

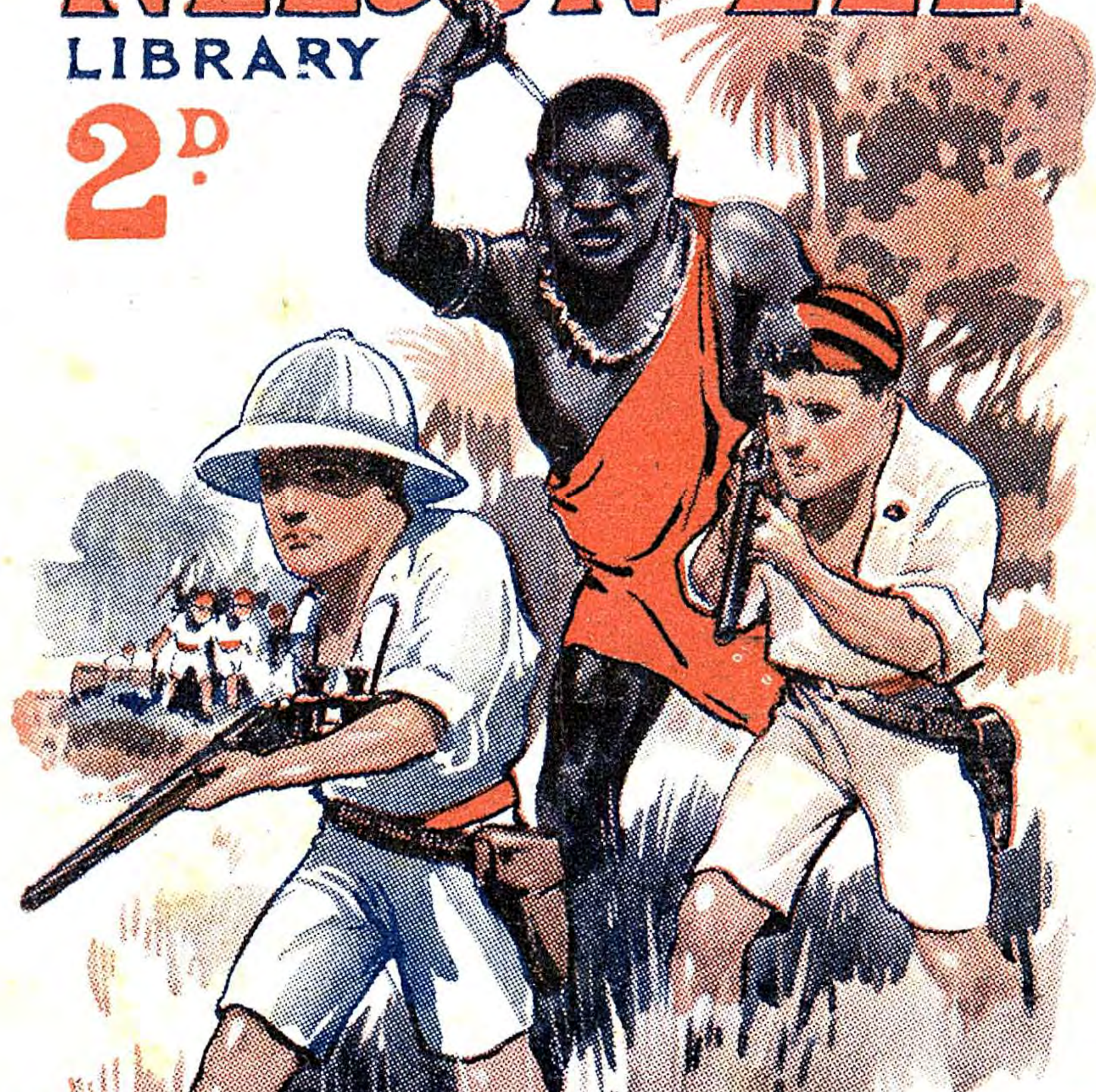
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St. Frank's IN THE Congo!

A powerful new holiday-adventure story, featuring Lord Dorrimore and the Boys of St. Frank's in the Mystery Jungle.



"Sorry, guv'nor, but we want to go to Umlosi's rescue, and you're not going to choke us off!" declared Nipper firmly to Nelson Lee. "Mutiny, by gad!" exclaimed Dorrie grimly. Mutiny it was, for the St. Frank's boys and Moor View girls did not intend to be left behind while the others went to the rescue of Umlosi, who was trapped in the depths of the mysterious Congo!

Wonderful New Adventure Series!Mystery Thrills!

St. Frank's IN THE Congo!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The opening yarn of a stirring holiday-adventure series, featuring Lord Dorrimore and the Boys of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 1.

Adventure Bound!

THE flat-bottomed little river steamer chugged contentedly on her way up the crystal waters of the Kwanzi, and the tropical sun of Central Africa beat down on the deck-awnings with an overpowering heat.

"This," said Archie Glenthorne languidly, "is the life!"

"Brother, I agree!" murmured William Napoleon Browne, as he stretched out a long arm and seized a glass of iced limejuice.

"I mean to say, restful scenery, what?" went on Archie. "Dashed comfy deck-chairs, and so forth. In fact, everything absolutely topping and all correct-o!"

He gazed dreamily astern, where the creamy foam stretched away into the distance. And he watched the ripples that went eddying

towards the brilliantly clothed banks, where the vegetation came right down to the water's edge.

Nipper, strolling along the deck with Mary Summers, chuckled as he observed the two lazily-reclining figures.

"You two look busy!" he remarked drily.

"Believe it or believe it not, Brother Nipper, we are busy," declared Browne. "Do not be deluded by our restful attitudes. Do not make the mistake of assuming that our lives are untroubled. I would remind you that this river, for all its beauty, is the haunt of uncouth insects which appear to have a special liking for my unfortunate person."

"Absolutely," said Archie, nodding. "The flies are a dashed nuisance. A chappie can't even obtain forty of the best without a regiment of the blighters making a massed attack on his facial front."

"Still, it's not so bad, is it?" asked Mary,

her eyes alight with interest and animation. "Personally, I think it's just gorgeous. I'm enjoying every minute."

"Same here," agreed Nipper, as they leaned over the starboard rail. "Dorrie was right about this river, too. Did you ever see such crystal water? If you look straight down, you can see the rock bed. None of those beastly marigolds here!"

"I always thought marigolds were rather nice," protested Mary.

"Everything in moderation, old girl," replied Nipper. "The Congo has rather overdone the marigold business, in my opinion. It looks more like a river of beer than anything else."

"Tea, young 'un," smiled Lord Dorrimore, as he lounged up and joined them. "It sounds much better to say 'tea.' Anyhow, we've left the Congo far behind now, and the Kwanzi happens to be one of the really clear streams that this country can boast of. There aren't many."

"But I thought we were in the Congo?" asked Mary.

"So we are," replied his lordship. "The actual Congo territory extends for a tremendous distance—half across Central Africa, in fact. But I was referrin' to the river. We've kissed it good-bye for the time bein'."

A commotion came from further along the deck, and they turned.

"A hippo!" shouted Tommy Watson excitedly.

"That's nothin'," said Lord Dorrimore drily. "You'll get used to seein' gentry of his type. We're gettin' into the big game country now—well away from the more civilised regions. By this evenin' we ought to be at Insissi."

"And that's where you're going to leave us while you go elephant hunting with the guv'nor," said Nipper coldly. "How can you do such a thing, Dorrie? How can you be so callous as to leave us behind?"

"Cheese it, young 'un!" grinned Lord Dorrimore. "Elephant huntin' is a man's job. You ungrateful young chimpanzee! Aren't you satisfied with the trip—for its own sake?"

"Rather!" said Nipper promptly.

"Between you an' me and the deck-rail, I wouldn't care a toss about your comin' after the elephants," added Dorrie confidentially. "But I'm a reckless sort of beggar at the best. Mr. Lee thinks otherwise—an' you have my sympathy."

His lordship nodded and walked away. For a moment Nipper stood looking at the river bank, across the dazzling water. Mimosa, palms, and gaily coloured creepers were festooned in bewildering profusion along the bank, and there was an ever-changing vista of gorgeous tints.

"It wasn't fair to grumble at him, Dick," said Mary reproachfully.

"Eh?" said Nipper, with a grin. "Dorrie is a sportsman. He knew I was only joking. All the same, I'd love to go on the actual

hunt. But the guv'nor's quite right—it wouldn't do. There's old Handy."

"What about him?" smiled the girl.

"Well, just imagine Handy on an elephant-shooting trip," said Nipper. "You surely don't think we'd bring him back alive? Dorrie talks about being reckless, but he's a man of supreme caution compared to Handforth."

"We could leave Handy behind."

"You might as well talk about leaving the guns behind," chuckled Nipper. "No, the only safe way is for us all to stay at headquarters, and have a good time while the guv'nor and Dorrie are away shooting."

The Sprite continued her way up river, and every member of her company was in a gay mood—with the sole exception, perhaps, of Umlosi. Lord Dorrimore's black friend was thoughtful and grave. Something deep was weighing upon the mind of the great Kutanaa Chief.

Yet this was strange, for every chug of the little steamer's paddle was taking him nearer to the home of his fathers.



CHAPTER 2.

Dorrie's Holiday Party.

It only seemed a short time since the holiday party had started out from England. Lord Dorrimore had invited Nelson Lee to go elephant hunting with him, and the famous schoolmaster-detective had readily consented. For St. Frank's was enjoying the long vac.

But there was Nipper, too, and Nipper had naturally suggested another of those jolly holiday parties, for which Dorrie was famous. His lordship had cheerfully invited Nipper to bring the whole school if he liked.

But that was only Dorrie's fun.

The party, as a matter of fact, was comparatively small. There were a dozen St. Frank's fellows and six Moor View girls. Or, to be exact, five—for Dora, the sister of Irene Manners, was older than her schoolgirl companions, and she wasn't a Moor View girl, either.

Naturally, such stalwarts as Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, Handforth & Co., and Archie Glenthorne were included. For the rest, Browne of the Fifth had graced the party by his presence, and he was the only senior among the lot. Willy Handforth was the only fag, and it was a curious fact that these two had selected one another as close companions for the trip, sharing the same cabin and sitting next to one another at table.

They had journeyed out to Africa on the good old Wanderer, Lord Dorrimore's famous yacht, and the Wanderer, which was fitted with engines like a destroyer, had reached the West African coast in an incredibly short space of time. But she had her limitations. Even the Wanderer could not negotiate the celebrated Livingstone Falls, with its cataracts

extending for a stretch of over two hundred and fifty miles down the mighty river

The yacht docked at Matadi, on the Belgian-Portuguese frontier, seventy miles from the sea. The Congo is navigable for this great distance inland, even in the case of ocean-going steamers.

After that the party had travelled by train to Kinshasa, and in the region of the Stanley Pool—a good-sized pool, by the way, since its expanse is something like two hundred and fifty square miles—the Sprite had been waiting, in readiness to go up river.

But the mighty Congo itself was not navigated for long, for Dorrie's little river steamer turned off into the Kasai, in itself a vast river with powerful tributaries such as the Kwango, the Kwengo, and the Kwilu. This latter is one of the few great streams of the Congo with clear water. The spectacle is quite extraordinary at the Kwilu's junction with the Kwango, where the two waters can still be distinguished for several miles—crystal clear on one side, and turbid on the other.

From the Kasai the Sprite had branched off into one of the other tributaries, and was finally wending her way up the clear waters of the Kwanzi. Her destination was Insissi, beyond which the little steamer would be unable to push owing to cataracts.

It was quite a light-hearted party. Lord Dorrimore was keen on the forthcoming elephant hunt, and Nelson Lee was looking forward to the change, too. The boys and girls were finding enjoyment in every minute of the trip, for it was something new to them. They had been in many parts of the world with the amiable Dorrie, but the Congo territory was all fresh ground.

Indeed, to Harry Gresham and Aiec Duncan the experience was doubly joyous, since this was the first time they had been on one of Dorrie's famous jaunts. At the last moment they had found it possible to join, and they were having the time of their lives.

"Well, boys, we shall be at Insissi this evening," remarked Nelson Lee, as he joined a group of juniors under the port awning. "By what I can hear, you'll have a very enjoyable time while Dorrie and I are absent."

"Rather, sir!"

"We're having an enjoyable time now, sir!" smiled Duncan.

"It's just glorious!" declared Harry Gresham enthusiastically.

Handforth frowned.

"Sorry to disagree with you, sir, but I

don't see how we shall enjoy ourselves at Insissi," he said gruffly. "It's only an up-country trading post, isn't it?"

"It is the home of Mr. James Stanford, an English trader who has established an enormous business in copra," replied Nelson Lee. "It is the last port of civilisation on this river. Beyond lies the virgin forest."

"Where we shan't be allowed to go," said Handforth pointedly.

"Precisely," nodded Lee. "Where you won't be allowed to go."

"Then it's a fraud, sir," protested Edward Oswald. "It's not fair—Eh? Leggo my arm, Church, you ass!"

"Then dry up!" muttered Church, turning red.

"Yes, cheese it, Handy," hissed McClure.

Handforth's chums were only too grateful for the trip itself, and it pained them to hear their leader grumbling. Not that Handforth was in any way ungrateful. He simply wasn't satisfied.

"I'm not going to cheese it!" he said firmly. "We're being swindled! The idea is to bring us to the fringe of the virgin forest, and then leave us there. Why, it's—it's like taking a horse to water, and then preventing him from drinking!"

CHAPTER 3.

Handy Isn't Satisfied!

NELSON LEE smilingly shook his head.

"I can quite understand your feel-

ings, Handforth, but you apparently have no inkling of the dangers of an elephant hunt."

"I'm not afraid of danger, sir," said Handforth promptly.

"Quite the contrary," chuckled Lee. "In fact, it is your reckless disregard for danger which makes this particular trip impossible for you. Elephant hunting is perfectly safe to an old hand like Lord Dorrimore—and I have had some experience, too. But you boys would be at a very great disadvantage."

"And we all realise it, sir—except this obstinate ass!" said Church indignantly. "We're quite willing to stay at Mr. Stanford's place until you come back from the hunt. I dare say we shall get some excitement, one way and another."

"Excitement!" scoffed Handforth. "Where? I don't mind telling you that I'm jolly disappointed! I thought this trip up river was going to be full of perils, with fights against hippos, and battles with rhinos, and awful encounters with crocodiles!"

"You expected rather a lot, didn't you,

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE

has written a story—

"BUCKING UP OLD ALGY!"

This famous member of the St. Frank's Remove has been busy for weeks. Nobody suspected that he had any literary talent, but his story is so extraordinarily good that the Editor has decided to publish it in serial form, commencing—

NEXT WEEK!

Ted?" asked Irene Manners, as she joined the little group.

"And instead of that," complained Handforth, "this river journey has been as tame as pushing a punt up the good old Stowe."

"You want too much for your money," chuckled Gresham.

"We're fed up with him!" put in McClure tartly.

"Eh?" said Handforth, frowning. "What's that?"

"We're fed up with you!" repeated Mac.

"Both of us!" said Church. "To the neck!"

"Look here——"

"You've been grumbling ever since we started!" went on Church fiercely. "You growled because the river wasn't full of alligators, and you've been asking where all the lions were, and why they didn't roar!"

"You silly ass——"

"Yes, and he's been looking for herds of elephants," said McClure. "I believe he expects to see them galloping along the banks. I never knew such a chap! Never satisfied!"

"I'm afraid he never will be—if he expects all that!" said Lee drily.

"I shall be satisfied if you'll let me go on this elephant-shooting trip with you, sir," said Handforth eagerly.

"An idle dream, my son," remarked Dorrie, as he seized Nelson Lee's arm, and drew him aside. "Sorry, an' all that, but your pater expects to see you home again by the end of the holidays. I don't quite know why, but I expect he has his peculiarities, like the rest of us."

Dorrie nodded as he went off with Nelson Lee, and Handforth stared.

"What the dickens did he mean?" he asked blankly.

"I don't think he really meant it," murmured Irene. "And really, Ted, you are a bit unreasonable to expect them to take you elephant hunting. One needs to be a crack shot—and elephant guns aren't like the rifles you use at the shooting ranges."

But Handforth refused to be mollified.

"They might be away for two or three weeks," he protested. "And we shall be stuck at this cobra station, twiddling our thumbs."

"A cobra station ought to be exciting!" grinned Willy. "What do you expect it is, Ted? A place where they breed snakes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want any sauce from you!" frowned Handforth.

"You've got the wrong word, my lad," said Willy. "It's copra—not cobra."

"What do I care what the word is?" roared Handforth. "Copra is some beastly stuff they grow in these tropics, and I've heard they use it for making soap. Some horrible concoction, I'll bet!"

Church grinned.

"Isn't it just like Handy to air his ignorance?" he asked. "He doesn't even know that copra is the commercial name for coconuts."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you trying to spoof me?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"My dear ass, copra is simply a trade name for dried coconut kernels," said Nipper kindly. "They're shipped to the coast, and then to England—and you finally eat it on your bread in the form of margarine."

"That's just where you're wrong!" retorted Handforth. "I don't eat margarine."

"I was only speaking figuratively, you chump," grinned Nipper. "And I wouldn't be so sure about margarine, either. Many a time in the dining-hall at St. Frank's I've had my suspicions. In any case, margarine is good, wholesome stuff—and better than poor quality butter."

Handforth took a deep breath.

"Why talk about margarine?" he growled.

"I was discussing elephant hunting—and you twist the conversation on to the subject of margarine! Why aren't we going with Mr. Lee and Dorrie?"

"Is this a new riddle?" asked Church politely.

"No, you fathead!" barked Handforth. "I want to know——"

"It's a pity you can't resign yourself," interrupted Nipper. "You hopeless ass! We're all as keen on this hunt as you are, but we've got sense enough to realise that it can't be done. There would be too many hardships——"

"Hardships!" echoed Handforth, amazed.

"Hardships!" repeated Nipper firmly. "You mustn't forget that we're a set of poor, weakly infants. We're unable to stand the strain of a trek through the forest. We can't be trusted with guns. As for the girls, they're fragile flowers, liable to wither at the slightest exposure to the blast."

"What blast?" asked Handforth. "We're not in the Arctic!"

"Just an expression," said Nipper calmly.

"It's no good, Handy—we're Dorrie's guests, and we've got to keep smiling. We're allowed to enjoy the primeval forest from the safety of this deck. But when it comes to the real fun, we're barred."

Handforth looked at Nipper with eager eyes.

"Then—then you agree with me about all this?" he asked breathlessly.

"My son, I'm with you heart and soul!" said Nipper. "If you want to know the truth, I'm disgusted. This proposal to leave us all behind is too thick for mere words."

And the others—girls included—heartily agreed.

ALL ABOUT THE ECLIPSE!

(See page 41.)

CHAPTER 4.

The Call of His People.



ORD DORRIMORE sat forward in his deck-chair, and looked keenly at Umlosi, the giant Zulu chief who was Dorrie's constant companion.

"Old fellow, you don't really believe these yarns, do you?" he asked. "Man alive! You're not tellin' me that you take them seriously?"

"There are many things which one may believe, N'Kose, and many which one may disregard," replied Umlosi solemnly. "Even as thou knowest, my father, I am not a man to believe the idle chatter of windbags and emptyheads. I have travelled much, and I have learned much. I know that the witch-doctors of my own tribe are empty tricksters, and I have learned to disregard the superstitions of ignorance. All this is known to you, my father."

"Then why worry because a lot of idle rumours are circulatin' along the river?" asked Dorrie, in wonder.

Umlosi was unusually grave.

"'Tis not for us to call them idle, N'Kose," he replied. "Mayhap I am unduly exercised in mind. Mayhap there is naught in these stories to occasion my journey into my own Kutana country. Perchance I shall go on an idle mission. 'Tis even possible that I shall arrive in Zenobu to find myself a laughing stock among my own wise men."

"Then why, in the name of wonder, risk it?" asked Lord Dorrimore. "I was relyin' on you, Umlosi, to join in this elephant huntin' picnic. You've got a marvellous nose for 'phunts,' an' we shall be all at sea without you."

Umlosi shook his ebony head.

"Thou art unduly modest, my father," he protested. "For art thou not the mightiest of hunters thyself? Is not the great Umtagati almost as mighty as thou?" Umtagati was the Zulu's name for Nelson Lee. "Ay, in many things methinks he is greater. I am but a poor——"

"We won't go into any arguments," interrupted his lordship gruffly. "Why the deuce are you keen on dashin' off into the Kutana country? I know it's up this river, but your chief town of Zenobu is many days' march beyond Insissi. An' that means a journey through the densest forest, an' over the mountain range. Why not leave your home-town trip until we've bagged the ivory?"

"Thou art making it difficult for me to pursue my course, my father," said Umlosi, in distress. "But I must go. 'Tis the call of my people from the land of my fathers. 'Tis said that the Kutanas are vanishing as though by some mystic influence. Hunters go forth, and never return. Young men go into the forests and are never seen again."

"Just rumours," protested Dorrie. "Good

gad, Umlosi, you know how these stories get about——"

"Ay, N'Kose, I know," said Umlosi. "But I rely not on these rumours. Waul! Am I a fool to heed such idle trash? 'Tis deeper than that, my father. My snake tells me that all is not well in the country of the Kutanas."

Dorrie made a helpless gesture.

"Why bring your snake into it?" he asked. "I'm ready to admit that your snake—or instinct, to put it in plain English—is a pretty marvellous piece of mechanism, but it's liable to exaggerate. There's no need for this terrific haste."

"In that case, N'Kose, I must crave thy pardon if I disagree," said Umlosi gravely. "Here, within me, I feel the call," he went on, thumping his great chest. "I must journey to Zenobu, and call the head men of my tribe together."

"Yes, an' waste weeks on a confounded palaver that will come to nothin'!"

"Thou art harsh, my master," protested Umlosi. "Many years ago I might have wasted time to a palaver, as thou sayest. But thou hast taught me better. I know how to deal with those who possess long and idle tongues. I go into my country to see and to act—not to talk. I must know what ails the Kutanas. For, verily, there is a great and deadly blight on the land."

Lord Dorrimore gave it up.

"Naturally, I shan't attempt to stop you, old fellow," he said. "If you think like that about it you'd better get your carriers together, and make tracks as soon as possible. But can't we arrange a meeting place up country, so that you can join the hunt later on, after you've satisfied your curiosity?"

"'Tis a wondrous plan, N'Kose," said Umlosi, nodding. "Let us make plans, and settle them firmly into our minds so that there can be no mischance."

He fell into silence, and Lord Dorrimore regarded him thoughtfully. What did Umlosi fear? What mysteries were these which caused the genial giant such mental disturbance?



CHAPTER 5.

The Arrival at Insissi.

HANFORTH pointed.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed, with an eager note in his voice. "I suppose this'll be Insissi?"

"It's not likely to be any other place," grinned Church. "There aren't many of these white settlements up this river, you ass. I say, doesn't it look gorgeous?"

But Handforth had no appreciation for scenic beauty. His mind was a practical one, and the most wonderful scenery in the world left him cold. The others, however, were enthusiastic.

A bend in the stream had revealed a tiny jetty, half a mile further along. The river widened at that point, and there was a great clearing. Palms grew down almost to the

water's edge, and a picturesque dwelling house could be seen. It was a real house, not a native structure. There were wide verandas, with gaily-coloured sun-blinds. There were gardens, and endless flowers. Further beyond a glimpse could be obtained of other buildings, and still further along the river were wharves, with warehouses alongside. There was an air of bustle and activity, and many figures could be seen running about.

"Mr. Stanford is evidently well prepared for our reception," smiled Nelson Lee. "That's one advantage of having a miniature broadcasting station on board, Dorrie."

"Yes," smiled his lordship. "We've been in verbal touch with our genial host ever since we left the Stanley Falls. Marvellous thing, wireless—especially in a country like this. Beats the telegraph every time. You'll like old Jimmy. He's one of the best."

"Rather a pity he hasn't a wife," remarked Lee, as he stood watching. "With a home like this he should have somebody to look after it."

"Jimmy's got sense," grinned Dorrie. "He's a bachelor—like us."

When the Sprite gently drew up against the little jetty, Mr. James Stanford was the first to shout his greetings. He was surrounded by his native "boys," and there were even one or two white men there, too. Mr. Stanford was a big, burly, jovial-looking man, attired in spotless white. This latter touch was obviously a special compliment for the occasion.

"Welcome to Insissi!" he shouted. "By Christopher, we don't often have visitors to this out-of-the-way spot, but when they do come we welcome 'em. How are you, Dorrie, old man? It's ages since I saw your ugly mug!"

Mr. Stanford was introduced all round, and he was like a child with a new toy. His delight was unbounded. Sometimes it was months before he saw a white face, other than the faces of his overseers, and a party such as Dorrie's was a sheer joy to him.

The whole settlement had turned out to give the visitors a welcome, and there was a kind of triumphal procession as Dorrie's party was escorted up to the big bungalow—for, at close quarters, such the house proved to be.

"I'm afraid you'll find everything horribly cramped," said Mr. Stanford apologetically. "When I built this shack I was prepared for one or two stray visitors, but hardly for a crowd. But you're all welcome—and the more the merrier. But don't blame me if the accommodation is skimpy. Some of you youngsters will have to sleep with your feet out of doors!"

This, of course, was a gross exaggeration. As a matter of fact, the bungalow was surprisingly roomy. The living apartments were delightfully big, and Mr. Stanford had made the most wonderful arrangements for accommodating his visitors by night.

Irene & Co., naturally, were assigned to the best bed-rooms, and they were filled with wonder that a bachelor could have made

such delightful provision for them. They did not know that the wives of Mr. Stanford's overseers had spent weeks in preparation.

The St. Frank's fellows were well provided for, too. A great temporary structure had been added to the rear of the bungalow, and it was fitted up as a dormitory. Everything was fine.

And, although the fellows were naturally interested and excited, there was nevertheless a feeling of regret under the surface. For Mr. Stanford's hospitality meant that they were here for a long stay—two or three weeks, at the very least.

True, a wonderful programme had been prepared for the young visitors. Boating trips to the cataracts; treks into the hills to various places of interest; exploring tours into the outlying jungle. All these things had been planned. And surely they should have been sufficient to satisfy any schoolboy or schoolgirl?

But the young people knew well enough that there would be no hint of danger in all these enterprises. They would be protected by an army of guards wherever they went—they would be kept away from any possible peril, and thus the spice would be robbed from the whole business.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, on the other hand, would start out for the unknown interior—for the haunt of the wild elephant. They, in all truth, would have the real adventures! Even Umlosi was preparing to leave on a mission of mystery.

Deep down in their hearts the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls felt that there was something radically wrong with this scheme.



CHAPTER 6.

Off Into the Wilds!

NIPPER drew Tregellis-West and Watson aside.

"Have a look at Umlosi," he said softly.

"We can't make out what's worrying him. There must be something uncanny about the old beggar."

"I've always thought so, dear old boy," murmured Tregellis-West. "A few rummy stories have trickled down the river, but I understand they oughtn't to be heeded."

"This is a country of rumours and exaggerated yarns," agreed Nipper. "These natives get hold of the most extraordinary ideas, and it's no good trying to drive sense into their heads. They're like a lot of children."

"And yet Umlosi is taking notice of all these whisperings," said Watson. "I thought he had more sense."

"He's a queer card," said Nipper, shaking his head. "He has rummy dreams sometimes, and they have a queer way of coming true. He's got an instinct, too—and it's something we can't understand."

They stood outside the veranda of the bungalow, and watched Umlosi. The latter



One after the other Handforth & Co. were rubbed over with the evil-smelling concoction, and by the time M'toza had finished staining their bodies they were scarcely recognisable. Certainly they would pass as niggers — and that was what they desired!

was some distance away, squatting solemnly on the ground. With him were a number of coal-black negroes, and they were all talking and gesticulating. These men were obviously of the Kutana tribe. Their very blackness told this. For there are all ranges of colour in Africa, and only a few tribes are really black.

After a while, Umlosi rose to his feet, and came abruptly towards the bungalow. It was almost evening now, and the short tropical twilight would soon snap down over the peaceful little settlement. Most of the visitors were strolling about, interested in their new surroundings.

Umlosi halted before Nipper & Co., and they could see that his eyes were troubled.

"I seek N'Kose, my father, O Manzie," rumbled the black giant.

"You needn't seek far, then," smiled Nipper. "Dorrie is just coming round the end of the building with the gov'nor and Mr. Stanford."

"What's the trouble, Umlosi?" asked

Watson. "You're not going to leave us yet, are you?"

"Alas, young master, I must go forthwith," replied Umlosi. "News of gravity has reached me, and I can delay no longer. I must go to my own people."

A moment later he was talking to the men.

"Well, old friend, have you had a chat with your compatriots?" asked Mr. Stanford smilingly. "They heard of your coming, and they have been waiting for you for some days."

"They are men of my own tribe, and they bring me evil tidings," replied Umlosi. "In the Kutana country, the people are in terror. Even the chief has been spirited away by this mysterious power. My people think it is caused by a great Ju-Ju, which has been sent by the evil spirits to wreak destruction over the land. I must go at once to still these fears, and to learn the real cause of them. For I believe not in these stories of witchcraft."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Dorrie suspiciously. "I believe you're still influenced by these Ju-Ju yarns, you old heathen! You pretend to be above that sort of thing—but I know you! I tell you it's all rubbish! Why, if I thought anything else, I'd come with you."

"Nay, my father, let me go alone," said Umlosi. "'Tis my own people who call, and I must obey. For am I not the real chief of the Kutanas? For many long moons have I wandered, leaving my people in the care of a trusted cousin, surrounded by his wise men. But he, too, has been taken, and my people need me. I leave at dawn."

"Just as you like," said Dorrie. "Supposin' there's something really amiss, Umlosi? How are you goin' to let us know? We'd like to help. An' it's many days' march into the Kutana country."

"I must rely on mine own strength, N'Kose, since thou wilt be beyond reach," replied Umlosi. "There is no way of communicating with thee—"

"What about the wireless?" asked Nipper keenly. "The one you've got on the Sprite, Dorrie? It's a portable broadcasting set, isn't it? Umlosi's carriers could take it easily enough."

Dorrie nodded.

"My son, I didn't know you had so many brains," he said promptly. "Jimmy has a wonderful receiving set here, and he's only got to tune in to a special wave-length, which I shall set, and all you youngsters will get Umlosi's reports as he gets deeper and deeper into the wilds."

"But what about you?" asked Nipper.

"We've got a receivin' set among our kelter on the Sprite, and we'll take it along with us," replied Dorrie. "So we'll tune in to the same wave-length—an' we'll get Umlosi's reports, too."

"N'Kose, I know naught of these wondrous instruments," protested Umlosi. "I fear to take them with me. For they are things of magic, and my men will distrust them, and say they are bewitched."

But Umlosi was convinced that it would be all to the good if he took the set with him. It was really one of the latest things of its kind—a really portable broadcasting station, very compact, and capable of being operated without aërials, over a distance of more than a hundred miles. The range was treble this distance under favourable conditions.

Thus, Umlosi could keep his friends acquainted with his movements, for they would have no difficulty in picking up his wave-length. He could speak to both parties, but they, of course, would not be able to reply, since their sets were only for receiving. However, it was quite unnecessary for Dorrie's party or the youngsters to talk to Umlosi, since they would be in no position of danger. Umlosi was the only one who was venturing into the Unknown—into that territory which was reputed to be bewitched.

CHAPTER 7.

Handy Means to Go!



NEXT morning, Umlosi was off.

Most of the St. Frank's boys were out, and they gave him a great send-off. His companions were all Kutana men, and the party consisted of fifteen or sixteen. They were all heavily-laden, since it was necessary to carry food and equipment.

The Kutana country was eighty or ninety miles further into the wild interior—a section which had more or less escaped the attentions of white men. And even after this journey, Umlosi would only be on the borderland of his own domain. Zenobu, the chief town of the Kutanas—a purely native city of ten thousand souls—was many marches beyond.

The latter part of this trip would lead through unknown country. And it was this section which rumour spoke of as being tagati, or bewitched. None of the blacks knew what that belt of forest contained, but most of the surrounding tribes were afraid to venture near. Umlosi and his men would go through because it was the only route to their own land, and they were grim warriors, and were ready to risk the unknown perils.

Nipper's idea of providing Umlosi with a wireless set was a good one. The plan was so simple that there could be no hitches. Dorrie himself had sealed all the controls of the portable broadcasting set. It was only necessary for Umlosi to have the instrument opened up, and switched on. He would then be able to speak into the microphone with the certain knowledge that his voice would be conveyed into the ether.

Umlosi, for all his sophistication, was nalf frightened of the instruments, but he had enough ready wit to grasp Dorrie's simple directions. And the arrangement was for him to broadcast daily, at the hour of sunset. As he made camp, and at the hour when the short twilight swept down, so would he send his messages.

There could be no misunderstandings. Mr. Stanford would be listening in on his own set at that hour every evening, and the boys and girls would thus have the novelty of hearing Umlosi's voice coming to them from the unknown forest. And Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, on their elephant hunt, would listen in at that hour, too.

After Umlosi's departure he was soon forgotten. Nobody really believed that there was any actual peril, and it was felt by all that the Kutana Chief would soon be on his way back to join in the big game hunt.

But the day passed rapidly, for it was full of interest to all. Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were busily preparing for their trek into the elephant country, which was the land of the Arkazoli tribe. These people were friendly and harmless and would, indeed,

give all assistance. Many of the carriers at Mr. Stanford's place were Arkazoli, and they were like a lot of happy schoolboys at the prospect of the hunt.

That night, at sundown, Umlosi's first message came through. His voice was uncannily clear, and he reported an uneventful journey, and now he was encamped on an unknown stream in the great forest.

And, on the following morning, Dorrie's preparations were so far advanced that he was almost ready to make a start. Piles of equipment were taken from the Sprite, and there was much talk with the carriers, and it seemed that one elderly Krooboy, a West Coast native, was in sole charge of the outfit.

The St. Frank's fellows gained quite a lot of fun out of talking to this man, for he spoke the usual coast English, and it was only occasionally that the juniors were able to understand the trend of his talk.

"I don't mind telling you I'm pretty fed up with the whole business," said Handforth, as he stood looking on. "All this preparation, and we're not going."

Nipper sighed.

"Yes, it's a bit exasperating," he agreed. "But I've talked to the gov'nor until I'm blue in the face. It's no good, Handy, we've got to resign ourselves. I daresay we shall have plenty of fun here!"

"But it won't be like elephant hunting," said Handforth. "It's a swindle! It's a fraud! Why are we treated like babies? We ought to go to Mr. Lee and Dorrie in a body and demand——"

"Fathead!" interrupted Church. "We can't do that! Why, it would be an insult to Mr. Stanford. After all the trouble he's taken, too!"

Handforth grunted.

"H'm! I'd forgotten that," he admitted. "It would be a bit of a slight on the host, wouldn't it—and he's a brick, too. I suppose we'd better give it up as a bad job."

"Thank goodness!" murmured Church and McClure

But they were congratulating themselves too soon. For that evening Handforth had a strange, intent expression on his face. His eyes were gleaming, and he was filled with inward excitement. His chums pretended not to notice, but they were very uneasy.

They were more suspicious than ever when Handforth led them aside, and took them down towards the river. All the others were indoors, enjoying Mr. Stanford's hospitality.

"My sons!" said Handforth impressively. "This elephant-hunting expedition starts tomorrow. Old Dorrie and Mr. Lee are off into the Arkazoli country at dawn."

"What about it?" asked Church.

"We're going, too," said Handforth calmly.



CHAPTER 8.

The Great Idea.

OR a moment or two Church and McClure made no comment. They had been expecting something like this, and they were ready to laugh their leader to scorn. But somehow the laugh wouldn't come. There was a grim purposefulness about Handforth's calmness.

"Well?" he asked at length.

His chums gazed thoughtfully at the twinkling lights of the Sprite. They looked at the dim shadows of the gently flowing river, and they listened to the croaking of frogs, and to the strange, mysterious sounds which came from the virgin forest on the other side of the stream. And, meanwhile, they kept up a constant battle with the flies and mosquitoes which hovered round.

"You're crazy," said Church at length. "You're absolutely dotty. How the dickens can we go?"

"I've thought it all out," replied Handforth. "Just the three of us. The other fellows won't know anything about it—until after we've gone. The idea, in a nutshell, is for us to go as carriers."

"Carriers?" repeated his chums, staring.

"Carriers," said Handforth firmly.

"Wonderful!" grinned Church. "How do you think of these marvellous ideas?"

"What a brain!" said McClure with admiration.

Handforth detected the obvious note of levity.

"You think it can't be done, eh?" he asked.

"There's no telling," said Church. "It's quite possible, of course—particularly if Mr. Lee and Dorrie go blind between now and the morning."

"Go blind?" repeated Handforth.

"Well, it seems to me there's just a chance that they might spot us among the carriers," said Church carelessly. "Somehow or other, I don't think we look much like these Arkazoli chaps. Still, we might pass unnoticed. You never know your luck!"

Handforth received this sarcasm coldly.

"You funny fathead!" he said with scorn. "My idea is to bribe old Oliver Cromwell."

"Bribe who?"

"Old M'toza, or whatever his outlandish name is," said Handforth. "The chief of the carriers—that fellow who talks a bit of English. I've heard that there's a certain harmless plant about here which stains the skin a lovely deep brown—just the same colour as these Arkazoli beggars. Why shouldn't we disguise ourselves at the last minute, and join the train of carriers in the early dawn? Once we've squared old Oliver Cromwell, it ought to be easy—because Mr. Lee and Dorrie won't make any close inspection. Isn't that the idea of the year?"

Church and McClure were too astonished to voice their true thoughts.

"Well, if you think it's possible, go ahead with it," said Church. "But you're the greatest optimist under the sun, Handy. And if you think I'm going to appear in public, with only some brown stain instead of clothes, you've made a large-sized mistake!"

"Same here!" agreed McClure warmly.

"I've thought of that, too," said Handforth coolly. "Some of these blacks are rather keen on rigging themselves out in cheap cotton togs—shorts and things like that. We can easily get hold of some odds and ends. The more grotesque we're dressed, the better. Less likely to be noticed. These blacks have a fancy for colour."

"And how do you propose to bribe this M'toza chap?" asked McClure. "It's no good offering him money—not our money, anyhow!"

"Don't you believe it," said Handforth. "Silver is silver all the world over. But it won't even be necessary to do that. I've got a reading-glass in my kit—one of those big magnifying lenses. Old Oliver Cromwell will give his soul to get hold of it. These black chaps love a mirror or magnifying glass. You leave it to me!"

And Handforth strode off hurriedly towards the Sprite—having just caught sight of M'toza himself.



CHAPTER 9.

Easier Than They Thought.

M'TOZA was a big, grinning Krooboy of advanced years, but still active and energetic. He had something of a reputation for handling carriers, and Mr. Stanford had strongly recommended him.

"Hey, you black feller!" said Handforth. "I want a word with you privately."

"You palaver with me, sah?"

"Yes," said Handforth confidentially. "It's a bit private, so I want to talk to you on the quiet. The fact is, I want you to do me a favour, old son."

"I no fit for sabby, sah," said M'toza blankly.

"What do you mean—you no sabby?" asked Handforth. "You speak English, don't you?"

"I fit for heap plenty English palaver," said M'toza proudly.

"Then I want you to do me a favour——"

"No sabby, sah!" protested the Krooboy. "Dem talk too quick. I no fit for sabby."

Handforth was rather nonplussed. He failed to understand that he himself was required to speak the same extraordinary English as M'toza—otherwise the conversation could not be successfully carried on. And while he was pondering, Church and McClure came up.

"Can't make the beggar understand a thing!" said Handforth indignantly. "He

says he speaks English, and yet he can't understand me!" He turned to M'toza. "How would you like a nice big tip?" he added.

"No sabby, sah," repeated the Krooboy, in distress.

"You ass!" said Church. "Of course he can't sabby. I say, M'toza! You fit for big dash?"

The West Coast native grinned from ear to ear.

"What the dickens——" began Handforth.

"You've got to talk to them in their own language, you ass!" grinned Church. "Dash means tip out here. He says he's fit for a dash—and that means he's ready to take a tip."

"It's not English at all!" said Handforth tartly.

"Of course it isn't!" chuckled Church.

"But it serves the same purpose. We shall have a bit of a job making him understand what we want, but we'll have a shot at it."

And for some time they persevered—for Church and McClure were quite convinced that M'toza would refuse to help, and that, even if he didn't refuse, the project would come to nothing before the expedition started out.

But Handforth's chums were wrong.

M'toza understood surprisingly well, and he was perfectly ready to join in the plot. In fact, he seemed to regard the whole thing as a glorious joke, for he laughed uproariously, and then vowed that he would keep it a dead secret.

"You come one-time morning, and me fit for palaver juice," he said grinningly. "Thank you for dem glass, sah. Him mighty fine dash, sah! I lib for help you."

"Double Dutch!" said Handforth, shaking his head.

"He means he'll fix us up with that brown juice in the morning," said Church. "We'd better be on the scene just after dawn."

M'toza nodded with vigour.

"I lib for wait near dem," he said, pointing to a clump of graceful palms beyond the end of the bungalow. "You come one-time, and I lib for help you. Thank you, sah. I lib for go, sah."

The Krooboy, delighted with his magnifying glass, went off about his delayed duties, and Handforth looked at his chums with satisfaction.

"What about it now?" he asked.

"By Jupiter! It almost looks as though it might work!" said Church, taking a deep breath. "I say, what a score over the other chaps!"

"Won't it be a dirty trick to leave them out of it?" asked Mac.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We can't all go, and the rest of the fellows must pay the penalty for being devoid of ideas. We'll have the laugh over them."

"They're more likely to have the laugh over us," declared McClure dubiously. "We shall look fine, shan't we, when we're lugged out of the carrier ranks, and given the order

of the boot. And even supposing we get started, we shall only be sent back as soon as Dorrie spots us."

But Handforth refused to be discouraged by these pessimistic predictions. He was full of the scheme, and nothing would damp his ardour. Even the prospect of leaving Irene had no effect upon him. Irene was a jolly nice girl, but when it came to elephant hunting she was simply a back number.

Another message had come through from Umlosi, and all was well with him and his party. They were making good progress up country, and would soon be skirting the territory of the Oturi—a warlike tribe of savages in the far interior, where the white man's influence was little felt.

Most of the St. Frank's fellows were resigned when they went to bed that night. In fact, they felt almost glad that they were not going on the big game hunt, for Mr. Stanford had outlined such a gay programme that it seemed to have more attractions than the hunt itself.

Moreover, the bungalow was splendidly equipped, and it was hard to realise that it stood in a country where climatic conditions add greatly to the discomforts of life. Here all was serene. And the immediate outlook for the morrow was attractive.

First of all, Nelson Lee and Dorrie would be seen off, and then a tour through the native village of Insissi would follow, after which Mr. Stanford would escort his young guests over his warehouses and general plant. The local chief was getting up some dances, too, and there would be special feasting and tribal celebrations.

But Handforth & Co. went to sleep with very different anticipations.

As a matter of fact, the daring project was successful.

Stealing out in the dawn, before either Lee or Dorrie were up, Handforth & Co. had met the wily M'toza. And this cheery gentleman, true to his promise, had conducted his fellow conspirators to a shed, where he had stripped them, and had rubbed them over with some evil-smelling concoction which nauseated them, but which had the desired effect.

By the time the juniors had got into their new clothing—a weird assortment of rags, for the most part—they were scarcely recognisable.

"You wait here one-time," said M'toza cheerfully. "I lib for come soon, one-time."

"Soon one-time?" repeated Handforth. "When does that mean?"

"I lib for gib you dem light loads," promised the head carrier. "I no make you big ache. No, sah! I lib for make easy!"

"That's a blessing, anyhow," said Church, after M'toza had gone. "He's a decent old stick. He's going to make things easy for us by giving us light loads. I say, what a lark! I believe it's going to work!"

"It's bound to work," said Handforth. "It's one of my ideas."

His chums were more and more astonished half an hour later—and not a little dismayed. For, although they passed unnoticed among the mob of other carriers—M'toza saw to it that they were well surrounded—their

"light loads" proved to be devastatingly heavy.

On every side of them the natives were being loaded up. There were gun-carriers, tent-carriers, and scores of others. And Handforth & Co. were lost in the midst of this jabbering crowd.

And at last came the start. M'toza kept as near as possible to the disguised juniors, and helped them in every way he could. The other carriers knew all about it, and hardly knew what to make of it. Handforth & Co., if they had only known it, were not adding to their prestige. But this was a detail they never considered.

It was surprising enough to be on the march, included in the expedition. Insissi was left behind, after Mr. Stanford and the boys and girls had given Lee and Dorrie a rousing send-off, and had wished them the best of luck. The general plan was for them to return at the end of two weeks.

And Handforth & Co. went with them. But they heartily wished they hadn't.

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CHAPTER 10.

Not So Easy, After All!

MAZINGLY enough, the thing came off.

What with the bustle of departure, the crowds of blacks, the general commo-

tion of the last-minute preparations, Handforth and his chums were not even missed.

Nipper certainly noticed that the chums of Study D were absent when all the others got up. In fact, most of the fellows were aware of Handforth & Co.'s disappearance. It was so much more peaceful! But it was merely assumed that the trio had proved extra energetic.



Church and McClure were fed up to the neck by the end of the first mile, and even the stubborn Handforth was regretting his rashness by the end of the second.

The trail led through the dense forest, and the heat was humid and stifling. There was no breeze here to bring them relief, and the long line of loaded blacks wound along the trail like a great snake. There was no possibility of the three amateurs dropping out.

"Oh, corks!" groaned Church desperately. "I'm nearly whacked, you chaps! I don't know what M'toza loaded me with, but it feels like a packing-case with a piano in it!"

"My back's nearly broken!" groaned McClure. "If these loads are light, I pity these poor niggers! But I suppose they're used to it!"

"It's no use growling," said Handforth, his face streaming with perspiration. "I can't bear people who grumble! By George! Where's M'toza? When I catch sight of him, I'll give him the length of my tongue! The old bounder has done this on purpose. I'm aching in every bone—my spine will have a permanent kink in it! When the dickens do we have a rest?"

"I thought you couldn't bear people who grumbled?" asked Church hoarsely. "Perhaps you'll admit this is a rotten idea now? Instead of enjoying the luxuries of Mr. Stanford's place, we're working like niggers."

Handforth set his teeth.

"Yes, but we're on the elephant hunt," he said. "That's the main thing."

"Why shouldn't we make a commotion of some sort, and attract old Dorrie?" suggested Mac. "We should be able to chuck this awful torture——"

"Not yet, you fathead!" interjected Handforth. "We're too near to Insissi! We should be sent back!"

"That's what I meant!" said McClure.



CHAPTER 11.

Discovered!

BUT Handforth wouldn't hear of it.

His natural stubbornness came to his aid, and he was determined not to show the white feather. And Church and McClure hadn't the heart to obey the dictates of commonsense, and leave him in the lurch. As usual, they stuck to him, regardless of the freakish nature of the enterprise.

And as the morning advanced they got their second wind.

Their loads proved to be lighter than they had first thought. Once they were thoroughly accustomed to them, they plodded on with the rest of the carriers, and did not feel the discomfort so much. Fortunately, there were many halts, and they were glad of these brief rests.

The mid-day meal was something of a nightmare, for they were served out the

same food as the natives. It didn't look at all appetising. Handforth & Co. had heard rumours that these blacks were partial to cooked caterpillars, and such-like delicacies.

However, the cheery M'toza saved them at the last moment—by bringing a can of honest corned beef and a box of biscuits, to say nothing of some cheese and a welcome bottle of fizzy lemonade. All of these the Krooboy had smuggled from the Sprite—after a little argument, probably with Dorrie's black cook.

When the march was resumed, Handforth & Co's spirits were high. M'toza was looking after them well, and he had made them grateful by changing their loads. By a re-arrangement, he had now given them such slight packs that they seemed ridiculously easy to carry. He had, apparently, been afraid to favour them in this way earlier, lest Nelson Lee or Dorrie should have singled them out for inquiry, at the final inspection.

But there was little fear of that now, for Lee and Dorrie were half a mile away, at the head of the long caravan, and there was no likelihood of them coming back to examine the carriers. M'toza was trusted, and he was in full charge.

So the whole day passed, and, when night came camp was made, with blazing fires, and many tents. They were in a little clearing, near the banks of a swiftly-flowing river, and the roaring of lions, and the cries of other wild animals eloquently indicated the primeval nature of this forest.

"Well, we've done it, my lads!" said Handforth dreamily, as he listened to the chanting of the carriers. "We're on this hunt, and we're miles and miles from Insissi. In other words, we've done the trick!"

"Then why not tell old Dorrie about it now?" asked Church. "No need to keep up this game any longer. We shan't be sent back."

"We won't chance it," replied Handforth, shaking his head. "It's too risky. We'll give them until to-morrow night——"

"By the Lord Harry!"

Handforth started violently as he heard the exclamation. Spinning round, he beheld Lord Dorrimore, pipe in mouth, strolling about among the carriers, not ten feet away.

"Cave!" hissed Handforth. "It's old Dorrie!"

His lordship nodded.

"The trouble with you, Handy, is that your voice is a bit too penetratin'," he said coolly. "Come out of it, you young blighter! How many more of you are there? An' where the deuce are you hidin', anyway?"

Dorrie was quite calm—although he was inwardly astonished. Handforth's voice had come to him as a complete surprise.

"Keep low!" muttered Handforth tensely. "He'll never spot us——"

"Rats!" said McClure. "What's the use?"

He and Church stood up, and it was idle for Handforth to remain obstinate. He, too,

stood out. The rest of the carriers were grinning widely.

"Good gad!" said Lord Dorrimore, staring. "Of all the infernal nerve! Actually stainin' your confounded skins, an' masqueradin'— How many more of you?" he added suddenly. "The whole crowd?"

"Only the three of us, Dorrie," said Handforth anxiously. "We—we thought we'd spoof you until to-morrow, and if you hadn't crept up like this we should have——"

"Crept up!" roared Dorrie. "Why, you young alligator, I was only makin' my usual inspection. Ye gods an' little fishes! Have you been carryin' loads all day, an' marchin' with the rest of these carriers?"

"Yes, sir," said the three juniors.

"Then, hang it, you deserve to come along with us for your pluck an' determination!" grinned his lordship.

"You won't send us back, Dorrie?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"We'll see what the Big Chief says," replied Dorrie, with caution.

The Big Chief—in other words, Nelson Lee—was considerably startled when Handforth & Co. were led into his tent. But he could not keep the twinkle from his eyes when Dorrie explained the situation.

"Well, you ought to be sent back to Insissi in chains, but we'll have mercy on you," he said at length. "Under the circumstances, Dorrie and I might let you come along—but Mr. Stanford and all your young friends will be worried stiff at your disappearance——"

"That's all right, sir," interrupted Handforth, grinning. "I left a note with Johnny Onions, and told him to give it to my minor in the middle of the morning."

"Johnny is an unsuspecting chap, sir, and he only thought it was one of Handy's jokes," put in Church. "But everybody at Insissi knows what has happened by now, so they won't be worrying. Handy explained what the game was."

"Crafty young monkeys, aren't they?" said Dorrie. "Let 'em stay, Lee. Where's that personal-boy of mine? I'll rout him out an' tell him to get the bath ready. You youngsters had better get this stain off, an' dress yourselves like respectable—— By gad, though! What about your clothes?"

"M'toza took charge of a big portmanteau of ours, sir," grinned Handforth. "He helped us to work the stunt, you know."

"I thought as much," said his lordship, with a chuckle. "I've always suspected M'toza of bein' a bright boy. But we won't go into sordid details. Go an' clean off that schoolgirl complexion before it grows on you!"

Unfortunately, the complexion had grown on Handforth & Co. already. For after an hour of vain effort, they were as brown as ever. They couldn't get the stuff off.

M'toza was certainly a fellow who believed in doing things thoroughly.



CHAPTER 12.

Out of the Ether!

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE stretched his long legs with luxurious ease, and reached for his glass of lime-juice.

"Undoubtedly, Brother Willy, we must confess that Brother Ted has stolen a sinister march on us," he said, shaking his head. "Our only consolation is that we have ease and luxury while he is plodding along under a vast load of motley equipment, with the torrid sun beating down upon his guilty head. My sympathy goes out to Brothers Church and McClure, for it is unnecessary to doubt that they were drawn into this murky enterprise."

Willy Handforth frowned.

"Just like Ted, of course!" he agreed. "The surprising thing is that it worked. Ted's ideas always go wrong."

"There are exceptions to every rule," murmured Browne.

They were lounging on the deck of the Sprite, under the starboard awning. It was mid-afternoon, and too hot for any strenuous exercise. The other St. Frank's fellows, and the Moor View girls, were taking their ease, too.

They knew all about Handforth & Co.'s escapade, and their chief sensation was one of astonishment that it had worked. They consoled themselves by the thought that the heroes of Study D would soon be sent back.

Exactly as planned, Willy had received the note from his major, via Johnny Onions, some after the expedition had started—when it was too late to do anything. Not that anything would have been done, in any case, for everybody took it for granted that Nelson Lee or Dorrimore would take whatever steps were necessary.

"Personally, I consider that elephant hunting is a greatly overrated form of recreation, Brother William," proceeded Browne. "I am all for sport, but in a climate of this over-like quality, give me a lounge chair, a book, and an everlasting supply of iced drink. I ask no more."

"There's something in it," agreed Willy, with a grin. "Anyhow, I'll bet old Ted is regretting his pig-headedness by this time. He *would* go elephant hunting, and now he's finding out what it means!"

A tramp of feet sounded on the gangway, and Nipper & Co. hove into view. They came to a halt near Browne and Willy.

"You two look jolly energetic," said Nipper. "But don't get up—don't disturb yourselves on our account."

"I can assure you, Brother Nipper, that no such thought was in my mind," said Browne gracefully. "Any little service, however, that I can render from my present reclining posture——"

"We've only come on board to have a go

at the wireless," interrupted Nipper. "It's a big set, and we thought we might be able to pick up something from long distance."

"Go ahead!" invited Browne cordially. "I trust that you will not use the loud-speaker—particularly if you tune in, by some tragic mischance, a band with a saxophone in it. While admitting that the saxophone is a useful instrument, invented solely for the benefit of humorous writers, its musical qualities are extremely doubtful. I would add that I am in the mood for a slight siesta. I trust you will bear that in mind."

"We'll try and tune in a lullaby," said Nipper obligingly.

They went into the deck cabin, near at hand, where Dorrie's powerful wireless set was installed.

"Isn't she tuned in especially for Umlosi?" asked Watson.

"Begad, yes!" said Sir Montie. "Perhaps we'd better not interfere, Nipper, old boy?"

"We know the wave-length, and we can set her again when we've finished," replied Nipper. "Not that it matters, anyhow—because there's Mr. Stanford's set in the bungalow. Umlosi won't be 'on the air,' as the Americans put it, until sundown."

This particular set was a powerful one, and quite capable of picking up signals from any of the big European stations. Nipper was even hopeful of getting Daventry. The set which Dorrie had taken along with him was a much smaller one—a portable, with concealed aerial.

"Switch her on," said Nipper, as he sat down.

Watson touched a switch, and Nipper prepared to operate the knobs. But before his fingers could reach them the loud-speaker sprang into life. As the switch went down under Watson's fingers, Umlosi's voice filled the cabin.

"If perchance thou art at the wondrous instrument, N'Kose," it came in tones of extreme urgency. "Methinks 'twill soon be ill with us. These accursed Oturi are upon us in vast numbers!"

Nipper & Co. looked at one another with startled eyes.



CHAPTER 13.

Nipper's Quick Decision.

WILLY HANDFORTH ran into the cabin, with Browne at his heels.

"Was that Umlosi?" asked Willy quickly.

"Hush!" muttered Nipper.

"I know not whether thou art listening, or no—although I fear 'tis idle to hope for such fortune, N'Kose," came Umlosi's voice again, so clear and distinct that it was difficult to believe that he was not actually in the cabin.

"If thou art, then know that my party is beset by these accursed Oturi. Even as I speak, they lurk round, and draw in upon us."

"Great Scott!" muttered Nipper tensely.

"But—but—" began Watson.

"Listen!" urged Willy.

"As yet, the dogs are making no open attack," came Umlosi's voice. "The forest is thick around us, and many spears have shot from the surrounding undergrowth. To advance is impossible—to retreat as vain. We are outnumbered, my father, and I see blood. Methinks these jackals of Oturi will soon swoop down and slaughter us. Wau! 'Twill be a great fight, N'Kose! Have I not always said that I would die spear in hand?"

There came a pause, poignant with horror.

"This is awful!" muttered Watson shakily. "I—I can't believe it, you know. Poor old Umlosi's in awful danger, and he's appealing to Dorrie for help. But what's the use? He's miles away, and we can't even ask him for his position!"

"I'm afraid we're helpless," muttered Nipper.

"'Tis strange, my masters," said Umlosi, from across all those miles of forest land. "I am sorely puzzled. Spears come, but none strike us. And yet these Oturi, dogs though they are, are not such poor marksmen. Methinks they play with us."

There came another pause, and it seemed endless.

"By my fathers!" came that voice out of the ether. "I suspect these curs of trickery, indeed! They seek to capture us alive, and convey us as prisoners to their kraal. Wau! Are they not cannibals? I have the truth, N'Kose! I know now why their spears harm us not."

"Cannibals!" breathed Watson. "But—but I thought that cannibalism was a thing of the past in Africa?"

"It's not so dead as you think," whispered Nipper. "In some of the remote regions it's still practiced in secret. I've heard—"

"I now leave this magic box, N'Kose," said Umlosi. "My men prepare to give battle, and I must join. I will speak later—if, perchance, I still live. But thou knowest well, my master, that I will die fighting sooner than be captured by these foul enemies of the Kutana race!"

The loud speaker became "dead," and everybody in the cabin drew a deep breath. For the moment the tension was over. All those fellows could picture Umlosi's desperate plight. Surrounded by enemies—talking into that microphone.

"What can we do?" asked Watson desperately.

Nipper's eyes were gleaming.

"We've got to tell the gov'nor," he replied. "We've got to tell Dorrie!"

"But they've gone!" shouted Watson.

"If we hurry we can overtake them!" snapped Nipper. "There are over four hours of daylight left, and we can hurry. Dorrie's party is travelling slowly, and what with all the carriers, and breaking the trail, they didn't reckon to cover more than ten miles before nightfall. We'll overtake them by the time they make their first camp to-night."

"Brother, I agree," said Browne. "Not



"Venture not up this accursed stream!" croaked the dying man. "Thou wilt neither serve Umlosi nor thyself. 'Twill mean death, even as I now die!"

long since I deplored the expenditure of any energy, but now I am like a hound about to be unleashed."

"But Dorrie's got a wireless set, too," said Sir Montie.

"Yes—closed up, and on the back of some nigger!" retorted Nipper. "Umlosi's very words proved that he had no hope that anybody would be listening-in—he was only doing it on the chance. The arrangement was for us to pick up his signals at nightfall. Dorrie won't know a thing about this."

"And Umlosi thinks that he and his party are to be captured by cannibals," put in Browne. "When Brother Dorrie hears of this, he will abandon his elephant hunt and swerve across to the rescue. Let us arouse the indolent throng, and be on the move."

Nipper turned swiftly to Willy.

"You hang on here, Willy," he said. "We'll rush round and collect the other fellows. If any message comes through, remember it—particularly if Umlosi gives any details of his position."

"Trust me!" said Willy promptly.

Nipper and the others hastened out. This sudden decision to overtake the big hunting party was no wild goose chase. Dorrie would have broken the trail, and it would be easy enough to follow. And, with any luck, the expedition could be easily overtaken by nightfall.

Mr. Stanford was in a fine way when he heard the news, and he wanted to send some of his own men. But the St. Frank's fellows wouldn't hear of it. Umlosi was their old friend, and they felt that this was a personal

matter. But Mr. Stanford insisted upon providing a number of Arkazoli warriors to accompany the juniors.

Irene & Co. had to be reckoned with, however. They, too, caught the spirit of this sudden excitement, and decided to go.

"It's impossible!" said Mr. Stanford, alarmed. "The perils of the forest are too great—"

"It's no good, Mr. Stanford—we've made up our minds," said Irene Manners firmly. "The only way you can keep us here is to lock us up. We're not going to be afraid of the forest. If the boys go, we go!"

"Hear, hear!" declared the other girls in one voice.

And nothing would shift them from their purpose. They felt that this was a challenge, and they would never hold their heads up again if they weakly remained behind—just because they were girls!



CHAPTER 14.

Umlosi's Desperate Plight!

U MLOSI drew up his great frame, and offered his chest as a mark.

"Come forth, ye dogs!" he thundered. "Art thou cowards and curs to lurk in the forest? Fight like men, and we will give battle!"

But no reply came from the dense bush.

The afternoon sun blazed down with pitiless intensity, and the very air shook and

quivered with the heat. Umlosi's little party was halted in the forest, where the sunlight trickled down through the foliage overhead. Any attempt to advance meant a flight of arrows, as they had already proved.

And still the mysterious enemy refused to show himself.

"Wau! They are but insects!" rumbled Umlosi, as he turned to his handful of men. "Full two score they number, and yet they show themselves not. But 'tis ever the way of the accursed Oturi."

"They will take us alive, O Umlosi," said one of the others.

"'Tis their custom," declared another.

"We will fight, fools!" said Umlosi angrily.

"Of what avail, when they refuse to give battle?" asked one of his men. "Do the Oturi ever fight in the open? At most they will wound us, and then sweep down while we are helpless and carry us off as prisoners. We are food for the next Oturi feast, good Umlosi!"

"Thou speakest true words, I fear," muttered Umlosi.

He was filled with rage. To fight these lurking enemies was impossible, since they would not come into the open.

"'Twas ill-advised for us to venture into this region," said one of the other men at last. "For are we not near the Kalala River? Are we not within a march of the River of Devils? There are strange Ju-Jus, Umlosi. We are in the midst of bewitched—"

"Talk not empty words, M'zuma," broke in Umlosi. "'Tis true that the Kalala River is nigh, but I fear it not."

A voice came from the surrounding forest.

"Yet thou wilt learn to fear it, bold Umlosi!" it shouted. "Ere long thou wilt be taken beyond the River of Devils. We cross it to-day with thy trussed body in our hands. Into the Tagati forests beyond the Kalala. Soon, empty one, thou wilt know fear!"

Umlosi sprang up.

"Come forth, thou hounds of hate!" he thundered. "Come forth and fight!"

The forest echoed with jeering laughter, and then a flight of spears came hissing through the air from almost every quarter of the compass. M'zuma and two others were wounded, and they fell. Umlosi turned swiftly to the "magic box" near him—the little broadcasting set. It was compact enough, with its batteries and aerial entirely enclosed. Umlosi pressed a knob, and he knew that the magic was now potent.

"I speak again, N'Kose," he said, with his mouth close to the microphone. "I doubt if thou art listening, but no harm is done by attempting to reach thine ears. These foul Oturi are upon us. They mean not to kill, but to capture—Wau! Two more of my men fall!"

He looked round, and his eyes were blazing.

"They show themselves not, these pigs," he continued. "They seek to carry us beyond the Kalala River—into the mysterious Ju-Ju

lands beyond. Perchance I will die fighting, but my snake tells me that I am to live—only to suffer tortures and humiliations in the hands of the enemy."

The air suddenly became filled with screaming yells—fiendish, horrible cries. Umlosi swung round, and as he did so a spear pierced his right shoulder, and sunk deeply into his body. He plucked it out as though it were a mere splinter, and the blood gushed forth.

"N'Kose, they draw closer—they have sapped my blood already," he said fiercely. "They draw in—"

Two score forms suddenly appeared, and Umlosi gave a great shout of joy. At last the enemy had showed himself! In his eagerness to get at the foe he kicked the wireless instrument away from him, shattering its mechanism in a flash.

His spear rose in his powerful grasp, but as he was about to use it a shot rang out.

Umlosi fell like a log.

CHAPTER 15.

To the Aid of Umlosi!



WILLY HANDFORTH stared before him.

"Poor old Umlosi!" he muttered huskily. "Oh, poor old chap!"

His ears were still tingling with those last words he had heard. The enemy was drawing closer! They had sapped Umlosi's blood! And then an utter silence—a silence that was so agonisingly eloquent that Willy could see the true picture of what had happened. The attackers had closed in, and the wireless instrument had been smashed in the rush. Umlosi had never switched off. The sudden "deadness" had come too dramatically for that.

"Up the Kalala River!" muttered Willy. "Into the mysterious Ju-Ju lands beyond! And Umlosi expects to be taken alive—so that he can be tortured by cannibals! Poor old chap, he's a prisoner even now, while I'm sitting here, in the midst of all this peace!"

Willy sprang into life. He hurried out of the cabin, dashed across the deck, and up towards the bungalow. Eight St. Frank's fellows, and six girls, all in business-like attire, were ready for departure. A number of trustworthy natives were excitedly jabbering together close by.

"Well?" asked Nipper, as Willy came up. "I was just coming for you. We're ready to start—"

"The sooner we go, the better," interrupted Willy. "Umlosi's finished!"

"Dead?" shouted a number of voices.

"I don't think so—but it's certain he's been captured," replied Willy.

And he related what he had heard.

"Yes, you've guessed it," said Nipper, at length. "That's the only possible explanation. Umlosi has been captured by the Oturi."

"Who are they—these Oturi?" asked Mary Summers quickly.

"A tribe right in the interior," replied Nipper. "For scores of years they've been the greatest enemy of the Kutana people—Umlosi's own tribe. Umlosi's often told us about them. They never kill the Kutanas if they meet a small party of them. It's one of their tribal customs to capture their enemies alive, and to torture them. They're cannibals of the worst type. There's only one thing I can't understand."

"And that, brother?" asked Browne.

"Umlosi's mention of the Kalala River," replied Nipper. "According to Dorrie, the Kalala is in a different direction to the Oturi country, and lots of these rumours of natives disappearing have come from there. They're beginning to call it the 'debbil-debbil' river. Why are these Oturi taking Umlosi into that territory?"

"Perhaps Dorrie will know," said Willy briskly. "Let's go to him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"St. Frank's to the rescue!"

"Moor View, too!" said Doris promptly.

"Hurrah!"

They were all excited. To inform Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore was an absolute duty. One or two messengers would have been sufficient, but they were all determined to go, and Mr. Stanford's appeals were useless. And in his heart he admired them. He knew, moreover, that there was little or no danger in their projected trip.

There was not one chance in a thousand that Lord Dorrimore had picked up Umlosi's message. And even Nipper had only got it by mere chance. When Dorrie knew, he would probably change all his plans. Umlosi was an old and faithful comrade.

And so the party of young people set out, eager and anxious concerning Umlosi's plight. The trail was easy enough to follow, since the greater party had passed along it only a few hours earlier.

The way led through untrodden forests for the most part, but there were no delays.

And this was as well, for the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls would be in real danger if they were caught by the night before they overtook the expedition.

So they pressed on with all speed.

The boys wanted to ease down, so that Irene & Co. should more readily keep pace with them. But the girls wouldn't allow it. Indeed, they set a pace which the boys found it difficult enough to maintain.

"We're not going to admit ourselves the weaker sex," said Irene stoutly. "What do you say, girls?"

"Not likely!" replied Tessa Love. "We'll give them a twisting!"

Even the gentle Dora—Irene's cousin—was as determined as any of her fair companions. And the boys accepted the challenge with alacrity.

They were all keyed up to a high pitch of effort by the very urgency of their journey. Umlosi was in peril—if not dead—and Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were the

only ones who could organise a rescue party.

Nipper, perhaps, had a keener sense of the risks than any of the other fellows. It would be a serious matter if they failed to overtake the expedition before nightfall. For they had no facilities for camping—no tents, no food, even. They were purposely travelling light, so that they could cover the distance in record time. And if the African night came down upon them, they would be in an awkward fix.

Nipper's hope was that Dorrie had delayed once or twice in order to shoot at some chance prey. Any little stoppages of this sort would make all the difference.

The forest was full of life, and not one of the boys or girls possessed a firearm, in case of sudden danger. They were, indeed, taking a big chance—for the native guides were more or less useless in an emergency.

During the daylight, the only real peril would come, perhaps, from a leopard. Lions and most other wild creatures would scuttle away at the first scent of the human beings on the wind. But the leopard has a habit of attacking without provocation. And although he is much smaller than the majestic lion, he is more dangerous.

But these chances had to be taken, and the party of young people pressed deeper and deeper into the heart of the humid, sweltering forest.



CHAPTER 16

The Half-Breed.

U MLOSI opened his eyes in a dazed, listless way.

He did not know where he was and he had awakened from a curious confusion of dreams. He seemed to have some dim recollections of ill happenings, and for a moment he remained quite still, looking up towards the slanting rafters overhead.

Then, semi-consciously, he began to recall what had happened, although it seemed like a nightmare. There had been an attack in the forest. The Oturi had surrounded—

"Wau! 'Tis impossible!" muttered Umlosi, sitting up.

But he only made a slight movement. The sound of rattling chains came to his startled ears, and it seemed to him that a spear had been thrust into his very vitals. Excruciating agony racked his frame, and his head swam and throbbed with the sheer pain of it.

It helped to restore him to fuller consciousness.

He remembered now. A spear had wounded him in the chest, during that unequal battle in the forest. Then, as he was about to meet the enemy, something had struck him on the head. A bullet, in fact, had furrowed his skull, and laid him low. That shot might easily have killed a white man, but Umlosi's head, as Dorrie had often stated,

was as hard as if it had been composed of toughened steel. And bullets, instead of penetrating, glanced off. This, of course, was an exaggeration, but Umlosi's skull was undoubtedly reinforced.

The full remembrance of that attack angered him, and made him forget his agony. All his life Umlosi had been contemptuous of physical pain. He made light of wounds which others might have made much of.

But for once Umlosi's spirit was stronger than his physical stamina. He fell back with an involuntary groan, and the chains rattled again. He had not seen them, but he knew well enough that he was manacled. Heavy metal cuffs were fixed round his wrists—he could feel them—and coarse chains encumbered him.

No attempt had been made to tend his wounds. They had bled freely, too, sapping him of much of his great strength. He decided to wait—to give himself time to recover.

He was aware, too, of a dull bewilderment. Where was he?

The Oturi had captured him, and it was not the custom of the Oturi to carry any of their wounded enemies. They were far more likely to wait until their victims recovered, and to force them to travel by their own strength. If they were wounded too severely, they were disposed of on the spot.

But this was no Oturi hut that Umlosi found himself in. It was a long shed, built after the fashion of the white men. Strangest of all, an electric light gleamed almost immediately overhead.

Electric light! Here, in the heart of the interior forest! What kind of place was this that he had been brought to? The stricken Kutana chief could be excused for telling himself that he was still dreaming.

Then he heard the sound of voices. Footsteps echoed, and a door creaked open. He turned his head, and noticed, for the first time, that many of his comrades were lying on this dusty floor, chained and helpless. Two or three were sleeping, others groaning with the agony of their injuries.

Several men appeared. Two of them were white, and the others were Oturi warriors. These latter were talking excitedly in Swahili.

"Lord, these men are worth much money," one of them was urging. "Be not deceived by their wounds. They are only trifling. We have brought them from afar, and they are great men of the Kutana tribe. One, indeed, is a Chief of Chiefs."

"I'll see what they are worth, my friend," said one of the white men, in harsh, dictatorial tones. "Cease your chattering. I hear much of this exaggerated talk from all your kind. The prisoners are of little value to me."

"You speak rashly, bwana," wailed the Oturi, in dismay. "Are these men not powerful, strong, and fit for heavy work? Their wounds are as nothing. I bring them hither

at great risk, for if K'labá knows of this I shall die in great tortures, and my bones will go unburied."

"Your bones interest me not, fool," said the white man, using the same Ki-Swahili tongue—the language of almost all Central Africa. "K'labá, the Chief of the Oturi, shall know of this if you demand too high a price."

Umlosi wondered greatly. Who was this man? Obviously a half-breed by his coarse features and his brutal-looking eyes. He advanced towards the prisoners, and examined them one by one, kicking them over, and making disparaging remarks concerning their physique.

He came to Umlosi, and the Kutana Chief held himself stiff.

"What wantest thou with me?" he asked, with dignity.

"Lie still, dog!" said the half-breed coarsely.

He delivered a violent blow which sent Umlosi staggering sideways, and those chains prevented him from taking any action. His weakness, too, startled him. For he found that he was as strengthless as an untried youth.

And the half-breed felt his muscles, opened his mouth and examined his teeth and, indeed, treated him as though he were a specimen of live stock. The other Kutanas were treated in the same way, and the Oturi warriors stood looking on, anxious and uneasy.

"They may work well after they have recovered," said the mysterious half-breed. "Come, my friends. Let us discuss the price. But open your mouths too wide, and you will get naught."

They went out, and Umlosi found his comrade, M'zuma, looking at him from the other side of the shed. Neither spoke. But the same thought filled the minds of them both.

Their Oturi conquerors were selling them! Selling them into slavery!

CHAPTER 17.

The Mysterious Silence.



LORD DORRIMORE looked intensely worried.

"Can't make it out, Lee," he said, shaking his head. "Why in the name

of all that's rummy hasn't the old beggar started his usual children's hour? I suppose the set's all right?"

"Perfectly in order," said Nelson Lee, as he adjusted his own earphones. "But there's nothing on the ether, Dorrie. For once, Umlosi has failed. I don't like it."

"Neither do I," growled his lordship, frowning.

The expression on his face was so unusual that Handforth & Co., marching cheerily into the tent at that moment, stared at Dorrie in wonder. For half a moment they believed

that his mood was occasioned by their own escapade.

"Anything wrong, sir?" asked Church, glancing at Nelson Lee.

"I'm afraid there is, young 'un," replied Lee. "There's no message from Umlosi this evening. The usual hour has passed, and not a sound has come. And yet Umlosi faithfully promised to call us up."

"By George!" said Handforth. "Perhaps there's some truth in that story about the natives mysteriously disappearing! It'll be pretty awful if old Umlosi is——"

"Hush!" snapped Dorrie suddenly.

He strained intently at the earphones.

"No, nothing," he went on, after a moment. "Upon my word, Lee, I'm infernally worried over this. Umlosi is a methodical old beggar, and he would never have missed the evening message under ordinary conditions. Something pretty bad must have happened."

"They may have had a mishap with the set—and in that case there's not much chance of getting any further message. For even Umlosi, for all his sophistication, looks at that wireless set as a magic box, full of witchery and mystery."

But Lord Dorrimore was not consoled.

This portable receiving set was only a small one, and not powerful enough to operate a loud-speaker. But there should have been no difficulty in picking up Umlosi's voice with the earphones.

But there was nothing but a grim, mysterious silence.

"It's very upsetting," growled Dorrie, as he rose from his seat, and paced up and down. "If anything's happened to the old rascal, I'll never rest content until I've discovered—— Hallo, what do you want, M'toza?"

The elderly Krooboy had suddenly appeared at the tent entrance.

"Man come, sah, and say dem white boys and white girls come through bush one-time," he replied. "I lib for come tell you, sah!"

"What's that?" broke in Lee quickly. "White boys and white girls coming through the bush? That can't be true, surely!"

"You're mad, M'toza," said Dorrie. "You one big fool. Dem white girls and white boys no come. Where you get this talk?"

"I lib for bring man to toll you, sah," replied M'toza.

He vanished, and Lee and Dorrie glanced at one another. Handforth & Co., looking very brown, in spite of their prolonged washing, were beginning to get excited.

"I'll bet it's Nipper and the crowd!" said Edward Oswald. "They got jealous because we joined the elephant hunt, and they've followed us up."

"That's about it," agreed Church. "And the girls have come, too."

"If they have, they'll soon go back!" said Nelson Lee curtly. "By James, Dorrie, this can't be true! Nipper wouldn't be so foolish——"

"Here's M'toza back again," interrupted Dorrie.

The Krooboy appeared, leading an Arkazoi runner.

"Lord, I travel ahead of the young white masters and the young white maidens," he said, in Swahili. "They come with big news. It was hoped to reach here before sunset, but all is yet well. Even now they are entering camp."

"And what of your lord, Stanford?" asked Dorrie. "Did he let these young people venture forth?"

"They come with many of my warriors, lord," replied the man.

"Well, it sounds true," said Dorrie, turning to Lee, "but I'm hanged if I can understand it. We'd better get a lot of torches alight, and go along the trail to meet them. Good glory! What will they be up to next?"

Nelson Lee was looking grave.

"This is no boyish escapade, Dorrie," he said. "There must be something very urgent at the back of this seemingly insane enterprise. Yes, we'll go out to meet them."



CHAPTER 18.

The Welcome 'Lights.

NIPPER held the flaring torch high above his head. "Come on, everybody!" he sang out. "We can't be more than a mile or two away now—and we must keep on the move."

"Supposing we can't do it?" asked Tommy Watson.

"We shall do it—we've got to do it," replied Nipper. "You all right, Doris? Mary and the other girls all there? Stick close to us—and don't get too near the fringe of the forest."

"Go ahead," said Doris Berkeley. "We're safe enough."

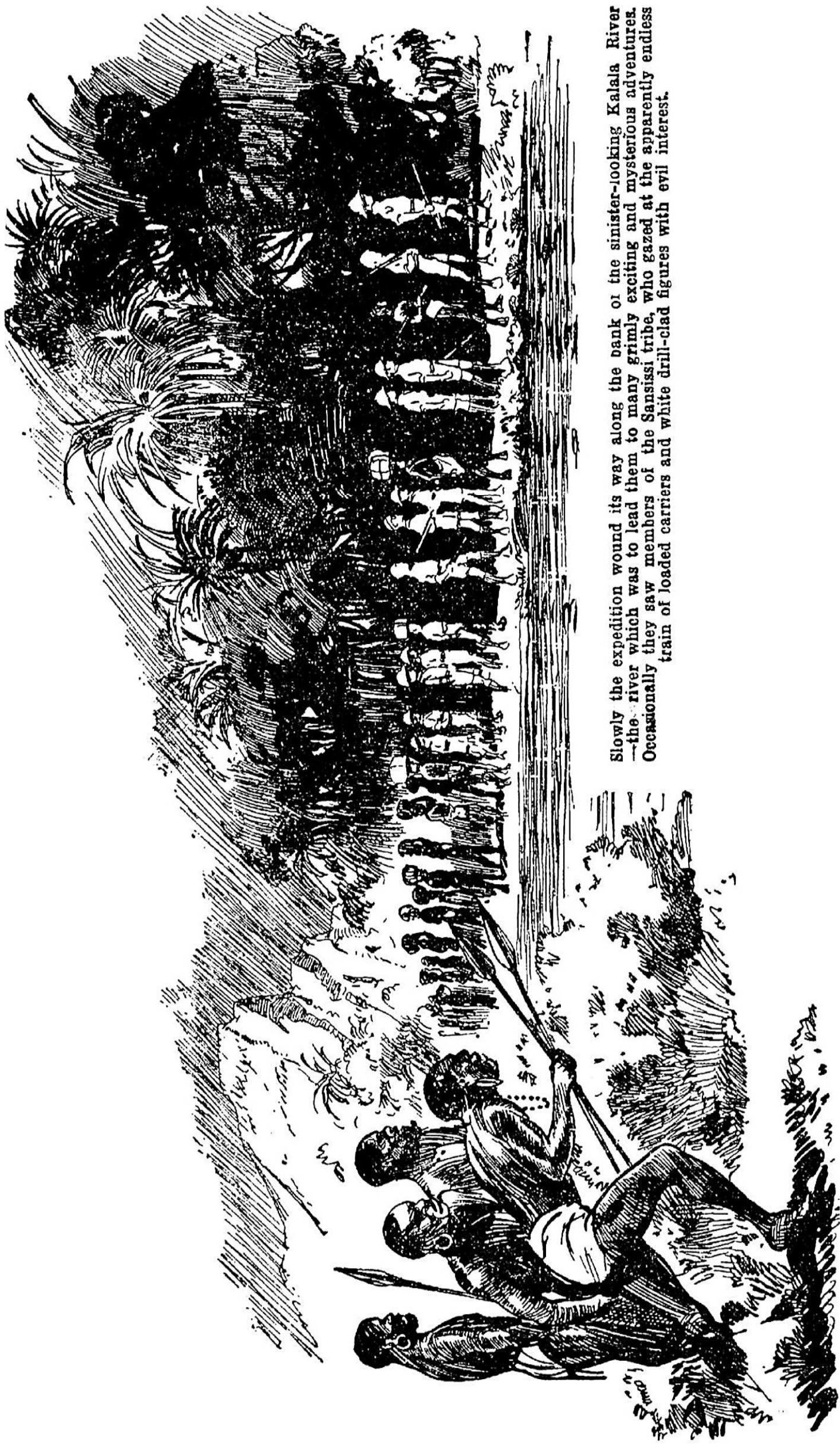
The party was trudging on through the dark, mysterious depths of the African forest. Every member of that determined band was footsore and weary. When they had started, they had overlooked the fact that the humidity of the climate would soon bring appalling fatigue. Many of them were ready to drop, but they pluckily trudged on.

Nipper and Browne had consulted, and they knew that they were comparatively near to their destination. The trail of the earlier party was very fresh, and another mile—or two, at the most—would see them through. Darkness had swept down, but nobody thought of camping.

Indeed, camping was really out of the question, since they had no tents, or food.

THE ECLIPSE!

(Special Article on page 41.)



Slowly the expedition wound its way along the bank of the sinister-looking Kalala River—the river which was to lead them to many grimly exciting and mysterious adventures. Occasionally they saw members of the Sansissi tribe, who gazed at the apparently endless train of loaded carriers and white drill-clad figures with evil interest.

And the forest was alive with wild things—the majority of which were on the move, now that darkness had come.

The experience had been startling enough, even before the full blackness of night had descended. There were many lions about. None had been seen, it was true, but there could be no mistaking the roars which arose from amid the trees, particularly to leeward, for the creatures of the forest were quick to scent these intruders on the wind.

But no attack had come as yet.

"There's nothing to be afraid of as long as we keep these torches going," declared Nipper. "They'll only make a lot of noise."

"Who's afraid, anyhow?" asked Gresham.

"None of us," said Willy. "We may be a bit tired, and we're possibly a bit jumpy—but we're not afraid."

This was a perfectly frank statement.

Half the members of the party were, indeed, jumpy. And they could not be blamed for being in this condition. For they had no guns to defend themselves with, and the myriad sounds from the surrounding undergrowth were nerve-wracking.

Now and again a great commotion would take place fairly close at hand, and the boys and girls half-expected to see a herd of elephants charging at them, or a rhinoceros make a blind rush. But neither of these events happened.

Once they ran into a horde of baboons, and the creatures went scuttling past, lurking in the undergrowth making wild cries.

Even the natives were jumpy. In fact, they were thoroughly scared. They knew that these white youngsters carried no firearms, and they were consequently nervous. They had tremendous faith in the white man's power of killing the beasts of the forest, and here there was no chance of protection should a leopard make an unprovoked attack.

"It can't be much farther now," said Johnny Onions, at length. "Phew! I'm aching in every giddy limb! What about you, Archie?"

Archie Glenthorne looked fagged and worn as he strode along, holding a torch in one hand, and assisting Marjorie Temple with the other.

"I'm absolutely full of beans, old lad!" he replied cheerfully. "Positively robust, and all that sort of thing. Oh, rather! I mean to say, what do we care for the jungle?"

"Good old Archie!" said Duncan, from just behind. "You're sticking it like a good 'un. You needn't tell us you're a slacker any more."

"I wasn't aware, you blighter, that I had ever said any such thing," replied Archie warmly. "A slacker, what? Odds shurs and insinuations! Kindly remember, old grease spot, that——"

"Hurrah!" yelled Watson, from ahead. "Lights!"

"Oh, good egg!"

"The camp!"

"I knew we should do it," said Irene confidently. "Oh, and shan't I be glad of a rest—and something to drink! I've never been so thirsty in all my life!"

"You didn't say anything about it," said Nipper.



"What was the use?" asked the girl. "Some of you would only have insisted upon stopping at a stream, and every second counts."

The forest was more open now, with clear patches which revealed the gleaming stars overhead. The ground sloped away, down into a hollow. And in the distance a considerable glare could be seen, flickering eerily among the trees. And, nearer at hand, were other flares.

"They're coming to meet us," said Nipper eagerly. "Well, thank goodness we've got

through safely. I don't mind admitting that I've been pretty anxious for the last hour."

A minute later Nelson Lee and Lord Dorri-more were recognised as they came hurrying up the slope. They no longer doubted the truth of the report. For here were the other members of the holiday party, before them. The juniors were greatly relieved to have got through so far without any mishap. Now they were all together again, they could face the future with determination to stand by one another through thick and thin.

"So we've got to curb our curiosity until they've washed and fed?" said Lord Dorri-more. "Well, I must say it's a sound idea—although it's pretty exasperating."

"Rats!" said Handforth, as he pushed forward. "We want to know why these chaps have come! Jealous of me, I expect! By George, Irene, I'm jolly glad to see you, though."

The chums of Study D had naturally come out with Nelson Lee and Dorrie to meet the party. And the party now stared at Handfor & Co. in considerable astonishment.

"We heard you were going to disguise yourself as a native carrier, Ted, but why keep it up?" asked Irene. "You look terrible! Why, you're as black as Umlosi himself!"

Handforth turned red—although nobody noticed it.

"The beastly stuff won't come off!" he explained indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This can wait, lads and lasses," said Dorrie briskly. "Don't waste any time on frivolous chatter. We've got to get back to camp."

And half an hour later the new arrivals were feeling like changed beings. Irene & Co., with a special tent to themselves, had changed completely, and were looking greatly refreshed. The girls had taken good care to bring plenty of clothing with them, and even the St. Frank's fellows had managed to get a few things together of their own. The natives had hardly noticed these light loads.

"It's about Umlosi, sir," said Nipper, who was the first to be ready. "Just one or two of us wanted to bring you the news, but the others insisted upon coming. And perhaps it's just as well, because we're all together again."

"Umlosi?" said Nelson Lee, with a quick glance at Dorrie. "What can you know about Umlosi, Nipper?"

"I'll tell you, guv'nor," replied Nipper. "I don't wonder you're anxious—yes, I saw that look of yours, Dorrie. You didn't hear anything from Umlosi this evening, did you?"

"Not a sound," said his lordship. "Come on, young man! Let's hear what you've got to say! I'm like a cat on hot bricks!"

Nipper explained the full details to his astonished audience. Browne, Willy, and one or two others, had come up by now, and they



edition wound its way along the bank of the sinister-looking Kalala River which was to lead them to many grimly exciting and mysterious adventures. They saw members of the Sansissi tribe, who gazed at the apparently endless line of loaded carriers and white drill-clad figures with evil interest.



CHAPTER 19.

Dorrie's Decision.

NELSON LEE was the first to speak.

"All safe?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, guv'nor," replied

Nipper. "We're a bit fagged and footsore, but there aren't any casualties. Everybody's safe. We rushed after you because—"

"Leave that, young 'un," interrupted Lee. "But—"

"I imagine that your news is urgent," said Lee, nodding. "But your condition is urgent, too. You all need a rest—food and drink. You must wash, too, and refresh yourselves. We can talk later."

Nipper was grateful, and so were the others.

"That's a jolly good idea, guv'nor," said Nipper wearily.

were all watching Lee and Dorrie intently. Both men were looking grave. Dorrie, indeed, was more perturbed than the boys had ever seen him.

"We can't doubt the truth of this, Nipper," he said, at length. "By the Lord Harry! What young sportsmen you are!" he added warmly. "It was confoundedly good of you to rush after us like this with the news. Poor old Umlosi! Collared by the Oturi! I'm afraid the old beggar is in a tight fix."

"But why the Kalala River?" asked Lee, frowning.

"That's what I'm wondering at, sir," said Nipper.

"Young Willy heard this, didn't he?" asked Lee. "There's no chance that you made a mistake over the name, Willy? You are sure it was the Kalala River?"

"Absolutely certain, sir," replied the fag. "Umlosi's voice was as clear as yours. I can hear it now. 'They seek to carry us beyond the Kalala River,' it said. 'Into the mysterious Ju-Ju lands beyond. My snake tells me that I am to be tortured in the hands of the enemy.' That was what Umlosi said, sir, as near as anything."

"But why the Kalala River?" asked Lee, turning to Lord Dorrimore. "Didn't you tell me, Dorrie, that the Oturi country is more to the north-west? The Kalala is the region where so many mysterious things have been happening."

Dorrie nodded.

"It's the region where we're off to at dawn!" he replied grimly. "Old Umlosi is in danger—and he appealed to me for help. I didn't hear it, but these youngsters did. We're goin' to his rescue!"

"There's nothing else to be done," agreed Lee. "We can't leave him to his fate. The elephant hunt must be postponed."

"Hang the elephant hunt!" said Dorrie. "This may be a matter of life or death—Umlosi's life. The old boy has been with me through a hundred adventures, and I'm off to find him!"



CHAPTER 20.

Nipper & Co. Mean Business.

HANDFORTH pushed forward, his eyes blazing with excitement.

"By George, it was topping of you all to bring the news like this!" he said enthusiastically. "We can dash off into this Kalala country——"

"One moment, lad, one moment!" put in Lee. "I rather think that Dorrie and I will have something to say about that."

His lordship was pacing up and down, his hands clasped behind his back.

"If the poor old boy's alive, we'll rescue him," he was muttering. "Yes, by gad—even if we have to fight the whole Oturi tribe! If he's dead, we'll avenge him. We can't wait for officialdom to get to work. If it comes to that, I'm hanged if I know whether the Oturi country is under British administration, or French, or Belgium. It might even be the Portuguese. What does it matter? It's one of the remotest spots in Central Africa! We'll deal with this business ourselves—an' do it thoroughly!"

"Just a moment, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee.

"Eh?" said Lord Dorrimore. "Sorry, old man! I'm worried stiff——"

"You must give your attention to matters of moment, nevertheless," interrupted Lee. "What are we going to do about these boys and girls?"

"Do about them?"

"We can't leave them here, can we?"

"Of course not," said Dorrie. "Let them come along."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Dorrie!"

"Are you mad, Dorrie?" asked Lee angrily, as he heard those excited cheers. "How can we take them with us? This is no mere elephant hunt now—it's a trip into a dangerous zone."

Dorrie looked thoughtful.

"Not so dangerous," he said. "The Oturi may be very bold when they jump on a small party of Kutanas, but they wouldn't dare to monkey with white people. I've heard they're cannibals on the quiet, but that's only a detail. I'd sooner trust these cannibals of the interior than a lot of the Coast cattle. All the same, I don't think we'd better let these youngsters come. They'll be far safer at Jimmy's place."

"In the morning, you must all return," said Lee, turning to the dismayed boys. "We will give you a strong escort, and you can easily be back at Insissi by the early afternoon."

"I say, guv'nor, isn't that a bit thick?" asked Nipper. "Steady, you fellows!" he added. "Let me do the talking."

"We're not going to be left out in the cold!" said Handforth excitedly.

"You couldn't be so unkind, Mr. Lee," cried Irene.

And the other girls were as concerned as any of the boys.

"We're all Umlosi's friends, guv'nor, and we're just as anxious about him as you and Dorrie are. This expedition is equipped with everything of the most modern type—tents, washing utensils, camp beds and blankets—everything, in fact, for a big party. You can't say that we shall be in the way."

"It's not that, Nipper—as you know," replied Nelson Lee, with a glance at the indignant girls. "But there are certain dangers——"

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"We're not afraid of them, sir," put in Nipper quickly. "And it's all for Umlosi."

"Hear, hear!"

"Dorrie has said that these blacks won't dare to touch white people," exclaimed Doris. "I vote that we all refuse to go back."

"That's it!" cried Mary. "We won't obey orders!"

"By Jove, I take that stand, too!" declared Nipper, with a glare at Nelson Lee. "Sorry, gov'nor, but we've got to be firm about this. We want to go to Umlosi's rescue, and you're not going to choke us off."

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth. "Good for you, Nipper!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I mean, the good old fuse has been lighted, what? We jolly well refuse to leg it back."

"Mutiny, by gad!" said Dorrie. "Mutiny, in all its stark reality. Shall we take the ringleaders, an' throw them to the lions? Or shall we let them all come with us? I'm hanged if they don't deserve it for their pluck!"

For a moment Nelson Lee hesitated.

Commonsense told him that there was only one possible course—and that was to send all these young people back to Insissi, where they would be perfectly safe under Mr. Stanford's hospitable roof.

But then, Nelson Lee happened to be human. And one glance at all those eager, expectant faces—one look at those sparkling dancing eyes—cast the die. Much as Nelson Lee accused himself of weakness, he couldn't leave them behind. He hadn't the heart to turn them back.

"You're right, Dorrie—they deserve to come," he said, with enthusiasm. "At dawn we all start for the Kalala River—to Umlosi's rescue."

"All of us, sir?" shouted Nipper delightedly. "You'll let us all come?"

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled.

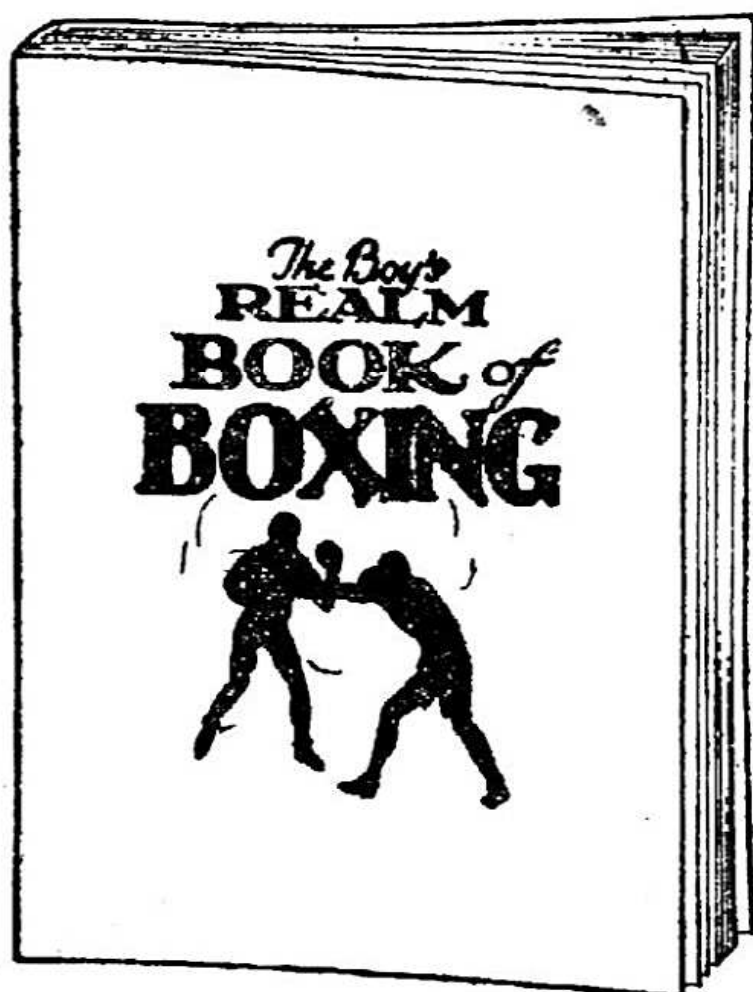
"It seems to me that there's nothing else for it," he replied. "You're here, so you might as well remain with us, and it isn't my show, anyway. If Dorrie says it's all right, we'll let it stand."

"Of course it's all right," said his lordship. "Let 'em come—an' good luck to 'em! I'd rather have them like this—eager to go into the unknown forest—than startin' back at their own shadows. They're a bright crowd, by glory, an' I wouldn't lift a finger to send them back."

So the victorious mutineers went to bed excited and triumphant. They were officially permitted to accompany the rescue expedition!

In private that night, over a last pipe, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore came to the conclusion that they had acted wisely in giving their sanction. For, if they hadn't given it, the whole crowd would have defied them. And that would have been a very awkward complication.

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"Hang it all, Lee, we should have done just the same when we were youngsters, shouldn't we?" asked his lordship. "The girls, too! Gad, I'm proud of the whole bunch! They're the real bulldog breed!"

"You're right," nodded Nelson Lee. "We wouldn't have done anything else."



CHAPTER 21.

The River of Mystery.

EXT morning, long before the sun was far above the horizon, the expedition was on the move.

And now, instead of making towards the elephant country, Lord Dorrimore led his party off into the mysterious region of the Kalala River. There were not many parts of Central Africa that Dorrie didn't know by heart. He was a

hunter of many years' experience—an explorer of countless journeys.

He could speak a score of dialects as fluently as the natives themselves, and he knew the characteristics of almost every tribe. And, if it came to that, Nelson Lee was well versed in African knowledge, too.

"This is fine, you chaps," said Nipper, as he strode along, side by side with Tregellis-West and Watson. "We're off into the unknown, and we must thank poor old Umlosi for the opportunity. So let's justify our inclusion by obeying all orders, and making ourselves generally useful. I want to make the gov'nor satisfied that he did the right thing."

"Rather, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "The die is cast now, an' we're booked for the big adventure. Begad! It'll be frightfully rough if we fail to find the old chap."

"How far is it to the Kalala River, anyway?" asked Watson.

"Not such a great distance, when it comes to a matter of miles," replied Nipper. "Dorrie says we ought to get to the Kalala by to-night. But that's only the first leg of the journey. We don't know what lies beyond. It's a tremendous way to the Oturi country—six or seven days' march, I believe."

"But we're not going there, are we?" asked Tommy.

"The trouble is, we don't know where we're going!" replied Nipper thoughtfully. "Umlosi's directions were pretty vague, weren't they? But news travels pretty quickly among these blacks, and Dorrie is

hoping to pick up information as we go along. We're bound to get on the right track sooner or later."

And that, as a matter of fact, was the simple truth. There was no definite destination to make for. The only thing was to reach the Kalala, and to make fresh plans there, according to the information that could be picked up.

Lord Dorrimore was expecting to hear news from the Sansissi tribe, who occupied the country immediately ahead. The Oturis, too, would probably give up some information—although they were a sullen, obstinate people. Their territory was immense, and they were scattered about over large tracts of forest and hill country.

But there was a region which even Dorrie knew very little about—and that was the dense forest beyond the Kalala River. Truth to tell, his lordship was eagerly looking forward to the journey, for it would take him to a part of the Congo country that he had never before explored.

Towards the afternoon a small river was struck, and after following this up for some miles, mostly in the open, the stream joined forces with a much larger river.

And this river was a curious one.

It flowed sluggishly between high banks, and its waters were dark and strange. Although not muddy, they seemed to be almost black. A mysterious river of unknown depth, and practically unexplored.

"It's the Kalala, all right," declared Lord Dorrimore, as he stood on the bank. "I

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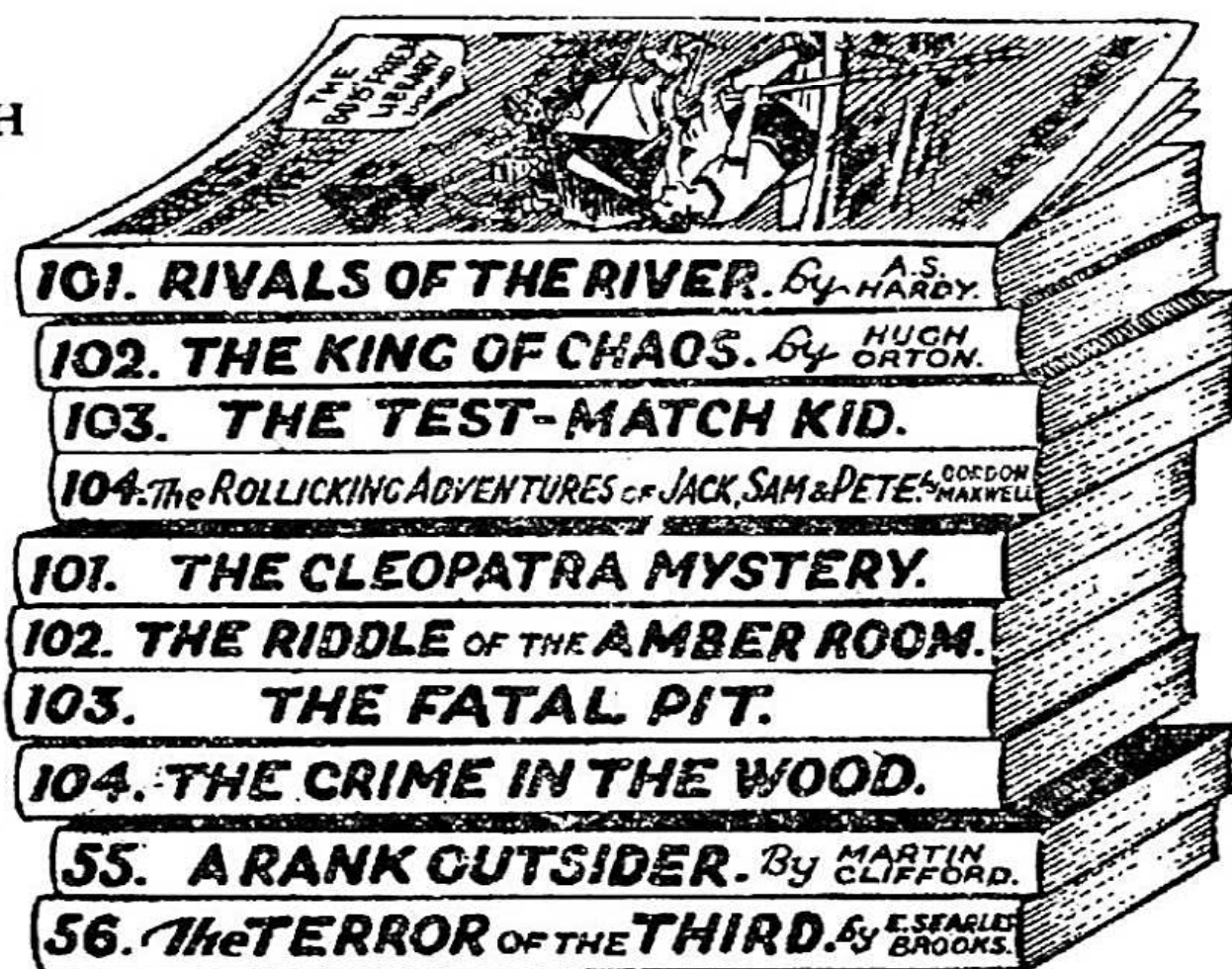
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can't say I like the look of it much. It's got a nasty, ugly expression about it."

"We've got to decide what is to be done," said Nelson Lee. "It seems to be all dense forest on the other bank, so we'd better work our way up the river on this side. We haven't passed any native villages for some time, so we shall probably strike one before long—and we might get some information."

And for another hour or so the expedition followed the bank of this sinister-looking stream. Members of the Sansissi tribe were seen once or twice, and they were frankly interested in the apparently endless train of loaded carriers and white drill-clad figures.

The adventurers learned that a fairly large kraal, or village, lay a mile or two ahead, and it was decided that they would honour the chief by staying the night within his precincts.

The younger members of the party were so interested in all they saw that it is to be feared that they rather overlooked the object of their journey. This was the real thing! At Mr. Stanford's place they had only just glimpsed the fascination of the actual forest. But now they were miles from civilisation, and going deeper and deeper into the unknown!



CHAPTER 22.

The Thing Out of the River.

HARRY GRESHAM suddenly pointed.

"What's that thing floating down-stream?" he asked. "I've had my eye

on it for some time, but I can't quite make out what it is. It moved just now, too."

"A hippo, probably," said Duncan.

The New Zealand junior came to a halt, and shaded his eyes against the fiercely blazing sun. And Handforth & Co., just in the rear, nearly bumped into him.

"Get a move on, my son!" said Handforth briskly. "If you stop, you'll bring the whole procession to a halt. What are you looking at, anyway?"

"Great Scott!" shouted Duncan. "I believe it's a man!"

"That's what I thought—only I didn't like to say it, in case I was wrong," said Gresham eagerly. "I thought I should be laughed at."

"Yes, it's a man—one of those blacks," declared Alec. "Look, Handy! Can't you see? That thing floating down in mid-stream!"

A commotion further along the line attracted their attention. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore had seen that floating figure, too, and the whole expedition was brought to a halt. Two or three of the Arkazoli carriers were already throwing off their loads, preparatory to swimming out.

They had no fear of crocodiles in this deeply-flowing stream.

The current was sluggish, and the body was floating down in a curiously limp way. Handforth wondered if Harry Gresham's statement was correct. Had that figure moved?

"I believe he's alive," remarked Lord Dorrimore, as the rescuers swam out. "Anyhow, we shall soon see. They'll bring him in within two minutes. I'd have gone out myself if there was any danger."

"No need for that," said Lee. "These fellows can do the job."

And very soon the body was drawn towards the bank. Gentle hands lifted the man out, and at first it seemed that there was no life left. The St. Frank's fellows kept away with the girls, and Lee made a swift examination.

"He's a Kutana—one of Umlosi's men, too!" he said grimly.

"By gad, I thought so!" exclaimed Dorrie. "This looks hopeful, Lee! One of Umlosi's crowd! Any chance of bringing him round? He might be able to give us the very information——"

"I'm afraid it's an idle hope, old man," interrupted Lee. "His pulse is very, very feeble. I can hardly detect any heart-beat. Poor fellow! I'm afraid he's done!"

"What about artificial respiration?"

"That's the strange part of it," frowned Lee. "The man isn't drowned—there's practically no water in his lungs. I've found no sign of any wound, either. What is the reason for this feeble pulse?"

"Hanged if I know," said Dorrie. "He looks a healthy specimen. If it comes to that, we know that all Umlosi's men were as fit as fiddles. What ails him?"

"I can't tell," said Nelson Lee. "Hallo! this brandy seems to be doing him a little good. Did you see his eyelids flutter just then?"

Dorrie knelt by the man's side.

"Good glory, he's comin' round!" he muttered. "Be of good heart, old friend," he added, in the Kutana tongue. "It is I——"

"N'Kose!" murmured the stricken man, opening his eyes and looking at Dorrie with feeble recognition. "Thou hast come, my master. I fear thou art too late."

"Umlosi is dead?" asked Dorrie huskily.

"Nay, master, but he has been taken beyond!" breathed the Kutana. "Go hence, N'Kose! I pray thee, retreat from this accursed river. Naught but evil and death will come of——"

His voice trailed away, and his jaw seemed to stiffen.

"Brandy—quick!" panted Lord Dorrimore.

Again the man rallied.

"Umlosi!" said Dorrie, bending close. "Where is he, friend? What of thy chief? We go to aid him."

"The accursed Oturi have taken the good Umlosi," said the poor fellow, in a voice so weak that it could scarcely be heard. "If thou wilt go in search, the only way is by river. There is no way through the great forest. But the river is bewitched and accursed."

"Yes, but what happened?" asked Dorrie gently. "How did you meet with this disaster?"

The man looked bewildered and dull. Already his eyes seemed to be glazing.

"I go, master," he breathed. "'Tis my time—"

"Wait!" urged Dorrie. "Canst thou not tell more of this river? Live yet a minute, old friend. Tell us of what is beyond."



CHAPTER 23.

The Death Warning!

THERE was something very pitiful in this tragic little scene. The poor fellow was dying—almost at his last breath, in fact. Only the brandy was giving him a false minute of life. Nelson Lee and Dorrie could see him fighting against the long sleep.

"The river!" he said dazedly. "Turn back, N'Kose! Venture not up this accursed stream!"

"But Umlosi is there!" said Dorrie. "We must go!"

"There are devils, my master!" croaked the dying man. "The very water is bewitched. It is *tagati*! Go not, for thou wilt serve neither Umlosi nor thyself. 'Twill mean death, even as I now die!"

"Listen!" said Nelson Lee, bending close. "Dost thou know what the Oturi have done with thy chief? We seek him——"

"The river!" gasped the unhappy man. "The river means death——"

A strange sound came into his throat, and he suddenly shook from head to foot. Then, with a long sigh, he became limp. For a moment Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore knelt there reverently.

"Poor beggar!" muttered Dorrie at last. "Has he gone?"

"Yes," whispered Lee.

"An' we know no more than we did at first," said his lordship. "At least, very little. Umlosi is up this river, an' we're warned not to proceed. Well, I'm a perverse chap. I'm more determined than ever to go ahead. Anythin' mysterious attracts me."

Lee looked thoughtful.

"I'm thinking of the young 'uns," he said. "Much as we want to help Umlosi, ought we to risk it, Dorrie? Ought we to endanger the lives of these——"

"Oh, nonsense!" interrupted Dorrie. "We can't take too much notice of this poor chap. The Kutanas are a cut above the other tribes when it comes to intelligence, but with all due respects to 'em, I'm afraid they're a superstitious lot. If there's anythin' they can't understand—even if it turns out to be somethin' perfectly simple—they go about whisperin' of witchcraft an' sorcery, an' they think everythin's had a Ju-Ju curse put on

it. We mustn't be fooled by that stuff, old man."

Lee stroked his chin.

"I'll grant all that, Dorrie, but how did this man die?" he asked. "He wasn't drowned—he wasn't speared or shot. There's not a scratch on him. Physically, he was as sound as a bell. No sign of disease or fever whatever. What brought him to this?"

"Poison?" suggested Dorrie.

"It's possible, although I can't for the life of me detect any trace of poison," said Nelson Lee. "Well, we shall have to let it go, of course. I am no surgeon, and I can't hold a post-mortem examination. But this man's warning is very disturbing, Dorrie."

"Not to me," said his lordship. "I'm keener than ever. But you're thinking of these boys an' girls, aren't you? Better not say anythin' to them, eh?"

"Good gracious, no!" said Lee. "There's no reason why they should be unnecessarily alarmed."

So when Lee joined a group of juniors, and they surrounded him, asking eager questions, he only shook his head.

"The man is dead," he said quietly.

"But hasn't he given any information, sir?" asked Nipper.

"Very little—and that, I fear, of no value to us," replied Lee. "We only know that Umlosi is somewhere up this river, and it is said that we can only progress by water. The forest is very dense."

"But how can we go by water, sir?" asked Handforth. "We haven't any boats."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I don't think that is a matter which need worry us," he replied. "The Sansissi people are great river users, and we shall soon arrive at their chief town, which is on the river bank. Money is just as eloquent here, Handforth, as elsewhere. We can hire all the boats we need."

And after the unfortunate Kutana had been decently buried, the expedition continued on its way. Although the boys and girls had not been told much, a feeling of foreboding had descended over the entire party. The hosts of Arkazoli porters and carriers were whispering together at every opportunity, and old M'toza had all his work cut out to keep them in hand.

The weather, perhaps, added to the feeling of sinister dread. For the expedition had hardly got under way again before a violent thunderstorm broke. Massed clouds came up with incredible speed, the lightning blazed, the thunder crashed like heavy artillery, and the rain came down in torrential volume—as only tropical rain can.

For half an hour the world seemed to be in agony, but everybody was glad of the cooling rain. Getting wet through was a pleasure here. And when the storm cleared the sky was bluer than ever, and the first signs of the Sansissi town became evident.

For here there were indications of cultivation, with women working in the rough fields. The men were far too dignified to de-



The St. Frank's juniors came rushing out of their tents at the sound of the tumult. By the river bank they could see scores of the Arkazoli porters fighting like maniacs for possession of the canoes. If these were stolen the whole party would be stranded in the heart of the African jungle!

mean themselves by working on the land. The Sansissi were hunters and warriors, and only the women did the manual labour.

Half the town came out to welcome the visitors, and this was a novel experience for the schoolboys and schoolgirls. There was no question of danger. These people were friendly enough. They were like children, crowding round, and following the expedition into the heart of the town, which was composed of hundreds of round, thatched huts. None of the visitors were particularly impressed by the smell. In many ways the open forest was preferable. But these natives were very strict on the question of hospitality, and nothing would please them but that the travellers should spend the night there. Dances and feasts were already being prepared.

The Chief was an elderly rascal with innumerable scars. He gave his name as Bofebi, and he and all his wise men came out to give the white party an official welcome.

But Bofebi also gave a word of warning.

"Lord, venture not beyond our lands," he said, after the first ceremonials were over and speaking in the universal Swahili. "For up the river lies death. I speak good words, O lord—and you, being a man of great wisdom, will heed them."

There was no doubt that danger lay ahead—danger of a lurking and mysterious kind. But Bofebi's words, vague and full of superstition, left little impression on Lord Dorrimore's prosaic mind.

CHAPTER 24.

Whisperings of Hidden Peril.



ORD DORRIMORE heartily agreed to Bofebi's last remark.

"You are right, Bofebi," he said. "I am indeed a man of great wisdom, and my wisdom tells me that your warnings are idle. I believe not in your Ju-Ju and your tales of death."

"And yet you would be wise to heed, master," said Bofebi. "Strange things happen beyond the Kalala. Have not the Kutanas disappeared, never to return? Is there not magic beyond our understanding? Even my own people have been taken, and my wise men can give no explanation."

"Well, let us discuss this in due course, good Bofebi," said Dorrie. "For the moment we will accept your hospitality, and we know that it will be of great magnificence."

The feast that evening, in the light of many great fires, was impressive enough, but nobody was particularly attracted by the food. The meat was safe enough—being freshly-killed antelope—but there were many other dishes which were rather too mysterious to be safe.

"I don't care if I offend the beggars, I'm not eating any of these messes," said Handforth firmly. "For all we know, they may be stewed lizards, or something awful like that!"

"That's what I feel," murmured Church. "But it looks so bad to refuse——"

"Can't help that!" interrupted Handforth. "And you needn't whisper, you ass. These beggars can't understand English."

"Don't you be too sure," said Nipper. "Lots of these Africans pretend they can't understand English, but they know more than they'll admit. These Sansissi people do a good lot of trading further south, and they're not so primitive as they look. Africa is different to what it was in Stanley's time."

"Stanley who?" asked Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You hopeless ass!" grinned Willy. "I suppose you've never heard of H. M. Stanley, the great explorer?"

"Oh, the chap who found Livingstone?" asked Handforth, with a glare. "Of course I've heard of him!"

"Marvellous!" said Willy. "He's right for once. I'd have made a bet that Ted was going to say that Livingstone found Stanley."

"Accidents will happen!" grinned Church. Handforth clenched a ready fist.

"I don't want to spoil the feast, but I'm going to punch your face, Church!" he said grimly.

"Steady, you chump!" gasped Nipper. "These blacks won't understand what you're up to, and they might think there's a real fight starting. And in two minutes they'll probably do a war dance, and massacre the lot of us!"

"My goodness!" panted Handforth, aghast. He hadn't noticed Nipper's wink, and, as usual, he took the statement literally. However, it had the desired effect, so Nipper thought it unnecessary to explain.

"I don't want to sound critical, but I'd much rather be in our own camp," remarked Dora Manners, when the feast was over. "Do these people expect us to sleep in their terrible huts? I believe they've got scorpions and other insects running about."

Browne smiled benevolently.

"It will gratify you to learn, Sister Dora, that Brother Dorrie has displayed his usual tact, and has arranged that our tents shall be erected beyond the bounds of the kraal. All will be well. But it seems to me that there are whisperings of trouble among our worthy retainers."

"How do you mean—trouble?" asked Dora.

"I fear that discontent is spreading," replied Browne. "Have you not observed the carriers gathering in groups, and hobnobbing together? Brother M'toza has been having a strenuous time, I believe."

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were discussing the same subject.

"It's no good blinking at the facts, Dorrie—and they're not any too pleasant," Lee was saying. "It's rather a pity we came to this Sansissi village. The beggars are getting at our Arkazoli carriers."

"Yes, I've seen it, too," said his lordship gruffly. "But we had to come—there was no other way. As for the carriers, we needn't

worry. They'll be all right after we get on the river to-morrow."

"I hope so, anyway," said Lee. "Your reputation is pretty wonderful, Dorrie, and the majority of these blacks would go almost anywhere with you."

"I've never had my carriers desert me yet," said Lord Dorrimore, with reasonable pride. "An' everybody knows they're beggars for chuckin' their loads into the undergrowth, an' leggin' it home. Rummily enough, they never do that sort of thing with me. My charmin' personality, I suppose."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Your charming liberality, you mean," he said drily. "My dear man, it's famous through every tribe that you pay at least double the recognised 'cash.' No wonder the carriers flock to serve you. I hope this particular crowd will remain loyal."

But there was a doubt in Nelson Lee's voice.



CHAPTER 25.

The River of Fear.

UNQUESTIONABLY, there was plenty of cause for uneasiness.

In spite of the blacks' respect for Lord Dorrimore, and in spite of their love for his liberality, there were many signs of discontent. The Arkazoli porters had lost their light-hearted, happy smiles. They had become secretive and sullen.

At first they had started out on an elephant hunt, and that would have taken them into their own country. They had been as happy as sandboys at the prospect.

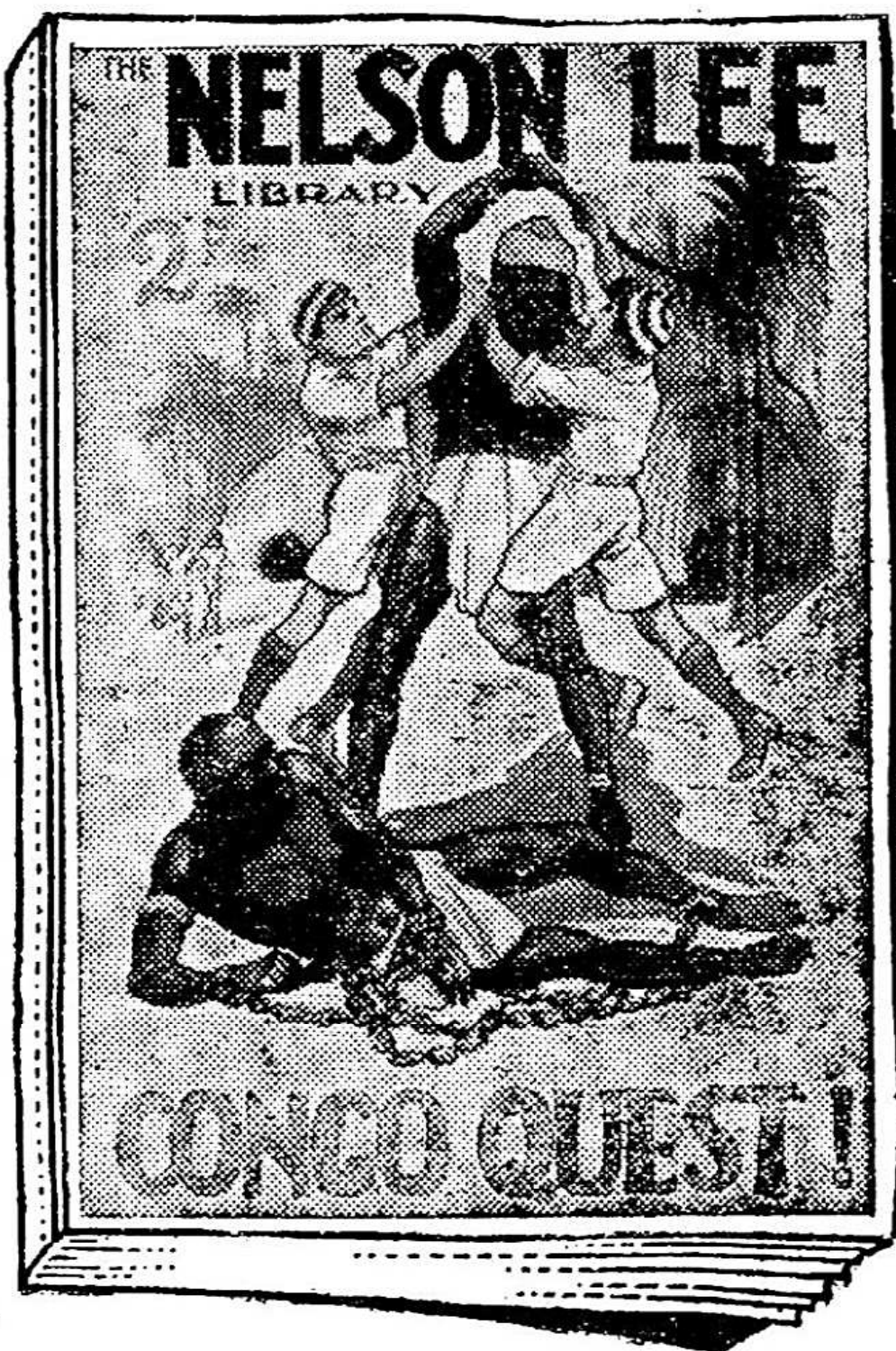
But they knew that they were being led into the land of mystery, where men were said to disappear by the power of some magic Ju-Ju. Dorrie had promised them double pay, and at first they had obeyed orders freely. But now they were beginning to act in a manner that could only be interpreted in one way.

They were getting restive, and when African carriers get into that condition they need close watching. M'toza, who was a Coast boy, and who affected a contempt for Ju-Jus and superstitions, worked hard among his charges. He was constantly reminding them of Dorrie's powers. Was the great lord not a magician himself? All those who served under him were protected from witchcraft. While they served him, they were safe. Let them desert, and they would be seized by unknown devils and destroyed.

This sort of thing had a big effect, and the wily M'toza succeeded in getting the carriers in hand. But they were still sullen and restive.

They had been talking with their Sansissi hosts, and had heard many whispers of dark doings up the Kalala, and beyond. Nothing was said openly—nothing ever is in these places—but the air of mystery was far more eloquent than any definite statement.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"THE CONGO QUEST!"**Marooned in the jungle!****Left helpless in the heart of the mysterious Congo, the St. Frank's party determine to fight on and rescue Umlosi.****Amazing adventures befall them.****They find a plantation, fitted with a modern power-station—and peopled by slaves in clanking chains.****This great story is full of real thrills and startling happenings.****Here's a surprise! Next Wednesday's issue will contain the opening instalment of a serial by****ARCHIE GLENTHORNE.****The Genial Ass of the Remove has called his story:****"BUCKING UP OLD ALGY!"****It is written in Archie's own inimitable style, and you will thoroughly enjoy this unique yarn. The story is just as Archie wrote it, except for slight amendments in spelling and punctuation.****Don't miss this fine new feature!**

ORDER TO-DAY!

It was hinted that there were fearful dangers up the river. Bofebi and his head men were, indeed, looking rather ugly when they definitely learned that the white men were determined to go up the river. The Sansissi Chief did not like to have his warnings ignored. But he had more sense than to oppose Lord Dorrimore's will.

He even provided scores of canoes, so that the party should be able to take to the water at dawn. For, after all, there was no reason why he should refuse the money which Dorrie was willing to pay. Bofebi had named an iniquitous price, and he had nearly fainted when Dorrie had agreed to pay it. In spite of his anger that the white man should ignore him, he could not refuse such money.

Dorrie himself was lighthearted.

"There's no need to worry, Lee, old man," he said, as they prepared for bed in their tent. "We've got the canoes, an' old Bofebi can scowl as much as he likes. Never let these beggars have their own way. The white man is the master—an' it's just as well to let them know it."

"I agree, of course," said Lee. "At the same time, Dorrie, you must admit that

Bofebi is an ugly scoundrel, and I'm afraid he has a great deal of influence in this district. I am not concerned about his own tribe, but they've been getting at our carriers."

"They'll be all right after we get on the move again," declared Dorrie. "These natives are always scared of their own shadows. There's nothin' to be afraid of. I don't believe in all this mystery stuff."

And yet, on the following day, even Dorrie was compelled to admit that the Kalala River exerted a strange, uncanny influence. Even he felt the effect of it.

Even before the sun was over the tree-tops, the expedition was ready to leave. In scores of canoes they left the Sansissi town, and paddled their way up the slow, mysterious Kalala current. And before they had been going an hour, the river was exerting its strange influence.

Perhaps it was the scenery which caused this effect.

At any rate, the Kalala was very different from any of the other rivers that the party had seen. The mighty Congo was a giant, and this was a dwarf—so insignificant that

no ordinary map even dignified it by mentioning it. But the Kalala was more impressive, in its own way, than the Congo.

The current was sluggish, and the water, although clear, had a curiously blackish look. The forest came down to the very banks, and in many places the brilliant foliage met overhead.

The long procession of canoes passed beneath these arbours, disturbing screeching birds and baboons and monkeys. In one or two places hippo were seen, and the further they penetrated the more primitive became the aspect.

They were right out of the path of civilisation here!



CHAPTER 26.

Deeper Into the Unknown.

PERHAPS it was the knowledge that they were penetrating farther and farther into the unknown that caused the intangible sensation of fear. The Arkazoli carriers—now busy at the paddles—showed it most. Their uneasiness was increasing with every mile that was traversed. At times the river would widen, and deep, silent pools could be seen underneath the dense masses of overhanging foliage.

And these pools were avoided as though they were plague-spots. The natives kept the canoes to the centre of the stream, and they were so jumpy that the slightest sound from either bank caused them to look round with the whites of their eyes showing.

Even the boys and girls began to feel this hidden dread. When they spoke, they unconsciously lowered their voices. They watched the thick bush fascinatedly, as though expecting to see lurking enemies.

Nelson Lee was frankly uneasy, and Dorrie did not disguise the fact that this experience was new to him.

"I've got to admit it, Lee, old man—there's somethin' deucedly rummy about this blessed stream," he said, in a low voice. "I've never known any river to have such an effect on me. I've got a sort of creepy feelin' down my spine."

"Better not let the boys or girls hear you talking like that," murmured Lee anxiously. "Don't think I'm a killjoy, old man, but oughtn't we to turn back?"

Lord Dorrimore looked dogged.

"We're goin' after Umlosi," he said. "We can't waste time."

"Yes, you're right there," admitted Lee. "The only hope of rescuing Umlosi is to get on his trail without a minute's delay."

"Rather a pity we haven't got the old Sprite here," went on his lordship. "The water's deep enough—a lot deeper than most of these smaller streams. But it might have taken us months to work her round—even

supposin' that we weren't stopped by cateracts."

"I don't think there's any possible way of getting a steamer up to this river," said Lee. "We're really in the wilds here, Dorrie. And these porters of yours know it, too. I'm afraid you're going to have a job with them later on."

"I'll give them a good jawin' when we land to make camp," declared Dorrie. "Perhaps you'd better help, old man. You've got an uncanny way with natives."

"Nonsense!" laughed Lee. "My powers are nothing compared to yours, Dorrie. If you can't persuade the carriers to remain loyal, nobody can."

A shout came from one of the other canoes, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore saw Handforth pointing to a floating object a short distance away. It proved to be a crocodile, floating upside down, stone dead.

And shortly afterwards one or two fish were seen—also dead.

"Infernally mysterious," muttered Dorrie, with a frown.

He noticed the bow paddler looking at him.

"Bwana, let us not proceed," said the man nervously. "For is this not a river of dead things? It is a Ju-Ju river."

"Talk not such nonsense," said Dorrie coolly. "Are you a man, or are you a trembling child? There is no Ju-Ju here, an' I will protect you. Let me not hear these bad words!"

"If we proceed, bwana, it will mean death to all," said the man. "But you are the great lord, and we are your servants. We will obey."

Dorrie looked at Nelson Lee, and made a grimace. He didn't like the Arkazoli's profession of obedience. That sort of thing generally meant that the opposite was going to happen. Dorrie decided to watch his "boys" with greater care than ever.

But for the brooding sense of mystery, that trip would have been a sheer delight. When they could manage to forget the inexplicable atmosphere of fear, they were charmed. The Kalala River was a place of untold beauty. Its deep waters were so smooth that the vista ahead was mirrored in the glass-like surface. At times the banks would draw in, and the travellers were obliged, now and again, to crouch down in order to pass beneath the thickly overhanging vegetation.

Creepers in endless profusion grew in this humid heat, and the colours were too gorgeous for words. And yet there seemed to be something sinister about all this beauty. It was a deadly kind of magnificence.

And the further they progressed the denser became the bush. On either side the forest was utterly impenetrable. Tangled masses of creepers and trees overhung the water's edge, and even if a pathway could have been found the travellers would have been beset by countless perils. For the ground was swampy, and probably swarming with deadly insects, snakes, and other horrors too numerous to imagine.

The only course was to keep to the water. The uncertainty of the quest was another feature which had a worrying effect. Had Umlosi really been brought up this river? He had been captured by the Oturi, and the Oturi were as scared of the Ju-Ju country as any of the other tribes. Why, then, had they brought their prisoners into this bewitched region?

Everybody was aware of an increasing foreboding, and with every plunge of the paddles the explorers felt danger!



CHAPTER 27.

The Vote.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST looked at Nipper in a queer sort of way.

"Dear old boy, that's the twentieth dead thing I've counted," he remarked. "All floatin' down the river on this sluggish current. It's a bit frightful—it is really. It makes a fellow think!"

"I can't imagine any explanation," said Nipper, frowning. "Why should these fish be dead? These African streams aren't poisoned—unless some devilry has been at work."

"When you come to think of it, we haven't seen a single live thing in this river," said Watson. "Crocodiles—fish—even birds. All floating down—dead! And they're all coming out of the region that we're going into."

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie.

"Getting nervy?" asked Nipper.

"To be candid, old boy, I am," said Sir Montie frankly. "I'm not usually a jumpy chap, but this beastly river has got me all on edge. It's frightfully fascinatin', I'll admit, but the fascination isn't of the right kind. I shall be glad when we get into more open country."

"Same here," muttered Watson. "This forest seems to be closing in on us. I don't wonder the blacks are looking scared."

The day was getting on now, and Dorrie was looking out for a likely camping spot. If anything, the party was more uneasy than ever. Yet nothing untoward had really happened. There had been no sign of any human being, and the peace of the Kalala was almost uncanny. It was, indeed, this brooding tranquillity which had such an effect. If the white people were affected, what could be expected from the superstitious blacks?

Dorrie was beginning to worry. This was a very unusual condition for him, for he generally took life in a very tranquil fashion.

"There seems to be no campin' spot on this infernal river," he growled, after another mile had been covered. "It's a certainty we can't stay in these canoes—I'm cramped enough already, an' I expect the rest of the gang is sufferin' in the same way. Yet there's no clearin'—"

"Just as you're speaking about it, we come within sight of one at last," interrupted Nelson Lee. "By Jove, Dorrie, look yonder! I think we ought to decide on this place before we get further into the unknown. There might not be another."

Dorrie's eyes lit up as he looked ahead.

"Good egg!" he exclaimed, with relief. "A toppin' spot."

The occupants of the other canoes were equally animated. It was a relief to find a clearing in the midst of all this impenetrable bush. Two or three hundred yards ahead the forest retreated, leaving a wide stretch of grass land, extending for perhaps half a mile, with patches of mimosa here and there.

It was not an ideal pitch for camping, for the grass looked very long and spiky, and there was every chance that the spot would be mosquito-infested as soon as dusk fell.

But it was impossible to look for any higher ground, and further along the river seemed to become more thickly engulfed than ever. It would never do to be caught on the open water by the swift darkness.

So all the canoes were paddled to the bank, where choking masses of reeds entangled the water.

Everybody was glad enough to get ashore, so that they could stretch their legs. And Dorrie took care to mingle freely with the carriers, encouraging them by his cheery personality. They lost a great deal of their nervousness under his influence. And there was plenty of hard work to be done, too—erecting tents, building fires, and making the hundred and one preparations for camping.

"They're all right while we're dodgin' about, Lee," said Dorrie, after a while. "But that old scoundrel of a M'toza isn't much use. Oliver Cromwell, eh? The fellow who gave him that name was a bit of a humorist. The old beggar pretends to be contemptuous of Ju-Jus, but he's as scared as any of the other blacks now that we're on this river."

"That's what I fancied" said Nelson Lee. Nipper & Co. came up.

"Have you noticed the river bank here, sir?" asked Nipper.

"What about it, young 'un?"

"Well, there's something rather rummy, in my opinion," said Nipper. "I've just been talking about it to Montie and Tommy. This forest is probably packed with game—lions, leopards, and those sort of merchants. In that case, why don't they use this clearing for coming down the river to drink?"

Dorrie nodded.

"I noticed that the instant we came ashore," he said. "It's ugly, my lads! If the animals won't use this river, then there's somethin' pretty funny about it."

"But why?" asked Tommy Watson. "The water isn't poison, is it, sir?"

"As far as I know, it's perfectly wholesome—and why the animals don't come down is a mystery," said Nelson Lee. "There

certainly seems to be something very unusual in this district."

They all felt it later on, after darkness had come, and while they were sitting round the camp fires. As expected, the mosquitoes were a terrible nuisance. But it was rather comforting to hear the roar of the lions, and the numerous sounds of the other wild creatures of the forest. Everything wasn't dead, at all events!

"I don't think it's quite fair for us to go ahead like this, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee quietly, as he stood with Lord Dorrimore, apart. "There's now no question about the danger of this river, and some of the boys may have regretted their impulsiveness. I think we ought to put the question to the vote. Shall we go ahead or shall we turn back while there's still time?"



CHAPTER 28.

Everybody Agrees!

LORD DORRIMORE smiled. "It's not a bad idea, but I'm willin' to wager on the result," he said.

"These St. Frank's fellows will never show the white feather, old man. An' I've a pretty good opinion of the girls, too. Still, you might as well put it to 'em straight from the shoulder. If we're goin' back, we'll let the carriers know, an' put 'em in a good humour."

No time was lost.

The evening meal was already over, and the travellers were sitting round the camp fires, discussing the possibilities of the morrow. Somehow, there was a lack of the usual lighthearted chaff. Faces were serious, and voices were lowered.

Further away, the blacks were gathered in groups, muttering together, and showing every sign of an uneasiness which might well turn into a sudden panic.

Nelson Lee gathered the crowd together, and they could tell that there was something special in the wind. Even Dorrie was looking unusually serious. They waited expectantly.

"Now, you young people, Dorrie and I have been having a chat," said Nelson Lee. "There are twenty of us, all told—twelve of you boys, six girls, and Dorrie and myself."

The twelve fellows wondered what was coming. They consisted of Nipper & Co., Handforth & Co., Archie Glenthorpe and Johnny Onions, Browne and Willy, and Gresham and Duncan. The girls were Irene Manners, her cousin Dora, Doris Berkeley, Marjorie Temple, Tessa Love, and Mary Summers.

"What's the discussion, sir?" asked Nipper.

"We want you all to understand that we do not question your courage or determination," said Nelson Lee diplomatically. "Umlosi has been taken into this unknown region in mysterious circumstances, and we are all anxious to find him."

"Rather, sir!"

"We'll find him, too!" said Handforth confidently.

"Hear, hear!"

"But we must face the facts," continued Lee. "Our carriers are restive, and we may have serious trouble with them. Is it worth going on? I want you all to vote on this point. Shall we continue our journey into this dark interior, or shall we turn back now—while we still have the chance?"

"Turn back?" asked Handforth, staring. "You're not serious, sir?"

"I know what your vote will be, Handforth," said Lee drily. "Your recklessness is well known. But I am addressing you all. Don't be hasty. Don't think that a vote in favour of turning back will be a sign of weakness. I am deliberately refraining from giving any orders, or from attempting to influence you. I want you to decide this point of your own free wills. Shall we go ahead, or shall we turn back?"

"Hands up, those in favour of goin' ahead," said Lord Dorrimore.

"That's easy, sir!" said Nipper promptly.

"Good gad! Absolutely!"

"Rather!"

Every hand was raised, and Irene & Co., if anything, were quicker to raise theirs than the boys were. Every face was eager and anxious.

"Jolly good!" said Handforth, as he noted the raised hands. "You surely didn't imagine that we should vote any other way, sir? We've started out to rescue Umlosi, and we're not giving up!"

"No fear!" said Harry Gresham. "Let's stick it!"

"We're not afraid of this river, sir."

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"Well, what can you do?" he asked, turning to Nelson Lee. "They're determined to carry on, an' I never expected anythin' else. To-morrow we continue our trip up the 'debbil-debbil' river. An' personally, I'm not expectin' to meet any spooks. As for the carriers, I'll pay 'em a visit, an' try to knock some sense into their thick heads."

He walked off, and Irene turned to the other girls.

"Imagine it!" she said indignantly. "They thought it possible that we should vote for turning back!"

"Ridiculous!" said seventeen voices, or something to that effect.



CHAPTER 29.

Another Ominous Sign.

AS he would, Nipper could not sleep. The other fellows had dropped off soundly, in spite of the mosquitoes. And as no sounds came from the girls' tent, they were apparently slumbering, too.

But Nipper was restless.

He had not forgotten the worried look on

Lord Dorrimore's face, and it wasn't merely Umlosi's fate which had caused that worry. Dorrie was puzzled over this Kalala River mystery.

Outside the tent, Nipper took a look round. Most of the carriers were asleep, but some of the more trustworthy men were placed at different points round the camp, on guard.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were wakeful, too. They were down by the river, staring out across the dark waters. Their attitudes seemed to be tense and alert, and Nipper went up and joined them.

"I couldn't sleep," said Nipper.

"Rats!" retorted his lordship. "You get back to your blankets, my son, and turn in. We shall have a pretty strenuous day tomorrow, I imagine, an' you need all the sleep you can get."

"That's very sound advice, young 'un," said Lee, nodding.

Nipper looked at them both rather grimly.

"What's the idea of this?" he asked. "You're keeping something from me. You're trying to speak carelessly—and I'm not so green. What is it, guv'nor?"

"Nothing much," said Nelson Lee briefly.

"Yes, but what?"

"I suppose we'd better tell you—only keep it dark, for the love of Mike!" murmured Dorrie. "Don't let any of the others know—an' keep it from the blacks, at all costs. Another dead body floated by five minutes ago!"

"Phew!" whistled Nipper, staring at the river. "Another?"

"Well, I'm counting that poor fellow we buried," said Dorrie. "He was as good as dead, anyway."

"But are you sure of this, sir?" asked Nipper, looking at Lee.

"Very sure," replied Nelson Lee. "The body was so close that we hooked it in, and I examined it. The poor beggar was a Kutana—absolutely unscratched, and dead from some cause unknown. We let it slip back into the water, and allowed the current to carry it down."

Nipper was rather shocked.

"Wouldn't it have been better to give the chap a decent burial, sir?" he asked.

"I'll admit it sounds a bit callous, but there was nothin' else for it," said Lord Dorrimore. "If these blacks had seen anythin', they would have stampeded on the spot. Good glory! What is there up this devilish river? Why do these dead things keep floatin' down—includin' human bein's? I never knew anythin' like it in all my experience!"

"It's another sign," said Nipper. "It's all very well to talk about goin' back, guv'nor, but we can't. After this we've just got to go ahead. It's our duty to investigate."

"Good man!" said Lee approvingly. "As

long as you've all got this spirit, there won't be much to fear."

They stood silent for some moments, watching the sluggish current—half-expecting to see another sinister object floating on the black water. They were all thinking—all puzzled over this uncanny mystery. What deadly work was going on up this strange river?

Dorrie turned suddenly, alert and tense.

"What was that?" he whispered.

"Eh?" gasped Nipper. "I didn't hear—"

"Yes, Dorrie's right!" breathed Nelson Lee. "I heard something, too. And I thought I saw— Look! Figures moving!"

"Those confounded carriers!" muttered Dorrie, as he looked at the scene in the flickering firelight. "Where are the guards? Not one of them at his post! By the Lord Harry! If they've started any trouble—"

"Look out!" shouted Nipper, in alarm.

There was no need for any further whispering. With dramatic suddenness the night air became filled with wild shouts. The lurking forms no longer sought concealment. Dozens of men came rushing down towards the river.

"By James, they've mutinied!" shouted Lee.

Lord Dorrimore sprang forward, and his voice thundered out in Swahili. But he might as well have ordered the river to stop flowing. The blacks were half-mad with terror, and it was obvious that their object was to seize the canoes—their only method of getting back to civilisation.

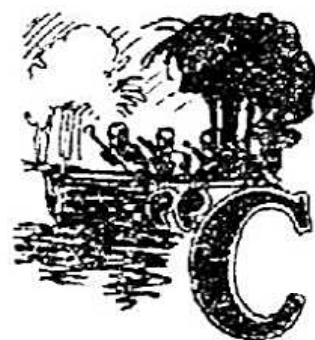
"Quick!" roared Dorrie. "It's no good—we can't stop them! But, by gad, we can save some of the canoes! We're done if they take the lot—we're absolutely wiped out!"

"Nipper, rouse the boys!" shouted Lee urgently.

"If they're not roused already, they must sleep like logs!" gasped Nipper. "Yes, here they come!"

At the river bank the scene was indescribable. In the gloom, the scores of Arkazoli porters were fighting like maniacs for possession of the rough native craft.

And if they seized them all, the white party would be cut off from every possible means of salvation!



CHAPTER 30.

Alone in the Forest.

ANNIBALS!" roared Handforth excitedly.

"What!" gasped Church.

"Look! We're being attacked by cannibals!"

thundered Handforth. "Look at 'em fighting! Look at 'em—"

"You silly ass! They're our carriers!" said McClure.

"Our carriers? Why, of all the swindles —"

"Come on, you chaps!" yelled Nipper, rushing up. "The men have revolted, and they're trying to pinch all the canoes. We've got to save some, or we shall never get back to civilisation!"

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were working like madmen. They forebore to draw their revolvers, and fire at these fear-crazed blacks. The men were in no way aggressive. They only wanted to get away. Even M'toza, the Krooboy, had caught the fever as dangerously as the others.

It was not merely a question of canoes. There were stores packed on those clumsy river craft—food in plenty, and mostly of the luxury type. Tea, coffee, sugar, bacon, powdered milk, and large quantities of similar stuff which helped to make the journey pleasant. If all this food was lost, in addition to the canoes, the situation would be even more serious.

For it is no easy matter to obtain food in the African wilds. Contrary to the general belief, many of the tribes are fighting a continual and everlasting battle against starvation. Dorrie's party would be in a terrible predicament if all the stores were sunk or stolen.

Fortunately, all the laden canoes had been drawn aside farther up the river, and the frenzied Arkazolis took no heed of them. They only wanted the empty boats so that they could go down-stream, away from this place of terror.

Their panic was so great that they were even willing to risk a night journey. And already a number of canoes had vanished into the darkness, most of them heavily overloaded.

A few of the others were saved.

The boys arrived in time to be of good service. A dozen craft were pulled back, and in the general confusion two or three of the unhappy blacks fell into the deep water and were carried away.

At the end of ten dramatic minutes the excitement was over. Not a single carrier remained. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were left utterly alone with the twelve St. Frank's boys and the six girls.

Echoing out of the darkness came the last sounds of the departing blacks, and even these sounds soon died away. From closer at hand came the hundred and one calls of the African bush.

"Well, that," said Dorrie, "is that!"

"We were afraid of it all the time," said Nelson Lee. "Thank Heaven we saved these canoes and the stores."

"But what does it mean, sir?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "Why couldn't we stop the rotters? If it comes to that, why can't we get into these other boats, and give chase?"

"By jingo, that's it!"

"Let's go and fetch them back, sir!"

"Out of the question," replied Lee. "We don't want them back, either—they're absolutely useless to us in their present panic. In fact, we're quite lucky. They might have turned ugly, and attacked us. As it is, thank Heaven they only deserted."

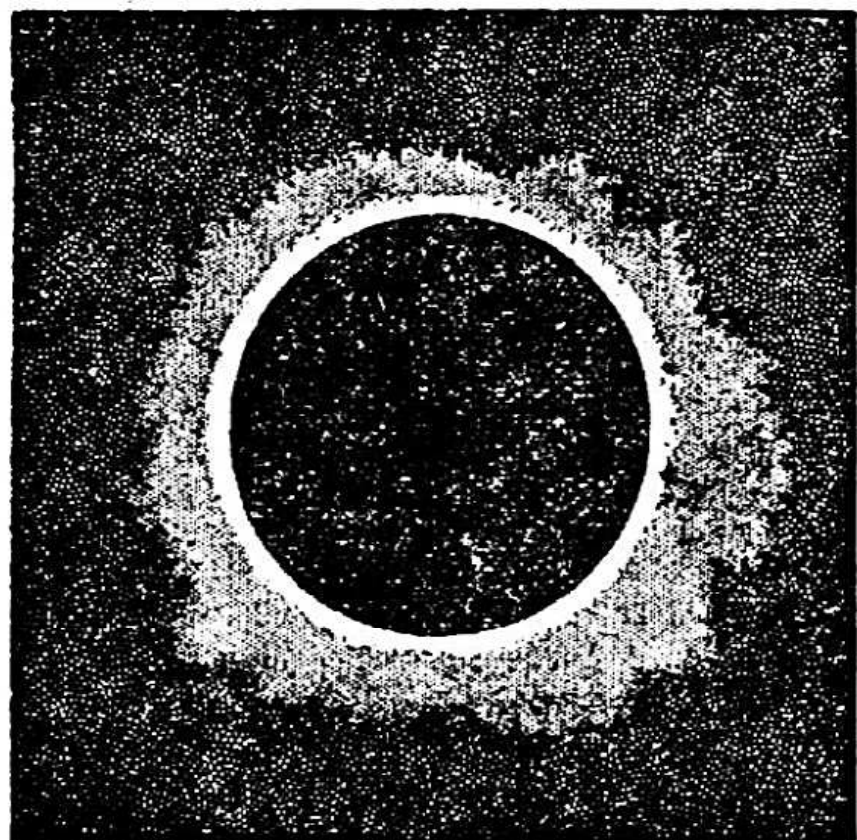
"And we're left alone!" said Dorrie. "My goodness! This is getting more exciting than ever!"

The other girls and the St. Frank's fellows were silent.

Alone!

Lord Dorrimore's party had been left deserted in the wilds of this unknown forest! Their minds were tortured with doubt as to what had become of Umlosi, and even their own immediate outlook was fraught with hidden dangers!

THE END.



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There are two big events due this week—the eclipse of the sun, and a specially-written, topical story of the occasion. Read how Sexton Blake solved a double problem, including a murder committed at the very moment of the passing of the moon's shadow. Let the posters advertising our great story "Eclipse!" remind you to get this week's

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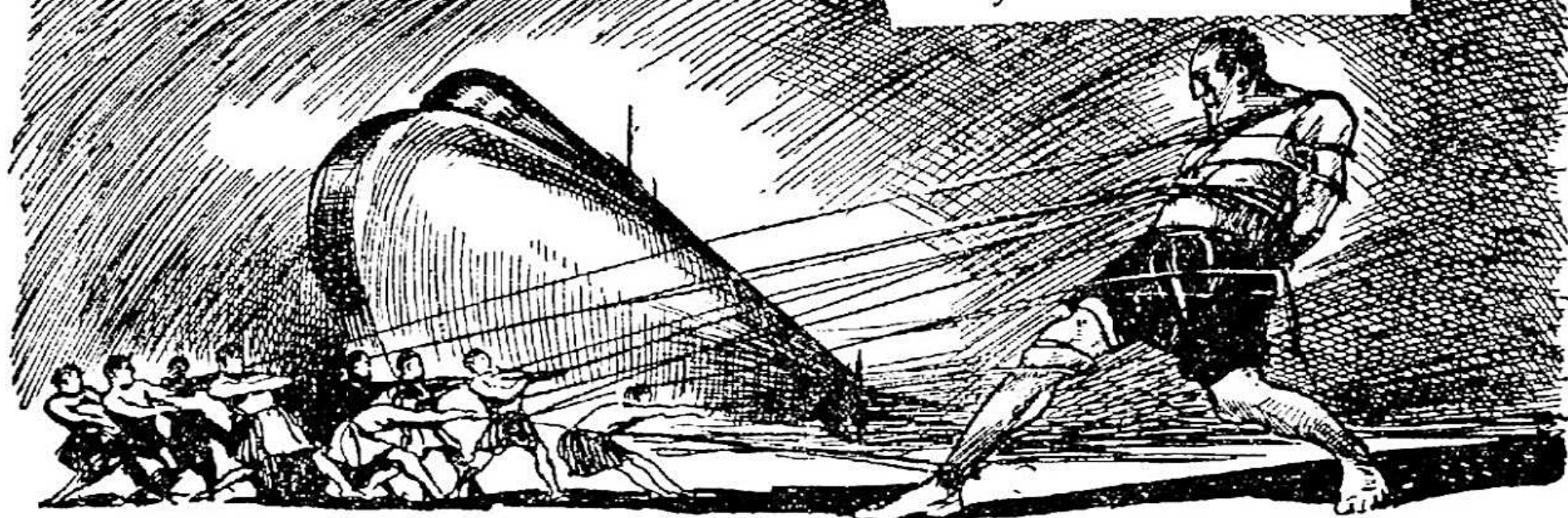
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The BURIED WORLD!

By LIONEL DAY



WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

Jim Maitland lives in a small shop in Stagmore. A mysterious man named Stanislaus Cripps owes money to the shop, and Jim determines to collect it. He climbs over the wall of Widgery Dene—Cripps' estate—and drops into the grounds. There he finds an amazing machine which is something between a submarine and an airship. Mr. Cripps is on board and Jim asks him for the money. The man refuses to pay, and before Jim realises it he finds the machine in the air! It travels half over the world, then dives into the ocean. It reaches the bottom, and then instead of resting on the bed continues going downwards! It is then floating on the surface of an underground river, and Mr. Cripps explains that there must be a sort of leak in the ocean bed and they are being sucked down to the centre of the earth. They stop the machine and come on deck. But as they appear they are captured by several amazing giants who fall on them from the

shore. Jim escapes and later saves the life of a little man called Masra. In return Masra and his daughter Tinta let him live with them. Jim finds himself among a colony of dwarf men who are called the Kru people, who are at enmity with the Giants. Jim, accompanied by Masra and Tinta, rescue Mr. Cripps. A scoundrelly Kru named Ka-Ra turns traitor and goes over to the Falta, inciting them to capture Cripps and his three companions. This they do; Jim escapes, however, and again rescues the others. The Falta and the Kru now look upon Cripps as a sort of magician, and they accept his leadership without demur. The ancient feud is completely forgotten, and Cripps effects many amazing changes in the Buried World. One day Tinta visits Jim. The boy, not noticing her new dress, fails to compliment her upon it and Tinta immediately starts to cry. "You don't like me any more!" she sobs.

(Now read on.)

Good News!

JIM ran to Tinta's side, and took her little slim, warm hands in his.

"Oh, Tinta, how can you say such a thing?" he asked in surprise. "You know that I like you."

She cheered up a little at that.

"Say that again, Krim," she faltered.

"I'm fond of you—you know I am, Tinta."

"But you do not take any notice of my beautiful clothes, and I came to show them to you first of all."

"But, Tinta, I don't care a hang about your clothes," protested Jim. "I thought you beautiful that first day I saw you—when you were wearing that old thing of yours. Of course, this is very beautiful, and I suppose it suits you down to the ground. But I shall always think of you as I first saw you, that day when I woke up in the Inner Cavern, and you were there with your father."

Stanislaus Cripps came in at that moment, and he inquired the meaning of the tears that still lingered in Tinta's eyes. When Jim explained, a little shamefacedly, what had happened, he burst into a great, booming laugh.

"Boy, you're an uncivilised savage, like all

boys of your age! Don't you know you ought to have told Tinta that the dress became her to perfection—that it suited her down to the ground—that she looked a queen? Oh, boy, where were you brought up? I'm ashamed of your manners!"

But at this point Tinta quite irrationally interrupted. The Hairy One had no right to say such things to Krim. Krim was her friend, and she would not allow such things to be said against him!

Stanislaus Cripps listened to Tinta's outburst, then dropped into a chair and made the house ring with his booming voice.

"Oh, boy!" he exclaimed boisterously, and left the matter at that.

Gradually the marvellous transformation that Stanislaus Cripps had set his hand to effecting in the Buried World was accomplished.

Sections of the Outer Cavern were found to have deposits of soil, and in this wheat—after it had first been subjected to an electric current—was planted. Artificial sunlight from specially constructed lamps provided the necessary light. Vegetables also were planted.

In that warm, sheltered atmosphere, and in the perpetual glow of the artificial sunlight,

these experiments in agriculture were crowned with amazing success. It was a great day when the corn was cut, and the first harvest in the Buried World celebrated.

Mills ground the wheat into flour, and the Kru and the Falta tasted bread for the first time. Stanislaus Cripps even managed to obtain some synthetic sugar from the mushrooms, and great was Tinta's delight when she made her first loaf of sweet bread.

Meanwhile, the relations between the Kru and the Falta had been established on a perfectly friendly footing. The old feud was forgotten, and they now shared the abundant harvests of fish that were let into the lake at regular intervals.

Once having tapped the power of the Great Drain, Stanislaus Cripps, armed with that immense energy, was able to accomplish these feats within a period of six months. Labour there was in abundance, and each Falta was able to do the work of forty men. The Kru, too, were quick to learn. Before the end of that six months, Stanislaus Cripps had established a school of instruction, in which both the children and the adults learned.

One evening, when Stanislaus Cripps and Jim were alone in the former's house, the scientist suddenly made a statement which filled the boy's heart with joy.

"All that can be done here, boy, for the present has been done. We have laid the foundations, the Falta and the Kru must finish them, and that will take time. And meanwhile, boy, you are hungering for home."

Jim jumped to his feet with a cry of delight.

"Oh, sir, do let us go! All this time mother must have thought I was dead!"

"Very natural of you to want to see your mother again, boy. But what about Tinta?"

Jim's face fell.

"Couldn't she come with us, sir?"

Stanislaus Cripps combed his long, red beard reflectively.

"That's a problem, boy. How do you think she'd fit into a village in England? Better wait and come back in a few years. There's always the Flying Submarine to bring you, you know."

But Jim was dismayed at the thought of leaving Tinta behind. He produced quite a number of ingenious arguments as to why she should come, and ought to come. And Masra, too, of course. But at that Stanislaus Cripps shook his head.

"No, boy, that is the real difficulty. Tinta is too young to leave her father, and I can't possibly take Masra away from here. He is the keystone of the arch I have constructed. He knows exactly what I want done. Masra must remain, and that means that Tinta will have to as well. But you shall come back, boy, and if you want to, you shall be married to her here in style, even if we have to bring a parson all the way from Widgery Dene."

Tinta cried a great deal when Jim broke the news to her and told her what Stanislaus Cripps had said. But when he urged her to leave her father and come with him, she shook her head.

"I cannot leave Masra unless I go to wed you, Krim, and, as the Hairy One says, we are too young. You must go back to the sun for a while, Krim, and then you must return, for I will be waiting for you always."

Homeward Bound!

THE day of departure came at last. The Flying Submarine had been loaded up with gold bars—with which, Stanislaus Cripps declared, he intended to pay his

debts—and the final ceremony, in which he gave his parting advice to the Kru and the Falta, took place.

They were all assembled in the Outer Cavern, the Kru forming an inner circle, with the giant forms of the Falta standing with folded arms on the outer rim. Above them blazed the great arc lights that made the blue haze of the Cavern as bright as day.

On a stone dais stood Stanislaus Cripps, attired in his suit of plus fours, which were somewhat ragged and stained now. With energetic gestures he addressed the assembled multitude, telling them generally what he expected of them, and how they were to live in friendship one with another and work for the communal good.

"I go now in the Flying Thing, but I will return again. Let me find everything as it should be when I return. Falta, you will obey Gra in all things—Gra, whom I have invested with my magic. And you, O Kru, will submit yourself to Masra in all things, for I have filled his heart with my wisdom, and the words he will speak to you will be my words. Farewell!"

Without another word he turned, and, followed by Jim, passed through the open door into the Interior of the Flying Submarine. There Jim took hold of Tinta's hand.

"I will come back, Tinta," he said, a lump in his throat. "Wait for me, won't you?"

"I shall be waiting for you always, O Krim!"

As Tinta stepped back on to the floor of the Outer Cavern, Stanislaus Cripps closed the door. Jim raced up the spiral staircase, and, breathlessly, gained the deck.

There, leaning over the rail, he looked down on the upturned faces of the Kru and the Falta, who were chanting in unison words of farewell to the Hairy One. Tinta was standing on the dais all alone. He could see the beauty of her upturned face, and the tears gathered in his eyes.

The Flying Submarine, her reservoirs depleted of air, was beginning to rise. As she moved, a great cry rose from the assembled multitude below. Jim could hear the twittering cry of the Falta that was so like the screaming of sea-gulls. But of all the sounds that came up to him, one voice alone he distinguished. It was the voice of Tinta.

"O Krim, fare-well!"

Now the speed of the Flying Submarine's ascent was increased enormously. The crowd of Kru and Falta grew smaller and smaller, until at last they were indistinguishable from the boulders that scattered the ground. Only the great arc lights continued to shine in the gathering dusk like stars.

Jim's eyes were focussed on that little figure on the stone dais; gradually it faded into insignificance and was gone. With a choking sensation Jim turned and made his way down into the pilot-house.

The shaft of the great tunnel now widened out on either side of them as they ascended. Up and up they went, and so rapid was the vessel's rise that hardly twenty minutes elapsed before the first beam of sunlight struck her shining sides. A few moments more and the great vessel had shot out into the outer world!

There below them lay the sea, and above them was the blue sky. Even in the bitterness of his grief at parting with Tinta, Jim was filled with a curious elation as he looked down upon that world, which at one time he had never expected to see again. As he leaned over the rail on deck, Stanislaus Cripps suddenly gave vent to an exclamation.

"Forgetting my scientific duties, boy, I must get the accurate position of this entrance to

the Buried World, otherwise, I may have difficulty in finding it again. We don't want to enter it by the Big Drain any more. Besides, it would play Hull and Halifax with my new hydro electric machinery!"

He began to make careful observations with a sextant.

"Take down the longitude and latitude, boy, and remind me to enter it in my notes. Those notes, when I publish them, will make the British Association sit up and take notice!"

Jim scribbled down the figures he gave him on the back of the envelope. That done they returned to the interior of the vessel.

The screw-cap was lowered into position, and then the Flying Submarine was sent at the extreme limits of her speed in the direction of—home!

England Once More!

FOR that day and the day that followed neither of them spoke much. It was only on the third day, just after they had sighted the coast of France, that Stanislaus Cripps spoke of the future.

"Your mother's got a back yard, boy, hasn't she? Well, we'll moor the Flying Submarine over that yard, and lower the gold by the crane. It will be about two o'clock in the morning when we get there, and, as there's no moon, we ought to be able to do the trick without being noticed. I don't want any police prowling round, asking questions. This discovery of ours has got to remain a secret—boy, remember that—until I've had time to rush my notes through the Press. I want to strike the old white-haired buffers of the Royal Society and the British Association stiff! And that reminds me—what did I do with my notes?"

Then began a frantic search of the Flying Submarine. But nowhere could the notes be found. After two hours of useless effort, Stanislaus Cripps suddenly remembered.

"By the piper that played before Moses! Boy, I remember now that I left them all packed up in the living-room back in the Buried World! Thunder and lightning! We must go back for them at once, boy!"

The thought of returning to the Buried World when he was so near home was too much for Jim, however. He begged and pleaded for at least an hour with his companion.

"All right, boy," Stanislaus Cripps exclaimed at last. "We will carry on and, what's more, I won't bother you to make the return journey with me. Just give me those notes you took for me of the position of the Shaft."

Jim handed over the envelope on which he had pencilled the note Stanislaus Cripps had given him.

"Very careless of me, boy, but thank goodness I have remembered where I left them. Now, as to this gold. There ought to be five hundred thousand pounds' worth there. Half's yours, boy! You'll have to take the lot to a bank, and get them to deal with it. You can put aside my share. And don't forget the diamond I gave you with which to pay your mother's bill. It must be worth twenty thousand pounds at least!"

He glanced suddenly at the white-topped table. "Heavens, boy, do you know that we've crossed the Channel and are over England now? We must begin to pick up our bearings."

The engines were stopped, and the Flying Submarine was lowered to within two hundred feet of the ground. Moving with her own momentum and the south-easterly breeze that was blowing, she sped swiftly over the dark landscape below. Suddenly Jim gave a shout.

"There's Widgery Beacon, sir!" he exclaimed. "And there's Stagmore!"

Re-united!

STANISLAUS CRIPPS steadied the rush of the Flying Submarine by reversing the propeller. Very gently she slid towards Stagmore, and became stationary over the long, tortuous High Street. To locate the back-yard of the little shop was somewhat difficult, but by descending to within fifty feet of the ground, they were at last able to make it out.

The anchor was lowered, and, after some manipulation, was fixed in the entrance of an old, disused dog kennel. Jim, all agog with excitement, slipped down the rope to the ground. All about him everything was very still and very dark. Stanislaus Cripps hailed him from the open doorway.

"Lift coming down, boy!" he whispered.

The cradle of the lift appeared out of the darkness, packed with gold bars.

"Don't unload, boy, until I get back to the pilot-house to check her buoyancy; otherwise, when we get rid of that weight, she will shoot up into the air. I'll flash a light through the porthole when I'm ready."

Jim waited impatiently until he saw that signal, and then began to unload the gold bars. When that task was at last accomplished, Stanislaus Cripps reappeared at the open doorway. Jim could see his squat figure, his red, shaggy beard, and his big head silhouetted against the light behind.

"All clear, boy?"

"All clear, sir!"

"Cast off the anchor, then, boy! I'll see you again in a week's time. Get that stuff to the bank, and translate it into coin of the realm as soon as you can. Good-bye, boy!"

Jim released the anchor from the dog kennel. It was hauled up. Then the door closed, and a moment later the Flying Submarine had swept skywards and was soon lost to sight in the darkness.

Jim waited for a moment, and then crept towards the back door of the house. There was the window of his bed-room, which he could reach by climbing up the scullery roof. A few minutes later he had gained that little apartment.

His heart beat excitedly as he felt the end of the iron bedstead and the bookshelf containing his library. It seemed almost unbelievable that he was back again.

He passed out on to the landing. There was his mother's room—he could see a faint streak of light coming from under the door. Tiptoeing towards it, he turned the handle and opened the door noiselessly.

Now he could see his mother, as he had always seen her in his imagination during his long residence in the Buried World, with her dear, sweet face turned against the pillow. But she looked older, he thought; more wrinkles had gathered about her eyes; and—it might have been a trick of the candle that burned by her bedside—but her hair seemed greyer.

Jim crept towards her side, and, kneeling down, bent over her for a moment. Then his lips touched her cheek.

"Mother!" he whispered.

She was awake in a moment. With a little cry she sat up, her eyes blinking.

"Who is that?" she cried, in an agitated voice. "Oh, who is that?"

She was looking at him, but looking at him as if he were not there—as if he were some

apparition from another world that knelt at her bedside.

"It's Jim, mother! Oh, mother, don't you recognise me."

He saw her thin, work-worn hands go fluttering to her face.

"Jim?" she stammered, and then, with a choking sob, added: "And I've prayed so long that I might go to you, or you might come back to me!"

Jim realised then that his mother really thought he was a phantom come back from the dead.

"It's really me, mother!" he cried, putting his arms round her neck. "It's Jim, come back. I'm alive, mother! And oh, mother dear, you don't know how I've been longing all these months for you!"

A Vain Hope!

THERE was little sleep for either of them the rest of that night. Mrs. Maitland's first care after the wonderful truth dawned upon her that her boy, whom she had mourned for so long as dead, had in truth come back to her, was to go downstairs, relight the still smouldering kitchen fire, and make Jim a cup of cocoa.

While he drank that steaming beverage, he related the story of his amazing adventures since the night when he had set out on his bicycle to collect the money Stanislaus Cripps owed his mother. It was a long story, and many of the details had to be left over for the days that followed.

"I shall never forgive that Mr. Stanislaus Cripps!" his mother exclaimed when he had finished. "Oh, Jim, we searched the country for you. When you didn't come back I went to the police, and then they ransacked Widgery Dene and sent copies of your photo to every station in England. It was bad enough this running away like that owing me money, but I would have forgiven him that if he'd only sent me word that you were safe!"

She gave a little determined toss of her head.

"Now I'll make him pay that sixteen-and-fivepence-halfpenny, even if I've got to put him through the courts—just to punish him!"

Jim slipped his hand into his pocket, and drew out the diamond that Stanislaus Cripps had picked up from the floor of the Cave of the Fires.

"Mother, he gave me that in settlement, and remember when he gave it me he asked me to see that you were sure to send him a receipt—though what he'd do with such a thing I can't imagine."

Mrs. Maitland stared at the diamond suspiciously.

"Just like his impudence, Jim, to send me a piece of glass when he owes me for all those goods!"

"It isn't a piece of glass, mother. It's a diamond—and Mr. Cripps thinks it's worth at least twenty thousand pounds!"

His mother refused to believe that—refused to credit, too, that the precious metal stacked in her humble back-yard was really gold. It was not until an astonished bank manager accepted that heap of metal as representing half a million sterling, and a diamond dealer from Hatton Garden in London sent Jim a cheque for eighteen thousand, that she was really convinced, and realised that Jim had not been just repeating a number of fairy tales related to him by the egregious Mr. Stanislaus Cripps.

"We're rich, mother!" exclaimed Jim happily.

"You'll never have to work again. You'll be able to leave here and get a nice house and a motor-car. Then, when Tinta and I are married, you'll have to come and live with us!"

"She sounds a very nice girl, Jim. I hope she really is worthy of you."

Jim could only laugh at that preposterous notion. Tinta worthy of him? Why, it was all the other way! Tinta was as far above him as the sun is above the earth!

"Mr. Cripps should be back in a few days, and then he can tell you all about her. I've promised not to say a word about the Buried World until he's published his book, so you mustn't say anything to the neighbours. I've just been abroad with Mr. Cripps—that's all you need tell them!"

But the week went by and Stanislaus Cripps never returned. The week faded into a fortnight—into a month—into a procession of months.

Often at night Jim would rise from his bed and stare out into the starlit sky, hoping with a great longing to catch a glimpse of the great shining hulk of the Flying Submarine—the one thing that could take him back to Tinta.

Refused, indeed, to move from the little shop and take up his quarters at the big house his mother had purchased, for fear lest Stanislaus Cripps might come in the night, and, not finding him there, go away again.

But even he at last recognised the futility of waiting. What fate had overtaken the Flying Submarine he never knew, but a year went by and Stanislaus Cripps failed to return, and he never heard his booming voice again.

Only in fancy, when Jim sat by the fire, or in the lonely watches of the night, did he hear again that voice—that vibrant "boy"—hear the twittering scream of the Falta—see the azure gloom of the Inner Cavern, and glimpse the dear, sweet, never-to-be-forgotten features of Tinta!

THE END.

SOMETHING NEW!

Did you know that Archie Glenthorne is hot-stuff at story-writing? He is!

He has just completed a top-hole yarn entitled—

"BUCKING UP OLD ALGY!"

and the opening chapters will appear in our next issue.

This story is written throughout in Archie's own cheery style, and it is the sort of story that makes you feel glad you're a reader of "The Nelson Lee Library."

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

Our Magazine Corner.**THE SUN'S GREAT STUNT!***All about this week's marvellous sight—the Eclipse!*

ALL England is talking about the amazing show the sun is due to put up this week—on the 29th, the performance commencing about 6.20 in London and the south generally. (Eight minutes later round Edinburgh). It will last for less than thirty seconds, but during that time eerie things will be happening, which very few indeed of us in this country are likely to see again.

For a total eclipse of the sun, though it happens about sixty times in a hundred years—being visible only from a different region of the world each time—is an extremely rare “bird” in these islands. The last total eclipse frightened people rather severely over 200 years ago; they had more respect for these dramas in vasty space than we have now! The next one will not happen along until 1999.

So any of you who miss this thrill on Wednesday—because you got up late!—will likely to be hobbling around on sticks when the next occurs—if, indeed, you are still on earth.

How It's Done!

Really, the sun will be behaving only as usual, exactly as it has been doing for an untold number of centuries. The trick will be performed by the moon. It is a pretty simple one. The moon happens to pass between the earth and the sun in such a way that it hides the sun's face, the blacked-out circle looking for a few seconds like a circular trapdoor to some fearfully fiery pit dug in the vault of the heavens.

Imagine such a trapdoor, with a blazing inferno lighting its way out into space around the edges of the door. That's the impression you get when viewing a total eclipse of the sun. Always that inferno of flame and incredibly hot gases is raging around the outside of the sun. But until the moon happens to black out the sun as we are accustomed to see it, the ordinary sunlight shines more strongly than the shooting flames, and so these remain invisible.

Some of those flames are over 300,000 miles long, and roar out from the sun's furnace at a speed which leaves one dizzy to think about. A 200-miles-an-hour aeroplane would have to travel 900 times faster to keep pace with one of those flames on its journey from the sun into nothingness!

If one of them happened to give our earth a lick, the world would stand about as much chance of survival as a split pea tossed into a smelting furnace. Luckily, there is not much danger of that, though, for in spite of the appalling character and length of the flames you will be able to watch on Wednesday, we are far beyond their reach.

We get a breathless vision of what space and distance really mean when we realise that a sixty-miles-an-hour express could roar completely around the earth in something under twenty days, but to accomplish a similar trip—at the same rate—from here to the sun would take 177 years!

Only Three Seconds!

To get to the moon in the same way (in size it is a good deal smaller than the earth, and a mere flea-bite compared with the sun), would occupy a mere 168 days. Then again, the sun,

earth and moon are all tearing headlong through space at a steady twelve miles a second. That explains why the eclipse lasts only a few seconds. The astronomers, who are in high hopes of snatching several thrilling secrets from the eclipsed sun, by means of huge telescopes and cunning spectroscopes, really have only three seconds in which to do their job, that being the space of time during which the eclipse is absolutely total.

It will only be total in a certain area across the North of England and Wales. Those of us who live outside that thirty-miles-wide stretch will not be able to see those terrifying flames, nor will darkness descend so completely—which means the stars will not come out so plentifully as where the moon's shadow is flung across the country.

But we shall see the moon “nibbling” at the sun, until just a bit of the latter remains exposed. Then the sky will light up again, and the eclipse, so far as Britain is concerned, will be at an end.

Don't take risks of seriously damaged eyesight by staring at the sun without a bit of smoked glass to look through. That's most important, though there is no risk during the actual seconds when the sun is completely blacked out.

Stars in Day-time!

About those stars which will come out as the sky darkens just before half-past six in the morning. One at least will be on show outside the area of total eclipse. That will be Jupiter, which is 1,200 times the size of our earth, and has no less than eight moons in attendance! Like ourselves, Jupiter runs no risk from those enormous flames, for he is 483,000,000 miles from the sun.

One more example which will help you realise how far off in space this drama is staged. A wireless message which takes a bare second to travel right across the earth would take eight minutes—if it were possible to send it—to “hit” the sun!



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A Horsey Record.

A LANCs reader asks what is the fastest speed a horse has ever reached. Has the rate of a mile a minute been attained? It is not on the record. Here are the figures: 1 mile, 1 min. 33 1/5 sec.; 1 1/2 mile, 2 min. 27 2/5 sec.; 2 miles, 3 min. 19 2/5 sec.

The Drum at Brum!

A Birmingham chum asks me about taking up the drum as a profession as he is very keen on the rataplan. It seems to lie with him between drumming and cattle raising. He would prefer the open spaces to a city. My impression is that he will settle down to a good trade in his fine city, and play the drum of an evening when work is done.

C.I.D.

A Doncaster pal asks me the meaning of these letters. They stand for Criminal Investigation Department, and it is a department that contains some of the cutest brains in the world.

More Trouble.

T. Jackson is worrying about his calves. They are too thin. Cycling and work on the ash track will alter matters. Another way is to stand erect, heels together, then bend the knees until he is sitting on his heels. It is tiring, but twenty goes morning and evening will help to pad out the calves. Anxiety concerning this part of the anatomy brings up the theory of the late Dan Leno. He said the calves should have been placed in front as buffers to fend off shin kicks. But I am inclined to think the effect would have been ugly, if striking.

That 1864 Penny.

Pennies are all much of a muchness to most of us, and I can tell J. B. that this is so even with one dated 1864. He has got one of that year, and asks whether it is extra valuable. Not a bit of it. There was a false report that somebody tipped a bar of gold into that year's minting of pennies. Thoughtless if it had been done, but there is nothing in it. They are mighty careful at the Royal Mint with their bars of gold!

A Cracked Lip.

Sympathy can be felt for the victim of this trouble, but a salve can be obtained from any chemist which will soon put things right. My Exeter chum who asks about this would be well advised to keep away from his funny friends until the hurt is healed.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

William Cormack, 4, Becket House, Tabard Street, London, S.E.1, wishes to hear from readers in his district, also the nearest O.O.

F. Lay, (Sec. Tollington Philatelic Society), 29, Stapleton Hall Road, Hornsey, London, N.4, wishes to hear from readers for the exchange, etc., of stamps.

A. Horton Jun. M.R.I., Oxford Road, Manchester, wishes to hear from readers, especially those who are interested in Pitman's Shorthand. All letters answered.

Ivor Wyn Jones, c/o W. D. Jones, Morfa, Bychan, nr. Portmadoc, N. Wales, has back numbers of N. L. L. to sell.

Charles Daniel, The Guildhall, High Street, Worcester, wishes to obtain N.L.L. (old series).

Charles V. Brereton, 50, High Street, Congleton, Cheshire, wishes to correspond with readers in Africa, Japan and Europe. All letters answered.

A. Broughton, 104, Warmeworth Road, Balby, Doncaster, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

Samuel Shootster and E. Warner, both of 58, Euston Street, Euston Square, London, N.W.1, wish to hear from readers in New Zealand interested in cricket and swimming.

A. Horton, Manchester Royal Infirmary, Oxford Road, Manchester, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

Miss D. Cantor, 107, Luipaard Street, Krugersdorp, S. Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers in Australia and Canada.

M. Warren, 18, Spey Street, Poplar, London, E.14, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

Leonard Rethman, Victoria Hotel, Krugers-

dorp, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers in Spain and Egypt.

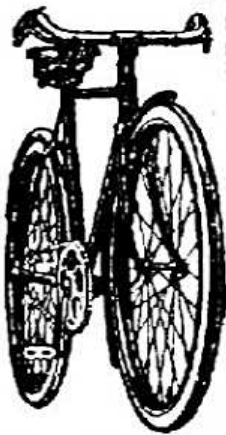
M. Koji Mohamed, 191, Arab Street, Singapore, wishes to correspond with stamp collectors.

H. McMahon, 50, Long Street, West Broken Hill, N. S. W., Australia, would like to hear from readers in America. All letters

answered. Also in Africa, Australia and England.

F. Wagner, 8, Moorland Road, St. Austell, Cornwall, wishes to hear from readers interested in Natural History, Science, and stamps.

Arthur R. Thomas, 13, Oakland Road, Mumbles, Swansea, wants Nos. 366-380 inclusive of N.L.L.; must be in good condition.



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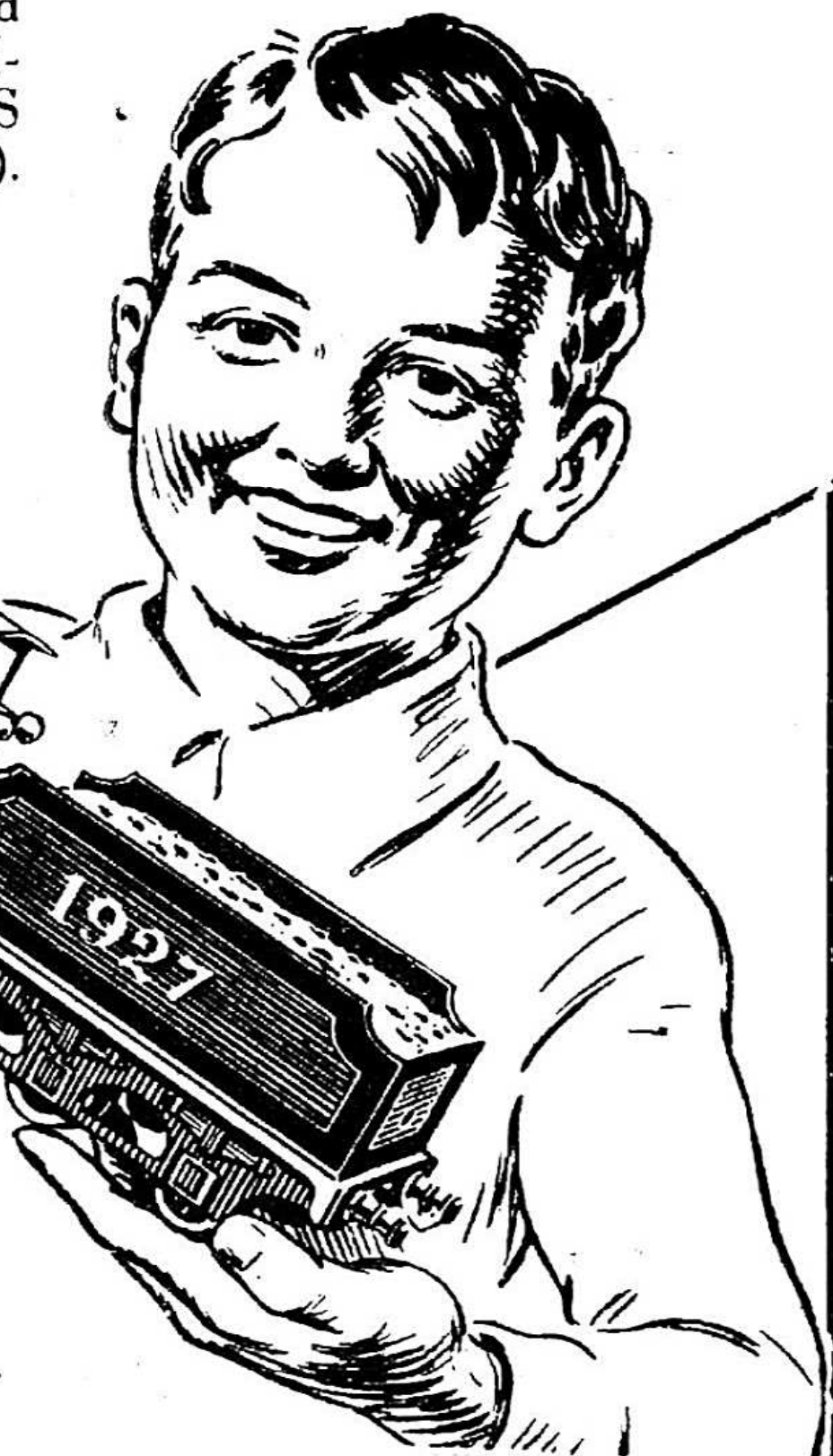
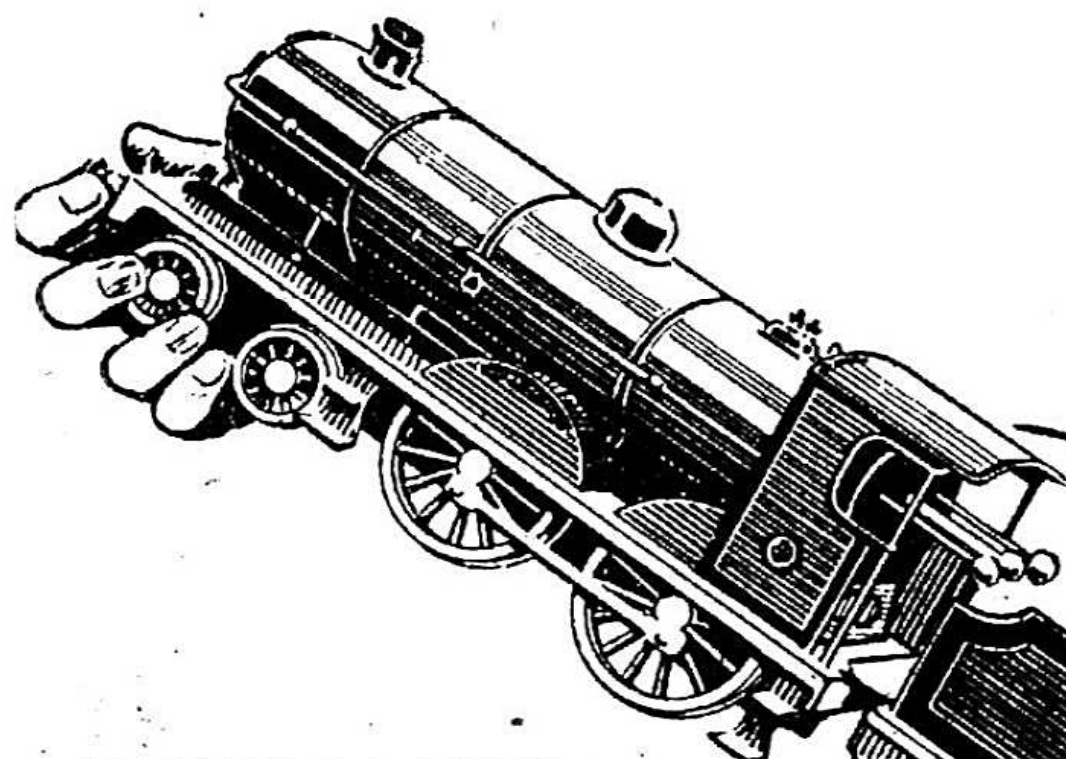
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