to keep watch?

Did the Belgian know or suspect her intention? The doubt was terrible. She resolved to ascertain. Anything was better than uncertainty.

She looked out of her door upon the stairs. It was dark there, but she could hear a chattering of negroes.

She closed the door silently.

For some minutes she stood still, her heart beating painfully. That she was guarded she could have little doubt now. A prisoner—divided from the one man who would have given her aid! But would they dare to use actual force?

She could only try. She opened the door upon the veranda and stepped out. A burly form loomed up before her.

"No come," grunted a voice.

"Stand aside!"

The figure did not move.

"Massa say, no come."

It was useless. With a heart like lead Marie re-entered her room. She was a prisoner!

What would Sidney Lisle do? He would think that, as she did not come, her uncle had consented, after all, to take her back to Boma. That was the arrangement. What else could he think? And he would go.

Or—worse still—perhaps he would suspect what had really happened, and would take some desperate step, and they would kill him.

Hark! What was that?

Through the silence of the night there sounded, sharply, a sudden burst of firing. Marie clasped her hands in an agony of terror.

"Oh, my friend, my friend! They are murdering him!"

Sidney Falls into the Snare—Face to Face with Death.

THERE were ridges of dark cloud across the sky, and the moon was hidden, only an occasional flicker of silver light dancing upon the wide, rolling Congo.

A light canoe rocked to the current, moored amongst the mangroves. Upon the landing-stage of levelled planks Sidney Lisle stepped lightly. He crossed it to the nearest clump of trees. It was, above all, necessary to remain unseen while he waited for Marie.

He waited and watched. How long he would have to wait he knew not. The lights were out in the bungalow. If Marie were coming, he thought it would be soon.

He had made all preparation for a flight to Boma. The canoe, purchased from Congo fishermen up the river, contained what necessaries he had been able to obtain for the girl's comfort during the journey. Once afloat on the giant river there would be little danger in pursuit. A thousand hiding-places would offer themselves to the fugitives, if required; and, better than these, he had his trusty rifle, and his brave British heart. He waited, watching the path by which Marie must come from the house.

Of the Belgian's treachery he was, of course, ignorant. But he was keenly on the alert. He had never been more thoroughly alive to the signs of danger. The rustling of a branch in the windless calm of the tropic night was sufficient to place him on his guard.

He had turned his back to the group

of palms while looking for Marie. At the slight sound of stirring he swung swiftly round. A low, startled exclamation broke from his lips; for even as he turned five or six dark figures sprang upon him out of the shadows.

"Seize him!"

It was Hellendorf's voice, hissing in the intensity of his spite and excitement.

In the grasp of many hands Sidney staggered for a moment. But, brief as the warning had been, he had braced himself for the attack, and in a moment he had torn himself free, felling the foremost two of his assailants with crashing blows from his clenched fists.

Then he sprang back, his revolver in his hand, gleaming up to a level.

"You Belgian dog! Come on, then!"

He faced them with perfect fearlessness. There was an instant's pause for breath. Then knives and pistols glimmered. A second more, and they would have been upon him like bloodhounds.

But at that critical moment from the silent night came a crash of firearms, and the Englishman's opponents reeled to right and left, struck by tearing bullets.

Only two of them remained upon their feet, and these two, without even looking round, took to their heels, racing away blindly towards the bungalow. One of them was Ludwig Hellendorf.

Sidney was as amazed as the Belgian probably was. One moment he was on the verge of a desperate struggle against odds, from which it was scarcely likely that he would emerge alive; the next, he saw his foes fallen or fled, himself secure and unassailed. It was a startling transition.

"Burke!"

A shaft of moonlight came through an opening in the clouds. It revealed to him the tall, soldierly figure and bronzed face of the Congo captain.

Burke held out his hand, with a smile. "Lucky for you we are here, Sidney."

"Very. You have saved my life, probably. But—"

"You want to know what we are doing here?"

"That's it."

"I told you that King Leopold's flag would not shelter that dastard from my vengeance."

"You are going to attack the bungalow?"

"Yes."

Sidney glanced round. There were a large number of moving figures amongst the palm-trees. The Congo cannibals were there in force.

"It's a strong place, Burke; and Hellendorf has his guards."

"I don't think his men will stand long against mine. I haven't been idle all this time. I have called up all my command."

"What is your force, then?"
 "A hundred men."

Burke turned away for some minutes, to give quick, decisive orders. Meanwhile, Sidney thought over the situation. That Marie was now a prisoner in the bungalow was, of course, clear to him. To rescue her, or die in the attempt—that was his instant resolve. And he said to himself that nothing could be more opportune than the arrival of Burke and the Congo soldiers. Alone and unaided his prospects were dubious indeed. Doubtless it was unpleasant and humiliating to fight side by side with black cannibals. But for Marie's sake—He was in the midst of these hasty reflections when Bernard Burke rejoined him. There was a gleam of satisfaction in the captain's eyes. He appeared to regard success as assured.

"What are you going to do, Sidney? I need not remind you of your parole."

"I have no wish to interfere with you, Burke, even if my word did not bind me. I have done with that scoundrel."

Burke laughed grimly.
 "So he has shown the cloven foot already?"

"He is in league with Hellendorf. They are keeping Mademoiselle Louvois a prisoner yonder."

"I suspected as much. But tell me

what has happened since you left me yesterday."

Sidney did so, in a few brief sentences. The captain listened attentively.

"It is clear that she is a prisoner. I should pity her if she remained in the power of Ludwig Hellendorf," Burke said grimly.

Sidney set his teeth.

"She shall not remain in his power while I live," he said resolutely.

The captain appeared to be reflecting. "You will stand by me, Bernard?" asked Sidney. "Your vendetta does not extend to an innocent girl?"

"Heaven forbid! Yes, I'll help you. I had intended to demand Louvois at the hands of Hellendorf. The Belgian is a scoundrel, but I have no quarrel with him. And if he surrenders Louvois he can live, for aught I care. But I will demand mademoiselle also."

"He will not give her up without a fight."

"I am sorry for him, then. If fighting begins, the time for surrender will be past. My men are tigers when they have tasted blood, and there is no stopping them. If the Belgian fires a shot they will not leave a man living in the bungalow."

Sidney shuddered; but he did not falter. All personal considerations must yield to his concern for Marie. Her rescue came before everything.

"But we'll give him a chance," added the captain. "Come on! My men have encircled the bungalow. They are only waiting my word to attack."

The clouds had drifted before the silver moon again. Again deep darkness fell as they strode towards the bungalow.

"What is it, Hellendorf? What has happened? You have not let him escape?"

A savage cry broke from the Belgian. He thrust Louvois aside, and began to shout orders to the startled negroes.

The sound of firing had alarmed Louvois. He met Hellendorf in the hall as he rushed in, white and panting.

While Hellendorf was giving rapid orders for the defence of the bungalow, Louvois stood trembling. He understood that there was danger, though he did not know precisely what it was.

Hellendorf, more than half a poltroon as he was, had his wits about him. The bungalow was built for defence in case of necessity. It did not take long to prepare for an attack.

With doors and windows barred, the steps to the veranda taken in, and the veranda itself manned with black riflemen, the Belgian breathed more freely.

He knocked off the neck of a bottle, filled a glass, and drank deeply. Louvois ventured to question him again.

"What has happened, Ludwig?"
 "What? Didn't you hear?"

"I heard firing."
 "The Englishman was there. But he wasn't alone. Just when we were upon him we received a volley."

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