

A Rousing Story of Exciting Adventure in Zululand

THE FIRST CHAPTER

Alec Shows His Mettle

store stood two figures: a well-built, bearded man, hands deep in trouser pockets, and a clear-eyed youngster.

The African sun blazed down on a rolling plain, covered with clumps of mimosa thorn bush. In the distance a rocky ridge stood stark against the cloudless blue sky. It was scenery typical of Zululand.

The bearded man was the trader, John Baker. The lad was his nephew, Alec—and both were looking worried.

They had no eyes for the gorgeous scenery. They were staring at a knot of half-clad, biglimbed Zulus shuffling along the dusty wagon trail that ran close to the little store.

Hoarse laughter broke from the bunch of ebony savages. A club was flourished defiantly. Then the Zulus had passed on, churned-up dust billowing in their wake. The laughter and chattering grew faint.

"What d'you make of that, uncle?" burst out young Alec, glaring after the vanishing

figures. "Not one of those fellows stopped here! What on earth's the trouble?"

John Baker growled something into his bushy beard. Then, from the pocket of his khaki shirt he fished out a huge pipe, crammed it with Boer tobacco, and applied a match.

"It's going to break me, my lad," he rumbled, puffing out a cloud of blue smoke. "This trading store of mine was as good as a gold mine till two months back. Natives from miles around came here to buy beads, wire, blankets, and such. Now, as you've just seen, they slouch past!

"I can't keep goin' much longer," he ended.
"It's ruination. I shall quit Zululand.
There's big trouble brewing, to my mind!"

Alec spun on his heel.

The lad had been in Zululand less than a year, having come straight out from England to help his uncle run the small trading store. He loved the country, and had no desire to leave.

"You'd quit Zululand for good, uncle?" he cried, dismayed.

"Or be ruined!" barked the elder man.

"But," protested Alec, "there must be

ome reason for the Zulus cutting us down like this. If we could---'

"There is!" came the swift rejoinder.

"Rhinberg! He's the reason."

"Ah! That German trader over at Malima Kopje!" gasped Alec. "I haven't been near his place for weeks. Why, he only

opened up about two months ago!"

"Exactly!" snapped the elder Baker. "Two months! And since then not a native has shown his face here. Rhinberg's gettin' all the trade. I'd have no complaint if I reckoned he was playing straight. But I'm almost certain he isn't. He's ruining me, and the natives as well, by underhand methods. But I can't prove it."

"Prove what, uncle?" broke in Alec.

"What d'you suspect him of?"

"Of selling poisonous liquor to Zulus, my lad," John Baker replied. "Fire-water! He'll madden the natives till they're ready to break out. Of course, they won't come here now—they know we won't sell the stuff. But I'm only guessing. I can't accuse Rhinberg without proof."

John! Baker broke off, striding up and down the veranda of his store, smoking

furiously.

Young Alec knitted his brows and cudgelled his brains. If his uncle were right, Rhinberg would soon ruin them both, and also cause a native rising. Savages are quickly roused.

But suddenly a scheme flashed into the

lad's brain.

"I've got it, uncle!" he cried. "I'll get over to that German's store, and tell him I've come to offer him some of our blankets and copper wire. If I catch him trading fire-water, I'll come down like a ton of bricksgive him twenty-four hours to quit the district.

"It would be no use you goin'," the lad went on eagerly. "As soon as Rhinberg spotted you coming he'd hide his stuff. Of course, if we're wrong, he wins. He's the

smarter trader. That's all."

"There might be something in it," nodded John Baker. "An' 'tain't spying on the fellow. If you catch him red-handed you . The reply was only a stifled moan. can accuse him right out. Besides that, a sprang to the ground, left his mare's reins

spirit trader's a public danger. All right, Alec. Get along! Taking the car?"

"Not much, uncle," Alec flung over his shoulder. "I don't want Rhinberg to know I'm coming before I'm half-way there! I'll ride Lightning."

Then Alec was down the veranda steps in two jumps. In two minutes he had reached the log stable where he kept his bay mare, Lightning.

Clapping on saddle and bridle, the lad vaulted up. Then he rammed home his heels

and thudded away.

It was some distance to Rhinberg's store. But Lightning tossed her head and went down the dusty trail like a red streak.

Alec pulled down his big, floppy hat against the tug of the wind and gave the mare her head. On she swept, uphill and down, till Alec topped a rise, from the summit of which he could see the German's store.

Hold hard, Lightning!" he breathed,

and pulled her down to a canter.

Across a little valley, Alec saw the stony Milima Kopje. Near the foot of that hill stood the wood and iron building that was Rhinberg's store.

"There's a bunch o' Zulus squatting there," muttered the lad, shading his eyes with his hand. "Are they buying blankets-or t'other

thing? I'll mighty soon find out!"

Then he left the wagon trail, pushing his mare through the tough, yellow grass at a walk.

Soon Alec was within a hundred yards of the store, threading his way through the scattered thorn trees. He could plainly see the Zulus grouped before the rough building on the slope above him. To his ears came hoarse, guttural laughter.

"Laugh away!" gritted Alec. "If I'm right you'll quit laughin' in another five

minutes---"

The lad broke off, reining in sharply. Something stirred in the grass on his right. He caught the sound of gasps and groans.

"Who's there?" he cried. "What's

wrong?"

trailing, and darted forward. Thrusting aside the grass, the lad saw the figure of a small Kafir boy sprawling on the ground.

"What's the matter, son?" cried Alec. "What are you kicking up all this row about? By Jingo," he gasped, "someone's been giving you a lamming!"

The Kaffir boy sat up, gaping at sight of Alec. His thin, black legs were covered with white weals. He seemed about to run.

"Hold hard, kid!" exclaimed Alec. "I ain't goin' to eat you! What's your name?

An' who's been lacing . you with a sjambok?"

Tuppence, baas," piped the black boy. "Me work along store of Baas Rhinberg. My baas done give me sjambok too much."

"Why,"
Tuppence,"
s n a p p e d
Alec, "what
have you
been doing
to deserve a
hiding like
that?"

"Nothing bad, baas,"

replied Tuppence, rubbing his scared legs. "I go to clean out store. I forgot Baas Rhinberg tell me not to go in end room. He catch me there—plenty angry—seize sjambok and beat."

"The brute!" gritted Alec, clinching his fists. "Fancy flogging a kid to ribbons for pushing in where he was told not to! I'll let Rhinberg know what I think of him.

"But," he added to himself, with a gasp, "why was Rhinberg so mad with this kid for

buttin' into the end room? That sounds queer. I wonder if the ruffian really has got a stock of fire-water? I'll——"

A hoarse shout from above made Alec swing round. Striding down the slope towards him the lad saw a squat, powerfully built man, clad in dirty khaki drill.

The newcomer had hawk-like features, with a reddish moustache half-hiding a cruel mouth. His rolled-up shirt-sleeves revealed long, muscular arms. It was Rhinberg himself.

"Vot you vant?" the German trader

bawled at Alec. "You you der Baker cub, hein? Go avay! Who give you leave to buck mitt my boy Tuppence?"

"I wasn't

"I wasn't
b u c k i n g
with Tuppence, Rhinberg!" retorted Alec
hotly. "I
found him
in the grass,
a n d wo ndered who'd
h a l f-flayed
him. I find
it was you,
you bully!"
Rhinberg,



The Kafir boy's thin legs were covered with white weals. "Who's been lacing you with a sjambok?" Alec demanded. (See this page.)

his whip dangling from his wrist, planted himself before Alec. He shook a finger in the youngster's face.

From above came a gust of deep laughter. Plainly the Zulus round the store enjoyed seeing the British lad hectored.

"I gif Tuppence der sjambok, young veller," leered Rhinberg, jabbing his finger at Alec, "because he do nod obey orders. He poke his nose into vot do nod concern him. I

t'ink you bedder be careful vhere you poke

your nose!"

"Poof! You can't scare me, Rhinberg!" cried Alec, his eyes blazing. "I ain't a Kafir kid——"

"Be off!" roared Rhinberg, raising his

whip. "Get out at vonce!"

"I'm going when I'm ready," flared Alec, forgetting caution. "An' that's when I've told you what I came for. I came to accuse you o' selling fire-water to Zulus. To grab cash, you're selling stuff that'll drive the fellows crazy! If you don't quit the district in twenty-four hours you'll have the police on your trail!"

Alec expected to see Rhinberg explode with wrath. He was thunderstruck to see the trader place his hands on his hips and bellow

with laughter.

"Fire-water, you young vool!" guffawed the German. "I never sell der stuff. Ask der Zulus up dere. Ask Nkozi, der biggest chief for miles around. Go and get police if you vish. Search my store! Search Nkozi's kraal!"

"Aye, search my kraal, white youth!" came down a thunderous shout from a gigantic Zulu who had risen to his feet. "I am the chief, Nkozi. And I do not let my young men buy the poisonous fire-water. Neither will I be accused of doing so. It is a lie!"

Alec was amazed. Plainly Rhinberg and the big chief were speaking the truth.

"Zatisfied?" leered Rhinberg.

"No, I ain't!" retorted Alec. "I don't know what you're at, but you're up to some dark game. The Zulus didn't shun my uncle's store before you blew up here!"

"Go avay!" bawled Rhinberg. "Tell your uncle I vill break him inside of von month!"

Further speech was useless. Alec spun on his heel, strode over to his bay mare, vaulted up and swung her round.

He rammed in his heels, but he had hardly gone twenty yards when wild shrieks behind

made him pull up.

"Don't beat me, baas!" the boy Tuppence was screaming, as he jumped up and down. "Me tell no tales! Me know nothing!"

"You talk mitt der Englander!" boomed Rhinberg, and his sjambok hissed through the air.

There was a thunder of hoofs. Lightning came galloping back full split, Alec riding with a loose rein.

"Blitzen!" howled Rhinberg and swung round, making to slash at Alec with his hippo-

hide whip.

Alec ducked. Then came a thud. Rhinberg, struck by the mare's shoulder, rolled over and over on the ground. Alec was flourishing above his head the whip snatched from the German trader as he fell.

"I vill kill you for dat!" bawled Rhinberg,

scrambling up.

"Come on then!" shouted Alec, but whipped his rifle from its bucket as the Zulus above started down with a roar.

At sight of the shining barrel the savages hesitated, spears half-lifted. Rhinberg clenched his big fists, but said nothing.

There was a moment's fateful pause. No one stirred. Then Alec whirled Lightning about, to shoot homeward at a hand gallop. There was nothing else he could do. Already he seemed to have done more harm than good.

Arrived back at his uncle's store the lad flung himself from his sweating mare and dashed up the veranda steps. Rapidly he related all that had happened.

"So you're sure Rhinberg ain't selling firewater" exclaimed John Baker, as his nephew

ended.

"Plumb certain, uncle!" replied Alec.

"But he's up to some funny tricks. The
Zulus used to be friends with us—now they
hand us the frozen face. Why, chief Nkozi
would ha' headed a rush at me if I hadn't had
my rifle. Rhinberg's got some hold on 'em.
It's a mystery!"

"I don't care what it is!" stormed the elder Baker, smashing his great fist down on the veranda rail. "We won't be hounded out o' Zululand by a German!

"I've changed my mind, Alec. We'll fight the fellow. Take the car to Duikersdorp tomorrow, an' fill it with trade goods. We'll get our trade back somehow. Get the best stuff going!"

"Right you are, uncle!" cried Alec, his eyes shining.
"I will!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER Through the Storm

"Gosh, it's getting dark!"
gasped Alec, as he
bent over the steering-wheel
of the car and went humming and roaring along the
rough road. "I hope the
dickens that storm don't
burst before I'm home!
I'll get stuck on the veldt
for the night!"

Alec was eager to get home and start the trade campaign against Rhinberg. The back of the car was loaded up with blankets, beads, and wire he had bought in the little town of

Duikersdorp.

It had been a long drive.

Night was already shutting down when Alec was
still miles from home. The
approach of night didn't

worry him, but the threatening storm did.
On hummed the car, jolting and banging.
The sun had gone down. Nearly all the sky

was black with thunderclouds.

In the dim light, Alec saw the thorn trees tossing and swaying. A sudden chill wind had sprung up, sweeping across the veldt.

All at once a drop of rain splashed on the lad's hand. It was followed by several more, pattering on the car's bonnet. In a moment the rain was lashing down like crystal rods.

"In for it, by Jingo!" cried Alec, and

switched on his lights.

But now the rain was roaring down. Night had fallen in a twinkling. The car's lights scarcely pierced the haze of falling water.

Rapidly the dusty trail became mud. The

car skidded from side to side.

"I wish I'd put chains on the wheels,"



"Blitzen!" howled Rhinberg, and Alec—just in time—caught the stock of the heavy hippo-hide whip as the man lashed out at him.

(See Chapter 1.)

thought Alec. "What a dolt I was! If it keeps on like this I'll be jolly well jammed."

Just then a red flicker of lightning zigzagged across the sky. It was followed by a deafening crash right overhead. The storm had burst in full fury.

Half-blinded by the rain, Alec drove on. His ears were filled with the drumming of the downpour, the constant peals of thunder like artillery.

The flashes of lightning seemed endless. One second the night sky was ablaze; then blackness followed that blotted out the land-

scape.

Slowing down, Alec struggled on for another hour. He was drenched to the skin, dazzled by the lightning, and deafened by the thunder.

The wagon track wound like a corkscrew. In a night storm it was impossible to keep to

it. And soon a terrific jolting told the lad he had left the road.

"Bushed!" he gasped. "I guess I'd best buzz back on my own track till I'm right

again."

With difficulty Alec worked the car round. Then he was groping his way through the thorn trees, going back on his own wheel-tracks, which glistened in the car lights.

Worse followed. With a sudden grinding of machinery, a snort, and a bump, the car

stopped dead. The lights went out.

"Hang this 'bus!" yelled Alec, leaping out. "She's conked out altogether. What a mess!"

Through the driving rain and the blackness the lad fought his way forward. Then he whipped out a pocket flashlight and frantically sought for the trouble.

His expert fingers fumbled here and there. He could find nothing wrong. But he suddenly looked into the petrol tank, then gave a

whoop.

"Run out o' juice!" he cried. "She's dry. Thank Mike it was nothing worse. Well, I can't be far from home now. I'll leave the bus here, footslog home, grab a can o' petrol, an' run her home when the storm's over."

Alec guessed he was south of the road. So, as near as he could judge, he headed due north.

Again and again the lightning crackled. It sprawled blue and yellow trails across the ink-black sky. The frequent flashes helped Alec.

Ten minutes plodding through the mire, his sopped hat-brim clinging round his ears, and

Alec found himself on the wagon trail.

"Got it!" he whooped. "Now we shan't be long. Hallo! What's that over there? A tin roof. It must be our store. Uncle'll crack his ribs laughin' when he hears I bust down ten minutes from home."

A vivid glare had just given Alec a glimpse of an iron roof. Darkness shut down again like a blanket. But he had got his direction.

He fought through the storm. In a few minutes he saw the dim outline of a building

loom up ahead of him.

"No lights!" he gasped. "Where the thump can uncle be? He can't ha' gone to bed yet."

"Jumpin' snakes!" he broke off with a whistle. "Tain't our store at all. It's Rhinberg's!"

Alec pulled up disgusted. He had reckoned himself home. Instead, he had struck the house of their enemy. For a second he paused irresolute. Then he explaimed:

irresolute. Then he exclaimed:

"Well, I ain't goin' on in this. I'd lose my way." He laughed shortly. "Rhinberg won't sell me petrol. I don't suppose he's got any. But he can't stop me from shelterin' on his veranda. Here's seeing, anyway."

Chuckling at the situation, Alec mounted the veranda steps. Then he shook cascades of

water from his hat.

"Any port in a storm," he laughed. "But I ain't goin' to let Rhinberg catch me here an' accuse me o' spying on him at night. I'll knock him up and tell him why I'm here."

Not a light showed at any window. The house seemed deserted. Only a flash of light-

ning showed Alec the door.

"Rum!" muttered the lad. "Mighty rum!" Then he pounded on the wooden door.

Alec's blows were hardly audible. The rain was drumming on the roof. The thunder still cracked and banged mightily. There was no

reply.

"I'm jolly well going to rouse him," gritted the lad. "I might get petrol at a price. Anyway, 'twould be deuced awkward if I lie low an' Rhinberg cops me here!" And he hammered again.

This time a low cry answered Alec. "Who's there?" shouted the lad.

"Tuppence, baas," came in a thin wail.

"Baas Rhinberg done gone away. I can't open door. He done leave me bound. Don't go away, baas. Free me. Hide thongs cutting my wrists an' ankles too much."

Alec sucked in his breath with a whistling

gasp.

"The bounder!" he hissed. "What did he leave the wretched kid tied up for? If he's done anything wrong he ought to shove him in clink—not leave him tied like a dangerous beast.

"Righto, Tuppence!" he shouted aloud. "I'm coming."

Twice Alec hurled his sturdy frame at the door. At the second effort there was a splintering crash.

The lock had burst. Alec went headlong into a pitch-dark room, to land on his knees on the

boarded floor.

"Burglary!" he laughed scrambling up.
"Folk 'ud think I bust in to pinch something! I don't care! I ain't leavin' a kid tied up with hide thongs. They must cut like knives!"

Then he switched on his electric torch. The

white eye of the lamp cleaved the darkness, showing the small form of Tuppence lying bound by the store counter.

In a second Alec whipped o u t h i s sheath-knife. In another he had sliced the Kafir boy's thongs and helped him to his feet.

"What's all this mean, Tuppence?" he barked.

" Me not understand, baas," replied

the native boy. "But I t'ink big trouble close for you an' the baas, your uncle."

"Why? How?" Alec rapped out.

"You done take Baas Rhinberg's sjambok," answered Tuppence, "so I tell you. Otherwise you die one time quick. Baas Rhinberg done go to kraal of Nkozi. He say: 'Dem' Bakers not live much longer.' He tie me up, leave me here, so I can no run warn you."

Alec whistled.

"Much obliged, Tuppence," he gritted. black shadow before him.

"But now you hop off. Get away to your own kraal. If Baas Rhinberg catches you after this he'll kill you. Run! Footsack!"

Tuppence didn't hesitate. He bolted out of the store like a jack rabbit, to vanish amongst the boulders and bushes.

Alec strode out on to the veranda. He stared across the veldt, thinking rapidly.

The storm had ceased as abruptly as it commenced. The black clouds had rolled away. Now a round, golden moon swam in the night sky, revealing glistening puddles

and dripping thorn trees.

"Shall I hike home an' warn uncle?" muttered Alec.
"Or shall I make tracks for Nkozi's kraal, stalk Rhinberg, an' find out what's in the wind?

"I guess
I'm going to
the kraal,"
he exploded
after a second. "I'm
goin' to find
out just what
that German's plotting!"

Alec quitted

the veranda in a bound. He knew the way to Nkozi's kraal, and he started for it full split.

It was mighty lucky for many people that Alec had decided as he had!

THE THIRD CHAPTER Alec's Strategy

Alec pounded on through the strips of bush. The bright moon threw his flitting black shadow before him.



Peering through the doorway, Alec saw Nkozi, his flat, ebony features diabolical in the red glow from the fire. Beside him stood Rhinberg, chuckling evilly. (See Chapter 3.)

At last he pulled up, breath sobbing in his lungs. He could make out a cluster of domed, beehive-shaped huts, black against the

moonlit sky.

"Nkozi's kraal!" panted the lad. "An' it's mighty lucky I visited it once on business , for uncle. I know which is the chief's hut. It's that big one in the middle. Now, here's where I imitate a hungry cat," and down he went on his hands and knees.

Alec crawled forward cautiously, hugging the shadows. He knew if he were caught he

would probably be promptly speared.

Nkozi had shown his hostility the day before at the store. And this time Alec had no rifle! Believing himself near home he had left his weapon in the car, under the seat.

But Alec's luck held. Unseen the lad crawled through a gap in the reed fence that surrounded the kraal. Then he paused, star-

ing anxiously round.

From several huts came growling voices. In one a pariah dog snapped and snarled, but was quickly silenced. To Alec's nostrils came the smell of wood smoke and the reek of the hump-backed cattle that stamped in their muddy little enclosure.

"O. K." chuckled Alec. "Nkozi must ha' got the only visitor he was expecting! There's no guards about. Now for the earthworm

business."

Alec dropped on to his stomach. Then he started working his way forward with his elbows and feet.

A few minutes' difficult progress and the lad was in the black shadow of the chief's big hut. He pricked up his ears, then gasped.

"Rhinberg's in there, or I'm a Dutchman!" he told himself. "I'd know his rasping voice

anywhere. It's like a crow's!"

Then, very carefully, Alec inched his way round. At last, hugging the hut grass wall, he peered round through the low doorway.

. What Alec saw made a gasp of triumph well up in his throat. But he bit it off, then

strained his eyes and ears.

Before a smouldering log fire, Nkozi the chief squatted on his haunches, his chin stop der demon-cart so dat der warnings cupped in his left hand. Rhinberg stood cannod be taken. Your men can steal der

beside the chief, his thumbs hooked in his pistol belt.

In the red glow, Nkozi's flat, ebony features looked diabolical. Rhinberg was chuckling evilly. His squat figure threw an uncouth shadow on the hut wall.

"Den der rising starts to-morrow?" queried the German, unconscious of the

watching Alec.

"That is the order I have received from my king," replied Nkozi, showing the whites of his eyes as he looked up at Rhinberg's vulture-like face. "Even now the impis gather from the kraals. I have fifty spearmen here. The meeting-place is half-way to the town of Duikersdorp.

"Wow, Baas Rhinberg! The Zulus will eat up that town. They will wipe out all the

English in Zululand!"

"Great guns!" breathed Alec to himself. "I've stumbled on a sight bigger thing than I guessed! The Zulus are on the war-path! What part's that fiend Rhinberg playing?"

Alec quickly learnt. Choking in the vile atmosphere of the hut Rhinberg forced

out:

"Dot is well, chief. I hate der Englanders. But dere are two near here who have a firewaggon—dose Bakers, uncle und nephew. Dey may learn of der rising. Den dey vill rush to Duikersdorp swiftly und give warnings."

"That is the reason I sent for you, Baas Rhinberg," growled Nkozi. "You alone can stop the fire-waggon. Can you not secretly tamper with that demon cart's body,

so that it will not run?"

Rhinberg's pig-like eyes glittered in the firelight.

"Gladly vill I do that, chief!" he snarled. "But why nod send warriors to kill der Bakers dis night? Dot would be easy."

Nkozi shook his bullet head.

"No," he replied. "I dare not. The king's orders are that there is to be no killing till he gives the word. If I start before that word comes the rising may be spoilt. I should be held to account."

"Vair well," nodded Rhinberg, "den I vill



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AMBUSHED!

Baker cub's horse. But vot do I get for my vork?"

"You are our friend, baas," replied Nkozi, kicking the red embers together with his big foot. "Therefore the king's soldiers shall neither harm you nor burn your store. You have my promise. Is not that enough reward?"

"No," spluttered Rhinberg, "it vos not enough. Gif me six of der things I always buy from you at der great price. Den I vill see der demon-car gannot run. Und when der rising start I vill kill der Baker cub mineself. He knock me down mitt his horse! Donner! I do nod forget dat!"

"Good, baas," replied Nkozi promptly, fumbling with a buckhide pouch at his girdle, "I will pay for your work. Here is your reward.

"If the white police knew you bought these things from me you would go to gaol. But that is nothing compared with your fate if you fail to stop the fire-wagon! You will die-not quickly."

"Trust me, chief," snarled Rhinberg. "I vill wreck der Bakers' fire-carriage and earn der reward. Now pay! Den I go to der Bakers' store at vonce."

Alec couldn't see what followed. The lad's face was close to the ground, and he dare not raise it.

But he saw Rhinberg stoop towards the sitting Zulu. Something passed from the black hand to the white. Then Rhinberg straightened up again, patting his breeches pocket.

"I go, chief," he snarled.

"Aye, go quickly!" replied Nkozi, without looking up. "Some time to-morrow the king launches the impis. Look to it that the firecarriage is wrecked this night. If you fail——"

Alec heard no more. He saw the German make for the low door by which he was lying. Rapidly he wriggled away into the shadow.

"Gosh!" the lad breathed to himself. "The Zulus are breaking out to-morrow. They'll kill all the English within fifty miles. An' that brute Rhinberg's taken some bribe voice in a harsh, wrathful whisper.

to queer our car-so that we can't give warning if we get wind of the rising! Guess again, Rhinberg!" he gritted. "You ain't goin' to earn that blood-money!"

Alec had crawled to the back of the big hut. Just then footsteps reached his ears. He lay motionless.

Then he saw the squat, powerful figure of Rhinberg stride past him, boots squelching in the mire.

Alec dimly saw the German pass out through the gap in the reed fence. Then he rose to his feet, soundless as a shadow.

A few seconds later Rhinberg was threading his way through the bush. And after him stole the lithe figure of young Alec.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER The Zulu Rising

A LEC's blood was boiling. His pulses leapt. He had discovered Rhinberg's villainous treachery, which would mean the death of many white folk. But he was not certain yet how to act.

Strong as he was, Alec knew the gorillalike Rhinberg was a great deal stronger. Also the German was armed.

"Best thing I can do," muttered the lad, "is to hang on the bounder's trail till he's near our store. Then I can dodge round through the bush an' warn uncle.

"We'll catch the ruffian sneaking into our car shed, knock him out, and rope him up. Then we'll carry petrol to the car and beat it for Duikersdorp."

His brain working feverishly, Alec stuck close to the squat, ungainly figure striding ahead. He wanted to make sure Rhinberg was heading for his uncle's store before he dodged round through the bush.

It was mighty lucky the lad trailed the German for a bit. For he suddenly saw Rhinberg pull up with a savage grunt.

Alec stopped, too, not ten yards behind his quarry. He crouched by a thorn tree, measuring the distance with his eye and wondering what Rhinberg had found.

Rhinberg was stooping, staring at the ground. To Alec's ears came the ruffian's "Tracks!" hissed Rhinberg. "Boot-marks in der ground. I haf been followed to Nkozi's kraal! Dere vos only two people round here who vould follow me—either Johan Baker or his cub nephew!

"It must be der cub! He haf spied round my store and Tuppence haf told him where I go. Blitzen! Der cub must be close now! I vill warn Nkozi to search der bush at vonce."

Rhinberg jerked upright and spun on his heel. In the moonlight Alec saw the German's vulture-like features were twisted with rage.

There was not a second to lose. Once Rhinberg reached Nkozi's kraal, Zulu warriors would be on Alec's tracks. The fleet savages would catch the lad before he was half-way home. The warning of the rising would never reach Duikersdorp.

All this raced through Alec's brain like a flash of lightning. And even as Rhinberg

whirled round, Alec launched himself.

There was a quick thudding of feet. Then the German saw Alec come flying at him from the shadows.

It was a total surprise. For a split second Rhinberg stared thunderstruck. Then his hand darted to his pistol.

"You spied on me!" he boomed. "You.

jackal's velp! Take dot!"

The steel barrel glinted as the weapon flashed up. But Alec was coming like a shot from a gun. He covered the ten yards in three great bounds.

There sounded a hard smack—like the cracking of a coconut. Before Rhinberg's finger could tighten on the trigger Alec's bunched knuckles crashed to the villain's jaw.

It was a terrific blow. All the lad's weight was behind it. Down went Rhinberg like a felled ox. Unable to stop, Alec sprawled headlong across the prone body.

But the lad was on his feet in a twinkling. And, whirling round, he made to snatch up

the dropped pistol.

His hand closed on it and he scooped it up. But the same instant his eyes fell on a small buckskin pouch that had fallen from Rhinberg's pocket.

"That's what Nkozi gave the rotter!" gasped Alec. "The reward for crocking our

car. What the thump is it?"

Alec snatched up the little bag. He felt things inside like hard pebbles and shook them into his hand.

"Diamonds!" he gasped, his eyes bulging.
"Rough diamonds! An' what did Nkozi
say in the hut? Why, that police would be
on Rhinberg's trail if they knew what he
dealt in!

"By Jove!" he ended. "That explains everything. Rhinberg's an I.D.B. merchant! He buys diamonds that Zulus have stolen from the mines. No wonder he was mad with that kid Tuppence for barging into the room where he kept them! An' that's how Rhinberg collared uncle's trade. He must ha' promised to buy these stones from the Zulus on condition they traded with him only. Well, the game's finished now!"

As he ended Alec glared down at the sense-

less Rhinberg.

"You're an utter scoundrel!" he gritted. "For a handful o' stones you help Zulus on the war-path. You ought to die! But I'll give you a chance for your life. I'll just fix you so you can't budge for an hour or so. Then escape from your black pals if you can!"

Quickly Alec bound the stunned Rhinberg with strips of clothing. Then, seizing the pistol, and flinging the diamonds down, he made off through the moonlit bush as hard as

he could pelt.

Already bands of Zulus must be swarming through the bush towards the appointed meeting-place. Only by a desperate rush could Alec and his uncle break through and warn the folk of Duikersdorp.

Panting for breath, Alec at last pounded up the steps of his uncle's store. He found old

John Baker sitting up for him.

"Where's the car, lad?" cried the elder man, leaping up from his chair as his drenched nephew burst in. "What's happened?"

"Car's back in the bush, uncle!" cried Alec. "I ran out of petrol. Get your rifle,

quick, and listen!"

Rapidly Alec related how he had overheard the plot to tinker with the car while the Zulus gathered.

"They're risen, uncle!" he ended in a yell. "They're only waitin' their king's order to start the killing! An' that ruffian Rhinberg

took a bribe to wreck our car so we couldn't get through! He's the Zulus' ally. He's been buying all their stolen diamonds, and that's how he crocked our trade!"

"An I.D.B. man!" shouted John Baker. "Where's he now?"

"Where I dropped him!" yelled Alec. "Quick, uncle! Grab all the petrol you can. We'll have to shove it in the buggy an' drive Lightning. There's no time to footslog to where the car's bushed!"

Then the two Bakers hustled for their lives.

Alec raced to the stables, got his mare Lightning out, flung on the harness, and hitched her to the buggy. His uncle seized several tins of petrol, rushed down with them, and piled them in.

Five minutes later a whip cracked. Lightning sprang forward. Then the buggy's wheels whirred as the Bakers drove at a gallop for the stranded car.

Hoofs thudding, kicking up showers of mud, Lightning raced down the wagon road. Alec gripped the reins. His uncle sat beside him rifle ready, straining his eyes for a glimpse of Zulu spearmen.

But they saw no one. And soon Rhinberg's store showed plain in the moonlight.

"Car's quite close here, uncle!" explained Alec, and swung into the bush, the light buggy bobbing and dancing like a boat at sea.

But Alec had struck the wheel tracks where the car had left the road in the storm. They were quite plain now. And suddenly Alec uttered a muffled shout.

"The car, uncle!" he cried, pointing to a dim bulk through the trees. "Now we'll soon be buzzing!"

Out they sprang. The elder Baker dashed to the car, and started flinging all Alec's new trade goods overboard. In a few seconds the ground around was littered with blankets and bales of copper wire.

It meant the loss of pounds' worth of goods. But the stuff was far too heavy to be carried in a dash to save lives.



As the barrel of Rhinberg's weapon glinted in the moonlight Alec lashed out with all his strength, his bunched knuckles crashing home on the villain's jaw. (See Chapter 4.)

Meanwhile Alec placed chains on the car wheels to prevent skidding. Then he filled up the petrol tank and heaved the other tins into the back seat.

"Ready, uncle!" he cried. "Except for Lightning. I'll turn her loose. She'll follow a bit, then cut her own line for Duikersdorp. She knows the way. An' I bet no savage'll get within a mile of her!"

In a moment Lightning was unharnessed. Then both men sprang into the car and Alec started up. The engine roared to life, and the lad swung round and went bumping back towards the road.

They reached the road, and Alec gave the machine all the speed he dared. Forward leapt the car, roaring along the moonlit, muddy road. Lightning was quickly dropped behind. But Alec had no fear for her. The clever mare was certain to reach Duikersdorp some time.

"Got away, uncle!" yelled Alec triumph-

antly, as he crouched at the wheel.

That very instant wild war-whoops rang through the bush. Glancing back, Alec caught a glimpse of flashing assegais as a bunch of Zulus spilled out from the bush and came roaring in pursuit. The car had been heard by Zulus on the march.

"Who cares?" yelled Alec. "They can't

catch us!"

"No, but they'll signal to pals ahead!' shouted John Baker. "Drive, Alec! Drive! You'll-hear the war drums in two shakes!"

Alec gasped and opened wide the throttle. The car swayed and lurched desperately. But the lad was using all his skill. If the Zulus ambushed them, the warning would never reach the threatened town.

The car hummed and purred on. The wind whistled in Alec's ears. The bush went by like a black sheet. Boulders loomed up ahead, came abreast, and were dropped behind.

Suddenly, above the roar of the engine, Alec heard a throbbing sound. Steady beats came from far and near. The sounds died down, only to be heard later farther ahead.

"The drums!" hissed Alec.

"Aye! Signalling to block the road!"

cried his uncle. "Let her rip, Alec!"

On they tore, mile after mile. The moon sank, and the eastern sky grew pale. Dawn was at hand.

Once Alec heard shouts on his right. But he let the car out and the sounds faded rapidly.

"That was a bunch of 'em, uncle!" he

yelled. "But we've slipped 'em!"

John Baker said nothing. He sat with his rifle ready, and his beard jutting grimly forward.

The hours slipped by. The humming car seemed to eat up the miles despite the roughness of the road. At length the sun was beating down fiercely. Alec could see for miles over the green, bush-clad veldt.

"Beat 'em!" cried the lad. "We ain't heard a drum for hours! An' we can't be a

dozen miles from town!"

Came, then, a wild, warning yell from the elder Baker. He was standing up, and could see further than his nephew.

"Full speed, Alec!" he howled. "There's Zulus swarming towards the road from each side! There! They're dashing along behind a line of bush! Full speed, or we shan't get through!"

Alec glanced where his uncle pointed, and the lad gasped as he caught the flicker of steel.

Down the road raced the car, stones whizzing up from the flying wheels. Zulus were converging on the road from both sides. A single spear could out the lad at the steering-wheel.

"Faster! Faster!"

John Baker's voice rose to a thrilling shout. But it was drowned by yells from the bush. From the corner of his eye Alec glimpsed naked black forms, waving feather head-dresses, and brandished spears and clubs.

"We're through!" he shouted, eyes on the track. "Those fiends won't get us!"

That very instant came a knocking sound from the engine. The car was slowing down. The war-whoops broke out with bloodthirsty eagerness. They approached rapidly.

"She's missing, uncle!" yelled Alec. "A plug oiled up, I guess. Can't you keep the

brutes off a---"

Howls rent the air. Then from each side triumphant savages rushed bounding from the bush. An assegai whizzed through Alec's shirt sleeve. Another removed John Baker's hat. Then:

Bang! Bang! Bang! John Baker was on his feet, emptying his rifle into the swarms of brown assailants. Several bit the ground. others jumped over the bodies and came roaring forward.

It was touch and go. Alec couldn't hit up speed. They had dropped to ten miles an hour. Spears shivered across the quivering car's bonnet. To Alec the air seemed full of flashing steel, and black, leaping bodies. Zulus were all round.

With a fierce shout John Baker clubbed his empty rifle. He whirled it round his head, to bring the butt crashing down on a warrior

who sprang.

Again he struck, and once again. The Zulus were amazed at the strength of the huge, bearded man. He had downed three. But more were coming on, with whoops and strident whistles. The fight couldn't last.



Hoofs thudding, Lightning raced out into the storm, the buggy's wheels flinging up showers of mud. (See Chapter 4.)

All seemed over, when the car gave a sudden lurch. Then it shot forward. In a moment it was making forty an hour once more.

"Saved!" bawled Alec. "By the skin of our teeth!" and saw three Zulus who had leapt from the bush ahead go down before their headlong rush.

More spears came hurtling from behind. But they fell short. The Zulus were quickly outstripped. The bloodthirsty yells of rage and disappointment grew rapidly faint.

"A mighty close shave, my lad!" gasped Baker senior, leaning back and mopping his face. "But I guess that's the last of 'em. We ain't likely to strike more now. But keep your eyes skinned."

But they met no more Zulus. And shortly afterwards they hummed into Duikersdorp, shouting their warning. In ten minutes mounted police were clattering out to meet the Zulus.

But few were found. The savages knew the car would give warning, and rapidly dispersed to their kraals.

Thanks to Alec, the rising was nipped in the bud.

"I wonder what'll happen to Rhinberg?" cried Alec, as tired and travel-stained, he swung down from the car before Duikersdorp's one hotel.

"I guess the Zulus'll kill him," exclaimed John Baker grimly, " for not wrecking the car. They're vengeful folk."

But Rhinberg's fate was never learnt. He vanished completely. Whether he was caught and killed, or escaped to try his luck in another country, remained a mystery.

But what is certain is that Alec recovered his mare. Dust-grimed and sweating, Lightning clattered into Duikersdorp some hours after the car.

Also, the Bakers' store prospered more than ever before. Zulus admire pluck, even in their enemies. The tale of Alec's dash and John Baker's fight ran through the kraals; and natives flocked to the store to buy goods and gaze at the fighting traders.

There was only one drawback to the rush of popularity. Tuppence, who became the Bakers' store-boy, suffered badly from swelled head.

THE END