

# LIEUTENANT BONES



EDGAR  
WALLACE

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# LIEUTENANT BONES

BY

**EDGAR WALLACE**

Author of "The Keepers of the King's Peace,"  
"The People of the River," etc.

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POPULAR NOVELS  
BY  
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SANDERS OF THE RIVER  
BONES  
BOSAMBO OF THE RIVER  
BONES IN LONDON  
THE KEEPERS OF THE KING'S PEACE  
THE COUNCIL OF JUSTICE  
THE DUKE IN THE SUBURBS  
THE PEOPLE OF THE RIVER  
DOWN UNDER DONOVAN  
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BLUE HAND  
GREY TIMOTHY  
A DEBT DISCHARGED  
THOSE FOLK OF BULBORO'  
THE MAN WHO WAS NOBODY  
THE GREEN RUST  
THE FOURTH PLAGUE  
THE RIVER OF STARS

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## CHAPTER I

LIEUTENANT BONES, R.N.

THERE was a lawless group of villages set upon a wooded ridge at the confluence of B'suri and the Great River, and these villages were called by the name of the largest, M'fumbini-falapa. It had another name which I will not give, lest this story falls into the hands of innocent people who speak the B'mongo tongue, but it may be translated in a gentlemanly way as "Everlastingly nasty." It was neither clean within, nor picturesque from without. The huts straggled and strayed without order or symmetry. They were old huts, and patched huts, and many were uglified by the employment of rusty scraps of galvanized iron, for near by, *cala-cala* long ago, an optimistic British company had erected a store for the collection of palm nuts. The enterprise had failed, and the store had been left derelict, and in time the wild had grown round and over it. And the people of M'fumbini had in their furtive, foraging way taken scraps—they did nothing systematically or thoroughly—and had added abomination to abomination until their village was an eyesore and an offence to all beholders.

Sanders had argued and ordered, held palaver after palaver, but all to no purpose. They were an isolated folk, for here the rivers run very swiftly together, and landing on the littered beach was attended by risks which their neighbours seldom cared to accept. So they lived alone with their skinny children and their indescribable wives, and were disowned both by the Isisi and the N'gombi, with whom they claimed tribal associations.

The effect of environment on character has been too often noted to require enlarging upon in this narrative. The M'fumbini folk were liars and thieves, who practised magic and believed in horrible ju-jus. Lonely fishermen who speared their waters had a habit of disappearing and there can be no doubt that they were "chopped," for the M'fumbini were cannibals. Only once were they detected.

Mr. Commissioner Sanders arrived on a certain night and surprised the villagers at a particularly unpleasant festival.

At dawn his soldiers strapped the hands and feet of the chief, slipped a rope round his neck, and hanged him to a very high tree. Sanders might have saved himself the trouble. Within a year the new chief had developed a secret society called "Three Sticks," which enjoyed a ritual which is not reducible to print.

If they were isolated, they sent out their scouts and spies, who ranged through the Territories, wandering mendicants who lived on the hospitality of friendly or apathetic tribes, and avoided those who were neither friendly nor quiescent. These travellers learnt many things, but one N'kema, a shrewd youth with one eye—he would, of course, have been killed by the healthy tribes, which do not tolerate any kind of bodily deformity—returned on a certain day with news, and there was a grand palaver.

"N'kema, my own sister's son," introduced the chief to the squatting assembly, "has heard many wonders, and my ju-ju has whispered to me that there is truth in his words. Hear him, people, *s'ibi m'laka!*"

And N'kema spoke, and told of a white man who had come to the Territories, and by

strange instruments had made a marvellous liquid which drove people to wild happiness, and of how the people had brought rubber and ivory and all the most splendid possessions to exchange for the Waters of Madness. But Sandi, the fox, smelt him out and killed him, and now all the people were crying out for the magic waters.

“And this I learn’t, O chief and people, that in far countries, where the River-With-One-Bank<sup>[A]</sup> runs, there is much Water-That-Burns, and the fire-ships bring them in big pots and float them to shore. Now, I think that if we dig up our ivory, and I go to these wonderful places and trade the ‘teeth’ for the water, and bring it here secretly, we shall be rich.”

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<sup>[A]</sup> The Sea.

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“That is mad talk,” snarled the chief, “for what will Sandi do? Is it not the law that all ivory teeth and rubber and the beautiful things which we find shall go before Sandi, and he shall make a book for their going out? And is it not the law that all things which come into these lands shall go before Sandi and his young men and soldiers? And is it not the law and the high word of Sandi that the Waters of Madness shall not come into this land? O N’kema, I think you are a fool!”

“Lord, Lord,” said the one-eyed man eagerly, “I have very cunning thoughts in my head, for in the night, when Sandi sleeps, I will take a big canoe filled with treasure past his fine house and along the River-With One-Bank to the places where I may trade. Also I have found a man of the Akasava, who has lived in these far lands, who will guide me.”

The palaver lasted until early in the morning, and all the next night the chief, accompanied by his councillors, dug with mysterious rites the old store places of the community, and on a moonless night, when, as fortune would have it, a white mist lay over the delta, N’kema and his laden canoes passed the river sentry and struck along the seashore to the north. Of his subsequent arrival at the port of a certain independent country, of his chaffering, of his bargaining, and his ultimate success, it is not necessary to speak here. He came into a new land and a new world, and learnt, perhaps for the first time, of war great beyond his comprehension. He was, at any rate for the time being, nearer to this world convulsion than were his masters.

The breath of war occasionally blew toward the Territories—a gusty puff of short duration, which almost carried the thunder and rumble of guns that did not cease by day and night. Then the gust would pass, and there would be a stillness and a silence which were almost painful. Literally, the War came sometimes by letter, sometimes by newspaper, and now and again, at great and glorious intervals, through another and more intimate medium. The native clerk in the telegraph office would arrive breathlessly with a large yellow form bearing many thumb-prints, but conveying, in the ill-spelt message from Administrative Headquarters, a story of thrilling achievement.

For an hour, for a day, there would be a strange silence in and about the Residency. The effect upon the three men who were the recipients of the news was strangely different. At first the news would gather four heads together over a big map which was outspread upon the dining table—the fourth was that of Patricia Hamilton, the Houssa Captain’s

sister, as eager and as enthusiastic a strategist as any—and they would trace with a pencil the lines of new villages taken, and would solemnly drink the health of their Army, and then they would melt away, each to his or her separate world of dreams.

For Patricia Hamilton it was a sad little world, peopled by suffering women-folk. Mr. Commissioner Sanders would wander off into the woods of the Residency, and what his thoughts were, none knew. Captain Hamilton grew silent and almost morose. He had volunteered for service with his regiment, and had made the larger sacrifice by remaining in the wild Territories to keep the King's peace amidst two million people with cannibalistic tendencies.

Lieutenant Tibbetts howled his regret to the skies, until he was savagely dismissed by his superior, and departed in a sweat of energy, with a wholly unsympathetic platoon, to invent new trench systems.

Sometimes days would pass before the reaction wore off and the men became wholly normal. Sanders was ever the first to recover, for wherever his sympathies might lie, however much he might regret a life misspent as a political officer, his job of work lay near at hand.

Only once did the War come to the Territories in tangible shape. Bones was strolling on the beach one hot afternoon, when over the horizon came a big black blur of smoke. He dashed madly up the beach, leapt intervening flower-beds, and vaulted over the rail of the verandah, to the alarm of three people who were sitting down, patiently awaiting his more dignified arrival to tea.

“Where the dickens have you been, Bones?” demanded Hamilton. “I have been yelling myself hoarse to call you to tea.”

Bones saluted.

“The mail in the offing sir,” he said.

“The mail?” said Sanders, with a frown. “Why she was here on Tuesday. She's not due again for another fortnight.”

“The mail in the offing,” repeated Bones, “sighted by me at five-twenty-five p.m., west-west-north by west.”

There was a hasty search for binoculars and field glasses, and presently four pairs were levelled upon the smudge of smoke, from which had emerged a stumpy mast and what seemed to be one huge funnel belching black smoke.

“I don't know what it is,” said Sanders, after a while, “but it is not the mail.”

“I think, sir,” said Hamilton, not taking his eyes from the oncoming craft, “it is a destroyer.”

Now, the destroyer is a type of warship which is never seen on the African coast. There were dainty little white gunboats and occasionally a dazzling cruiser—nothing more and nothing less. Neither the submarine, nor the destroyer, nor the battle-ship, nor yet the battleship-cruiser, finds her way to these latitudes, and the three men experienced that sense of pleasant novelty which the introduction of the real thing provokes in a world of make-believe.

“She is heading here,” said Bones. “I shouldn't be at all surprised,” he said solemnly, “if the Government had sent for me.”

“What would they want with you, Bones?” demanded Hamilton.

“You never know,” fenced Bones. “That article I wrote for *The Wildford Chronicle*”

Hamilton groaned.

“Have you been writing to the papers again?” he said, in a tone of resignation.

“It was a little thing,” said Bones modestly. “As a matter of fact, it was in a letter to my dear old Uncle Henry. I happened to mention casually that I had thought out a new way of upsetting the calculations of the jolly little torpedo, and, like a silly old ass, he sent the letters to the papers.”

Whatever his words might be, there was nothing in his tone which suggested that Bones blamed his relative for his indiscretion.

“Naturally, these things get about,” he went on deprecatingly, “and I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if the Admiralty noticed the article. Now, my idea about torpedoes——”

“It is a destroyer, all right,” said Sanders, as the boat swung slowly round to the anchorage, and her four squat funnels stood out against the white-hot western sky. “She’s a big ship, too. There goes her steam pinnacle.”

“Of course,” said Bones, with a little cough, “it will be rather awkward, Ham, my dear old skipper, my leaving you suddenly; but when one’s country calls for the best men and the best brains”—he shrugged his shoulders—“what can one do? Naturally, I shall hate leaving you all, but I must go just where I can best serve the jolly old Empire. War,” he babbled on, “upsets all our preconceived ideas of seniority and promotion, et cetera. Napoleon was a general at twenty-one—or it may have been twenty-four. Nelson was an admiral at twenty-six. Fellows who were lieutenants one year were commanding divisions the next. It is the fortune of war, dear old fellow.” He patted Hamilton’s shoulder sympathetically. “Don’t forget, dear old superior officer *pro tem.*,” he said huskily, “that you will always have a friend at court in old Bones. Don’t bother to send in your name. Walk right into my office. Never stand on ceremony with me, Ham, old friend. Never think of me as Admiral Sir Augustus Tibbetts, the torpedo expert, but just as plain Bones; I will never forgive you if——”

“I wish to Heaven you’d shut up, Bones!” said Hamilton. “Come down to the beach and give these fellows a salaam.”

The sturdy little pinnacle came swiftly across the rolling waters, crashed over the breakers, and grounded on the soft beach. A naval officer in white duck and sun helmet leapt out, and the officers exchanged perfunctory salutes before the men in the uniforms began an exchange of confidences.

“Cheerio!” said Bones. “How’s the game?”

The officer who had landed was a tall, good-looking youth of twenty-five. He flashed his white teeth in a sympathetic grin, and came up the beach to greet the two.

“Awfully sorry to come barging into your Arcadia,” he said, “but I suppose you have heard there’s a war on?”

Hamilton smiled but Bones was on his dignity.

“Dear old lieutenant-commander,” he said severely, “what is this strange news you bring us?”

The naval officer chuckled.

“Anyway,” he said, “I want to see your Intelligence officer.”

“Our——” demanded the mystified Hamilton.

“The Intelligence Officer—the Secret Service man.” The naval man looked from one to the other and Bones leapt to the occasion.

“Dear old nameless sir,” he said, confidentially linking his arm with the visitor’s, “we understand. You want to see me about a jolly old torpedo catcher?”

“Not on your life,” corrected the Officer firmly, “I want——”

“Come up to the Residency, sir,” laughed Hamilton. “I’m afraid we’re all Intelligence Officers.”

“Some more so than others, of course, dear old sea-dog,” interrupted Bones, maintaining his grip of the sailor’s arm. “Some of us—it isn’t for me to say which—have an aptitude for mystery an’ secrecy, an’ some of us couldn’t keep our silly little tongues from waggin’ if we tried. Now, talkin’ about torpedoes——”

Hamilton was introducing the officer to Sanders. His name was apparently, Bagshott.

“I was told I should find an Intelligence Officer at most of our Coast headquarters,” he apologized, and went on to explain that he had not touched the Coast, having come straight across from a certain Atlantic island, and that he was not—this very apologetically—acquainted with these waters.

“The fact is, sir”—he came to serious business, in the way that naval officers have, with a rush—“there’s a U-boat hanging around here. Last week she made an attack on the C. and C. mail, just missing her propellers by a fraction of an inch. She’s awfully far away from her base, but these new fellows can travel an enormous distance. Two days ago she sank a Norwegian steamer; we got her S.O.S. in time to arrive before she went under.”

“We can hardly help you, I’m afraid,” said Sanders, “though, of course, we will put ourselves entirely at your disposal. What can we do?”

“Have you ever tried catching submarines with nets?” asked Bones, with sudden excitement. “Gracious goodness, dear old thing, what an idea! Came to me all of a sudden—in a flash, dear old Ham! Put a jolly old net under ’em an’ haul ’em up. D’ye see what I mean, dear old naval officer?”

Lieutenant-Commander Bagshott did not even smile.

“I’m afraid somebody has anticipated you,” he said gravely.

“What—about fishin’ for ’em with magnets?” demanded Bones energetically and in no way abashed by the rebuff. “Get half a dozen magnets——”

“Be quiet, Bones! What can we do?” asked Sanders.

“You can tell me something about the river—how deep it is. The charts we have aren’t much use; these African rivers silt up, and the soundings change every week.”

“It’s jolly deep in places”—Bones was loath to abandon his self-appointed position as Intelligence Officer—“simply fearfully deep, dear old mariner!”

“I can give you all that information” said Sanders. “What else?”

“I want you to appoint an officer or some very reliable person——”

“One and the same, sir an’ friend,” murmured Bones, “if you get the right kind of

soldier-man.”

“Hit him on the head, Pat!” begged her brother earnestly. “Go on, sir. What will his duties be?”

“Watch the mouth of the river by night. She may sneak in and spend the day submerged. Also keep an eye open for any strange craft that puts in an appearance in these waters. There is a supply vessel somewhere about. It won’t be a pleasant job, because it may mean a month of watching.”

“Say no more, sir,” said Bones solemnly, shaking hands with the visitor; “consider it done. An’ if you and your bonny old crew ever want to pass the silent watcher of the night, the password’s ‘Vigilance,’ an’ the officer of the watch is Lieutenant Augustus Tibbetts, R.N.”

He stood erect and saluted.

“You aren’t Royal Navy, are you?” asked the astonished officer.

“‘R.N.,’ my cheery lad,” said Bones, “stands, in this case for ‘River Nelson.’”

“I’ll arrange for the watch to be kept,” said Hamilton, ignoring the volunteer; “it will give us an interest in life.”

An hour later the big destroyer was tearing back over the horizon, and by sundown had disappeared.

The duty began that night, Hamilton taking the steam launch to the middle of the one navigable channel and anchoring for the night.

At one o’clock in the morning he heard a stealthy sound, and turned his night glass to the river’s mouth, but saw nothing. Five minutes later a canoe came out of the darkness, and somebody hailed him in a hoarse whisper—

“Seen anything, dear old Captain?”

“Is that you, Bones? What the devil are you doing here?”

“Watchin’ and waitin’, dear old officer, watchin’ an’ waitin’. Any sign of the jolly old pirate?”

“Go back to bed, you silly ass!”

A muffled voice replied in accents of obedience, and the canoe was swallowed in the darkness again.

At three, when Hamilton was speculating upon the likelihood of such an attempt being made, there was a violent bump against the side of the boat, which brought him round, revolver in hand.

“Friend!” said the voice of Bones. “Terribly an’ desperately sorry, sir an’ fellow-watcher, but it was a slip of the paddle.”

“Why are you fooling around? Why aren’t you in bed?” demanded Hamilton wrathfully.

“Pass, friend, an’ all’s well!” said the philosophical Bones, evidently speaking to himself, and again faded away.

\* \* \* \* \*

“The point is this, Bones,” said Hamilton severely, as they sat at breakfast, “if you

don't sleep when I am on duty, how the dickens can you do your own *tour* when it is your turn?"

"It's pretty generally known all along the Coast," began the modest Bones, "that I'm called by the jolly old indigenous native The-Eye-That-Never-Closes——"

"You said 'eye,' I think?" interrupted Hamilton, reaching for the sardines. "You're quite sure that was the feature mentioned?"

"'Eye,'" said Bones truculently. "Bless my life an' soul, Ham, be just! Be a sportsman, dear old fellow! Don't rob poor old Bones of the last shreds of his poor honour! As poor old What's-his-name says, 'Who steals my purse steals nothing, but he who tries to pull a feller's leg, when he's down an' out, is a naughty old rascal.'" "

"The-Eye-That-Never-Closes!" murmured Hamilton, and shook his head sadly.

Bones took over his duty that night with every evidence of wakefulness. The launch had a small Hotchkiss gun in the bow, which Bones immediately loaded. In the middle of the night he forgot it was loaded, and idly snapped the trigger. Hamilton, with the trousers of his pyjamas tucked into mosquito boots, Sanders in an overcoat, and Patricia Hamilton strangely dressed, gathered on the shore and held a conference with Bones, who remained at his post in the middle of the river.

It was a conference conducted at the top of everybody's voice, and the hastily assembled Houssas, who had fallen in on the river's bank, added to the volume of sound by a sub-toned discussion amongst themselves.

"Awfully sorry!" yelled Bones. "Pure accident! Might have happened to any one. Shan't occur again."

"The shell nearly hit the Residency, you—you——"

"Not before the children!" warned Bones.

No further mishap occurred that night, and the next night of watching, which fell to Hamilton, was without incident, for Bones slept the clock round.

His turn came on the fourth night, though Sanders had volunteered to relieve him.

"Now, listen, Bones," said Hamilton, "and stand to attention when I'm speaking to you, you slack, insubordinate devil!"

"Always the little gentleman!" murmured Bones.

"Don't go to sleep, don't load the gun, don't play the goat, don't get panicky, don't make a row, and don't sing—that's all."

"You're sure you haven't forgotten anything, sir?" asked Bones, with exaggerated solicitude. "You haven't said anything about gramophones."

Bones went on board, and Hamilton, listening in the gathering darkness, heard the unmusical voice of his subordinate attempting the Soldiers' Chorus very loudly, sung to cover the noise of the opening breech-block as he stealthily inserted a cartridge.

Lieutenant Tibbetts was singularly wideawake that night, and, when the very natural feeling of exhilaration which comes to young people in moments of adventure had passed off, was singularly clear-headed. He lay face downward by the side of the gun, resting his chin on his folded arms, and stared out to sea. He felt no inclination to sleep, though the engineer and the steersman—who with four Houssas formed the crew—were snoring noisily.

The only sound he heard was the swish of the river waters passing the boat, and the “hush-hush” of lazy breakers on the distant beach. Vampire-bats darted and circled over him, swift night-birds dipped and dived to left and right, there were alarming commotions in the water, and shapes that leapt up, all glistening in the starlight, but Bones was not to be diverted. At seventeen minutes past two—the moment “is logged” in the official records of the affair—Bones’s heart leapt to his throat.

Something was entering the mouth of the river. He glued his eyes to his binoculars. It was a long craft—he guessed the length—and in the very centre a squat superstructure. He could not see the periscope.

His eyes glanced along the sights, the rubbered shoulder-piece of the gun was gripped to his side. He aimed at the superstructure and fired.

The sharp crash of the gun was echoed from wood to wood, but Bones had only eyes. He saw the superstructure leap and crumble. There was a yell which he did not hear, for he was loading again. . . .

N’kema had no time to mourn the loss of the spirit barrel which he had brought with such care and labour from Monrovia. He wrenched a paddle from the hands of a huddled paddler, and with a jerk of his shoulder pitched the dead man overboard. The swift current carried the canoe to sea and N’kema, aided by such of his crew as were left alive, helped the pace.

Another shell whizzed over his head, and he heard the crash of its explosion out to sea.

“Faster—faster!” breathed the one-eyed N’kema hoarsely. “O ju-ju beti, save N’kema! O ko-ko?”

He stopped rowing in dismay, for right ahead of him lay the dark outlines of a ship.

It was a strange-looking ship—a long line with a big hump in the middle. It was too late to stop the canoe, and it crashed against the frail side of the mysterious vessel, and there was a crackle and tinkle as of smashed crockery. Three spurts of flame came from the low deck of the ship, and N’kema rolled out of the canoe with a bullet through his heart.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bones came to breakfast that morning a picture of offended dignity. Hamilton’s wrath had subsided, but not his scepticism. He even offered gratuitous explanations.

“No, sir and late respected friend,” said Bones coldly, “I wasn’t dreamin’, an’ it wasn’t a crocodile, nor Mrs. Hippo, with Master Hippo, takin’ a jolly old joy ride. It was a U-boat, an’ I smashed it to smithereens. Didn’t you notice the smell?”

“There certainly was a curious smell,” agreed Sanders—“rather like rum.”

“Now, my theory is——”

Bones’ theory was not given to the table, for at that moment Abiboo came in with a telegram. Sanders read it aloud.

“From Senior Naval Officer to Commissioner Sanders: U-boat picked up this morning thirty miles west mouth of river, badly holed. Captain reports fired at from your station, but holed by collision with canoe.”

Bones beamed round the dumbfounded table.

“What did I tell you?” he demanded triumphantly.

“But holed by a canoe?” repeated the puzzled Hamilton.

Bones shrugged his shoulders.

“Did you ever know the Germans to speak the truth?” he added sadly.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SLEUTH

MR. COMMISSIONER SANDERS sat in the palaver house of an N'gombi village, and the deep circle of half-naked cannibals who squatted about him were not happy. The cooking-pots of the village were untended, for the women and even the children had gathered at the edge of the crowd to hear in what manner Sandi would accept an embarrassing situation.

All the morning the chief and his headmen had been talking, walking about the semicircle and waving their arms in gesticulations which betokened at once their earnestness and apprehension, and now the last speaker had finished, and it was the turn of the Law Giver.

“All this morning have I listened to you,” said Sanders, in the deep-chested Bomongo tongue, “until my ears have grown weary. Now, this I know. That in the full of the sixth moon I come to this village, as is the custom, to take in my two hands the taxes you must pay to Government—so much fish, so much manioc, so much corn and rubber and ivory. Now, you tell me that your hunting has been poor, and that your crops have been bad, and your young men have been too sick to go into the far forest to tap the trees, and that I must take to my King one-half of what is his due. Now, I know—because I have many spies—that you have given great feasts, and have had dances, and have traded your rubber with the Araby for foolish trinkets. This I tell you—that I will come to you when three moons have passed, and you shall give me all that you owe, and then, when another three moons have gone, I will come again, and you shall give me full measure. This palaver is finished.”

He rose stiffly from his stool and walked through the throng, which gave way sullenly and with lowering brows—for this order meant much work for the young men—and walked through the village. Standing before the hut of the chief M'liko was the little daughter of the house, a wilting, dejected figure. Sanders was fond of children, and he laid his hand upon the child's head and said—

“What is wrong with you, M'jibini?”

“Lord,” said the child, “I have a great pain in my head.”

“Go to my big ship,” said Sanders, “and speak with my soldier *capita*, and he will give you good medicine.”

It is a fact that the little girl did not go, but, overcome by fright at having been spoken to by so great a man, ran into her father's hut.

The chief M'liko came to the beach to see Sanders depart.

“Lord,” said M'liko, “we are poor and feeble men, and what magic can you give us that we may perform all the terrible tasks you have set us?”

Sanders looked at him through narrowed lids.

“This day,” he said quietly, “my magic shall begin to work, and you will see that I am very powerful.”

And he steamed away downstream, leaving a fuming and an insubordinate chief to scowl at the wake of the white *Zaire*.

That night the chief's daughter died suddenly, and a vengeful M'liko called his kindred together to tell him of the magic Sandi had wrought.

"This we know," said M'liko, "that Sandi has been very cruel to the people of this village. Now he has done the worst of all, for he has put his hand upon the child of my second wife, and she has died the death."

He touched the ground to the left and to the right, to propitiate the ghost of the dead child, and all who listened did the same.

"Now, if we do not work," said M'liko, "Sandi will come here, and he will blast our children by his magic, for this he has promised to do by his own mouth. Shall we wait to die." He peered round at the terrified faces, and saw that his kindred were with him.

This happened a week before the events which are recorded below. On a hot spring evening Lieutenant Tibbetts strutted across the Houssas' parade-ground, his brow wrinkled in a fierce frown. Now and again he would stop, open the big book he carried under his arm, read a passage and apparently memorize the wisdom he culled, for he threw up his head, closed his eyes, and appeared to be praying.

His superior, Captain Hamilton, watched the performance with annoyance. Mr. Commissioner Sanders was a puzzled and amused spectator, but the girl, who stood between the two men in the shade of the Residency verandah, was all gurgling merriment.

"What the dickens is wrong with Bones?" demanded Hamilton fretfully. "Is he training for a Buddhist priest, or something?"

Bones came nearer, discovered with an exaggerated start that he had an audience, and, with a smile wholly self-conscious and apologetic, came with quick, mincing strides to the verandah steps, humming what he was pleased to describe as a "snatch" in a loud, unmusical hum.

"Whenever you start singing, Bones," growled Hamilton, "I am reminded of the noise which a gramophone makes before the needle strikes the harmony."

Bones clicked his heels and saluted. This heel clicking of his was a new accomplishment which for some reason was particularly irritating to Hamilton.

"Where on earth did you pick up that disgusting habit of yours, Bones?" he snarled. The temperature was only a hundred and four in the shade, but the Houssa captain was shaking off an overnight attack of malaria.

"Dear old sir an' almost father," said Bones airily, "there are certain jolly old stunts that a feller who is studyin' for The Service has to get acquainted with."

"What service? Are you going to battle?" asked his incredulous chief. "And what is that book you're hiking around?"

Bones handed the volume to the other without a word.

"'Twenty Years in the Secret Service,' by an ex-spy," read Hamilton, and glared at his imperturbable junior.

"Oh, Bones," cried the admiring girl, "you're not going to be a Secret Service man? How perfectly splendid!"

Bones, flushed with pride, screwed in his monocle and clicked his heels again, bowing

from the waist downward.

“Army’s a bit dull, dear Miss Patricia Hamilton,” he said; “no chance for a feller with brains and that sort of thing. All very well for a dear old gentleman like Ham—no offence, jolly old skipper—but for a bright lad with vision an’ judgment——”

“Do you mean to tell me that you’re swotting up this kind of stuff?” demanded Hamilton smacking the book with his cane.

“Just pickin’ up a few hints—that’s all.” Bones clicked his heels again, saluted, and bent double.

“Swedish drill, too? Good Heavens, Bones,” said Hamilton, wilfully dense, “what a deuce of a lot of things you have to learn in the Secret Service! Can you do conjuring tricks?”

Bones shrugged his shoulders, raised his eyebrows, and spread out his palms in a gesture of despair.

“Watch him closely, everybody,” said Hamilton admiringly—“he’s going to palm a rabbit!”

Bones cleared his throat.

“Between the diplomatic an’ the military mind, my jolly old officer, there’s a chasm which——”

“Dinner!” said Sanders briskly. “Bones, we will anticipate your admission to the Great Service in the usual way. O Abiboo, bring me from the cold cellar of my fine house one bottle of the wine with the golden end, and also one bottle of the wine with the dust of many days.”

“What has put me on to the idea,” said Bones, over coffee and one of Sanders’ black cheroots, which Bones, with politeness, made an heroic effort to enjoy, “was a remark dropped by that naval person—you remember, sir?—leading up to my daring conduct on the night of the fourteenth ultimo.”

Hamilton nodded.

“Naturally, it is a very difficult and dangerous job, requiring a certain amount of observation and powers of deduction, but this jolly old book of mine, sir, is a regular corker. The disguises that fellow carried! The jolly old dodges he tried! Full of hints, sir. One of the most valuable works in my collection.”

“What is your collection?” asked Hamilton innocently.

“Well, to be absolutely accurate, dear old friend,” explained Bones, “I haven’t made the collection yet, but I have written home for books on the criminal and physiognomy, all Lombroso’s stuff, an’ a complete manual on the finger-print system. I am also thinking of getting another microscope for bloodstains and all that sort of thing.”

Sanders was eyeing the young man thoughtfully.

“Do you really think you have an aptitude for following clues?”

“An aptitude!” scoffed Bones. “My dear Excellency, it’s a gift. Why, when I was a kid about so high——”

“Suppose something very important disappeared from the Residency, do you think you could track it down?” asked Sanders, and added: “I am asking you this because, seriously, Bones if you are keen on that kind of work I might be of some assistance to

you.”

“Give me,” said Bones impressively, “a button off the jolly old criminal’s coat, a bit of his cigar ash, a handkerchief he has worn—anything you like—and leave the rest to me.”

“I wonder,” said Sanders.

That Bones was an advanced pupil in the art of deduction he demonstrated the next morning, when he met Hamilton on the edge of the reservation wood. Hamilton was rather burdened, for he carried a fisherman’s creel and under his arm a thick bundle of rods.

“You’ve been fishin’, sir,” said Bones carelessly. “From certain indications I gather you’ve had no luck. On your way back you met a man of the village, who asked you whether he might hunt in the reservation forest, to which you replied——”

“How on earth did you know this?” demanded Hamilton.

“Simple, dear old sir,” said Bones, with an indulgent smile. “In the first place, your creel is empty.”

“As a matter of fact, it is full,” said Hamilton opening the lid of the basket and revealing an orderly mass of silver trout, “only it happens to be Sanders’s creel.”

“Well, anyway,” said the unruffled Bones “You’ve been fishin’.”

“On the contrary, I have been shooting,” replied Hamilton, with annoying calm. “But I happened to overtake the chief, and he asked me for my gun—he saw a hawk over the trout pond. I took his rod and traps, and came on.”

Bones rolled his head from side to side in a gesture of impatience.

“But tell me, how did you know I met a man who wanted a licence to shoot?”

“Ah,” said Bones, in triumph, “there I’ve got you, dear old fellow. In the first place, by the dust on your boots——”

“To be perfectly frank, I didn’t meet him,” interrupted Hamilton, “but Sanders did. M’fufa of Besibi. He said you had told him you couldn’t give a permit, and had sent him along to me. Am I right sir?”

Bones coughed.

“Deduction, dear old man, is one of those dinky little sciences that are in their infancy,” he said hurriedly. “An’ now let’s turn to more serious subjects.”

Bang! Bang!

“I wonder if Sanders got his hawk” said Hamilton, turning his face in the direction whence the sharp explosions came.

“Personally,” said Bones, “I should not have taken two shots at a hawk. I should have taken only one, dear old sportsman.”

“At the end of which time,” suggested Hamilton, “your hawk would have been halfway home. What is your serious subject, Bones?”

They strolled together to the Residency, and Bones poured forth a story concerning a certain shortage of stores, due apparently to the fact that the last man who visited the store forgot to turn and remove the key. Bones condemned, in the fiercest language, the stupidity, the carelessness, and the criminal folly of a man who leaves a store unlocked in the midst of representatives of the Kano race. He concluded that the last person who had gone to the store had forgotten to lock the door—had, in fact, left the key in the lock—and

invited Hamilton to search out the offender and visit upon him the severest penalties that military law allowed.

“You were in the store after lunch yesterday,” accused Hamilton.

“Me?” said the indignant Bones. “Certainly I was in the store.”

“Did you lock it?”

“Did I lock it?” gasped Bones, clasping his forehead. “Did I lock it? Now, I wonder, if I did lock it?”

“Of course you didn’t lock it, you silly ass!” said Hamilton. “Who else could it have been? I gave you the key, which you did not return.”

“It was a mistake,” said Bones mildly, “that anybody might make—anybody—I don’t care who it is, dear old Ham. *You* might have made it yourself. If you cannot trust your own men, whom can you trust? Dear old lenient superior, have a heart!”

The matter of the rifled store—no more than a bolt of cloth was missing, and that had been heavily drawn upon—lasted until the lunch gong sounded.

Patricia Hamilton joined them on the verandah at a moment when the argument was becoming rather heated, and managed to soothe them both. Ten minutes passed but there was no sign of Sanders.

Another five minutes passed, and Hamilton was growing a little alarmed, when Sanders appeared on the edge of the wood and came walking slowly toward the Residency. His gun was under his arm, and there was in his face that far-away look of detachment which came to him in very critical moments. He mounted the steps of the verandah, slowly put down his gun, and then, as on second thoughts, took it up again and carried it inside the building.

“I’m sorry to have kept you waiting,” he said. “If you don’t mind I will wash my hands.”

“What have you got there, sir?” asked Hamilton, for Sanders was holding very gingerly a thin arrow.

“Be careful,” warned the Commissioner, and held up the point. The two men looked, and Hamilton uttered an exclamation, for the point was covered with a thin coating of brown gum.

“Poisoned! Where did you find it?” asked Hamilton.

“It nearly found me,” said Sanders grimly. “I was looking for my hawk, when it whizzed not an inch from my shoulder.”

“But who——” began Hamilton.

“I didn’t see the gentleman,” said Sanders, with a little smile. “I fired twice at the bush whence it came, and searched the path.”

He went into his room and reappeared cheerily enough, in time to hear the conclusion of the many suggestions which Bones was making to bring the miscreant to justice.

“Leave the matter entirely in my hands, dear old sir,” he said, rising to his feet. “Already I have one or two clues which are working themselves out in my mind.”

“They will die from lack of space,” said Hamilton.

“It seems awfully alarming,” said the girl seriously. “Do you think they will make

another attempt?"

"No, I don't think so," said Sanders airily.

He was a poor hand at a lie and convinced nobody.

Later he brought the two men together.

"I don't know who the fellow is, but from the news I had from the N'gombi this morning, I should imagine it is M'liko. Ahmet sends word that the chief is spreading a story that I killed his child by witchcraft—that is always a murder palaver. I expect him to make another attempt to-night, but I don't want your sister to know."

"Why not me let put a guard round the reservation?" suggested Hamilton.

Sanders shook his head.

"You could do it for one night, or for two, but you could not keep it up with your small force. No, let him come as soon as he likes—to-night for preference."

Bones suddenly rose.

"This jolly old rascal can't come by the beach," he said rapidly, "he can't come by the quay, he must come along the bush path. Leave it to me. I have got an idea in my head, sir." He tapped his forehead, and was all a-quiver with excitement. "Trust old Bones! I will save you!"

"Where are you going, Bones?" asked Hamilton.

"Trust me, sir," said Bones incoherently. "This is one of the grandest ideas——" He stumbled out of the room, crossed the verandah, and reached the ground in two strides, and they heard his raucous voice calling for Ali Abid before he was halfway across the parade-ground.

They saw no more of Bones that day, but late in the afternoon came his solemn servant with a strange request.

"Sir," said Ali, confronting Hamilton, "my lord needs a consignment of brown enveloping paper, or alternative supplies of ancient press journals."

"What does he want them for?" asked Hamilton, in surprise.

"Sir," said Ali profoundly, "for criminal detections by scientific brain-waves."

He was handed a roll of brown paper, and made his way back to his master.

What Bones was doing, none knew. There was a tangle of bush behind his house, to which he retired with a large saucepan, and they saw the smoke of his fire, and Abiboo and many others complained bitterly of a vile smell that came therefrom, permeating the married quarters to an unbearable degree.

Bones sent his excuses for dinner, and they did not see him again that night.

"So far as I can make out by judicious inquiry," said Hamilton, "he is making a peculiarly messy kind of fly-paper with a patent bird-lime which he and his infernal servant are concocting together."

"Bones means well," pleaded his sister.

"Bones does well," said Sanders, with that fleeting smile of his, "but I can scarcely imagine that he hopes to catch M'liko by that method."

They made a show of retiring to bed for the night at ten o'clock. The girl was the first to go.

“Are you going to bed soon?” she added.

“In a few minutes,” said Hamilton glibly.

He and Sanders sat talking in quiet tones for half an hour, then Sanders disappeared into his room and came back with two rifles, one of which he handed to Hamilton.

“The moon will be down in a quarter of an hour,” he said, “and that is about the time we may expect to meet our friend in the forest.”

“What is the plan?” asked Hamilton, taking the rifle and softly opening the breech.

“I will go forward into the woods,” said Sanders, “and do a little stalking. You remain halfway between the Residency and the wood, in support.”

They passed noiselessly from the house. The moon was already behind the trees, and there was only the light of the stars.

“I wonder what Bones is doing,” whispered Hamilton.

“I have great faith in Bones,” replied Sanders.

He left Hamilton at the appointed spot, and went forward into the black wood. He moved silently and cautiously, for Sanders was a great hunter. There was no sound when he stopped, as he did from time to time, and he came to the narrow entrance of the forest path without discovering any sign of his enemies.

He stood at the entrance of the leafy alley for some time, and then—

“O white man,” said a mocking voice right ahead of him, “I see you!”

Something snicked past him, and Sanders ducked and brought his rifle to his shoulder. There was another twang, and this time the arrow passed over him. He fired right ahead, though he knew that the men who were attacking him had taken cover behind the trees. In a momentary flash of the explosion he thought he saw a face, and fired again. He heard a scamper as of men running, and springing up, took two steps forward; but something caught him by the foot and held him.

He stumbled, put out his hand, and touched a soft gluey mess. Before he could think what had happened, he had put down his other hand to get a purchase to raise himself, and found that caught also. He pulled sharply, and there was a tearing sound, but the limed paper, though it came away, still clung to him. In an incredibly short space of time he was almost enveloped from shoulder to foot in a score of flapping, detaining squares of paper which literally held him to the ground. He forced himself forward, only to fall upon his knees into yet another well-limed trap. Bones had done his work very thoroughly. The paper had been glued to the canvas, and canvas had been staked to the ground, and over all had been spread this horrible viscid composition.

In that moment of quick anger Sanders spoke of Bones. He did not speak of him nicely. He did not refer to the excellent services which the enthusiastic young sleuth-hound had rendered to the State in other capacities.

Hamilton heard his shout, and came running up, but some one was there before him.

“Is that you, dear old Excellency?” said a voice from the bush. “Have you got ’em? What do you think of old Bones now?”

Sanders said nothing for a moment, and then—

“I will tell you later, Bones. I was hoping you had heard.”

“Surely,” gasped Bones, “surely, sir—surely you haven’t walked into it! Bless my

heart alive! This is terrible! I shall never forgive myself, dear old Excellency!”

It took them half-an hour to strip the “fly papers,” from Mr. Commissioner Sanders. Fortunately, Hamilton had an electric pocket-lamp, which assisted materially in the operation, but neither Sanders, nor his helpers, for that matter, were very presentable when the last of the papers had been forcibly torn from his person and flung into the bush.

“The men got away, sir, I am afraid,” said Hamilton. Sanders nodded.

“I saw M’liko,” he said. “That was quite enough. In another two strides I’d have had him. Lend me your lamp.”

He flashed the light ahead.

“Bones, I shall find it difficult to——” He stopped. “Hello!” he said.

He went cautiously ahead, keeping his lamp on the ground, and with the butt of his rifle he tapped the grass-covered path before him. As he did so, the whole of the path, for a length of four feet and a width of three, caved in and vanished. He flashed his lamp into the hole. It was a small trap, such as the natives construct when trapping elephants, with this exception, that at the bottom were twenty upturned spear-heads, and each was coated with brown gum.

Sanders looked. He knew that one scratch from any of those spear-heads meant death, and he saw the whole plan in a flash. That wild scamper in the dark had been intended to lure him on. All that night M’liko had been working at the hole and planting his poisoned spears, covering his work with thin reeds and grass, lest his victim carried a lantern and discovered the trap.

“Two more strides!” said Sanders thoughtfully. “If I hadn’t struck your fly papers, Bones——”

“Exactly, your Excellency,” said Bones, not without dignity. “You grasp my idea?”

“You are a great man, Bones,” said Sanders, “a truly great man.”

“That is what *I* say!” said Bones.

## CHAPTER III

### A CHANGE OF MINISTRY

LEUTENANT AUGUSTUS TIBBETTS, of the Houssas, sat in his canvas chair under the thatched shelter which constituted his orderly-room. Before him was a table neatly set with the paraphernalia of justice. There were three yellow crime reports, a sheet of foolscap paper, an open volume of "The Manual of Military Law," a company report ledger, and the defaulter sheets of the delinquents, who waited, between an escort with fixed bayonets, for the word to step up and accept the judgment of the gods.

By the side of Bones, in his most comfortable wickerwork chair, gaily cushioned and not wholly in harmony with the solemnity of the proceedings, sat Patricia Hamilton in a big and shady panama and a dress of dazzling white drill.

"You are sure that I am not in the way, Bones?" she asked anxiously.

Bones screwed his monocle into his eye and turned slowly and impressively toward her.

"Dear old miss," he said, with a certain stern quietness, "havin' invited you here, havin', so to speak, given you a seat on the bench, I ask nothin' of you save that you——" He coughed and looked at her significantly, and, turning again to his front, cried fiercely: "Silence in court, all of you, confound it!"

"Bones," said the horrified girl, "you really mustn't use strong language."

Bones blinked at her.

"Must terrify 'em, dear old Miss Patricia," he said, in a hoarse whisper. "Iron hand in the velvet glove, an' all that sort of thing. Silence!" This to the wholly silent group before him.

He nodded to the sergeant, and the first prisoner stepped smartly forward, accompanied by one of the escort.

"Lord," said the sergeant, in liquid Arabic, "this man owes Mahmut Ali twenty cupfuls of salt, and because Mahmut Ali asked for his own this man beat him."

Bones glared at the offender, but the offender was unperturbed.

"Lord Tibbetti," he said suavely, "it is true that I owed Mahmut Ali ten and ten cups of salt, but Mahmut Ali borrow my beautiful breeches for the wedding of his woman's sister, and fought with them on his legs, so that they came back to me in rags."

Bones beckoned the witness, the offended one.

"Lord that is true," he said frankly, "but I did not promise this man that I would not fight in his breeches, whereas he promised he would give me back my salt."

Bones stroked his chin.

"For beating Mahmut Ali you shall drill for two days in the hour of sleep. As for the breeches, Mahmut shall pay you their value and shall have the breeches. You shall pay him his salt. The palaver is finished."

"What happened?" asked the girl, in some anxiety, for Arabic was Arabic to her, as

Greek was Greek to Cicero.

“A rather indelicate matter,” said Bones gravely.

“I’m sorry,” said the girl hastily, and settled back.

“Summon the next case,” said Bones.

The next case was, as it happened, a serious military offence, and had been sent from the Upper River for judgment.

There had been an outbreak of measles in the territory of the Old King Beyond the Hills, and a quarantine guard had been set upon the Ochori frontier. It was alleged that the three men and a corporal who constituted that guard had abandoned their post for two days. In an European force this would have been a very serious offence indeed, but there were certain extenuating circumstances which permitted Captain Hamilton to allow his subordinate to deal summarily with the offenders.

“Lord,” said the spokesman for the prisoners—the offending corporal—“it is true that we men left the hill path and went back and feasted with the chief of the Ochori, but before now we have taken his commands and obeyed them. And, lord, we knew that Bosambo had a very cunning plan to overthrow Sandi’s enemies, so that when he sent for us, and there came ten warriors of the Ochori to take our places, we went away.”

“Hum!” said Bones profoundly. “Very serious—ver-y serious!”

“Is it really?” asked the girl, impressed. “What are you going to do?”

“I ought to shoot ’em,” said Bones, shaking his head.

“Bones!”

“I really ought—’pon my word, I ought! O man”—this in Arabic—“because this offence was ordered by a reigning chief, it shall stand against him and you shall escape.”

The third and last one, curiously enough, had also a connexion with Bosambo. It was a charge preferred by a native against a Houssa who had taken the law and a pliant rhinoceros whip into his own hand. There was no question as to the fact, for a corporal had witnessed the assault.

“This is true, lord,” said the soldier; “but this Kaffir told me many lies, for he said that the Chief Kulubu was the rightful Chief of the Ochori, and that all men knew this thing and that Sandi kept Bosambo in his place because they were sons of the same father.”

“Is this true, man?” asked Bones.

“Lord, I said the thing, yet I meant no evil,” confessed the complainant, “for this way men talk all along the river. And, lord, was not the mother of Kulubu the daughter of the old king of the Ochori, and was not Bosambo a foreigner who came from a stranger land, and did he not seize the Ochori city by wickedness?”

An embarrassing question for Bones, since Bosambo, chief of the Ochori, had undoubtedly come from Monrovia, a fugitive from justice. He had in fact, broken out of prison whilst serving a twenty years sentence, and, making his way across country, had found himself in the city of the pusillanimous Ochori, and had been received as a guest. And when the weak chief of the tribe had died most mysteriously and unexpectedly, Bosambo had seized the reins of chieftainship and had turned the Ochori—whose courage had been a reproach and a shame—into a first class fighting tribe. Also it was true that the rightful heirs had been set aside by Bosambo, and that Sanders in his wisdom desiring an

end of the old dynasty, had confirmed Bosambo in his self-appointment.

“Let all people hear this,” said Bones, after a long pause. “Bosambo is the true Chief of the Ochori, for Sandi has made him so by law; but men will always speak badly of those who are in authority and give the law to their people. Therefore you did wrong to speak against Bosambo, and you, Mahmut, did wrong to beat this man, for it is written in the Sura of the Spider, ‘Dispute not except in kindness.’ Therefore you shall drill for one day in the hour of sleep. The palaver is finished.”

He explained the last case to the girl as they walked to the beach to meet Sanders and Hamilton, who had been out to sea with their fishing lines.

“And if you ask me my opinion, dear old miss,” he said, “I think that Kulubu is a silly old silly.”

A statement which proved to be true.

“Bosambo must be warned not to interfere with the men,” said Sanders later. “I particularly wish to keep infectious disease out of the country, and by his folly he might have caused an epidemic. I am more annoyed because I explained to the villain the rapidity with which the disease spreads. It isn’t really very dangerous, for natives are seldom susceptible to a bad attack.”

“Poor Bosambo!” smiled the girl. “He is always in trouble lately.”

Sanders nodded.

“He is in bad trouble now. There’s a big plot on foot to weaken his authority. I believe Kulubu has some hereditary right to the chieftainship, and it might be extremely awkward if the people of the Ochori demanded a union between the Territories. Some of Bosambo’s headmen have been visiting Kulubu lately—that smells like trouble.”

“Do you think we ought to warn Bosambo?” asked Hamilton, and Sanders’s eyes lit with a transient smile.

“He has already warned me,” he said. “The fact is, the Ochori are very poor; their crops have been bad, and their fishing unsuccessful. Kulubu is a rich man—the fighters are always rich—and he has bribed and corrupted the Ochori until poor Bosambo hasn’t a friend he can trust. The Ochori have treated him badly, for he made them a nation. However, we shall see. Send ten men and a sergeant to within marching distance of Wumbi, Hamilton, and let Bosambo know they’re there.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Between the day and the night, in that thinnest grey wedge of dusk which marks the close of the tropic day, an ironwood canoe swung in from the centre of the Upper River, and, caught broadside on by a swift current, drifted a diagonal course to the white beach of Wumbi. The man who sat in the stern of the boat had judged the distance perfectly, and digging his paddle first to the left and then to the right with long strong strokes which set the water gurgling about the polished blade, he drove the nose of the canoe to the sloping beach. Wumbi lay against the red west, a purple blot of high trees sparkling with the fires of the village. The lazy blue smoke spiralled first greyly against the forest background until it topped the tree heads and waved in little streamers of black gauze against the glowing skies.

The man in the canoe rose slowly and stepped with that peculiar deliberation which is wholly native into the shallow water. He pulled the canoe higher on the beach, and, bending over, took from its interior a bundle of spears, a skin food bag, and a dead monkey. This he slung over his shoulder and walked slowly toward the path which, running an erratic course between the trees joined the beach near the hut of N'guro, the fisherman. Beyond was a thick tangle of grass reaching to the water's edge, and this he investigated. He found a long canoe well hidden by the vegetation, and was satisfied.

The hunter was tall and, save for the leopard skin about his waist, naked. His shoulders were broad and muscular, his neck well-set, and there was in the swing of his body a suggestion of unusual strength and agility. He halted at the edge of the village, leaning on a spear, the blade of which stood higher than his own tall head, and peered forward, for the light was growing dim. What he saw was evidently satisfactory to himself, for he resumed his advance. Before him, and evidently his objective, was a hut larger than any other. Before its door were two thick posts set at such a distance apart that a big man with outstretched arms might just touch either with the tips of his fingers. They were carved in strange designs, and were veritable fetishes through which an enlightened man might, with proper ceremony, commune with ghosts and ju-jus. Ahead of this a log fire smouldered, and, grouped about, the stranger could see the vague figures of five men. There were no others near, for this was the great house of Kulubu, Chief of the fighting Akasavas, and there was a clear space of ground about the hut, across which no man might walk without invitation, for Kulubu, who had started this era of chieftainship in the most promising circumstances—"All men shall be my brothers, and I shall be the slave of my people," was the rash promise he had made in grand palaver—had edged toward a greater autocracy than even the Akasava had known.

The new-comer took three steps towards the fire before the surprised "Wa!" of one of the low-speaking group indicated that he had been seen. For a second he stood at the implied challenge of that "Wa!" and in that second he was recognized.

Swiftly two of the five melted away in the darkness, leaving Kulubu, the king, and his two gnarled councillors alone to greet the visitor.

"I see you," boomed the stranger conventionally.

"I see you, Bosambo," said Kulubu quickly. "This is a wonderful day for me that the great Chief of the Ochori should come to my village and sleep in my hut. Now, my young men shall feast your paddlers and spearmen, and for you I will kill a fat goat."

Bosambo had sunk on his haunches by the side of the fire, his spears, gripped in his powerful fist, lying across his knees, his head cocked sideways and upward, for the king sat upon a fine carved stool, and was higher than he.

"O Kulubu," said Bosambo, "there shall be no feasting for me or for my men, for I killed near the Pool of Stones, and, more than this I journey alone."

The three men did not speak, but Bosambo, eyeing them keenly from under his drooping lids, saw the swift exchange of glances.

"Lord," said Kulubu at length, "we three men who have sat alone, thinking great wonders for the good of our people——"

"Sometimes there is a sickness which comes up from the river this day," interrupted Bosambo, "and men see those things which are not. Now, I tell you, Kulubu, that I saw

not three, but three and two.”

“‘Slaves are never seen,’” quoted Kulubu glibly. “That is the saying of the Akasava. And these, men were slaves, Bosambo, who brought fish and manioc.”

“‘Between a slave and a warrior is the length of a spear,’” Bosambo returned tag for tag, “and it was part of my madness that I saw spears in the hands of your slaves. And though all men know that you are very rich, with great stores of ivory buried beneath your hut, yet even great kings are not served by spearmen.”

Kulubu coughed and looked first to one and then to the other of the grim-visaged old men who sat on either side of him. They offered no assistance, and Kulubu rushed in where many wiser men might have hesitated.

“It is true, Bosambo, that these men carried spears,” he said, “but they were the brothers of my second wife, and, being lowly men, felt shame for me that you saw them at my palaver. Now, Bosambo, I will tell my women to sweep a great hut for you.”

Bosambo blinked up at his host.

“I sleep in the forest this night, Kulubu,” he said, “for I am on my way to meet Sandi, our father, for he desires to speak secretly with me.”

Kulubu’s head craned forward.

“There are many stories here in the Akasava,” he said softly, “for bad news floats with the river. Some men say that your people have made a cry against you to our Lord Sandi, and that they took their spears to your great house because you struck them cruelly. Also they ask for another chief.”

He paused invitingly, but the Chief of the Ochori stared at him in silence.

“Now, I think,” Kulubu went on, with a certain confident insolence which was duly noted, “that the Ochori are fools, for you are a good king and, by all sayings, well loved by Sandi. Yet men are born to rule, and have a great ju-ju from their eyes-opening to help them. If you have not this ju-ju, Bosambo, you cannot rule.”

Bosambo shifted his position.

“Listen to me, O Kulubu M’faga,” he said, “for I speak with the tongue of wisdom. Between me and my people is a bad palaver, for they are lazy, and on the day when I must take rubber and corn to Sandi for his Government, they bring me empty palms, and I am put to shame before my lord. Therefore I beat them and set them to make roads for me. Then came men plotting against me and against Sandi. Kulubu, from whence do they come? Also, certain headmen of the tribes go down the river and make a secret palaver with my enemy, and sit by his fire and speak evilly of me. Who is that enemy? Wa! Kulubu, I have seen three kings of the Akasava die—two upon a high tree and one under my spear. Shall I see three and one?”

Kulubu stood up, his eyes upon the bunched spears on Bosambo’s knee.

“All this madness, Bosambo,” he said mildly, “for is not Sandi more powerful than devils? And if you cannot hold your people, is it not true that they need a stronger hand? Now, I have taken counsel with my brothers because I love you, Bosambo, and I will do a great thing. On a certain day I will go to your city and be as king over your people, and you shall come to Wumbi and sit in my place, and at the full of the next moon I will ask the Ochori and you shall ask the Na-akasava: ‘Who shall be king of you—Bosambo or

Kulubu?’ This I will also ask the people of my own country, standing by your side, and by *Ewa* and the head of my head, by salt and blood and by all the Ghosts of the World, I will abide by their word. But this I say, Bosambo—that in the time of change you shall not go to the Ochori, nor shall I come to my land.”

Bosambo rose.

“This is a big matter,” he said, “and I must have my thoughts.”

He strode out of the circle of light along the path that led to the river. On the beach he halted and sat down.

“I think Bosambo will let you go,” said Kulubu’s headman, “for he is a very simple one.”

“Then there will be no more Bosambo in the Ochori,” said Kulubu, “for after a while I will go to Sandi, and I will show him how I have ruled these people, and I will take him great gifts of rubber and fish, more than the taxes, and then Sandi will put down Bosambo.”

“O chief,” said the other councillor, “what shall Bosambo do here? For if you put him in your place, may he not do evil things against you? And, chief, is there not buried in a secret place behind your great house much treasure of ivory and rubber?”

Kulubu nodded.

“But are you not here, and also my brethren, and the little chiefs who come and go from the villages about? And will there not always be at his side those in authority to watch him? Let all headmen know that I have gone to steal Bosambo’s country, and that, while Bosambo stays, they shall be very cunning toward him.”

On the first day of the new moon the change was effected. Bosambo came with his belongings in a canoe which brought also his four faithful attendants, and was installed in the great hut of Kulubu, and all men—at any rate, outwardly—gave him obedience, and the headmen brought him salt and corn, and the warriors their spears to touch, and though they were mirthful at this game, they did not show their mirth.

Bosambo took their homage very seriously. He called a small palaver of petty chiefs and headmen of villages, and discussed with them certain improvements of the law, such as, for example, the rights of husbands to claim a return of a portion of a price they paid for unsatisfactory wives, and the small palaver listened attentively and politely, agreed with all he said, acclaiming his wisdom in set phrases, and went out of his presence painfully charged with unuttered laughter.

They had less cause to laugh when they discovered that Bosambo did not discharge them to their several avocations as was the custom after a council, but maintained them in the village, calling them together every morning and night, demanding their views upon problems as far apart as the breeding of crocodiles and the preparation of manioc. At the sixth of these conferences Gisivulu, a person of some importance, since he ruled eighty square miles of territory, abandoned any pretence of polite interest.

“O Bosambo,” he said, “we are men with many tasks, and for six days and six nights you have kept us here, talking of fish and corn and rubber and hunting, whilst our people are awaiting our return, and our wives are very sorrowful, and our children cry for us. Give us leave to go, O chief!”

Bosambo looked at him thoughtfully.

“On a certain day you may go to your villages, but that day is not yet,” he said.

Bosambo summoned a palaver of “all chiefs and heads of families” for that evening, to discuss the effect of moons upon fishing, and, held, a weary assembly from eight o’clock in the evening until dawn. He followed this up by an afternoon palaver which lasted till close on midnight, and this meeting was in the nature of Convocation of Laymen, for the matter under discussion was “Ghosts.”

At the end of the second week the petty chiefs had a palaver of their own, and sent a delegation to Kulubu, urgently requesting that he should return; and Kulubu, who had enlisted the enthusiastic allegiance of his new subjects by a succession of dances and feasts, and by the remission of all “chief taxation”—a monthly tribute paid by the tribe to their lord—was puzzled.

“How may I come, Gisivulu,” he asked, “for have I not sworn with Bosambo that neither shall I go to the Akasava, nor he shall go to the Ochori, until an appointed time? And yet another week must pass before the full of the moon. I tell you, therefore, to go to his palavers and listen with deaf ears, and speak whatever your stomach tells you. In three and four sunsets I will come to my people, and as for Bosambo, he will neither have land nor people.”

“Lord,” said the aggrieved Gisivulu, “this Bosambo has made a great call for taxation. When the full moon waxes to a rind, we must bring him from every village, and for every man of that village, as much rubber as one may hold in four hands.”

Kulubu beats his fists together in joy.

“O ko-ko!” he chuckled. “At that time there will be no Bosambo sitting in my house, for I shall return chief of two great tribes.”

The delegation went away a little comforted, and Kulubu turned his mind to the entertainment of the Ochori people, for he had planned that night a festival of superlative grandeur, being no less than the Dance of the Weaver Birds. At three o’clock in the morning Kulubu went to his sleeping hut and sat down upon his skin bed, only to jump up again very quickly, for somebody was already lying upon his robe.

“Fish!” said Kulubu. “Who are you that comes to my fine house and sleeps upon my bed?”

“Lord,” said a quavering voice, “every night I have lain on your wonderful bed whilst your lordship has been dancing. Also my sister, who is here beside me.”

Kulubu dragged them in to the light of the fire outside, and saw a youth and a girl obviously not of the Ochori people. A shout from Kulubu brought Bosambo’s treacherous councillors to him.

“Who are these people?” asked Kulubu.

“Lord,” said the headman, “they are foreigners.”

Kulubu turned to the trembling intruders, who were staring at him.

“Master,” said the youth—he was a thin reedy creature, wearing nothing more than a girdle of native cloth—“master,” he said, “this is magic, for I thought I lay in the hut of the great chief Bosambo.”

“You speak true, little snake,” said Kulubu, “for this is the hut of Bosambo. Speak and tell me how you came here.”

The boy looked at the frightened girl at his side, and then from face to face before he sat down and began, in that sing-song tone which is peculiar to the people of the Old King, the recital of his strange story.

“Master,” he said, “I come from the village of Lichi-lichi, which is beyond the mountains, in the territory of the Great King. And there was much sickness amongst the people, and also our chief beat us, and some he killed to please the devils who put fever in our bodies. So we came across the frontier, this woman and I, and we saw the soldiers of Bosambo, who brought us to him, and he told us that by his magic he would cure us. He took us away to a hidden place in the forest and gave us food, and every night we were to come and sleep in his bed whilst he was at the feasts. Lord, he made a secret door to the hut, through which we could crawl, and every night we have come, this woman and I, and have lain on his bed, so that his magic might cure us, and every night when we heard his feet we have crept away, save only to-night, lord, when we were tired and slept.”

Kulubu listened without understanding.

“This was madness of Bosambo,” he said at last “for if you slept on his bed, might he not also get the sickness? Go back to your place in the wood, and, if you return to this city, I will have you beaten.”

In the days that followed the natives of the Lower River saw many pigeons flying north and south, and they knew there was a big book palaver between Sandi and his spies. One letter in particular which came to headquarters may be quoted—

“From Ahmet Ali, by the fork of the river, with ten soldiers.

“To Sandi at his grand house by the sea.

“In the name of God the Compassionate and Merciful, etc. Peace on your house.

“There is a new sickness in the Ochori which has come across the hills from the land of the Old King, and even Kulubu is stricken. So I have put a guard on the river, and none may leave nor enter the Ochori. Thus you told me, should the sickness come to any of the tribes. Bosambo is now the chief of the fighting Akasava, is giving many dances. This he does because Kulubu has not returned. He has sent all the little chiefs to their villages, and they are glad to go; because of the long palavers which Bosambo made, they are weary. Also Bosambo has dug up the great treasures of Kulubu, and has given every chief and headman a beautiful present. And he has dances and feasts in the city of Wumbi, and all men love him.”

Sanders read the missive at breakfast, his lips twitching with sheer delight.

“And the end of that adventure is,” he said, “that Bosambo has a new country, and Kulubu has measles. Get the *Zaire* ready, Hamilton. This will take a lot of straightening out.”

“Is there nothing I can do, dear old Excellency?” asked Bones eagerly. “No little job for poor old Bones?”

“You can go to the Ochori,” said Sanders, “and settle the measles.”

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LOVER OF SANDERS

ALI ABID was a stoutish man, a man of many black, rolling chins. He was the possessor of a plump, cherubic face innocent of beard, and his eyes were round and wondering.

Though he affected the jellab of the Moorish people, and wore scarlet tarbosh and the bright yellow slippers which the folk of Morocco affect, he was indubitably "Coast."

The Kano folk, who are followers of the one Prophet, resented his tarbosh and his easy assumption of the faith of El Islam, and most bitterly of all resented the green turban in which he appeared upon certain great occasions, for the green turban is the outward and visible sign of Hajdom which an acceptable pilgrimage to Mecca confers upon the adventurer.

Abiboo, a most faithful and devout Mussulman, once challenged him to prove his right to the green turban, and Ali had recited the first two Suras of the Koran almost without stopping to take breath, whilst an abashed Abiboo sat crushed down beneath a torrent of unfamiliar but very holy words, for Abiboo, being of the Kano people, was but an indifferent student of the Inspired.

Ali Abid sat one afternoon nodding in the shadow of his master's hut. The day was very warm and drowsy—a murky western sky and a thin haze that blended sea and sky lay on the lazy blue waters of the Atlantic. There was a lifelessness in the atmosphere which was reflected in every living thing. The big fronds of the palms drooped at a steeper angle; the weaver birds, usually so noisy, were silent, save for a testy "Cheep!" which came at intervals from some irritable father of a restless family. On a white sandbank in the delta of the river a big crocodile lay slumbering, his ugly mouth wide open, whilst, as motionless, near at hand, stood a long-legged bird, his head buried beneath his wing. Even the milk-white rollers crashed more languidly and, as it seemed, at more infrequent intervals, as though the great machine which governed their activities had run down and was badly in need of re-winding.

The white Residency, set on a knoll beneath the shading gum trees, showed no sign of life, and the yellow barrack square was deserted. No wonder that Ali Abid nodded, for the world was taking its siesta, and Ali was oppressed with that incomparable sense of loneliness which only wideawake people feel in a world of slumber.

Again and again he addressed himself to the copy of the book which he held in his lap.

To Ali Abid it was the most precious book in the world. It had been presented to him by a certain professor of bacteriology, who had lived for twenty years on the Coast, studying tropical diseases, and Ali had spent the greater portion of his life in the service of that learned man. Thus it came about that Ali Abid could read and speak English, and, more remarkable, that his English was not the Coast English as we know it, but the English of the lecture-room and the anatomical theatre.

He blinked himself awake, and for the tenth time addressed his attention to the great work. Its chiefest charm in Ali's eyes, apart from the fact that it had often helped him

baffle and confuse his enemies, was that it had been legally bequeathed to him by the old man, who had died at his post—he had been found dead in his laboratory over a half-finished treatise on “Embryonic trypanosomes in the proboscis of the Glossina.”

The will had specifically stated that “my native boy who calls himself Ali” should inherit “my annotated copy of El Koran in the Arabic language, as a memento of his master.” And Ali, pocketing the dubious description of himself, had taken the book with greater happiness because it bore the professor’s autograph and book-plate.

Thus Lieutenant Tibbetts, on a brief visit to Cape Coast Castle, had discovered what proved to be an excellent servant—a fat, disconsolate man sitting on the edge of a wooden jetty, with a book hugged under his arm and Tragedy written largely upon his expansive face.

Ali flattened the book on his raised knees and read aloud slowly, deliberately, and somewhat appropriately—

“And among His signs is this—that thou seest the earth drooping, but when we send down the rain upon it——”

A red and wrathful face appeared at the window above him—the face of a young lieutenant of Houssas whose wild blue eye and tousled hair proclaimed the awakened sleeper, than whom there is nothing more remorseless or fiendish.

“What the dooce are you howlin’ about, Ali, you jolly old trumpet?” snarled Lieutenant Tibbetts, called by his intimates Bones. “What the dickens are you ravin’ about, you naughty old silly?”

Ali closed his book and rose in one motion.

“Sir,” he said, “if studious application of study to holy book disturbs superior officer, it is desirable to make reprisals on myself and migrate to other spheres.”

Bones came yawning into the open, smacking his lips and indulging in that ritual of contortion which accompanies the return to consciousness of the young and healthy.

His servitor disappeared into the interior of the hut and returned carrying a large cane chair, which he placed on the cool side of the hut.

Bones scowled at the chair.

“My poor unlettered savage,” he complained testily, “what the dooce do you mean? Routine, Ali! Time-table, Ali! Goodness gracious, Heavens alive! Pull yourself together, my boy—wake up an’ look round!”

Ali passed through the torrent of protest to the hut, and returned with a board on which a neatly-written sheet of paper had been pasted. It was ruled in red and heavily underlined in places. At the head of the sheet in old English characters, were the words—

ROUTINE FOR THE WEEK.

Lieutenant A. Tibbetts.

Bones took the board in one hand and tapped it with the skinny forefinger of the other.

“System, my jolly old bird,” he said solemnly, “is the essence of success. Havin’ a definite objective, stickin’ your jolly old beak to the grindstone of routine, layin’ down a path an’ followin’ it, orderin’ your days an’ nights so that not a second is wasted, for, as dear old Thingummy says, ‘the movin’ finger writes, an’ all that sort o’ thing’—this is the

only way, Ali, my downy old lad, the only way to make anything of life.”

“Sir,” agreed Ali humbly, “methodical classification of matter assists subject to regulate jobs.”

Bones nodded with a complacent smirk, and turned his attention to the board.

“Rise at five-thirty. Bath an’ exercise with dumb-bells,” he read, and paused.

“What time did I get up, Ali?” he demanded.

“Sir, owing to absence of Captain in piscatorial hunt,” said Ali cautiously, “subject’s exit from bedstead was dated nine hours of the clock.”

“Nine?” said the horrified Bones. “Didn’t I get up till nine? You’re a naughty old story-teller! It was a quarter to nine!”

He wrangled through the time-table, tactfully skipping such accusing items as “Two p.m. to three p.m.—Study of field tactics.”

“Don’t get it into your silly old head that I’m sleepin’ because I happen to be thinkin’ with my eyes shut,” said Bones sternly, and Ali spoke learnedly of “cerebral subconsciousness.”

“Anyway,” said Bones, jumping to his feet, “three to four—map-reading. I’m in time for that.”

It was at that moment that the guard-room gong struck five, and Bones went briskly to his hut and had his bath, whistling flatly “The Day is Past and over” with great vigour.

He dressed, spent his customary quarter of an hour over his hair, singing violently the while, and stepped out of his hut.

“Hello!” he said.

There was a man sitting patiently before the door—a tall, broad-shouldered man with a laughing eye and a strong, good-natured face. He wore the leopard skins of chieftainship, and about his neck hung the silver medal which was the token of his authority.

He rose to his feet and brought up his hand in salute.

“Well, I’m dashed!” said Bones. “If it ain’t old Bosambo! Why, you wicked old jossler, when did you arrive?”

“Sah,” said Bosambo, Chief of the Ochori, in his best English, for he had been educated at a mission school at Monrovia, “sah, I lib for dis place dis minute. I make um canoe t’ree days.” He held up his three fingers. “I find um Sandi, I speak um Sandi, but I speak um you first one-time.”

Bones sat down, and at his nod Bosambo sank again to the ground.

“O Bosambo,” said Bones, in the Bomongo tongue, “this is a good sight, for it is many moons since I have seen your face. You shall tell me why you came.”

“Lord,” said Bosambo earnestly, “I came to make a palaver with Sandi. For I desire many things, but most do I wish that Sandi should let me go out of this country to see my mother, who is very sick.”

Bones shook his head in melancholy reproof.

“You’re a naughty old story-teller, Bosambo,” he said.

“I be big liar sometimes,” admitted Bosambo frankly; “I don’t be big liar this time. I look um my farder. She be bad.”

Bones chuckled, for Bosambo had had leave to pay a visit to his home in Monrovia, and there had been some trouble with the police. Also Bosambo had, in a moment of exaltation, thrown a coal-black cabinet minister into the sea, and had fraudulently converted to his own use the uniform of a Monrovia admiral, a theft which was not detected until Bosambo had returned and, at the urgent request of the Monrovia Government,—his baggage had been examined by Sanders.

“Lord,” said Bosambo, “I made a bad palaver with a dog of Monrovia, and now I will tell you the truth. My mother is not bad, but I wish to go to Monrovia to see certain wonders and to buy stores for my people. Now, if Sandi will be merciful, I will not go to Monrovia, but to Lagos, where I have a cousin. For, lord, these Ochori people I rule are fish, and I grow very sick in my heart because I stay with them all the time.”

“My dear old chap,” said Bones, in English, “just come along with me to the Commissioner. I will fix it for you in five minutes. You’re a bad boy!”

“You be fine chap,” retorted Bosambo; “you be big fine fellow, Bonsie.”

“Not so much of the Bonsie,” said Bones, turning haughtily. “I am surprised at you, Bosambo. You may call me Tibbetti or Maglibani, The-Eye-That-Never-Shuts, but not Bonsie.”

“You changed um name?” asked Bosambo, interested.

“That will do,” said Bones sternly, and led the way to the Residency.

Sanders came out to see his *protégé*, and greeted him with significant glance.

“I thought I’d just bring him up, sir,” said Bones. “He wants to go down to Lagos, and, of course, there’s no objection to that.”

“None at all,” said Sanders.

“I have given the matter a great deal of earnest thought,” said Bones.

“I expect you have, Bones,” agreed Sanders mildly.

“And whilst I don’t think we had better let the jolly old rascal go to Monrovia, there seems no reason why he could not go to Lagos.”

“None at all,” agreed Sanders.

“So I can tell him he can go, sir?” Bones put his head on one side like a perky bird.

“No, you cannot tell him that,” said Sanders. “If Bosambo leaves the Territories, he doesn’t come back. O Bosambo”—he turned to the waiting chief—“the lord Tibbetti has spoken for you, and thus I say: If you leave these Territories, you do not return, for your people are unsettled, and when you went away before, there was much bad talk. Did I not go in my fine ship to the Ochori city and punish your councillors? Now, I think you are growing too rich, and though I love you, and it would make me sad if you went away from this country, I will give you no book to return.”

“Lord,” said Bosambo stoutly, “I am your man. And I will go back to the Ochori, and perhaps your heart will be made softened, and you shall send word to me that I may go to my uncle, who is dying.”

“Mother,” murmured Bones.

“Also my mother,” said Bosambo, “who has the sickness mingo.”

“When that times comes,” said Sanders, the ghost of a smile twitching on his lips, “I, too, shall have the sickness mingo, for I shall be mad. This palaver is finished.”

Hamilton had joined the group, and as Bosambo went across the square, accompanied by Bones, Sanders turned to him.

“Bosambo wants a jamboree,” he said. “No, I don’t think he drinks, but he has a very good time, from what our consul wrote me, and I certainly do not think it is good for Bosambo to renew his acquaintance with civilization at too frequent intervals.”

Bosambo was expressing very much the same view to a sympathetic Bones.

“Sandi is the father and mother of all the owls,” he said, “for he knows, when I go into these wonderful places, I do many mad things because I am so joyful. But, O Bonsie——”

“Bosambo, Bosambo!” said Bones testily.

“O Tibbetti,” corrected Bosambo, “my heart is too big for the Ochori, and it swells until I am full of sorrow. I think I will go home,” he said philosophically, “and from time to time I will send word to Sandi, and perhaps he will think well of me and let me go.”

Bones did his best to entertain the visitor, for he remembered many things for which he had to thank this great-hearted Chief of the Ochori folk. He entertained him with his gramophone. He showed him his many photographs. He produced his literary treasures, explained the value of the Thesaurus of Mr. Roget—which did not interest Bosambo at all—and the functions and value of a small volume called “The Ready Letter Writer,” to which Bones had frequent recourse in his official correspondence, and finished up by presenting the grateful Chief of the Ochori with a bound volume of “Little Tots,” that had been inexplicably sent to Bones by a well meaning lady of Guildford, to whom Bones had addressed a letter when remitting a guinea for a local charity of which the lady was honorary secretary.

That the letter accompanying the bound volume began, “My dear child, how perfectly sweet of you, etc.,” was a matter for still greater mystery; and though Hamilton had pointed out that the lady’s erroneous impression arose from the atrocious spelling in Bones’s original epistle, this did not satisfy the young officer of Houssas, though it was undoubtedly the true explanation.

When the gong sounded for dinner, Bosambo took his leave, but not before Bones had placed him in the hands of his placid servitor.

“This night I go back, and I will carry my beautiful presents to my wife, and she shall thank you, Bonsie”—Bones made a weary gesture—“and perhaps I shall move Sandi’s heart. Also this Coast man, who is cunning, may give me great thoughts.”

“Cheerio,” said Bones.

“Sir,” said Ali, with dignity, “chief of indigenous natives may listen something to his advantage if he will accompany alleged Coast boy, but truly Arabic man, to suitable speaking place.”

Bones left them together, talking very earnestly.

It was some five weeks after the departure of Bosambo that Patricia Hamilton came down the sunlit steps and, shading her eyes, looked earnestly across the great yellow square, with its fringe of palms and its neat rows of barrack huts. There was nobody in sight, save the Houssa sentry, who marched resolutely up and down before the guard hut, and no other sign of life but the pigeons which wheeled and circled about the big post-office loft. Certainly there was no view of Bones. She went round to the shade of the western verandah and looked toward the sea. The beach was deserted, and here the world

might have been empty, but for the dun cloud of smoke upon the horizon which told of the passing of a Coast boat. She looked at her watch. It was eleven o'clock.

Mr. Commissioner Sanders and her brother had gone up to a village on the Lower River, to sit in judgment on the claim of a husband who, finding his wife had too many undesirable acquaintances of pre-nuptial days, was demanding the return of the goats, the salt, and other goods.

Patricia went back to her room and put on her solar topee, grabbed, in passing, a walking stick from the hall stand, and made her way across the hot square.

The rays of a tropical summer sun beat down, scorching her shoulders and her arms through her thin silk blouse. There was not a breath of air in all the world, and she was very thirsty and unaccountably irritable by the time she reached the door of Bones's hut.

That young officer was hot, but happy. A big pipe was stuck in the corner of his mouth, his shirt-sleeves were rolled up, and he was writing with great violence.

There were sheets of paper covered with uphill lines on the table, sheets half filled on the floor, sheets criss-crossed madly with marks of deletion in special reserve on his bed.

"Bones," said the girl ominously, "it is eleven o'clock."

Bones dropped his pen with a start and blinked at his visitor, then jumped up with such energy that he all but upset the table.

"Dear old Miss Hamilton! Bless my soul!" he said, groping for his helmet. "Well, well! Eleven o'clock, and I promised to be with you at twelve!"

"At eleven—at ten minutes to eleven," corrected the girl, with set lips.

"At ten minutes to twelve, dear old girl," insisted Bones gently. "I can prove it—my diary."

He held a large volume before her eyes, and laboriously unfastened the lock which bound its covers together.

"Twelve o'clock," he murmured, as he turned the pages. "Tuesday, Wednesday—here we are—Thursday. 'See Pat'—that's you—'see Pat at twelve.'"

"Let me look," said the girl, but Bones held the book at arms length.

"Private thoughts, dear old miss," he protested urgently. "Secret communings of poor old Bones's heart! Play the game, sister!"

She snatched the book from his hand.

"'See Pat at eleven o'clock,'" she read, and eyed him accusingly.

"Eleven o'clock?" said Bones incredulously "Are you sure?"

"What do those two strokes stand for, if they don't stand for eleven?" asked Pat.

"Those two strokes," said Bones slowly, "they stand for twelve o'clock. Everything I do is in secret cipher, dear old miss."

She closed the book and put it down.

"Bones," she said, "on your honour?"

"Say no more about it, dear old Miss Hamilton," said Bones briskly. "And now to work."

He led the way out on to the square, turned religiously toward the centre, and returned a salute which was not offered, then set forth with giant strides toward the Residency,

leaving the girl well in his rear.

“Bones,” she called desperately, “where are you going?”

He stopped dead, turned, touched his helmet.

“Where are we going?” he asked, in a puzzled voice.

He scratched his chin and looked aimlessly round the landscape for inspiration.

“Where are we going?” he repeated.

“You promised to help me make Mr. Sanders’s office tidy,” she said.

Bones slapped his thin thigh with great energy.

“What a silly old ass I am!” he said. “Why, of course!”

Sanders had agreed to this cleaning up process with great reluctance. His private bureau could, on occasions, be a chaos of stationery, of old memoranda, of official orders, Blue Books, White Papers and annual and biennial returns.

She led the way through the big common room to Sanders’s office, unlocked the door, and passed in. She stood a moment looking down at the littered desk, biting her lower lip thoughtfully.

“Bones,” she said, “have you noticed anything strange in Mr. Sanders lately?”

Bones frowned.

“Now you come to mention it,” he said, “I have.”

“What have you noticed?” she asked quickly.

“Well,” said Bones, “for one thing, he never takes his eyes off you.”

She went the colour of a peony.

“I think you are very stupid,” she said, “and, of course, it isn’t true. But have you noticed he has been preoccupied?”

“Indigestion,” said Bones. “My dear Miss Hamilton, they always get it. These dear old gentlemen——”

He met her cold eye and quailed.

“No offence, dear miss, dear old sister of mercy,” he said incoherently.

“Take off your coat and help me sort these. Mr. Sanders told me I might read everything and destroy anything I thought was no use.”

They had been working for an hour before Patricia Hamilton came upon a packet tied with red tape.

She unfastened the tape and opened the first letter, and the colour left her face. It was written in an almost illiterate hand.

For a moment she hesitated. Sanders had told her she could read everything, yet he could not have meant her to read these. He must have known they were there. A cold hand was gripping at her heart, and her fingers shook as she took the letter up.

“My own dear darling Sanders,” it began.

She looked at Bones. He was busy arranging in chronological order some official returns which had been rescued from the heap. She turned to the letter again.

“How my heart beats with rapture when I recall the moments I have spent in your

arms! The memory can never be effaced. The rapture of our parting fingers with me like a fragrant dream.”

There was more in the same strain. She did not read it through. It was incredible, impossible. She put the letter down and took up another, and almost uttered a cry of amazement at the changed tone of the correspondent. It began as did the other—

“My own dear darling Sanders,” but went on—

“I have received yours of the 15th, for which I thank you. I enclose, under separate cover, copies of the invoice, which I trust you will find in order.”

It bore no signature, and, looking at the first of the letters, she discovered that that also was without any name. She picked up the third letter, and, after the inevitable flowery beginning, it went on—

“Will you never return to me? This is the thought that haunts me night and day. How often I kiss our dear Eustace, and tell him that his father will come back to him soon! How I long to welcome you at the quay, and to tell you all my little troubles and my little joys. The money you send me is quite sufficient, dear one, and I am saving some to give you a great surprise when you return.

“Your loving and affectionate wife.”

She was numb now. She read the letters mechanically. The fourth in the same writing was more formal. It began, “My own dear darling, Dear Sir” and continued—

“We have this day shipped you, as per s.s. *Calgary*, the articles as per bill of lading and we have drawn against you for the amount specified. We are forwarding this letter in duplicate to your agents, Messrs. Brown and Smith. Assuring you of our best attention at all times,

“We are, sir, Yours faithfully.”

“What is the matter, dear old sister?” said Bones suddenly.

She shook her head. She had just finished the sixth letter, and it had been a more passionate love letter than the first.

“I think the weather is affecting me,” she said faintly. “Let us go outside, Bones.”

He took her to the verandah and found her a comfortable chair, and then went in search of the water for which she asked. Before he could return she saw her brother and Sanders walking across the square from the little riverside dock.

The *Zaire* had arrived while she was in the bureau. Bones came back with the water as the two men reached the verandah.

“What is wrong?” asked Sanders.

She did not look at him. She felt physically sick. She wanted to go away.

“I think it is the heat,” she said to her brother. She did not address Sanders. “It is nothing to worry about—I shall be better soon. Did you have a good trip?” she asked

Hamilton.

“A tiring one.” It was Sanders who answered. “Oh, by the way, Bones, I think this is yours.” He drew from his pocket a little brown volume and passed it across the table to Bones. “I have had a palaver with Bosambo,” he said, “and this was the outcome.”

“How the dickens did he get this book?”

“What is the book?” asked the girl, her curiosity getting over her repugnance to obtrude herself upon the conversation.

“It is a volume that Bones has probably found very useful. You see, Bosambo has some sort of education,” he explained, “and he can write a fairly good fist. With the aid of this he has—on the advice of Ali—been bombarding me with letters taken haphazard from the book, the idea being to produce a certain softness of heart on my part.”

The girl looked at the volume. It was entitled “*Lover’s and Business Man’s Letter Writer.*”

She opened the book and the first thing that caught her eye was a letter headed—

“Suggested letter from a lady to her lover.

“My own dear darling (insert name).

“How my heart beats with rapture when I recall the moments I have spent in your arms! . . .”

The girl dropped the volume on the table and laughed. She laughed and she cried, and three men looked at her with horror-stricken faces.

“Can I have that book?” she gulped.

“Of course you can, dear old sister,” said Bones heartily, “but you needn’t cry for it! You can have anything you ask for. Bless my soul! Don’t you know old Bones well enough for that?”

## CHAPTER V

### THE BREAKING POINT

TWICE in the year of crops there rose in the undisciplined hearts of men a desire for liberty and freedom. And these two high words convey to the mind of the idealist an altogether mistaken impression of the sentiments which animated the savage souls of the cannibal territories, they may be elaborated to connote liberty to slay and spoil and ravage, and freedom from all those unhappy consequences which civilization, in the shape of an unsympathetic Commissioner, might exact.

Such desires grow in a night and fructify at dawn, for native folk, albeit great talkers and given to interminable rhetoric, do not, as the river saying goes, "carry their passion to palaver". The mob sense overtakes them and dictates a common aim. They surge forward to their fate without knowing why, save that in every one there is a certain instinct of direction and purpose. Whether there was any preliminary treaty between the Akasava, the Isisi, and the Outer N'gombi, none knew. It is probable that there was. It is certain they rose in a night, some twenty thousand spears, and that Bakuro, the paramount Chief of the Isisi, was the guiding spirit and chief general of the war-fleet that gathered on a moonless night in that reach of the great river which is known as "The Many-Many Branches," for here a score of tributaries run into the great river at right angles, and incidentally form excellent cover for a concentration of war canoes.

Midway between the Isisi and the mouth of the river, where the Residency stands, is the tribe called Bulafa, but known from one end of the river to the other as "The Little Mice," because they are notoriously peaceable. On the river it is a famous retort to the teller of an incredible story, that "I saw a man of the Bulafa with a spear," which means, "I also have seen the impossible."

The tribe were sufficiently far removed from the fighting races, and sufficiently close to the paternal eye of Government, to dwell in great security and to enjoy a measure of prosperity which was not approached save by the Akasava, who were workers in iron, and were therefore rich. They fished, they raised goats, they cultivated great fields of maize, and they had even begun the cultivation of rice under the beneficent patronage of Sanders. But mostly they bred edible dogs, which were famous in the land.

The Chief of the Bulafa was awakened in the middle of the night by the arrival of a delegation which included the great Bakuro himself. It was an agitating moment for the Bulafa chief, for these men had spears, and their faces were smeared with camwood. The log fire, which glowed day and night before the chief's hut, was wakened to liveliness, and the palaver of those who squatted about the place was a short one, but intense.

"All peoples are joined together," said Bakuro, "and we will make an end of Sandi and his cruel ways, and when he is finished we shall rule this land according to the old customs. Now it would be shameful, O Chief of the Bulafa, if your great tribe stands aside, for when we win, how shall I stop my young men from ravaging your land? Therefore I tell you to bring your spears to this great killing."

The Chief of the Bulafa, one N'ko, was a stout man and he shook with fright.

“Lord king,” he quavered, “we are peaceable folk, who love our dogs and our women, and we make no war on any, for we are great cowards, and our hearts are like water. And how might we stand up against Sandi, with his soldiers? Also, lord, if I were to call my young men, they would run away and hide themselves in the forest.”

Bakuro pleaded for a hundred, for twenty, for ten men. The movement had been unanimous, save that he had not recruited from the Ochori, and he was cunning enough to see that, if his stroke failed, it might benefit him to produce representatives of the spineless Bulafa to testify to the general character of the movement. But the chief could do no more than continue his feeble protest.

When the chief and his headmen had departed, N’ko aroused his people, and before the morning was far advanced, from the land of the Bulafa arose a great yapping and whimpering, for the dogs were being led or carried to a secret hiding-place in the forest.

“Shall we not send the women too, N’ko?” said a fearful councillor.

“We can find women,” said N’ko, “and one woman is much the same as another. But there are no dogs like ours in all this world.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Amid the tasks, irksome or mechanical, that a man must perform in the course of his day, there is usually one which is particularly and peculiarly pleasant. Most men leave such duties to the last, and Lieutenant Tibbetts, of the Houssas, was no exception. Not until he had avoided and forgotten all that was without colour in the day’s work, and had reached the two hours appointed—in red letters—to this pursuit, did he settle himself down, with a sense of luxury and satisfaction, to the working out of his scheme of schemes—the creation of the Pan-African Army group.

He who in his life has not created something with pencil and pens knows nothing of the joy which Bones felt in the moist heat of his hut, the perspiration of his bare arms marking the paper in weird design. The author and the artist know that joy. The Government lawyer drafting his new bill, the begging-letter writer, the maker of prospectuses, the architect, the inventor—visionaries all that have tasted the sweet dope and have grown dreamily happy, as the poison grew more and more active!

There were forty million natives in British Africa. Ten per cent. were men of military age—an army of four millions! Bones produced two hundred divisions and gave them artillery. He opened iron mines and erected munition plants all over the map. He designed uniforms and equipment, and devised great broad roads leading through the heart of the wilderness to Egypt, and on these he erected store towns and dug wells and put down filter beds. He cut canals and laid railways, and reclaimed the wild—and all with a ruler, a pencil, and a pair of dividers.

He was debating with himself the need for connecting the Nile and the Congo, when Captain Hamilton strolled into the hut.

Bones blushed and drew a newspaper over the map and his scattered data.

“How’s the army going, Bones?”

Hamilton dropped into a chair and lit his pipe.

“Fine,” said Bones politely, “fine an’ healthy, reverend sir.”

He was at the stage of his dream where he dreaded the application of cold logic from the outsider.

Hamilton puffed thoughtfully.

“There’s a lot in your scheme, though I shall not live to see its accomplishment,” he said quietly. “Isn’t it absurd that all the cultured people of the earth should engage themselves in the barbaric destruction of one another, whilst the barbarian himself enjoys the ease and peace which the warring civilizations bring to him?”

“A perfectly silly ass idea, my jolly old skipper,” agreed Bones, but with caution, for he had learnt by bitter experience that his superior’s preliminary approval was frequently an artful dodge to nail Bones down to the championship of a theory which Hamilton would afterwards proceed to demolish.

“At the same time, dear old pacifist, wars are the big pushes of our jolly old civilization. Where would you be if it wasn’t for the war?” Bones demanded truculently. “You talk about peace, but there ain’t such a thing as peace. There is only a time between wars. Put that in your naughty old pipe and smoke it!”

For a wonder, Hamilton did not attempt to argue the matter, and continued on his way to the Houssa lines, for he had certain important instructions to give to his company sergeant-major. Later he joined Sanders in the tennis-court, an innovation due largely to the presence of Miss Patricia Hamilton, and at the finish of the set, when they were taking tea in the shade of a spreading cedar, he repeated wonderingly the gist of the views which Bones had expressed.

The girl laughed.

“Poor Bones—he’s so bloodthirsty!”

“Bones is right,” said Sanders quietly—“all peace is an interregnum. It may be a hateful thought, but it is nevertheless true. Peace is merely a period of reaping the crops which the seeds of war have sown, and the replanting of new seeds for a new and more terrible harvesting. People talk of a *status quo ante bellum*, but it is an empty phrase—things can never be as they were before war.”

“Surely nations may grow rich by peace?” protested the girl.

Sanders shook his head.

“They can neither grow rich nor great. England’s greatness was founded on a score of battlefields. The wonderful prosperity which the United States enjoy springs from the Civil War. The nations that have ceased to fight have decayed to third-rate Powers, at the mercy of the fighting tribes. What is true of civilization is true of this country.” He jerked his head sideways to indicate the vast hinterland he governed. “War is natural, peace is unnatural.”

“If that were so, even your third-class Powers would fight,” she suggested, and he nodded.

“There is a breaking point where peace is no longer the most desirable condition, even with these,” he said. “I have only known one tribe that has never found anything worth fighting about—the Bulafa folk.”

Hamilton laughed softly.

“They may have their breaking point, too,” he said.

“I doubt it,” said Sanders. He looked at the girl with a twinkle in his eye. “I suppose there is a point where even you would fight?”

She shivered.

“I can’t imagine it,” she said.

Sanders looked over to Hamilton and caught his eye, and the Captain of Houssas nodded.

“I wish you would let me go with you, sir,” he said earnestly.

“And rob Bones of his great adventure?” laughed Sanders. “No, I think Bones and I can manage.”

“Are you going away?” asked the girl quickly.

“For a week or two,” said Sanders. “I am due in the Territories. There are one or two palavers that I must attend.”

She was not deceived by the airy way in which he dismissed his forthcoming journey. She had now been long enough in the Territories to read the signs of trouble, and she knew enough of the routine of this little government to be able to ask inconvenient and embarrassing questions.

“How many men are you taking, Mr. Sanders?” she demanded.

Sanders hesitated.

“About fifty,” he said.

“That is forty too many for an innocent palaver,” she said reproachfully, and keeping her grave eyes fixed on his. “Is there really bad trouble?”

“Honestly, I don’t know,” said Sanders. “The only information which we have received came last night after you were in bed and asleep. There have been some meetings between the Akasava and the Isisi. Beyond that we know nothing. If it had happened three months ago, I should take no notice, but there has been a good harvest, and the corn is cut, and good harvests mean war. I am sending Bones with the *Wiggle*. I think he ought to go to-night, Hamilton; the river is navigable in the dark. I will leave to-morrow with the *Zaire*. The disturbance is too widespread to be dealt with by a single expedition.”

He turned to Hamilton.

“You had better warn Bones.”

Bones had reached the delightful point of his scheme where he was appointing his friends and acquaintances to the supreme commands of his paper army, when Hamilton strode into the hut.

“Awfully sorry to interrupt you,” he said briskly, “but Sanders intended telling you to-night. There is trouble in the Akasava, and he wants you to take the *Wiggle* upstream. Make some sort of reconnaissance as far as the lower edge of the Akasava country, and if there is any kind of trouble, don’t barge into it, but retire on Sanders. Here are your instructions in writing.” He passed an envelope across the table.

“In accordance with your jolly old sealed orders, sir,” said Bones, “I will proceed. Give me twenty minutes to pick my men and provision the cruiser.”

“The boat has been provisioned and the men have been picked,” said Hamilton. “All you have got to do is to get your manicure set and your silk pyjamas on board.”

“Spoken like a heartless one,” murmured Bones, and raised his unmusical voice for his servant.

As the sun was dropping into the western ocean, Bones put the nose of the *Wiggle* upstream, his unauthorized white ensign flying at the one stumpy mast, and Bones himself standing with folded arms at the stern of the ship, his head sunk on his breast in the deepest meditation, an attitude which Patricia Hamilton believed, not without reason, was adopted especially for her benefit.

When Bones had rounded the bend of the river, he turned his mind to practical things. He could sail through the night with little fear of danger, since the river for fifty miles has only one or two shallows, and once the group of islands which occur ten miles from headquarters were passed, the course was plain sailing.

Bones for all his dreams and his make-believe was an eminently practical young man. He might make extravagant entries in his log—“Wind freshening to S.S.W., moderate sea. Passed unknown craft inward bound”—but he had also a comprehensive knowledge of the river and its eccentricities. He judged that he would pass Bulafa city at three o’clock in the morning and gave instructions to the steersman that, if he was asleep at the time, he was to be called, for Sanders had particularly requested him to note the condition of the city as he passed.

The Bulafa served Sanders in the same stead as the white mice served the ancient submarine. They smelt danger and twittered audibly, and if there were any sign of fires burning and people stirring at this early hour—the one hour in the day that the native hates, since it is that in which devils are most potent—Bones had orders to go ashore and investigate. He was not in the danger zone yet, and would not be till the following night, so he could afford to sleep, putting a conventional sentry to assist the steersmen, with whom he could safely leave control of the ship.

Bones retired to the little cabin, undressed himself leisurely, and slipped into his pyjamas, those vivid silk garments which were the scorn of his superior. He stepped again on to the deck and leant over the rail, watching the black water, illuminated with innumerable points of light as they reflected the sparks which belched from the *Wiggle*’s chimney-stack, and speculating in his own strange way upon the wonderful possibilities which this mission offered. This was no unusual attitude of mind, for Bones saw opportunities for achieving merit in every task that came to his hand. He involved the commonplace in a rosy mist of dreams, whether that commonplace took the shape of a prosaic visit to Administrative Headquarters—“I sent for you, Mr. Tibbets, by the King’s command, to confer upon you the order of the Crown of India with Swords, for your many heroic and artful achievements”—or whether it was a hut-tax collection which took him into the near-by river villages (here he turned old stones and discovered vaults crammed with treasures of a lost civilization).

He straightened himself with a comfortable sigh, went back to the tiny cabin, put his revolver and cartridge belt near his head—Bones affected a picturesque but unauthorized equipment—and, stretching himself upon the bed, he drew a thin coverlet over him and fell slowly but deliciously into the land of dreams.

He dreamt that he had rescued a beautiful maiden from a horde of wild savages, who, curiously enough, wore the sombreros and “chaps” of American cowboys mounted on wild horses—the horse has never been seen in the Territories, by the way—and had

brought her to safety. She was very distressed because she had no boots or stockings on, although otherwise she was dressed in the most fashionable attire, and as it was raining heavily she wept. Nor was she content with weeping, for she howled, which was an unladylike thing to do, and all the time the rain was pattering down, tap, tap, tap, from the palm tree under which they stood.

“The best thing I can do for you, dear old thing,” Bones was saying, “is to get a cab.” For he was growing irritated, not only by her wild yells, but by the incessant tapping of the rain, and then he woke up.

The yells were real enough, as were the tap, tap, of arrows striking against the side of the vessel.

Bones slipped on his mosquito boots, buckled his revolver about his waist, and stepped out to the deck. The river was full of canoes. Men were clambering up over the side of the boat, and he heard the yell of Yoka, the steersman.

“O Tibbetti, swim!”

A man jumped towards him from the bulwark, and Bones fired. He heard another shot from the stern of the boat—probably one of the Houssa guard who had shaken off his assailants—and Bones fired again and brought down his man.

Instinctively he knew that there was no hope of beating off this attack. Who were the assailants he could only guess. The Akasava were bringing war into Sanders’s country, and had come in force. In one stride he reached the side of the *Wiggle*, and without a second’s hesitation he dived between two canoes. He was a splendid swimmer, but he knew his only chance of escape was keeping under water, and he struck out with swift, strong strokes for the opposite shore to that which had faced him when he had dived.

He passed under the keel of the *Wiggle*, and, when he could remain under no longer, came up to fill his lungs with air.

He was now some distance from the steamer, which, helmless and unattended, was keeping on its course, for Yoka had jumped at the same time as his master. He had not been seen, though there were two canoes between himself and the shore, and he dived again. Before he had leapt into the water he had replaced his revolver in its waterproof holster, a fact which gave him some satisfaction, though he was by no means out of danger. Hereabouts, as he knew, the river was swarming with crocodile, and the forest itself might hold a hundred perils.

He had reached the sloping beach, and had staggered ashore, when a canoe, which had come gliding along the river a few feet from the shore, shot out of the darkness, and there was a jabbering yell which told Bones that he had been sighted. He dashed into the thicket, his pyjamas torn to shreds by the thorns, his thin-shod feet bruised and lacerated by the sharp needles of the underbrush.

He could not outrun these men through the wilderness, but fortunately he struck the inevitable path which followed the river. His eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, picked out the way, and though he ran full tilt into a sapling, he suffered no other mishap. He knew he was being followed, and might have made a fight of it, but the first explosion of his revolver would bring the whole pack on his trail; there was a chance that the main flotilla did not know that he had been discovered. He felt rather than knew they were gaining on him, and whipped out his revolver. Then suddenly the path ceased. He did not

realize the fact until he drove full pelt into a thick reed fence which had apparently been erected right across the track.

It was not an insuperable obstacle, being made of thick rushes loosely plaited, and he was able to thrust his hand through and tear a hole in the reeds big enough to scramble through. His shoulders and one leg were through, when he heard ahead of him a curious whimpering and growling, and every hair on his head stood up. There was no time to hesitate. His pursuers were now close on his heels, but he stood on the far side of the fence, hot and panting, and levelled his revolver to cover the path along which he had come.

He saw a shadowy figure loom into sight, and fired, then he resumed his flight. He had not gone half a dozen paces when he trod on something soft, something which yelped in terror. He heard a rustling and a scampering, and there came to his nose a scent which was unmistakably dog. He stepped forward cautiously now. It was as though he had come into a world populated by members of the canine family. He heard them whimpering, growling, and yelping, and the explanation suddenly flashed upon him. He had heard of these dog kraals to which the Bulafa sent their precious stock when danger threatened, and evidently he had reached it. Behind him arose shrill noises of delight. Evidently the Akasava folk who had been chasing him had discovered the kraal, too. He found the watchman a shivering man half dead with fright, who had seen him long before Bones had detected his presence, and had crawled to his feet in a condition of abject funk.

Bones kicked him erect.

“O man,” he said, “you need have no fear, for I think these men have found your dogs, and they will not ‘chop’ you. Now you shall show me the way to your chief’s village.”

“Lord, lord,” whined the man, “what shall I say to N’ko and the people if these men take our beautiful dogs?”

“Blow your dogs!” growled Bones, in English.

An hour later he arrived at the town of Bulafa, and found that community, as Sanders had anticipated, in a condition of twitter. Fires were burning in the streets, little groups sat about each fire, and before the chief’s house were assembled the headmen of twenty villages. To this scene of panic entered Bones, bedraggled and ragged, his feet swollen and bleeding, his eyes wild, and his hair unkempt. He had looked around for his guide as they had entered the town; but that terrified man had disappeared, preferring the exclusive calm of the forest to the storm which he knew his tidings would evoke.

“O Tibbetti,” gasped N’ko, “I see you.”

Bones dropped down on to the stool they brought him, and wiped his steaming brow.

“N’ko,” he said, after he had recovered his breath, “this is a bad palaver. For the fighting men are out, and many will die before this new sun goes down.”

“I think it will be Sandi,” said N’ko hopefully, “for we are peaceable folk, and Bakuro will not ‘chop’ us.”

“Tell me all this,” said Bones quickly. But the chief, standing first on one leg and then on the other in his embarrassment, had no information to give.

“You shall tell me all this,” said Bones wrathfully, “or I will whip you till you die!”

Which ferocious threat produced the full story.

Now, in every loyal village on the river there is kept a pigeon-house set upon a high pole, and from time to time a man of the Government comes, releases the pigeons, which fly home to headquarters, and puts two others in their place. These emergency post offices were the especial charge of Sanders's secret agents. Bones made his way to the loft, passed up the ladder, and took from the small box fastened to the side of the pigeon-house a little block of thin paper, to which was attached a pencil. He wrote his note quickly, searched for and found the indiarubber bands, and inserting his hand, took out a pigeon. He fastened the thin paper to the leg of the bird, and with the first hint of dawn he flung the messenger into the air, and watched it circling above the village, and rising higher and higher, until it turned and sped southward out of sight.

The warning message came to hand at the Residency half an hour before the first of the war canoes came in sight, and the *Zaire's* Hotchkiss sent a bursting shell above the crowded river.

In the meantime Bones had not been idle. The Bulafa could muster fifty canoes and a thousand men; but, unfortunately, the Bulafa were not a fighting race. Bones pleaded, he urged, he cursed, he threatened, he spoke in English in Arabic, in Bomongo, but all to no purpose. The shivering men sat about the palaver house with Bones, a ludicrous figure in his torn pyjamas and the straw boots they had plaited for him.

"Lord," said the headman of an inner village, "we are not fighting men, and, when we hear the drums beat for war, we desire to run away. And we have suffered already, for Bakuro took with him a male child from this village to make sacrifice, and we have heard that he has slain this child and sent its spirit in a canoe to Sandi."

The unanimous "Wa!" with which this sentiment was received gave eloquent support to this statement.

Bones groaned in despair, and ran his hands through his already disordered locks. He knew that Sanders could keep his enemy at bay throughout the day, and that headquarters would be rushing reinforcements down. But no reinforcements could reach the Residency within twenty-four hours, and in the night-time the headquarters defences would be rushed, and—— Bones went white at the thought.

If he could only make a diversion in the rear! If he could bring fifty war canoes downstream and attack the tribes unexpectedly from behind, he was well enough acquainted with the native mind to know that they would scatter in panic.

He made his last effort.

"O people of the Bulafa," he said. "I know that you are all terrible cowards, and that your hearts are filled with fear."

There was a murmur of applause from the Bulafa folk. They were grateful that at last their inmost sentiments had been faithfully translated.

"Yet I tell you this," said Bones. "After these men have made an end of Sandi, they will come to you, and they will burn your villages and they will take your wives."

"Lord, that they will do," said N'ko comfortably; "but there are many women in this land, and if Bakuro is cruel to us, we can hide in the forest and come out again and build our houses."

"Also," said Bones, "they will take your crops, as they have taken your dogs."

"Lord," said N'ko, "if they take our crops, will not the earth bring other crops? And it

is better that we should be unhappy for a little while than be dead for all time. As for our beautiful dogs," he said, "they are in a secret place."

A fierce and joyous smile dawned upon Bones's face.

"O N'ko and people of Bulafa," he said softly, "your dogs have gone, for as I came near I heard the Akasava make a great killing."

The chief leapt to his feet, his eyes and his mouth round in astonishment.

"Lord, they are by the river path," he began.

"There I found them," said Bones cheerfully, "and there also the Akasava found them."

"O N'ko, it is true!"

It was a tearful voice on the edge of the group, and Bones recognized the frightened man who was his companion of the previous night.

Brokenly he related the story of the ravaged kraal.

"And this morning, lord, I went back, and there are no dogs, and I went secretly to the river, and I saw many dogs in the canoes of the Isisi folk."

A howl, in which bitter anguish and unquenchable hate mingled, rose from the great assembly. N'ko danced up the little hill to the palaver house, and it was a dance of rage.

"Are we snakes?" he roared. "Are we fish, that Bakuro should do this terrible thing?"

He raised his hand and uttered one shrill yell, which no living man in the Bulafa had heard for thirty years—the war call which is common to the Lower Isisi, the Bulafa, and the Lesser Akasava.

Twenty war canoes swept down the river that day, and came like a tornado upon the unprotected rear of their enemy, and bitter and bloody was the fight they fought.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The Bulafa?" said Sanders incredulously.

He stood, smoke-grimed and weary, by the port gun of the *Zaire*, and the deck was littered with expended shell cases. From the bush on the opposite bank of the river came the shrill cries of a party of the Isisi, who had hastily landed and were now fleeing before certain avengers of dogs.

"Bulafa, sir an' Excellency," said a tatterdemalion Bones, in triumph. "They——"

He stopped suddenly for Patricia Hamilton had made an appearance from Sanders's cabin. She, too, was uncleanly—her face was smudged, her hands were black.

"Hello, Bones!" she said calmly. "I worked the Maxim. . . . They sacrificed a little child . . . and floated it down river . . . I saw it. . . . That was *my* breaking point."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MADNESS OF VALENTINE

MISS VALENTINE DECARRON was one of those people who speak their minds, which practice argues either financial independence, unusual business capacity, or, in a woman, remarkable personal attraction. For only the wealthy, the capable, or the pretty can afford the luxury of saying right out just what they think, and blow the consequence.

Miss Decarron—pronounced Dek-a-run—had the inestimable advantage of being well off in her own right, of being immensely capable, self-sufficient, and beautiful. She had wonderful grey eyes, very large, and shaded with thick curly lashes. She had a milk-and-rose complexion, a somewhat *retroussé* nose, and a perfectly-modelled mouth and chin.

She lived with a maiden aunt, who was in awe, but disapproved of her. The maiden aunt's sister had been Valentine's mother, and when the late Mr. Decarron had also passed from the scene, Miss Pennyworth had transferred her tacit antagonism to the orphan and heiress of John B. Decarron's four hundred thousand dollars, for Mr. Decarron was a veritable American, in spite of his Heathside estate and his Thames bungalow at Bray.

Valentine did not resent the sniffs and shiverings of her aunt, and, strange as it may appear, but little exercised her candour at her relative's expense. She realized, in her decisive way, that maiden aunts, whether they were English or American, had certain definite privileges, not the least of which was the right to sniff at the goings-on of modern youth. It is impossible, within the limits imposed by circumstances, to enumerate all the things of which Miss Pennyworth disapproved, but it may be said that, when Miss Pennyworth was a girl, young ladies did not wear pyjamas, or smoke cigarettes, or ride astride, or punt or use slang, or meet men without a chaperon. From which it may be gathered that Miss Pennyworth's youth was spent in the dullest period of British history.

Valentine Decarron did all the things which produced a crepitus in Miss Pennyworth's nerves. There was a certain war in Europe which was responsible for many changes in the social order. It enriched its thousands and impoverished its millions, and was responsible for many remarkable and interesting innovations, ranging from poison gas to the lonely soldier.

Valentine had some ten lonely ones on her books before the authorities came down with a heavy hand upon the advertisers for reasons not wholly unconnected with enemy agents.

Valentine's list dwindled, but she retained to the end one correspondent—whose tragic lot, whose valiant and hair-raising adventures, whose modesty and whose power of description—albeit his spelling would have disgraced the Third Form—held and fascinated her, for this man gave her pictures of a new world, a world peopled with savage and remorseless cannibal tribes, a world of dark, grim forests, of sunlit rivers, of mystery lands which the foot of all other white men than the writer had never penetrated, a land of terrifying storms, of gorgeous flowers, of vivid birds, and of silent and noble men.

One morning she sat in the pretty drawing-room which overlooked a gay lawn sloping

down to the river, a letter upon her knee. She was dressed for the river, and the disapproving Miss Pennyworth stood outside the open French windows, with downy punt cushions under each arm and her head held at such an angle that even the Recording Angel could not miss the fact that she was no party to the frivolity which Valentine had planned.

That young lady, with pursed lips, and knitted brows, read the letter again.

“Dear old unknown friend,” said the letter, “once again, amidst the turgid emotions following a narrow squeak, squeak, which nearly brought an end to my young life, I take up my pen to send a few lines, a few lines, across the sea! Little you know, dear old miss, what joy I feel in writing to my unknown friend! Little did I think, when I put the advertisement into *The Wildford Chronicle*, nine long months ago, that I should discover, as dear old Shakespeare says, ‘a sympathetic and understanding heart’! Picture me writing this in the midst of the jungle, jungle! As I dip my pen in the ink, tigers come and go; but my trusty rifle is by my side. Elephants, crocodiles, etc., etc., fill the forest. . . .”

She raised her eyes from the letter and looked again toward the river. An electric launch, filled with laughing girls and young officers, passed slowly upstream. She sighed. It somehow seemed almost dreadful that people could laugh and be happy. . . .

“Some day, perhaps, I shall see you, if ever I return alive, which is *extremely doubtful*.” (The latter sentence was heavily underlined.) “But it may be a pleasure for you to know, a great pleasure for you to know, that there is one who thinks of you, and who would delight to honour you, who would build a great house for you, overlooking the sea, and would make you queen of a million loving cannibals, who call me—I am sure I don’t deserve it—‘The Eye-That-Never-Sleeps.’”

Miss Decarron folded the letter and put it in her little bag. She thought a while, then rose with determination.

“I am not going on the river, auntie,” she said; “I am going to London.”

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a custom of Mr. Commissioner Sanders to distribute the mail after breakfast. The mail boat usually arrived, and the Residency post-bag was put ashore, soon after dawn had broken. The bag was then carried to Sanders’s office, and the official tares separated from the private wheat. Because breakfast, and particularly the colonial breakfast, was designed to be a cheery and a sociable meal, Sanders made it a strict rule to postpone the distribution of the correspondence until after breakfast was finished. For when three people say “Excuse me!” in unison, and read letters with one hand, and grope blindly for their cup handles with the other, the fourth of the party, who is not so favoured with private correspondence, is apt to feel a little out of it, unless he takes refuge in long official documents which address him as “Sir,” and begin fulsomely enough with the altogether untrue statement that they “have the honour” to address him at all.

Sanders had few letters from the homeland. He had friends who loved the shy, taciturn man, but he did not encourage them to write. Letter-writing worried him, and, besides, his

friendship was of that kind which did not require a stimulation.

On a morning in October the mail was rather a heavy one. The activities of the enemy were largely responsible for the somewhat irregular arrivals of mails and when Sanders distributed the letters, he found he had more than twice the ordinary number to sort. In fact, three weeks' mails had arrived by this packet.

Breakfast being over, he proceeded to his work. Hamilton had the two letters which usually came to him—one from a friend in France, and one from a mysterious person whom the young captain of Houssas seldom mentioned, but who was occasionally referred to by Patricia Hamilton in such general terms as “Is Vera well?” or “Is Vera still in Scotland?” Sanders never asked any questions, and Hamilton never advanced explanations. Only Bones, who made a practice of dashing madly along all the paths which the angels had marked *verboten*, would occasionally offer a bland inquiry after “jolly old Vera,” an inquiry which was met by a stony and solemn stare which would have disconcerted ninety-nine men out of a hundred and reduced them to a pulp. Bones was the hundredth, and would shrug his shoulders, raise his eyebrows, and address himself to his own correspondence, or what was worse, would offer an apology in a set little speech.

Patricia's share of the letters was a heavy one, but Bones invariably monopolized fifty per cent. of all the mail matter which arrived. There were books and pamphlets and circulars on “How to improve your memory,” and “How I make fifteen hundred dollars a year on a five-dollar outlay”—Bones was an assiduous reader of the advertisement pages of magazines—and generous offers of encyclopedias, which are yours for the prepayment of a ridiculously inadequate sum, and thereafter of regular instalments for the rest of your natural life. In addition to these, there were the dozen letters which he never read in public, but which he put into his breast pocket and carried away with him to the secret places of his hut.

It was estimated that Bones spent not less than half his military income upon postage stamps and courses of training. They had an irresistible attraction for him, and either the prospectuses or the courses themselves arrived with every mail. He had learnt law in twelve lessons. He had become an aviator by correspondence, and an electrical engineer in twenty-four lessons. There were very few courses which Bones could not master, and about his hut were the framed certificates of innumerable correspondence colleges, testifying alike to his versatility and his unconquerable optimism. He made two little heaps on the table, the one of his private letters, the other of prospectuses and text-books, and Hamilton, who noted out of the tail of his eye a certain familiar mauve envelope, launched an innocent inquiry.

“Everybody at home all right, Bones?”

“Thank you, dear old officer,” said Bones cheerfully, “everybody is in the pink.”

“And in the mauve?” demanded Hamilton archly.

Bones blushed, picked up the letter, and hurriedly placed it in his uniform pocket.

“Between gentlemen, sir,” he said a little stiffly, “such inquiries are rather unusual. Far be it from me, dear old sir, to reprove you or to suggest that your jolly old manners——”

“Don't be peevish, Bones,” said Hamilton, possibly with the memory of certain references to the mysterious Vera, “and don't be a humbug. He has half a dozen letters a week”—he turned to his sister—“each from a different girl. It is my opinion that young

Lothario Bones is getting more than his share.”

Bones giggled, became instantly self-conscious, and smirked from the girl to Sanders.

“Who is she, Bones?” asked Patricia. “I also have seen those mauve envelopes.”

Bones cleared his throat.

“The fact is, dear old Miss Hamilton,” he said, “I have a sort of aunt.”

“Now, Bones,” warned Pat, raising her finger, “you know that isn’t true. You’ve told me about *everybody*, your mother, your auntie—the one with the funny voice—I know all the girls you write to—Grace Middock, Ethel Baymore”—she ticked them off on her fingers—“Queenie, Mildred, Agnes, that Stallington girl——”

“Ida,” suggested Bones complacently.

“Ida, Gwennie, Madge, Irene—that’s the lot, isn’t it?”

“Billie Caslon, Mary March, Madge Broadward, and Cissie Fairfax,” said Bones rapidly, “Gertie Boyd, Phyllis Martinbourne——”

“Phew!” said Hamilton, rising, and for the first time in his life he regarded Bones with admiration and respect.

“Anyway, I don’t know Miss Mauve,” said Patricia.

“Ah, well,” said Bones, gulping down his coffee, “live an’ learn, dear old miss.”

Bones did not immediately open his letter. It pleased him to carry it about with him until he attained to a fitting condition of mind.

That afternoon he secured the necessary atmosphere. He sat in a deep cane chair on the shady side of his hut. He held in his hand, the fierceness of his grip testifying to the art of the writer, a pleasant volume entitled “Saul Sure of the Secret Service.”

Bones was blessed with an imagination of a peculiarly luxuriant type.

Ever and anon he would lower the book to his lap and, squinting across the crater of the huge pipe which he affected in moments of intensive brain culture, would riot in a visionary world, where mysterious men met in unlikely places, and slipped into one another’s hands documents which caused or averted terrible wars. Sometimes they wore masks, and occasionally they were the butler who stood behind the chair of the foreign spy, and saying “Hock or Burgundy, sir?” leant over and snapped bright steel handcuffs on the miscreant’s wrists.

Across the straggling smoke—he had never mastered the art of lighting his pipe so that it “drew evenly”—he conjured to his vision midnight meetings in churchyards, distressed damsels falsely accused, who in the end owed their lives to the handsome young Secret Service man—for Bones was never a common detective.

Now and again Bones would put down his book and extract Romance from his pocket—Romance written in a sprawling hand on mauve paper faintly scented with roses.

There was this point in common between Valentine Decarron and Lieutenant Augustus Tibbetts—that both wrote a vile hand, and were superior to certain rules of orthography, a fact which had caused Bones considerable misgiving.

There were horrid moments of doubt and of self-reproach—moments when he “took his pen in his hand” to break off this queer friendship. And yet there was a certain clean charm about the correspondence, a freshness of view which went beyond the independence implied in the original spelling, that attracted him, even as the dogmatism in

the letters irritated him.

He laid his book down for the twentieth time and took out the letter.

“Sweet little child of Nature!” he murmured, as he opened it. It was dated six weeks before.

“Dear Friend (it ran),

“I simply can’t bear to think of you—too vivid—too depressing—alone under the stars, exposed to the elements and all that sort of thing. So I’m just going to give you a surprise——”

Bones smiled.

“Aunty thinks I’m mad, but I’ve always wanted to do it, and I’m just going to!!!!”

“Impulsive child!” murmured Bones indulgently, as he turned the page.

“By the time you receive this I shall be on my way out to you——”

Bones stopped smiling.

“I am writing this to catch the fast mail. I am leaving Tilbury to-morrow.”

A tiny bird, brilliantly blue, alighted almost at Bones’s feet and dropped his head first one side and then the other, eyeing Bones with some uncertainty, as if he mightn’t be a worm, after all.

“‘I am leaving Tilbury to-morrow,’ ” read Bones slowly.

“Tch Witt! Chee!” piped the little bird.

“Yes, sing, you little blighter!” said Bones bitterly. “There’s a fat lot to sing about!”

He read the letter again, then rose unsteadily.

“Hello, Bones—ill?”

Hamilton came down the steps of the verandah to meet his subordinate, and his tone betrayed concern.

Bones shook his head, staggered to a seat and collapsed into it, an inert heap.

They gave him a cup of tea.

“I hope it isn’t bad news?”

Bones nodded his head.

“Nobody—ill?”

Bones shook his head.

“Out with it, Bones!” demanded Hamilton sternly. “Chuck it off you!”

Bones swallowed, waggled his head, looked pathetically from Sanders to Patricia, from Patricia to her brother, clasped his brow, and groaned.

“Dear ol’ friends,” he began, “in this jolly old world a feller does perfectly disgraceful, naughty things without thinkin’ what a low-down rascally wicked old officer he is. Everybody does ’em—Ham’s done ’em——”

"If it makes your confession any easier to bring false accusations against me, go ahead," said Hamilton. "Now, what is it, Bones? Own up!"

"Of course, it was conduct unbecomin' to an officer and a gentleman," continued Bones incoherently. "I suppose I ought to resign my commission, on the threshold of my career"—he gulped—"but, dear old Ham, not the slightest intention of playin' fast an' loose with the tender affections of the workin' classes——"

"A breach of promise!" yelled Hamilton. "Oh, Bones, you gay dog!"

Bones raised a feeble hand in protest.

"No, sir, no, sir—lonely officer."

Hamilton stared.

"No harm meant, dear old sir," Bones went on rapidly. "Did it for a lark."

"Do you mean to tell me, Bones," said Patricia, in shocked tones, "that you inserted an advertisement in a newspaper, describing yourself as a lonely officer and asking nice girls to write to you?"

Bones hung his head.

Pat smiled.

"Well, it isn't so very dreadful, after all—unless you made love to them."

The young man handed the letter to the girl.

"Read it," he quavered; "there's nothing private in it."

Patricia Hamilton read and gasped.

"She's coming out to you—here!"

Only Hamilton retained his presence of mind when the bombshell burst.

He called the house orderly, though he knew that the visitor could not arrive until the next day.

"O Abiboo," he said, "lay another plate on the table and put another chair."

\* \* \* \* \*

There was a family conference held after lunch.

"It's a very nice address," said the girl; "I know Riverwood House."

"She's probably a lady's-maid!" groaned the young man. "Oh, lor, oh, lor!"

"What makes you think that?" demanded Hamilton.

"Look at the writin', dear old sir, look at the spellin'—she spells 'simply' without an 'e'."

"That, I admit, is eccentric," nodded Hamilton, unmoved, "but, after all, spelling isn't everything, Bones. The question is—what are we going to do with her?"

Sanders—who knows what chuckling joy was hidden behind the set mask of concern?—had been a silent listener, and now, when with one accord all faces were turned to him for a solution, he spoke.

"Obviously she must not find Bones living in the lap of luxury. We can't disillusion the poor girl so rudely. Bones will leave to-night for the Lower Isisi. There the conditions fulfil all requirements. If we cannot get rid of the lady by persuasion, we can send her

along to find him.”

“It seems fair,” said Bones, brightening up. “Shall I take the *Zaire* or the *Wiggle*, sir?”

“You will go by canoe,” said Sanders. “You will have four paddlers, and will take a rifle, ammunition, some canned beef, and a waterproof sheet. The rainy season has already started, and I have a feeling that, if the lady does insist upon going up country, she will find you in a condition which justifies her worst fears.”

“Good lor’, sir, can’t I take a tent?”

“ ‘Alone under the stars, exposed to the elements and all that sort of thing,’ ” quoted Hamilton.

It was a very sad young man who paddled away at dawn next morning. A thin drizzle of rain was falling, the dawn wind blew in chilly, thoughtful gusts, as though the directing force were waiting for favourable opportunities when rubber coats gaped at the neck. The river was choppy, and Bones managed to get one boat full of water before he eventually stepped into the canoe. It was the oldest dug-out on the station, and Hamilton, who had chosen the paddlers with great care, had selected representatives below the average of decrepitude.

Even the luxury of his servant and bodyguard, the English-speaking Ali, was denied him, and that stout man sat shivering on the quay, wrapped in an Army blanket and his native profundity.

“Good luck, Bones,” said Hamilton at parting. “Shoot a brace of tigers for me—I’m making a collection.”

Bones had not the spirit to frame an adequate reply.

At four o’clock that afternoon the supplementary mail stood in from the sea and hoisted the signal “Send surf-boat.”

Sanders, Hamilton, and Patricia waited on the beach for the visitor.

“I do hope she isn’t too awful,” said the girl. “I expect a pert little Cockney, wearing one of Bones’s uniform buttons made into a hatpin.”

“I don’t think you need worry,” smiled Sanders; “a lady’s-maid isn’t so well off that she can indulge in an expensive whim of this character. It is more likely that she is a determined spinster of uncertain age, with a parrot and a Persian cat that has taken prizes at all the local shows.”

“That’s curious,” mused Hamilton. “I think you will find she is rather a stout widow, with a cameo brooch containing a photograph of the late lamented.”

The surf boat came dancing landward, switching over the glassy rollers, and finally beached in a white froth of tumbling water. One of the rowers lifted out a girl and deposited her upon the sands—a trim, neat figure of a girl in white.

“Bones’s luck!” murmured Hamilton. “She’s as pretty as a picture!”

“And a lady, I think,” said Patricia.

Sanders had walked down to meet the girl. She met him with a little nod and a quick smile.

“You’re Mr. Commissioner Sanders, aren’t you?” she asked.

“That is my name.” He took the proffered hand.

"I'm Miss Decarron," she said. "You have probably heard of my coming."

Sanders introduced his party, and the two girls having discovered one another in an exchange of glances, they moved up the beach to the Residency.

"I'm afraid you think I'm awfully unconventional," said Valentine, and stopped to laugh. "Forgive me—I'm thinking of my aunt! I've been doing things I wanted to do for so long, and I didn't quite realize how terribly shocking my behaviour was until I was at sea. Mr. Tibbetts is not here, of course?"

She seemed to take it for granted that they knew all about her, and equally that Bones would not be finding a resting-place in such pleasant surroundings.

"Oh, no," said Hamilton; "Bones is up country."

"Bones?"

"We call him Bones," explained Hamilton quickly, "because—er—its—er—short for Tibbetts."

She looked round at the neat Residency gardens, the big white house with its cool, purple, shadowed stoep.

"No, he wouldn't be here," she said again.

She was a very pretty girl—Hamilton forgave the implied reproach for that. She had a bubbling sense of humour—Patricia forgave her more readily for that. As for Sanders, very little offended him, and he was fond of clean-looking white people who looked him straight in the eye and spoke their thoughts.

"You see," she explained at tiffin, "I felt it was a great adventure—dropping from the blue upon some one I had been in correspondence with—a lonely officer on the outposts of things. I felt I was doing my bit."

"Exactly," said Sanders. "It's a thousand pities you've missed him. I suppose you will go on by the next steamer?"

She looked at him.

"If I see Mr. Tibbetts before the next steamer sails, I may go on," she said, "but—Oh, I forgot!"

She opened the little *moire* bag she carried, and produced a long blue envelope which she had folded into four. An official envelope which has been folded and rolled and creased, to reduce its dimensions to the capacity of a lady's bag, is an unimposing exhibit. It was addressed to Sanders, and the Commissioner extracted a single sheet of white paper which commended Miss Valentine Decarron to the care and guidance of Mr. Commissioner Sanders, C.M.G.

"What would you like to do?" asked the Commissioner.

"I want to go up country to visit Mr. Bones—Tibbetts," she corrected, "because— Do you mind if I am frank?"

"Go ahead," encouraged Sanders.

"You don't see things as we see them, Mr. Sanders—you are too near and too intimate with the conditions. You don't realize what a difference there is between even this life, where you have comfortable surroundings, and the life a lonely man lives in the—the—"

"Forest?" suggested the Commissioner.

“Think of it—you *must* know what it is—in all sorts of peril by day and night, surrounded by savage tribes and wild beasts, eating your heart out for want of companionship! I suppose he comes down here sometimes?”

“Sometimes,” said Sanders gravely.

“How the poor fellow *must* revel in the change!” she said, with tears in her eyes. “I want to bring a little joy into his life. I know it’s awfully impertinent of me to tell you all this, but I’m not censoring anybody—I realize that officers must do this work. I am only justifying myself and my rudeness.”

Sanders patted her hand. (Patricia Hamilton at this point looked through the window without any expression whatever.)

“My dear young lady,” he said, “a kind heart carries its own justification. To-morrow we’ll go in search of Bones and rescue him from his deadly peril.”

“You’re laughing at me!” pouted the girl.

“Only nicely so,” said Sanders.

“We shall overtake Bones on the river,” he explained later, when the girl had gone to her room. “He ought to be looking unkempt enough by now even to fulfil her worst expectations.”

“Bones is rather a nuisance,” said Patricia Hamilton coldly. “She’s much too nice a girl to be fooled. Don’t you think she’s very pretty?”

Sanders’s unaffected surprise was very cheering.

“Pretty? I suppose she is,” he agreed; “she’s quite a pleasant young lady.”

“But isn’t she pretty?” insisted Pat.

“Yes, I should say she is; but I have a standard—Heaven knows how I found it!” he smiled. “I like a girl to be tall and fair, I like eyes that are a darker grey, and that smile readily, and——”

“I’m afraid you’re exacting, Mr. Sanders,” she laughed.

“Is this room hot?” asked Sanders, when she had swept out. “I thought your sister was looking rather flushed.”

“‘Blushed’ is the word, sir,” said Hamilton dryly. “You see, you described her rather faithfully.”

It was, for Hamilton, a day of gasps, but also a day of preparation, for the trip up river was to be in the nature of a picnic. There were fowls to be roasted, blancmanges to be made and cooled, savoury dishes to be prepared. Never had the *Zaire* slipped from her mooring-ropes and faced the river currents with so gay a party on board. She left an hour after sunrise, and she tied up at dusk.

News of Bones was scanty. They had found his camping-place of the previous night, but by the time they had reached this spot, the day was well advanced, for the heavy rains up country had swollen the river, and the little *Zaire*, breasting the mid-current, went very little faster than Bones’s canoe had gone through the slack water under the river’s banks.

So that the dinner-party was rather subdued, although one at least of that party had never expected to reach her objective on the first day, and was content with the fascinating novelty of her surroundings.

She shared the best cabin with Patricia Hamilton, and it had been arranged that the

girls should not be called until after a start had been made in the morning. Patricia woke expecting to hear the thrash of the paddle-wheel, but there was no sound save an occasional footfall on the deck outside. She looked at her watch; it was eight o'clock. She rose from the settee and dressed quickly, and the girl who occupied the bed turned.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked.

"I don't think so. Perhaps they haven't been able to get up steam. You see, the fuel is all wood, and sometimes they have a difficulty to get the right amount of heat. I will come back and tell you."

She found her brother and Sanders in earnest conversation with a native, and by the seriousness of their faces she guessed that something out of the ordinary had happened.

"It's the quaintest development," said Hamilton. "Come here."

He led her to the side of the ship and pointed across the water. The big river is a mile broad at this point. Usually the banks are fringed with tall grass and behind this is a jungle of undergrowth and bush which hides whatever features the country holds. But here the grass had disappeared, and the brown earth was clearly visible, and one looked across a park-like plain to a belt of distant trees.

"Take my glasses," said Hamilton, "and look just to the left of that big clump of gum trees. Can you see anything?"

"I can see some things moving," she said.

"How many?" asked Hamilton.

"About a dozen," said Patricia. "What are they?"

"Look closely," warned Hamilton; "you will see, not a dozen, but two or three hundred."

"Why," said the girl excitedly, "they are elephants! I have never seen them before. Are you going to shoot them?"

"It would be very difficult and very dangerous to get up to them," he said; "the ground looks smooth, but it is broken, and we are to windward. Now look far away to the left—you will see one tall tree."

"I see it," she said. "There is a big bird or something on one of the top branches."

"That is Bones," said Hamilton grimly. "So far as we can make out, the elephants have been raiding a village and trampling down the gardens, so that, when Bones arrived providentially on the scene, the villagers hailed him, and Bones went ashore with one express rifle and no carriers worthy of the name, and took on the herd. From what we learn they chased him for about five miles, until he found a tree they couldn't uproot."

"Why didn't he go into the forest?" asked the girl. "Couldn't he have got away? These forests are dreadfully thick."

"The forests," said Hamilton cheerfully, "are filled with little fellows about so high, whom we have never quite tamed. They use a blowpipe and a poisoned dart. They are not true pygmies, but they are true enough for Bones's purpose."

"Poor Bones!" said the girl sympathetically. "He is having a rough time, after all."

"You had better get some breakfast, and wake Miss Decarron," said Hamilton; "we shall clear for action in ten minutes."

Valentine came on deck and heard the story, which was told in a manner very

creditable to Bones, and left her with the impression that he had chased the herd, and gone up the tree to observe their retreat, and that whilst in that unhappy position he was surprised by large reinforcements.

She went very white. "How dreadful!" she said. "Can't you send somebody to shoot them?"

"I think the elephants would send them back," said Sanders gently. "You see, these are not tame elephants. There is only one thing to do, and that is to shell 'em, and give Bones a chance of getting away."

For the next quarter of an hour Miss Valentine Decarron witnessed a curious combat (she in her mind had already decided that this was an everyday incident in bush life). The guns crashed incessantly, the deck was a litter of empty shell cases, and the plain above the herd was white with puffs of bursting shrapnel.

"They are moving," said Hamilton, whose eyes were glued to his glasses; "they are going off to the right." He turned his prismatics upon the tree. "Bones is down. If they don't wind him, and we can keep their young minds occupied, we can get him away. Carry on, Ahmet!"

The guns pounded furiously. The grey mass of the big brutes moved very deliberately to the north, but there was no sign of Bones. Then suddenly the orderly moving herd broke.

"They have smelt him," said Hamilton. "Shorten your range, Ahmet!"

More furious became the fire of the little Hotchkiss gun; but though shrapnel was now bursting between them and their prey, a group of a dozen bulls were trotting furiously across the ground, their trunks swaying, their trumpets of rage sounding above the din of the guns. Nearer and nearer they came.

"He is coming along the little river bed," said Hamilton. "There he is!"

The foremost elephant, fifty yards ahead of his fellows, was gaining upon the flying figure. It seemed that Bones and the elephant reached the edge of the bank together. Then Bones leapt, and the swinging trunk of the big beast missed him by inches. Straight into the river he dived.

"Get away that canoe!" yelled Sanders, and paddlers tumbled into the dug-out, which was roped by the side of the *Zaire*.

"All right now!" said Hamilton soothingly.

"What is that?" asked the frightened girl by his side.

"Oh, that," said Hamilton, with a smile, "is just the current, the——"

By his side was a stand of rifles. He snatched up one and ramm'd home a cartridge, brought it to his shoulder and fired, for abreast of Bones was a unmistakable ripple of water.

"A croc!" shouted Hamilton.

The canoe was now in midstream, the paddlers working furiously.

The girl saw the bulging forehead of the crocodile as it came up—and hid her face on Patricia's breast.

"Got him!" said Sanders.

An explosive bullet hit the head of the great reptile, exploded with a blue flash, and he

sank with a mighty churning of waters.

A minute later Bones was hauled on board. He had lost a boot, one of the legs of his trousers had been torn off to the knee. He had thrown away his coat, and his shirt was in tatters and black with mud. A lank lock of hair reached halfway down his nose, and Valentine Decarron eyed him with awe and wonder.

“This,” introduced Hamilton gravely, “is your lonely officer, Mr. Tibbetts.”

She put out her hand and took his damp paw.

“I am so glad,” she breathed.

“Glad to meet you,” said Bones cheerily—it took a lot to upset Bones. “Hope you weren’t alarmed. Little things like this are all part of the jolly old day’s work.”

“Every day?” she asked, open-mouthed in surprise.

“Every day except Saturday,” said Bones.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE LEGENDEER

“BONES,” said Captain Hamilton, shaking his head, “has a stunt.”

Patricia Hamilton, swinging in a hammock which had been hung for her under the deep verandah of the Residency, laughed and flicked away a large and inquiring elephant fly with her whisk.

It was an approving laugh, and her dancing eyes traversed the limited range of her vision in search of the object of her brother's doubt.

Lieutenant Tibbetts was not in sight, for this was mail day, and he had a voluminous correspondence. Therefore did he sit in the hot atmosphere of his hut, his solemn orderly squatting at his feet, fulfilling at once the function of waste-paper basket and chief approver.

“Bones has always had a stunt,” said the girl lightly. “Stunts are the breath of his nostrils; they are his stimulants and his opiates, his children and his family. What is *the* stunt?”

But Hamilton shook his head again.

“Anything wrong with Bones?”

Mr. Commissioner Sanders, a spotless white figure from the mushroomed crown of his solar topee to the tip of his white buckskin shoes, stepped from the cool of the darkened dining-room to the stoep.

“He has a stunt, sir,” explained Hamilton. “Whenever I've been to his hut lately, I have found him writing furiously. As soon as I arrive, he turns his papers over—in a way that I can only describe as infernally uncivil—and blandly ignores any hinted request for information.”

“Perhaps he's writing a book,” suggested the girl.

“Of course he's writing a book,” said her brother; “but what kind of a book?”

Sanders smiled as he dropped into a deep cane chair.

“What does it matter?” he asked lazily. “It will certainly share the fate of ‘Who's Who on the Coast,’ ‘Savage Tribes I Have Conquered,’ ‘Alone in Cannibal Africa,’ to name a few of his great works. So far as I can understand, Bones exhausts his subject in ten pages, and then starts on another tack.”

“Ask him,” suggested the girl, and nodded toward the barrack square.

Bones was skipping across the clearing, a large portfolio under one arm, a smaller splash of black in the region of his left breast. For Bones was arrayed in snowy duck, and had very carefully placed his fountain pen in the pocket of his uniform in defiance of those printed instructions which accompany even the most well-behaved of stylographs, and which enjoin upon their users that (a) the vulcanite cover must be firmly fixed over the pen; (b) the pen must on no account be carried nib downward.

But his heart was light and his spirit was eager. He was altogether satisfied with himself and the world, but mostly with himself. For had not there arrived by the mail a

publisher's letter saying, that "We" were very pleased indeed with the two opening chapters of a certain work, and "We" would be equally pleased to publish the said book on terms discoverable in the enclosed rough draft of agreement, the said rough draft being a somewhat incomprehensible document which referred to Bones impressively as "hereinafter-called-The-Author-on-the-one-part"?

It is true there was a fly in the ointment, for the manuscript which Bones had believed to be sufficient to make a large and serious tome contained little more than material for forty printed pages.

Fortunately, Bones had already started work on a companion volume, and this new matter could be added to the chapters already sent forward. If the unguent held yet another insect, it was that Bones found his subject was running uncommonly thin. He had been compelled, for example, to tell one story twice, and, further, had been reduced to the expedient of quoting extensively from the work on a similar subject, of a rival author.

But that morning Bones had had an inspiration—a veritable illuminating flash of genius. Therefore was he happy.

After all, the great river was very far from the ken of book reviewers, and the land and its people were little known.

"You're very pleased with yourself, Bones?" said Hamilton suspiciously.

"Dear old officer," said the bland Bones, "I've a jolly good reason. If I may be allowed to offer a few unworthy remarks to the honourable captain——"

"You've been reading a Japanese book," accused Hamilton, and Bones inclined his head.

"Always pickin' up facts. I've got a positive passion for them, dear old fellow, whether they're solid, sober, simple, sane——"

"Or stolen," suggested Hamilton, as Bones paused in his alliterative flight.

"Facts have always been a perfect passion with me, dear old skipper," continued Bones, resting in a graceful attitude against the verandah. "I remember when I was a boy \_\_\_\_\_"

"If you are going to give us the story of your miserable life," said Hamilton, "I'm going. By the way, Bones, what is the great work?"

Bones screwed up his mouth and eyes into a simulation of innocence.

"Work, dear old sir?" he asked.

"What are you writing?"

"Aha!" said Bones waggishly.

"Oh come, don't be mysterious, Bones," pleaded the girl; "we are all dying to know."

Bones shrugged his shoulders and spread out his large hands.

"Dear old miss," he said graciously, "I can deny you nothing. Tell me to jump in the beastly river, ask me to climb to the topmost branches of yon tree, I'd do it like a shot."

"Get on with it," said Hamilton wearily.

"I am writing a book," began Bones, "about some of the funny things you see and hear on the river."

"Oh, that!" interrupted the disappointed Hamilton. "I didn't know it was going to be

an autobiography.”

Bones bowed to the girl and saluted his officer.

“Insultin’ and ungracious to the last, sir and superior,” he said, shaking his head in reproach, “freezin’ up the taps and faucets of brotherly love and kindness, chillin’ the eager young heart which, in its jolly old confidence, was pourin’ forth its secrets, wet-blanketin’ the enthusiasm of the young and strugglin’ artist—I have no more to say, sir. In due course you shall hear from my publishers.”

He saluted again and strode past into the interior of the bungalow.

For the remainder of the afternoon he refused to be more than icily polite to his senior officer, but toward the evening he unbent, and Hamilton noted with curiosity that Bones set himself to work to draw out the Commissioner.

Now, Sanders was a very difficult man to “draw,” for although he had volumes of strange experiences behind him, he never spoke of his accomplishments, and very seldom passed on the wisdom he had garnered in his adventurous career. Ordinarily, this reticence of his was respected, but to-night, for some reason or other, Bones plied him with question upon question. Was it true that the natives of the Upper River never ate salt save with the left hand? What was the real story of the N’gombi and the tiger-cat, and why was that animal never hunted or slain? Particularly was he anxious to know something of the legends which had grown around the superstitious Akasava.

“Now, what the dickens are you trying to get at?” asked Sanders, after an hour’s interrogation. “You are not so frightfully keen on this sort of information as a rule, Bones.”

“It’s his book,” said Hamilton suddenly. “By Jove, Bones, I have found you out!”

Bones blushed, choked a little, and finally with a giggle of embarrassment, confessed.

“The fact is, dear old Excellency,” he said, “although I have a very wide and, I might say, unique knowledge of the jolly customs and habits of the flora and fauna, I recognize, and I don’t mind owning,” he admitted handsomely, “that there are lots of dinky little stories which I have missed, and which you, sir, Excellency and almost father, have picked up.”

“And so you set forth to pump the Commissioner, you low and miserable subaltern!” said Hamilton, sternly.

“I am a historian, dear old peevish one,” said Bones, with a lofty wave of his hand.

“You are a robber,” said Hamilton.

“You are a gentleman,” said Bones, with extravagant politeness.

In truth, Bones had tried to do the right thing. He had even suppressed his great idea in his effort to sustain the character of historian in its purest aspect.

Two days later, when he departed for the Akasava on a hut-tax collection, he washed his hands of all responsibility for consequences, placing upon the broad shoulders of Hamilton, very unjustly, the full weight and burden of the criminal design which he had made and elaborated. He was absent for three weeks, and returned more cheerful, more elated than ever, and Hamilton reported that he had brought back a portfolio positively swollen with data.

This Sanders remembered to Bones’s discredit when, a few weeks later, complaints

began trickling down the river to headquarters of certain inequalities of treatment which the tax collector had shown. For some villages had, in Bones's absent-minded way, been altogether overlooked.

It fortunately happened that Sanders was called north to a palaver of a peculiar nature, so the negligence of Lieutenant Tibbetts could easily be corrected *en route*.

Yet it was not the knowledge of his omissions nor the memory of Hamilton's sarcasm which so troubled Bones as he stood on the quay and watched the *Zaire* thrashing against the current to the interior.

\* \* \* \* \*

The storm which came down from the mountains of the Old King's country was of not unusual vehemence. The brick-red clouds, so low that they seemed to brush the tree-tops, twirled and revolved in a thousand eddies, the lightning flickered and snapped blue, and the crack and crash of the thunder were deafening.

Mr. Commissioner Sanders, standing on the forebridge of the *Zaire*, had watched the storm approaching, and had made his preparations. The little ship was made fast bow and stern to the "wooding" beach, and the steel cables which tethered her were, as a precautionary measure, duplicated. All awning cloths had been hastily dismantled and stowed, deck chairs had been stacked away in empty cabins, the two Hotchkiss guns had been jacketed in waterproof, and the munition lockers fastened and sheeted.

Presently would come M'shimba-m'shamba that mighty devil wind, bringing a deluge of rain that would bear resemblance to nothing so much as a slightly diffused Niagara.

Sanders passed down the companion ladder to the steel deck, and picked his way through a hundred squatting natives to the engine-"room"—an open space protected from the elements by a canvas screen. He looked at the steam-gauge and nodded approvingly.

"O Yoka," he said, speaking in Bomongo, "presently comes my lord M'shimba-m'shamba, and I think he will blow very fiercely. Therefore you shall keep steam so that you may ease the strain upon our ropes-of-iron."

"Lord," replied Yoka, with a troubled face, "I have it in my stomach that the storm which comes is the very end of the world."

Sanders favoured the engineer with a speculative stare, for this trembling man was not the Yoka of old. His head was drooped, his shoulders were hunched, and across those broad, muscular shoulders ran little involuntary shivers.

Now, it is not natural for a native man to show any apprehension at natural phenomena. The story of the explorer who deluded the simple native by utilizing an eclipse of the moon to illustrate his own powers is, of course, apocryphal, because hundreds of generations of natives have seen eclipses of the moon, and have their own explanation for these happenings.

As for storms, which are of frequent occurrence in the months of rain, no native is greatly perturbed beyond the fact that they unmistakably demonstrate the existence of M'shimba-m'shamba. And Yoka had weathered many such a storm as was now gathering, and had expressed neither concern nor interest at its approach.

Sanders did not ask any questions, but returned to the upper deck, and, after a final

look round, retreated to his cabin and pulled the sliding door fast. Through the thick windows he watched the centre of the storm approach. He saw the great trees bend over till they reached cracking-point. He saw the river lashed into white, tumbling, frothy waves, he saw a great bird swept helplessly before the wind, and went back in his mind to find a storm of parallel fury. He could recall half a dozen. There was the storm of '12, which had capsized the mission steamer, the storm of the year of famine, which had caught the *Zaire* unprepared, and had snapped her one steel cable as though it had been pack-thread, and he had searched around for some cause which would explain the strange terror, not only of Yoka, but—as he had seen out of the corner of his eye—of all his staff. The rain had come with its full fury, lashing madly against the windows of the cabin, striking from every point of the compass so thickly that the world outside was a blur, and the glass ceased to be transparent.

The shriek of the wind was fearful and terrifying, the *Zaire* swayed and rocked, jumped and shivered, the heavens grew dark, and intensified the brilliancy of the lightning. The little ship was fenced by irregular palings of flickering light. He saw dimly a great tree that stood on the edge of the water flare blue and collapse; but he had seen these things before, and was less interested in the storm than the curious effect it had produced on one upon whose steady nerves his life had so often depended. For Yoka was not only engineer, but was a steersman who despised all charts, and had a thousand times piloted the *Zaire* by sheer instinct through the danger channels of the river.

The lightnings passed, the winds ceased to buffet and thump at the door, and the rains became a steady downpour, falling vertically. Sanders pulled open the door and stepped out. He was attired from neck to heel in a rubber coat, and wore a sou'-wester over his head.

The mooring-rope had stood the strain, and the storm had passed the *Zaire* without inflicting the slightest damage. The Commissioner looked down river, and had no difficulty in identifying the storm centre, for it had cut a path through the forest some hundred feet in width. Tumbled and uprooted trees marked the wake of M'shimba-m'shamba. He stepped down to the lower deck, to find Yoka, a pitiful figure, shaking as though he were in the grip of a fever.

"O Yoka," he said gently, "this storm has passed and the world is. Now, you shall tell me why you spoke like a little old woman, or I shall find for myself a new driver of engines."

Yoka lifted his face from his hands, rose unsteadily to his feet, and faced his master.

"Lord," he said, and his voice was shaky, "it is said that when M'shimba-m'shamba comes nine days after the full of the moon, that day is the end of the world."

"Who said this thing?" asked Sanders curiously, for no man had a more extensive knowledge of native lore than he, and this theory was new to him.

The man hesitated.

"Lord," he said, "this is a great saying that all men know, even Tibbetti, who is very wise in the ways of the river people."

Sanders was puzzled and a little piqued. The native folks, their lore, their fables, and their mythologies, had been almost a life-study of his. He thought he knew M'shimba-m'shamba and most of the legends that were attached to that awful god. He knew, for

example, that M'shimba-m'shamba never killed a black goat, and that he had a strange respect for bats; he also knew that the god was left-handed, and in consequence always moved from right to left, and that he spared villages that had no dwelling-hut nearer than fifty paces from the river's edge. He knew, too, that M'shimba-m'shamba invariably spared those who kept their hands under their arm-pits, but any legend which associated the dissolution of the world with the juxtaposition of a new moon and the passing of the wind god was in the nature of information.

He dismissed the curious incident from his thoughts, and gave his undivided attention to the continuance of the journey. He was due that night at Busulu, and since Busulu was twenty miles up river, and he had only four hours of daylight to negotiate that distance—the river by this time was running seven knots—Sanders could not afford to wait for the rain to stop.

He took his stand by Yoka's assistant at the wheel, a dozen men tumbled ashore, loosened the mooring-ropes, and splashed back to the deck of the steamer as Sanders rang the engines "Ahead." Later came Yoka to relieve his assistant, a calmer and much ashamed man, whose very silence was proof of his contrition.

At a place where three islands divide the channel of the river, and at the furthest end of a little gulf, which, for some unaccountable reason—due probably to the action of the currents—ran inland for a quarter of a mile, was the village of Busulu, which was unlike most villages in that it stood on one of the slopes of one of those infrequent hills which are met in the river country.

Busulu was a model community of the Akasava. It was also a rich community, for somewhere in the hill was a rich but small deposit of iron, and the Akasava shared with the N'gombi the distinction of being great workers in that metal.

The *Zaire* swung in to the little beach, and Sanders landed immediately, for, had he not known that the palaver was an urgent one, the presence of the village chief and the headmen of the neighbouring villages, no less than the silent crowd that were gathered behind the elders, would have marked the importance of the occasion.

He took grain and salt from the outstretched hands of Katu, the chief, and walked straight to the palaver seat beneath the wide-spreading branches of an ancient tree. The crowd followed slowly, and slipped without fuss or confusion into their places according to their ranks, and before the chief had begun his inevitable speech the whole village was squatting in a semicircle about the seat of justice.

"Lord," said Katu, "we are simple men, and, because this thing is too great for us, we have sent for you, knowing of your wisdom. For you make paths in the jungle of foolish minds, and burn up the huts which hide mysteries. Now, it is known all up and down this river that a man with five daughters and no sons between them is a great witch. And when he puts his eye upon his neighbour's crops, those crops wither, and when he looks at chickens, they lay no eggs, and pigs get the sickness; and thus he remains a witch and a spreader of evil until he dies, or until his five daughters by the same mother become the slaves of one man, from the moon's coming to the moon's going, and him they must serve, cooking his dinner and weeding his garden for all this time, and if the man does not look on them with eyes of love for that space, nor does not take them or any of them as his wife, then the spell is removed."

Sanders listened, all his faculties tense and receptive. For the second time that day he had heard of a native custom of which he was ignorant. It could hardly be a coincidence, and yet——

“This is strange news to me, Katu,” he said quietly, “for, though I have been many years living amongst you, I have never heard of such a bewitchment. Now you shall tell me the rest of this story.”

“Lord,” said Katu, after a pause, “we have found amongst our people one who is a fisherman and lives by the pool of White Ghost. This man has five daughters by one wife, and no sons between them. Now, this is very strange, and its like I have never heard before, not from one end of the river to the other, and I am an old man. And my people have taken this Fubeli, and my young men would put him to death, and I have no authority over them, for I am a little chief, but, because I sent for you, they have held their hands.”

“I will see this Fubeli,” said Sanders. And they brought before him a man whose wrists were tied together with papyrus—a dejected, bewildered man, who rolled his head helplessly and was obviously something of a fool, a condition into which solitary fishermen sometimes sink.

“Take off his bonds,” said Sanders sharply, and with some reluctance the man’s custodians obeyed.

“Fubeli,” said Sanders, “you have heard of these strange tales of witchcraft.”

“Lord,” said the man dully, “I am no witch, but a fisherman.”

A shrill old woman rose from the edge of the crowd and pointed an accusing finger.

“Sandi,” she cried, “I have a field of maize, and this man looked upon it and it died.”

Another accuser, stout and voluble, sprang up from the circle.

“This man bewitched my pig, Sandi, and also my goat has a cough because he looked at it.”

“Silence!” said Sanders. “Let this man speak. Have you five daughters, Fubeli?”

“Lord, I have five,” replied the man.

He looked round and called sharply. Standing a little apart was a group of girls, the eldest eighteen, the youngest twelve, as far as Sanders could judge. A weebegone group, very frightened, they came forward shyly and nervously.

“Now, it seems to me,” said Sanders, “that for this palaver there is no need to call me from my fine house, for if they serve some man for the space of a moon, tilling his field and cooking his fish, the spell is past.”

“Lord,” said Katu proudly, “that also I thought and I called a palaver of all the young men; but not one of these would take these girls, because they fear their wicked eyes, and, since none would take them, my young men would make an end of Fubeli.”

Sanders sat, his chin on the palm of his hand, thinking rapidly. The man, of course, was safe, and, if necessary, these superstitious villagers could be cowed, but that was not Sanders’s way.

“Let all men hear this,” he said suddenly. “All this talk of witchcraft is madness, and this man shall not die, because I am The Law, and, if men do evil, I judge them. And if they do great wickedness, then they die at my hand; but because you are my people, and have foolish ways of your own, I must be foolish with you, and make a palaver with my

spirit. To-morrow morning you shall come to me, and I will give judgment.”

He sent the accused man and his daughters aboard the *Zaire*, and that night he called a little palaver of the chiefs and headmen.

“I have been many years on this river,” said Sanders, “and I am very wise in the ways of my people, and I have heard many tales such as young men and old women tell between the cooking-pot and the bed, yet I have never heard the tale of the Father of Five Daughters.”

Katu shifted uneasily on his stool.

“I tell you this, Sandi,” he said frankly, “and I speak truth—that neither had I heard till Tibbetti told me at a dance palaver, when he came to catch rubber and fish for the Government; but because I am a vain old man, and would not say before my people that I was ignorant, I told Tibbetti that I knew this tale.”

A great light dawned on Sanders.

“Tibbetti!” he said softly. “So Tibbetti told you?”

“Lord, he told us many strange things,” said a headman, “for Tibbetti is a great storyteller.” Sanders smiled behind his hand. “He told us that when three crocodiles come head to head in the stream, putting their noses together, good luck will come to any man who sees this. Also if one watches the sun rise through his open fingers, he will be happy all the day, and there will be no sorrow on his stomach. This I had never known.”

“Also, lord,” said a third member of the conference, “if a man is followed by an enemy who is a woman, he will dip his head in the waters of the river, and she will run away.”

“I see,” said Sanders.

He went slowly back to the ship and roused Yoka from his sleep.

“Speak truly to me, Yoka,” he said. “What man told you that if M’shimba-m’shamba comes on the ninth day of the new moon, the end of the world is here?”

“Lord,” said Yoka, “Tibbetti, the wise one, told me this.”

“I thought so,” said Sanders in English.

The palaver he held the next morning was very satisfactory to all concerned, for he gave a definite promise, and, as the saying goes, “Sandi’s word has one face.”

He reached headquarters in time to join a little party that sat at tea on the shadiest side of the Residency.

“Yes, I had a good trip,” he said to Miss Hamilton as she handed him his cup.

“Was it really a serious palaver?” asked Hamilton.

“Oh no,” said Sanders airily.

“Good!” said Hamilton, “I was afraid they would kill the man before you got there. What was it all about?”

“I’ll tell you later,” said Sanders.

Bones was silent and watchful.

“How goes the book, Bones?” asked the Commissioner.

“Fine, sir,” said Bones, with spurious heartiness.

“By the way, what are you calling this book of yours?”

Bones hesitated, then—

“ ‘Folk-lore of the great River,’ sir.”

“How extremely interesting!” said Sanders, and sipped thoughtfully at his tea. Then: “I suppose the stories you tell are quite authentic?”

Bones coughed.

“Oh, quite, sir,” he said.

“You haven’t invented a few, by any chance?” asked Sanders carelessly.

Bones went very red, and the girl, whose laughing eyes had never left his face, almost choked in her joy, for Bones had made the great confession.

“Of course, if you invent them, you should invent things which are not likely to be seen, as, for example, three crocodiles rubbing their noses together in the middle of the river,” said Sanders, not a muscle of his face moving.

Bones twisted uneasily in his chair.

“Of course, sir,” he said faintly.

“Sometimes an inventor has bad luck,” continued Sanders, reaching for the cucumber sandwiches. “For example, it was any odds against a bad storm coming up on the ninth day of the moon, Bones.”

“You don’t mean to say it happened, sir?” asked Bones hollowly.

Sanders nodded.

“Oh, yes, it happened, and you would not imagine that the long arm of coincidence would produce the unusual phenomena of five daughters to one unfortunate man, thereby jeopardizing his comfort, his peace of mind, not to say his life.”

Bones turned pale.

“Do you mean to tell me, dear old Excellency,” he quavered . . . “a jolly old invention . . . dear sir . . . no harm intended . . . just a little bit of poetical licence.”

Sanders whistled softly, and Abiboo, his orderly who had been squatting in the shade of the verandah, rose.

“You shall go to my ship, Abiboo,” said Sanders, “and bring me the five women. I am sorry you are going to be inconvenienced.” Sanders turned to the uncomfortable young man.

Bones had nothing to say; he could only shake his head and indulge in sporadic salutes.

“The fact is,” explained Sanders to Hamilton and the girl, “Bones, finding his supply of legends and folk-lore was running short, went up the river and invented a few, imposing them upon the simple natives in such a manner as to convince them, as he almost convinced me, that they were ancient legends which had been overlooked in the hustle and bustle of life. One of these was that the father of five daughters possessed the evil eye, which could only be removed either by his death or by the five daughters serving some man as hewers of wood and drawers of water for the space of one lunar month. Correct me if I am wrong, Bones.”

Bones shook his head.

“Quite right, dear old Excellency,” he said dismally. “You might have invented the

jolly old yarn yourself.”

“Obviously it was impossible,” said the suave Sanders, “for the man to die in order that Bones should swell his publisher’s cheque, so the other alternative has proved remarkably useful.”

He looked round.

Abiboo was leading across the square a string of five nervous girls, clad in the simple fashion of the Upper River, and Sanders did not speak till they were marshalled in an apprehensive row parallel with the verandah.

“O women,” said Sanders, in the sonorous Bomongo tongue, “this is my lord Tibbetti, and for the space of a month you shall follow him wherever he goes, and shall sit with him when he eats, and shall bring him water that he may wash himself, and if he does not love you by the end of the moon, your father shall be free from the spell which is of him.”

“Good Heavens!” gasped Bones. “Do you mean to tell me that every morning I have got to see these terrible persons? Why, it will drive me mad, sir!”

“I think not,” said Sanders. “All you have to do is to look at the rising sun through your fingers and you will feel perfectly happy.”

“But, bless my life and heart, sir, they can’t follow me about!” protested Bones, his voice rising to an agitated squeak.

“If you don’t like them following you about,” said Sanders, “you must dip your head in the river water every morning, and they will disappear.”

Bones looked from one to the other, and found no help and no encouragement. He rose, pushing over his chair in his agitation, and walked along the verandah, down the steps, and, without looking to left or right, strode off to his hut, followed by five interested ladies of the Akasava, who, finding they could not keep up with his long legs, broke into a jog-trot.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FETISH STICK

VIEWED from the sea, the headquarters of Mr. Commissioner Sanders was a strip of golden sand, fringed to the seaward side by a green backing of trees. You caught a glimpse of the white Residency, with its red roof, and on a very clear day the little flagstaff, where the national standard hung limply. Perhaps you might even see the long rows of yellow barrack huts where the Houssas lived, but you saw little more.

Officers of passing steamers which came sufficiently near the West African coast would point out the mouth of the river, and show the passengers how the yellow waters ran far out, cutting a muddy roadway into the indigo blue of the sea, and sometimes a mail steamer would slow down and drop into a waiting surf-boat a small mail-bag. But the Territories and the three white men who ruled them had no personality to the ocean-going wanderers, until a certain day when a beneficent Government placed in the hands of the Commissioner a means by which he and his fellows might become at least articulate.

Lieutenant Tibbetts, coming to breakfast one fiery morning, discovered a folded sheet of foolscap paper beneath his plate.

“Ha! Monday, sir,” said he, with an extravagant start, as though the discovery that this was indeed the second day of the week came in the nature of a shock, “and Orders of the Week, as per regulations.”

“Read ’em, you lazy de—fellow,” said Hamilton, catching his sister’s reproving eye.

“Quite unnecessary, my jolly old tyrant,” said Bones airily, as he shook his serviette free with a loud flap, and all but caught Mr. Commissioner Sanders’s coffee cup. “Quite superfluous—I know ’em by heart:

“1. The orderly officer of the week is poor old Bones, who will do everything every day.

“2. Field trainin’ will be carried out on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, an’ Saturday, under the command of poor old Bones.

“3. Kit inspection on Thursday—Bones will arrange.

By order.”

“Read it,” suggested Hamilton.

With a hoist of his shoulders Bones opened the paper and read.

“‘Orderly officer for the week: Lieutenant Tibbetts.’ What did I say? ‘Field trainin’ in accordance with paragraph’—um—um—‘Lieutenant Tibbetts,’ as expected. Hullo, dear old sir, what’s this!

“‘On the erection of the new flagstaff and signal yard, Lieutenant Tibbetts will assume the duties of O.C. Signals. He will be responsible for the maintenance in good condition of the signal locker and flags, code-books——’ ”

“They are sending the pole down from H.Q. Administration,” explained Hamilton, “and it should be up by the end of the week. Do you know anything about signals,

Bones?”

Bones smiled.

“I think I may say in all modesty, dear old sir,” he said, with a fine carelessness, “that there’s jolly little I don’t know about signals. I hate to boast, dear old Ham, as you’ve often said——”

“I’ve never said anything so untruthful, but I should not let that discourage you,” interrupted Hamilton. “Nor should it divert your mind from the fact I asked you a very simple question, to which you have not yet replied. Do you understand signals?”

“I won’t deceive you,” said Bones solemnly. “I do.”

And this he proved, for when the great new flagstaff had been erected, and the Government tug which had towed the pole to the beach had turned its nose for home, Bones, with the aid of the Government code-book, signalled—

“Wish you pleasant voyage.”

Whereupon the tug spun round and came back at full speed.

“The signal flags H.L.M.I., sir,” said the exasperated skipper of the tug, “do not mean ‘Wish you pleasant voyage,’ but ‘Return at once; natives in revolt.’”<sup>[B]</sup>

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<sup>[B]</sup> The signal groups given here are, for obvious reasons, fictitious.—E. W.

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“Dear me!” said Bones. “How jolly romantic!”

And so the tug went off again, and Bones, undeterred, sent a string of flags fluttering up to the yard, which the skipper read: “Am short of coal. Can you tow me?” and which he rightly interpreted as being something rather complimentary in farewell messages.

Bones not only took kindly to his new job, but it became for him an absorbing passion. Not only did he spend his spare hours poring over the Government and mercantile codes, but he invented a code of his own.

Not only had he signal flags, but in a great box, each enclosed in a neat canvas bag, were the ensigns of the nations, “For employment,” said the printed instructions, “in saluting war-vessels, governors, commissioners, etc., of foreign Powers.”

“Some of ’em wholly superfluous, dear old sir,” he complained, “unless we receive a visit from the Swiss Fleet, or hobnob with the jolly old King of Siam. An’ who the dooce am I to salute with the German Royal Standard? It can’t be done, dear old thing!”

Life had a new interest, not only for himself, but for every native within ten miles of the station. Visitors and residents alike would gather about the flagstaff and watch Bones as he played with his new toy. And one of these visitors was the son of the sister of a certain Buluta, and a notorious thief. Of this small fact Bones was oblivious in the ecstasy of new discoveries, for he found friends which in olden days moved outside of his orbit.

He sent astounding greetings to little old tramps that came rolling over the edge of the ocean, spoke hilariously to passing liners, which answered briefly and often coldly—the “affirmative,” in answer to a sixteen-flag message, was little short of a snub—and once, when a lean, grey American warship came nosing out of nowhere, looking for submarines,

Bones surpassed himself in a cordial greeting which ran literally—

Y.

D. Y. D. has arrived at this port.

S.

Y.

L.

X. Have cavalry chargers on board.

A.

B.

T.

S. Am carrying feather's and hats.

Y.

R.

U.

G. Please arrange supply wine and macaroni

M. for Italian emigrants.

O.

The commander of the American warship—fortunately, thought that there was a regatta or a Fourth of July celebration on shore, and contented himself with signalling “Good-bye.”

“And what the dickens were you trying to say?” asked Hamilton, when Bones complained bitterly of the lack of international courtesy.

“My dear but dull old landlubber,” said Bones wearily, “it’s as plain as your jolly old nose. If Sanders were here, he’d understand it in a minute. I’ve studied the dashed thing an’ worked it out.”

“But what does it mean?” insisted Hamilton. Bones uttered impatient sounds.

“It’s a verse,” he said shortly—“that jolly little tune.

“Yankee Doodle came to town.

Riding on a pony;

He stuck a feather. . . .

“If you’re going to laugh,” said Bones huffily, “there’s nothin’ more to be said, sir.” And he closed the book with a bang.

Bones was frankly bad-tempered that morning, for, in addition to other vexations, he had discovered the loss of a certain national ensign which had disappeared from under his eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

About this time, in the forest village of Kasanga, a man fell sick. He had pains in his head, shooting, throbbing stabs of agony that did not cease by day or night.

He was lucky in that there lived in this village a very famous witch-doctor, one Buluta, to whom all the forest folk went in their hour of adversity. His fame passed the frontiers of

his own land, and you might not travel for a day anywhere in the river territories without coming upon a man or woman who wore on his or her breast one of those charms which were characteristic of Buluta. If you take a palm kernel, soak it in a solution of gum and camwood, thread it neatly with two steel wires, and turn the free ends of the wires until each forms the letter P., you have a fair imitation of that powerful spell-maker which cured coughs and ensured for married men the fidelity of their wives.

The sick would pay him a chicken for his services, and this gift was tied to one of the legs of the sufferer, and Buluta, kneeling by the patient's side, would knead and pound the unfortunate body of his victim, starting from the head and working down to the feet, until the evil spirit which possessed the patient, and which caused his unhappiness, would depart with a loud cry—which Buluta himself supplied—into the body of the bird. Whereupon he would cut off the head of the bird, sprinkle a few drops of its blood upon the gratified patient, who by this time should have felt such relief as would enable him to rise and call his doctor blessed.

And in most cases this relief was instantaneous and complete. Sometimes Buluta would find no response to his treatment, but that was invariably explained to his own credit by the discovery of bewitchment or a peculiarly strong devil whom the sick man had offended. In such cases as these Buluta would go into the forest for a consideration, and conduct an expensive wrestling match with the devil. Usually by the time he returned to the village to discover what had happened to the patient, the patient had died.

Now, this man who lay so grievously sick was rich, and Buluta had long envied him his wealth, so that, when he was summoned by the man's principal wife he saw the magnificence of the opportunity.

He had the patient stripped and laid upon a wooden grille, and beneath him he lit a fire of herbs that sent up a very thick and pungent smoke. He also painted all the toes of the sick man with red camwood, that the devils might not enter his body. Then he cut little patterns in the chest of Kofubu—that was the man's name—with a small keen knife.

What other treatment he would have introduced may only be surmised.

Since it was acknowledged that none was greater than Buluta, and that, if he could not cure Kofubu, no other witch-doctor could perform that service for him, the philosophical villagers decided that he must be left to die; and death would certainly have been his fate but for the happy circumstance that Mr. Commissioner Sanders was making a tour through the forest villages, and arrived one evening when the seven wives of Kofubu were discussing the division of his property.

Sanders carried a hairy little medicine chest which contained a few, but powerful, drugs designed to meet the half a dozen epidemic or simple maladies native to the country. If the disease was outside the range of the six diseases for which he had made provision, the sick man or woman was treated for the commonplace ailment which it most nearly resembled.

Sanders went into the hut of the man, and found two strands of wire tightly bound about his skull these strands having been in place for some twelve years. They were rather difficult to cut, and Kofubu suffered something in the process; but when they were removed, and after the man had spent a night under the influence of one of Sanders's six medicants, he discovered that his pain had disappeared.

“I think you are a fool, Kofubu,” said Sanders, “for who but a fool would put wire about his head?”

“Lord,” said Kofubu ruefully, “that was a very powerful charm which kept from me ghosts and evil devils.”

“You were nearer to ghosts and evil devils than you know, my man,” said Sanders, with a wry smile. He had no use for witch-doctors of any kind.

Sanders sent for the medicine-man.

“Buluta,” said he, “do you believe in devils?”

“Lord—I do,” replied the man, apprehensively eyeing the stick which Sanders carried.

“And do you believe that your devils will save you pain?”

The man, still with his eye on the stick, edged away.

“Answer!” said Sanders sharply.

“Lord, it is said that we wise men do not feel. Ouch!”

“And now,” said Sanders, when the flogging was finished, “hear my words. I will have no witch-doctor who draws blood in this land. This time I beat, but if I send for you, because you have done this evil again, I will await you at the Village of Irons, and there you shall stay for ten years.”

The Commissioner passed on the next day, and Buluta was forgotten, but Buluta did not forget.

It was a month or five weeks after Sanders had come and gone, that Buluta sent secret messengers to all the tribes, to the N’gombi, the Inner N’gombi, to the Akasava, the Lesser Akasava, and the Three-Streams Akasava, to the Isisi, the Lesser Isisi, to the Ochori and the Upper Ochori, and even into the forgotten land of the Old King.

To no chiefs or headmen did his summons go, but to strange old men who lived apart from the communities to which they were attached, and on the night his call reached them they left their villages furtively and came by hidden ways to the rendezvous which Buluta had appointed. This was one of those famous islands where bats hang in great bunches from the trees throughout the hot day, and fly by the thousand over the river at night.

There never was such an assembly in all the history of the land since the day when they buried Gufufu, the witch-doctor. There were old men and there were young men, too, men fantastically arrayed in skins of unknown animals, men belted about with teeth and claws, men cloaked in feathers, men streaked and circled with paint, and they came to sit at the feet of Buluta and learn his will.

“Wise goats,” said Buluta, “I have called you that I may tell of wonders, for I, who understand devils and have fought with terrible ghosts, have been beaten by Sandi because he hates me. Also I have discovered a great wonder. All men know that Sandi has a ju-ju which tells him when any man breaks the law, for have not the people of the river held very private palavers, and has not Sandi come swiftly? And when the Akasava went secretly to make war, and none knew, save the king, where the goats would bleed, was not Sandi waiting in the Isisi River for their coming?”

“Wa!” chorused his audience. “All men know this.”

Buluta’s eyes blazed.

“Now I have found the mystery,” he shouted in triumph. “Sandi has a wonderful

fetish.”

“That is foolish talk,” said a sceptic in the circle, “for all people know that Sandi is a white man, and white men have no fetishes.”

“Wa! That is true,” said another, “for did not Sandi beat me cruelly because I smelt out one who had bewitched the daughter of Kumulubu, the Chief of the Lesser Isisi?”

“Let all men hear this!” cried Buluta. “Sandi, who lives in a fine house by the sea, has put up a great stick near where the big water runs, and that is his fetish, for the son of my sister, who has newly come from Sandi’s home, tells me this, and every morning Tibbetti, the young one, goes before this stick and bows himself, and picks up pieces of cloth and hangs them upon the stick, and puts his hand to his face thus.”

One of the old witch-doctors nodded.

“I also have seen Bonesi put his hand to his face when he speaks to my lord Sandi and to Militini, and a soldier of Sandi’s told me that he does this thing to do honour to Militini and to Sandi, who are his chiefs. Now tell us, Buluta, what may we do?”

Buluta raised his hands; he was almost incoherent in his excitement.

“We will make a dance and a devil palaver—such a palaver as never was seen in this land—and we ourselves will put up a great stick, so that we may talk with ghosts, for the son of my sister has stolen a wonderful cloth such as Tibbetti hangs, and this is surely a great magic and a charm for sickness. And since we shall be as great as Sandi, he shall not harm us if through our medicine men die. Also, because he beat me, I will lay a spell upon him, and he will go mad. Wa!”

For six days there were mysterious doings on the Island of Bats, fifty separate fires burned and smoked, and the awe-stricken villagers on the mainland watched this evidence of the witch-doctors’ activity with their knuckles to their teeth. There was sacrificing of goats and chickens, and a score of snakes died in the course of twenty different rituals. There was a pounding and a mixing, a dancing and a chanting beyond all precedent, and when a week and three days had gone by, Buluta and five delegates launched their canoe and struck down the river to the forest of tall trees to choose “The Stick” and anoint their find with proper ceremony.

News of a gathering of witch-doctors reached Sanders, and the Commissioner acted quickly. Bones was torn from his tangled halyards and his chaotic signal locker, and dispatched, he protesting, in search of proofs.

Near the Forest of Happy Dreams the river broadens until it forms a great lake, where, on hazy days, it is almost impossible to see from shore to shore. Steersmen loathe this breadth of water, because sandbanks grow in a night, and islands that you chart on your way up give way to five fathoms of water on your way down stream. There are places in this lake where a steamer can bump her way into deep water and find herself within a sandy circle from whence there is no escape. On such occasions all the crew descend into the water and literally lift the steamer from her embarrassing situation.

On a hot day in July a little steamer, specklessly white, her tall twin funnels belching a constant billow of black smoke, picked an erratic way through the lake. Two sounding boys sat in her bows, and stabbed the water at intervals of a few seconds with long rods, transmitting the depth in tones of abysmal weariness.

Bones, standing on the bridge of the *Zaire*, with a telescope under his arm, and a very

severe and disapproving frown upon his forehead, watched the manoeuvre of the Government ship with every indication of impatience.

“O Yoka,” he said at last, turning to the steersman, “is there no straight course, for when I brought the *Zaire* through this broad river, I turned neither to the left nor to the right?”

“Lord,” said the Kano boy who steered, not taking his eyes from the waters ahead, “who knows this river? Every day the water finds a new way.”

Bones turned to a weary “Tut!” and his thoughts went back longingly to a cool beach and a high white flagstaff.

Presently he spoke again in Arabic.

“Now, my great eyes can see the course,” he said, “you shall go to the middle waters.”

“Master,” said Yoka earnestly, “I think there is sand in the middle waters.”

“It is an order,” said the imperious Bones.

The wheel spun round under the helmsman’s hand, and the nose of the *Zaire* pushed round. They struck the strong river current. The black waters piled themselves up before the bows.

“Exactly,” said Bones complacently; “I thought we should do it.”

Suddenly the speed of the vessel perceptibly stopped, and Yoka, who knew that this meant that she was reaching shallow water, spun the wheel with feverish haste. There was a shivering bump, another, and a whole series of frantic little hops, and, though the stern wheel thrashed furiously, the *Zaire* went neither backward nor forward.

“Master,” said Yoka simply, “this is a sandbank.”

Bones said nothing. He took his big pipe from his pocket, deliberately loaded it with tobacco, struck a match and lit it, and puffed cloudily. He was apparently deep in thought.

Then at last he spoke.

“We shall have to get her off,” he said.

Unfortunately, the *Zaire* on this trip was carrying a skeleton crew. There were a dozen Houssas, a few deck hands, a native engineer, also half a dozen villagers who had begged a passage to Youkombi. Moreover, part of the *Zaire* lay in deep water, so that it was impossible to wade. Bones rang the engines first to stop and then to astern, but the *Zaire* was firmly fixed.

“But presently the river will rise,” he said to Yoka confidently, “and the water will wash away the sand.”

Yoka scratched his chin.

“I think the waters are going down, lord,” he said, “for the river was in flood six days ago, and there have been no rains.”

“You are a silly old ass,” said the annoyed Bones.

He scanned the horizon for a sign of a village, though he might have known that there was none, for he had passed through the lake fifty times. Bones’s motto, however, was that “you never know,” and such was his optimistic spirit that he, at any rate, would not have been surprised to have discovered a fairly large-sized township equipped with, amongst other things, a complete dredging plant, had established itself since his last visit.

There was only one thing to do. Bones ordered the canoe to be launched, and, with four paddlers and one Houssa as an escort, he made his way to the nearest village, which, as it happened, was situated on the big middle island that lay athwart the northern end of the lake. There was, as he knew, a footpath close to the river, and he started off on his two-mile tramp to Youkombi, the village in question.

A mile from the point of his departure the path divided, for here the land forms a promontory. One path naturally followed the water, but the other cut straight across the neck of the salient and formed a short way for such people as did not fear ghosts. Bones took the nearer path, and in consequence he did not see the two watchers who squatted by the side of the water, only waiting for a glimpse of the *Zaire* to fly back with their discovery to Youkombi.

It also happened that when he reached the point where the paths were reunited, instead of following the one broad track that leads to the village, he followed the forest path which took him away to the left, for he was anxious to see for himself whether certain allegations against the people of the Youkombi were well founded. Though he was not conscious of the fact, he thereby missed the second group of watchers, who, as a matter of precaution, had been placed on the road half a mile from the village.

Bones searched diligently and patiently, for in all matters of strict and serious duty Bones was conscientious to a fault. His search was well rewarded, for under a dwarf mimosa, and almost hidden by the rank foliage which smothered the ground, he discovered a bundle wrapped in native cloth, and containing certain little wooden pots of native manufacture which were filled with vari-coloured clay. There was red and green and vivid orange, blue and brown. Also there was a necklace of human teeth, a mask of feathers, and a strange-looking ivory instrument shaped rather like a tuning fork.

Bones met no villager, and it was extremely unlikely that he would, because the whole of the Youkombi was sitting in rapt silence, watching a man, fantastically hued with great white rings painted round his eyes, and blue and green stripes of ochre running across his shrunken breast. They would have been interested in Buluta under any circumstances, for his name was a household word from the territory of the Great King to the villages by the sea. But what added fascination to his own personality was the fact that he was at that moment engaged, under the professional inspection of fifty witch-doctors, in curing the first wife of the headman of the Youkombi.

The cure was a simple business. She lay spread-eagled on the ground, ankles and wrists attached by stout raw hide thongs to little sticks which had been driven in the ground, and he was letting out the ninety-and-nine devils with which she was possessed, from time to time lecturing as an anatomical professor to his fascinated audience.

“O people and wise ones, thus you see my magic,” he said, brandishing his little knife and rubbing his nose with the back of his lean hand. “Because of the wonderful things I do now, Sandi would hate me and follow me with guns. But now, because of a great magic which I have done, I am greater than Sandi, and I may do many things which were forbidden. I cut this woman a little—so. What do you see, wise brothers and people of the Youkombi? Just a little blood. Do you see the little devils with eyes like moons? Only Buluta sees those. Look, there he goes!”

His bony finger pointed and traced the passage of the mythical devil, and as it indicated a progress nearer and nearer to the circle, those who stood in its line leapt out

and sprang, shivering, back to allow it passage.

“There it goes,” he croaked, “into the forest! I see it! It is gone! Presently it will come back a very beautiful wonder. None will see it but I.”

He bent his head as though listening, his hand to his ear.

“My ju-ju tells me it is coming! Look Look!” He pointed again to the forest. “It comes!”

An appropriate moment, this, for Bones to make his appearance, which he did, quite unknowing that he fitted so well into the scheme of clairvoyance. The people stood dumbfounded, their knuckles to their mouths.

“This is a great wonder,” said the headman of Youkombi, “for this good devil looks like Tibbetti.”

But the witch-doctor did not reply. This was a moment too great for words. As for his fifty hideous colleagues, they faded into the shadow of the woods.

Bones marched into the circle, his helmet pulled rakishly over one eye and an eye-glass in the other. He stood looking down at the medicine-man and his victim, and dropped his cane lightly on the shoulder of the headman.

“Take this woman away, Kabala,” he said. “Afterwards you shall call a palaver of your people.”

He turned his attention to the witch-doctor.

“O Buluta,” he said, “Sandi wants you.”

The witch-doctor licked his lips. Before him was the supreme injustice of a ten years’ sentence, and that it was unjust he stoutly believed.

He looked round helplessly—and then—

“Lord,” he cried, his eyes bright with hope, “by my magic and my ju-ju you may not touch me, for I am favoured by a fetish stick greater than Sandi’s! Look!”

Bones’s eyes followed the pointed finger. For the first time he saw the tall, roughly-dressed flagstaff.

“Good gracious, heaven an’ earth!” gasped Bones.

“Lord,” Buluta went on proudly, “that is a great devil, more terrible than M’shimbam’shamba, very fierce and terrifying, who eats up people. I call this thing *Ewa*, which is death.”

Bones shaded his eyes and looked steadily upward at the one standard that floated at the head of the staff.

He saw the big black cross on the ground, and the double-headed eagle with its clutching talons and nodded.

“Ewa, which is called death,” he repeated soberly. “I think you are wiser than you know, Buluta.”

His automatic pistol cracked three times, at the third shot the rope that held the Imperial ensign aloft was severed, and the flag came fluttering down.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PACIFIST

“THERE’S somethin’ about me,” said Lieutenant Tibbetts, in tones of wonder and admiration, “that’s very cowin’. I’ve been told by people, dear old officer, that there’s a strange look in my eye—a sort of terrifyin’ glance—er—you know the sort of thing I mean—a sort of concentrated stare like—like——”

“Like a squint?” suggested Hamilton helpfully.

“Behave yourself, dear sir and senior,” enjoined Bones testily. “Of course, I don’t mean that. It was rather neatly described here.”

He slipped a small leather case from his uniform pocket and extracted a newspaper cutting.

Clearing his voice, he read—

“ ‘Lieutenant Tibbetts, one of the most respected of our Empire builders—a son of Blackford, we are proud to say—is a typical Empire builder. Like other Empire builders, he is modest almost to a fault, quiet, retiring, and courageous——’ ”

“Where did this fairy story appear?” asked Hamilton curiously.

“It is from the *Blackford Herald*,” said Bones.

When he was being unusually severe, he dropped his chin to his breast and stared solemnly over invisible spectacles. It was a habit he had explained which he had caught from a whilom schoolmaster. In such a manner did he now regard his unabashed superior.

“Read on, good gossip,” said Hamilton cheerily.

“ ‘Quiet, retiring, and courageous,’ ” continued Bones. “ ‘He has the Empire builder’s eyes—grey, deep-set, and inscrutable. He has the Empire builder’s——’ ”

“Nose,” suggested Hamilton—“long, red, and impossible. Really, Bones, when *did* you build all these theatres? You never told us anything about it, you secretive dog. Go on.”

“There’s no more,” said Bones shortly. “ ‘Inscrutable’ was the word I was after.”

“But what is this all about, Bones?” asked Patricia Hamilton, balancing herself on the broad ledge of the verandah rail. “Nobody said you weren’t overpowering. I’m sure that, when you look at me, I go quite shivery.”

“Do you really?” demanded the delighted Bones. “Do you really, dear old sister? It’s personality, dear old princess—a sort of—well, it’s somethin’ that inspires confidence.”

“Angels and ministers of grace!” exclaimed Hamilton piously.

“Why do people bring their troubles to me?” demanded Bones rapidly. “Why do people ask me to act as a sort of mediator, dear old Ham? I ask you why?”

“Am I bound to answer?”

“I ask you, sir and Excellency.” Bones was getting excited; Hamilton, in his flippant mood, usually had that effect. “Why is it, sir and jolly old Excellency, if it ain’t personality?”

Mr. Commissioner Sanders put down the Blue Book he was reading, and smiled up at the red-faced young man.

“Because you’ve a clean mind and a clean heart, Bones,” he said, “and people know that.”

“And because I’m jolly shrewd, sir,” insisted Bones immodestly, “an’ I’ve got the knack of pacifyin’ people with a word in season.”

“It might even be that,” admitted Sanders from behind his book.

“By the way, Bones, who wrote that thrilling description of Bones, the Empire builder, you’ve just read to us?” asked Hamilton.

Bones hunched his shoulders.

“Dear old Ham,” he said carelessly, “these things get into the papers.”

“Did you write it yourself?”

Bones eyed the other with a painful smile.

“What a perfectly horrible opinion you have of me, dear old sir!” he said reproachfully.

“But did you?”

“There are some matters, sir and respected captain, which I must refuse to discuss.”

“But did you?”

Bones wagged his head in sheer exasperation.

“If you insist upon poking your—upon prying into my affairs, sir—deuced ungentlemanly I call it—I admit that I supplied a few particulars.”

All this was the sequel to the fact that Bones had undoubtedly pacified the enraged wife of Sergeant Ahmet Ali, upon whose character the wife of Private Mahmud Kabbatt had cast aspersions. The husbands of these ladies being temporarily absent from the station, Bones had set himself the task of restoring harmony between the Kano women—who had reached the stage of annoyance when they were searching their huts for their lords’ razors—and had marvellously succeeded.

“You’re a truly great pacifier, Bones,” soothed Hamilton. “You are wasted on the Coast. The next time there’s a war palaver, sir”—he turned to Sanders—“I vote we let Bones turn loose his personality upon the belligerents. Unfortunately, we’re all at peace.”

“Touch wood,” said Sanders, reaching for the rails.

Bones, behind his superior’s back, winked at the girl and gently tapped Hamilton’s helmet—a huge jest which sent them both into shrieks of insane laughter.

“Oh you Empire builder!” said Hamilton scathingly.

Well might Sanders touch wood, for war was stewing on the Upper River.

Bosambo, chief of the Ochori and ruler of the High Rivers, was patient and kindly up to a point. Beyond that he was both brusque and rude. It was not long before he came to that point with Gigini, the elder son of M’furu, chief of the Inner N’gombi. For Gigini was a tedious talker and given to roundabout metaphors, utilizing the imagery of forest and river and heavens to convey his turgid thoughts.

“Since the sun came up I have listened to you Gigini,” said the weary Bosambo, “and you have likened me to the strong trees and the little weaver birds, also to snakes and

monkeys, and yet I am no wiser. Also you speak of kings and chiefs and of people as of leopards and ants, and yet I know nothing of your meaning.”

“Lord Bosambo, I am a great talker,” said the other proudly, “and I am very cunning. Few understand me, for I am a mystery. Often I sit for days in the forest, thinking of wonderful sayings which are mysterious to all but me, therefore I am called ‘O-Ko-churu, The Surprising Speaker.’”

Bosambo looked at the other for elementary evidence of lunacy. But his eyes were clear and his skin was bright, and if he spoke wildly he spoke coherently.

“Gigini,” he said, “because your father is a great chief and my friend, and because *cala-cala* you came to me in the forests of your father and showed me where the okapi had been, I will do much for you. Now, tell me no riddles, but speak straight, for I have sat with you since sun-up, and I am tired.”

But to speak straight was not the way of Gigini, and he propounded a riddle, simpler than all the rest—

“Ten men went, by dark of night, to fish in a little river, and that which they took with them was as great as the canoe, yet the rain came, and there was nothing left.”

“Salt,” said Bosambo.

“A father had a loving son, but the father was cruel and beat the fruit that grew from him, if he stole. Yet it was not stealing, for one day the father would die, and all that was his would be his son’s. Moreover, it was a shame that the city of the Inner N’gombi should see its future chief beaten for ten bags given to the wife of the slave M’lami-Kosogo.”

“O Gigini, your father will beat you because you have taken ten bags of salt and given them to a woman; and I am to give you ten bags, and one day, when you are a chief, you will repay me. O ko! Do I sit here from the sun-under-the-trees to the sun-without-shadows for salt?”

“Lord,” said the abashed Gigini, “this is not all. For my father has many men who are not men, who are free, yet are bound, who live, yet are dead.”

“Slaves,” guessed the exasperated Bosambo. “O tongue that runs like a river! O monkey that says ‘Cheepi-chee’! Tell me all before the shadow touches my foot, or go.”

So the talkative man spoke of a grievance. For the father had amongst his slaves one who had lost two fingers, and as such was worthy of death. For the native secretly slays the maimed and the abnormal, and not all the laws of white men will prevent the practice of his crude eugenics. And this slave it was who had betrayed Gigini, telling of the salt which he gave to the woman, and now Gigini desired the man’s life.

“And because you are my friend, Bosambo, I ask you to buy this man and give him to me, for the chief—my father—will not let me take him, and if I kill him and he is not my slave—”

Bosambo rose.

“Gigini,” he said, “salt you may have from my great store, which Sandi has given me because he loves me, but I buy no slaves, and if I buy them, they come to me as mine. Also Sandi has spoken the word that no man shall die save at his hands, whether he be a slave or a noble. And I am Sandi’s man, and I keep the law for him through all this land;

and I tell you, Gigini, that if you kill this slave, and it shall come to my ears, I shall take you and hold you for my master. This palaver is finished.”

Gigini went away, carrying ten bags of salt, and Bosambo heard no more of him for a month. Then one day his spies brought word from the city of the Inner N’gombi that M’furu had taken his son into favour, and had given him two slaves, one of whom had certain fingers missing from his right hand. That day Bosambo took a pigeon from a great cage which had been made in the shade of the trees, and flung it into the air. He watched it circle higher and higher, until it turned southward and disappeared.

Two days later there fluttered down to the cage another pigeon, very weary and very hungry, and Bosambo carefully removed the slip of thin paper which was fastened to the red legs of the bird, smoothed it out, and read, with some labour, the answer to his message—

“To Bosambo, in the Ochori city.

“Peace on your house.

“Send word to Gigini, the son of M’furu, that when the rains cease I will come, and he shall bring to me this slave without fingers; and later I shall come again, and also he shall bring the slave, and if he says that his slave has gone a long journey, or has died or is ill, I shall take Gigini, the son of M’furu, with me to the Village of Irons, and there he shall stay until his slave returns.

“At my fine house where the river ends by the sea.”

Bosambo was instructing his messengers before his hut, when he heard a shrill outcry at the southern end of the village, and stood up. He heard a dozen voices cry “Salt, salt!” and he saw the crowd open to allow the passage of a dust-stained man, who swayed as he ran. A minute later the new-comer had flung himself at his feet. He was panting, almost breathless, his arms and his legs were scratched and bleeding, which showed that he had left the beaten path and had run through the thorn bushes; but the hand which was raised in supplication to Bosambo interested the chief most of all, for it was minus two fingers.

“Salt!” cried the man hoarsely.

Bosambo looked down at him and stroked his chin. The man’s eyes were wide with fear. He watched Bosambo eagerly, appealingly, for on the next action which the chief took depended his life. Bosambo turned to his headman, nodded, and his capita disappeared into the hut. The chief’s keen eyes looked back the way the man had come. He saw a group of running men passing from the forest towards the village street, and the sunlight glittered and gleamed upon their polished spear-heads. The headman returned, and in his hand was a small heap of salt, which Bosambo scooped into his open palm. He leant forward and offered the salt to the man. With trembling fingers he took a pinch and smeared it on his lips, deliberately, finickingly almost. The chief followed his example. He damped his finger, lightly touched the salt, and as lightly touched his own lips, emptied the salt from his hand into that of the waiting headman, and leant back expectantly.

He had not long to wait. Gigini, at the head of four spearmen, elbowed his way

through the group.

“This is my slave, Bosambo,” he said.

Bosambo held out his hand. The white glittering dust of the salt still lay on his palm.

“Look, Gigini,” he said, “this man has eaten salt.”

The young man’s face was puckered with rage.

“This man is my slave,” he repeated. There was a murmur from the big crowd who now surrounded the group, for Gigini’s insistence was little short of indecent, for if a slave escapes from one chief and is given salt by another, he has automatically changed masters. That is the law of the country, and has been the law from immemorial time.<sup>[C]</sup>

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[C] In some parts of wild Africa, particularly in the Lower Congo, the exchange is made by the sharing of goat flesh; in others, by the breaking of bread. The custom may very easily be traced to the Semitic influences which are observable throughout Central Africa, and probably dates back to the period anterior to the growth of the Babylonian Empire.—E.W.

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“Salt is salt,” said Bosambo briskly, “and I tell you, Gigini, that this man is a slave of the Ochori, and lives behind my spears.”

“Am I so little a one? Am I not the son of M’furu, the great chief?”

“Who knows?” said the philosophical Bosambo. “But if you were the son of all the chiefs, this man is salt.”

Gigini restrained himself with a mighty effort. Threats would not serve him, that he well knew.

“Bosambo,” he cried, “you have been my friend and the friend of my father; also I have given you many kindnesses, and we have been like brothers.”

“Also,” said Bosambo, “I have lent you ten bags of salt, which is most wonderful of all, and I think you have now come to give me back those ten bags and one other bag for interest, for I am very poor.”

“I will bring you twenty bags,” said Gigini eagerly, “also ten fathoms of cloth and two pigs, and you shall return me my slave.”

Again there was a murmur, for a slave who buys his freedom by the supreme risk of salt cannot be bought. He automatically gains his liberty on that strange ceremony, and Ochori sentiment was outraged at the suggestion that ancient custom should be amended.

“This palaver is finished,” said Bosambo.

“You shall remember me,” said Gigini, shaking his fist.

“Gigini,” said the other, “when I go into my fine store, I see ten little circles with dust about them, where once were laid ten beautiful bags of salt, and when I think of these fine bags, I remember you also.”

Gigini went away with his four spearsmen, and the slave who had lost two fingers became a free man of the Ochori. And Bosambo learnt that his name was M’lami-Kosogo, the same M’lami-Kosogo to whose wife Gigini had given his treasure of salt.

And then, a fortnight later, in the darkest hour of the night, came M'furu and three hundred spears to the edge of the Ochori village. They were selected spears, drawn from people who are notorious fighters, but they had little opportunity for displaying their valour.

It was unfortunate for him that M'furu himself led the band that passed, in single file, along the forest road that led to the village, for Bosambo had constructed a large elephant trap right in the centre of the path to the royal kraal, and M'furu and his son, who held the post of honour, were at the bottom of a ten-foot pit before they realized that the ground they trod lacked stability. And for their followers, they fled.

The side of the pit was very smooth—Bosambo had seen to that. Neither M'furu nor his son could secure a grip of the edge, which had been most carefully rounded, and from which all the long grass and bushes had been cleared. Bosambo had seen to that too. Nor did their stabbing spears, when dug into the angle of the pit, give them the slightest assistance to escape; and, if the truth be told, had they reached the surface of the level of the ground, they would have been pushed back again by the four headmen who squatted patiently in the bushes, not only willing to do the command of their supreme lord, but most anxious.

It so happened that that night it rained, and a native caught in the open under these circumstances is naturally supremely miserable, so that when the grey morning dawned, and Bosambo, with well-simulated surprise and concern, arrived on the scene and assisted his victims from captivity, his enemies father and son, were decidedly unhappy—the more so since neither had a legitimate grievance against Bosambo, for he had the rights of spear and bow, fair hunting and trap, net and trident, over all this area.

He entertained them for two days, and, by all accounts, fed them on bad fish and cakes of manioc, which gave them terrible griping pains, and then he sent them back to their villages, two very vengeful men.

“Lord Bosambo,” said Gigini, at parting, and his voice shook with the rage of injured vanity, “I have many wonderful thoughts, and I shall sit in the forest making riddles which no man can guess.”

“Riddle me ten bags of salt,” said Bosambo brusquely, “that you gave to the woman whose husband you would have killed. Do I know the answer to that riddle, Gigini?”

M'furu and his son took long counsel together, and they called to their palaver several wise men, notoriously artful. And they discussed all manners of means by which Bosambo might be brought low, none of which were entirely satisfactory.

“For if we go to Sandi,” said Gigini, discussing one possibility, “how shall we tell him, for whom every leaf in the forest is an ear and every flower an eye, why we went to the Ochori city with spears?”

“And if, lord king, you take your young men to a killing,” said one of the wise headmen called to the conference, “and you follow the river, how may you pass Bosambo's guards, who watch the river by night? It seems to me that Gigini, who makes riddles, must go to Sandi, and by his great cunning bring Sandi to a mind which will order the punishment of Bosambo.”

Now, it is remarkable that the conference should have reached a decision, and that men should have spoken throughout one long day, and have discussed ways and

possibilities, should have canvassed methods and causes, and yet that none should have spoken of the principal cause or offered the simple remedy which the situation called for. Sanders was delivering judgment in the bend of the Isisi, and the white *Zaire* was surrounded by the canoes of litigants. Gigini, being the son of the ruling chief, was granted an immediate audience.

“Lord,” he said, squatting at the feet of the Commissioner on the sunlit upper deck, “I have a great riddle.” He settled himself down to a most enjoyable morning. “My greatest enemy is a red snake behind a hedge of thorns,” he began.

The opening riddle was designed to puzzle, if not, indeed, to paralyse; but Sanders knew the answer, for he had a large stock of conventional native proverbs, and this was one of them.

“O Gigini,” he said, “you speak of a man’s tongue which sits behind his teeth, and you would tell me that your enemies are speaking evilly of you. Now, I tell you that there is no tongue more dangerous than your own, and you shall speak me straight, for I am here to give the law in plain words, and to hear of men’s grievances without disguise, and I tell you this, that if you give me another riddle I shall say: ‘Gigini, go home, for this is a very difficult palaver, and you must wait three moons before I give you an answer.’”

Whereupon Gigini, accepting the situation, told his story.

“Bosambo has done no wrong,” said Sanders, when he had finished, “for the law of salt is not only the law of the Territories, but the law of this great land. As for your slave, he has gone, and there is an end of it.”

He rose from his canvas chair and looked down at the supplicant.

“Much you have told me, Gigini, but on one thing you have not spoken.” He paused and eyed the other steadily. “What of the woman?”

“The woman, lord?” stammered Gigini. “O ko! Now I think you have ears bigger than an elephant,” he complained, dismally, “for none knew of this woman except me and the chief, my father.”

“And the slave,” said Sanders softly.

Gigini shifted uncomfortably, swaying his body from side to side in his agitation.

“The slave’s wife is a slave, too,” said Sanders, “yet they tell me she lives in one of your villages like a queen, and has women to wait upon her and young men to dance for her.”

“Lord, you know everything,” said Gigini bitterly.

Sanders returned to headquarters a few days later, and after dinner, on the night of his arrival, he held what Lieutenant Tibbetts described, in his magnificent way, as an imperial council. It was not in accordance with the regulations laid down for the government of Crown territories that one of the four who sat round the Residency table should be a slim girl with grey, laughing eyes, but somehow Patricia Hamilton had made herself indispensable at these “women palavers,” and even the fact that they dealt with the elementary passions of a primitive people embarrassed nobody but Bones, who was given to the practice of coughing very loudly and quite unnecessarily at the wrong places.

“It may, of course, be only a salt palaver,” said Sanders, “though we have had very few of these in the past years. But salt palavers usually lead to war, and when behind the

trouble there is a woman, the signs are not promising. Apparently Gigini, after making her his principal wife, is endeavouring to rid himself of her husband. Nothing can come of this trouble if the lady—whose name, Ahmet tells me, is M’seri—has no particular reason for desiring her husband’s death. But since, in this country, it is not considered to be good form for a woman to have two husbands living at the same time, and that fact is taken to reflect both upon her thrift and her ingenuity, I think we may expect some kind of trouble.”

“Why not deport the woman?” asked Hamilton.

“That means postponing, and spreading the trouble,” said Sanders.

“Of course it does. Hamilton, I am surprised at you!” said Bones reproachfully. “How often have I told you that the best thing to do in these circumstances is to go up to the jolly old dame and say: ‘Look here, Mrs. What’s-your-name, you’re giving us a devil of a lot of trouble——’ ”

“There are ladies present, Bones,” said Patricia Hamilton calmly.

Bones blushed, rose, saluted, apologized, and resumed his seat in almost one movement.

“I see no reason to suppose that you could argue with the lady,” said Sanders. “The only thing to do is to send somebody up on the *Wiggle*, to patrol the river between the Ochori city, and the mouth of the Isisi. Neither M’furu nor Gigini would move if they knew we were on the spot.”

“I am not so sure Bones isn’t right,” said the girl thoughtfully. “He has a wonderfully persuasive way with these women. Why not let him go up and speak to her?”

“I’ve got it!” said Bones, jumping up. “I’ve got it! Brain!” He tapped his forehead. “I know the exact solution.”

“What is it?” asked Hamilton curiously, but Bones shook his head.

“Give me the *Wiggle* and a free hand, sir, and I’ll restore the troubled situation. Not for nothing, dear old sister, am I called the great peace-maker. I’ll have ’em like cooing doves in a fortnight, dear old Excellency. Trust old Bones!”

“What’s your plan?” asked Sanders.

“A free hand,” said Bones imperiously. “Give me a free hand, dear sir and Excellency. I’ve got one of the dinkiest little plans—worthy of Napoleon, dear old Ham.”

He departed the next day full of confidence.

Bones’s first call was at the Ochori city, where he interviewed the slave who had lost two fingers.

“Lord, I am of the Inner N’gombi,” said the man, “and I was taken prisoner *cala-cala* long ago, and have been a slave always. And the woman M’seri, she also was of my tribe, and I built a hut for her, giving her father two fat dogs and a goat as the price of her. This M’seri was a wonderful dancer, and Gigini wanted to take her to his hut as his wife, but his father would have no slave wife for his son. So there was a great palaver, and M’furu beat his son, and also he beat me with a *chicotte*, but he would not put me to death because he feared Sandi. But M’seri spoke in Gigini’s ear and cried all night because I was not killed, for she hated me, saying that I shamed her by living when she was Gigini’s wife. Then Gigini bought me, and M’seri and he were making a secret killing palaver in

the forest, but one of his women cut the hide that bound me.”

“Very sad, my poor old sport,” said Bones sympathetically. He spoke in English, for Bosambo—something of a linguist—was present, and Bosambo loved an opportunity to display the learning he had acquired at the Fathers’ School at Monrovia.

“That womans, her be bad,” said Bosambo. “She be no good. She lib for make dis feller dead one time. Then she get spliced dis Gigini bloke.”

“My dear Bosambo,” said Bones faintly, “your language! Where did you find ‘bloke’?”

“She be fine word,” said the proud Bosambo. “Plenty ship feller use um.”

Bones had a theory, and in his choicest Bomongo he explained his plan. The husband of M’seri listened in perplexity. There were parts he understood and his eyes brightened. There were other parts that were beyond his grasp.

But when the husband of M’seri had agreed to all that was suggested—though he little comprehended many of the high-falutin arguments that Bones adduced—that young man addressed a letter which he sent by fast canoe to headquarters.

Spelling was never his strongest point, so please excuse—

“Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen,—

“I have accomplished the imposible!! My idea was this as follows. Reconcile the husband and wife show her how naughty etc. she is was is, make her feel sorry for him and awfully ashamed of herself and then let her steel silently away with her true love love. Gigini will be upset but I’ll talk to him for I’ve got a wonderful argument which will do the trick do the trick. Dear old old Excellency trust Bones!!! There’ll be no trouble no war palaver no trouble. Everything will pass off quietly and you wont know that the velvet glove has been taken off the iron hand. Salute for me noble lady Patricia and the jolly old Centurian Ham.

“Bones P.B. (Pax Britannica).”

To the village of N’chu—the pleasant, knoll-covering community which lies at the end of a long, broad road through the stateliest trees of the N’gombi forest—came Bones, accompanied by a small escort. He halted on the edge of the village and gave instructions to one of these, a certain man who had lost two fingers from his right hand.

“You shall remain hidden in the wood,” he ordered, “yet you shall so stand that you may see me, and when I wave my hand so, you shall make your way secretly to the hut of your wife, and you shall speak very kindly to her and presently take her away to Bosambo’s city.”

As for Bones, he walked through the village and stopped before the largest hut, where a woman sat grinding corn with a big pestle and mortar—a woman with a straight back and a small, proud head well set upon a graceful neck, who looked up at Bones curiously and without fear.

“O M’seri,” said Bones, “Sandi has sent me to make a palaver with you, also with Gigini.”

“Gigini is in the forest, lord,” said the woman, and went on pounding her corn.

“Then I will make a palaver with you, M’seri,” said Bones, “for the heart of Sandi is

very sad because you have left your man and gone to the hut of M’furu’s son.”

“My husband was a slave and a dog,” she said calmly, “and Gigini has given me many fathoms of fine cloth, and salt, and other treasures.”

“Yet this man—your husband—loved you, M’seri,” said Bones, with a choke. “Every night he cries for you in his empty hut.”

“If he were dead, he would not cry,” replied the woman, pounding the corn viciously.

“O M’seri,” persevered Bones, “if he came to you, you would give him hands?”<sup>[D]</sup>

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<sup>[D]</sup> Literally, “would you welcome him?”

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She thought.

“If he came, Tibbetti? I wish he would come here,” she said, and Bones glowed.

“Go to your hut, M’seri,” he said, “and I will hold a palaver with my spirit.”

She hesitated, but obeyed, gathering up the heavy pestle and mortar, and disappearing, with one backward glance, into the hut.

The slave without fingers came swiftly to Bones’s signal.

“Go—she is there,” said Bones, in a low voice.

He saw the man vanish in the dark opening of the hut, and took out his pocket-book.

“Dear old Commissioner,” he wrote, “I have done the trick! Without fuss, without trouble, I have——”

He stopped. There were voices in the hut, and he heard a woman’s wail that ended in a sob.

“I have reconciled them. All is peace.”

There was a mighty rustling in the hut, and he heard the slave speak sharply. Then the man without fingers appeared.

He was a little out of breath, and he was bleeding from a cut in the shoulder.

“Lord, it is over,” he said.

“Good business,” said Bones in English.

“The woman I killed with my hands,” said the man, “but Gigini, who was in hiding, I slew with his own spear.”

Bones rose, speechless.

“Now, I will kill M’furu, the father, and burn his village,” the man went on, and, turning, he ran into the forest.

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Bosambo heard the news, and flew his S.O.S. pigeons. He took six hundred spears and fought back M’furu’s northern army, whilst the loyal chief of the Isisi held the rush to the

south. On the seventh day came the *Zaire*, which shelled the last stronghold of the enraged king before the Houssas stormed the palisade.

M'furu was dying when Sanders reached him. He was lying with his back to a tree, on which he had crucified the slayer of his son and the attempting murderer of himself.

“Lord,” he gasped, “it would have been better if you had given me my slave.”

“It is better that you die, and all your land is blackened, than that the law be broken,” said Sanders sternly.

Later he sought out a very humble Bones—that Bones who had come flying down the river, followed by M'furu's war canoes, and had been rescued by the timely intervention of the *Zaire*.

“It was my fault, Bones,” said Sanders. “I should not have allowed you to go without proper equipment. The pacifist who hasn't the support of a Hotchkiss gun isn't a pacifist—he's a provocation.”

## CHAPTER X

### THE SON OF SANDI

WHEN Tigibini, the headman of Bulagongo, took to himself a seventh wife, and that the straight, sulky daughter of M'kuru, the Akasava small chief, he did not consult the girl upon the matter, for Tigibini lived in a little village on the River-that-comes-from-the-forest, and he was ruler, lawgiver and executor of the law, and headed forty young fishermen, who speared fish with a cunning and lightning swiftness which was fascinating to see. Also they could spear men with equal dexterity and as little remorse, if the truth be told.

M'kuru, the father of the girl, sat on his bed—which was a squat-legged oblong frame of ash, over which was stretched the skin of a buck—and fingered the straggling grey hairs at his chin.

“It is very wonderful to me, Tigibini, that you should desire a woman of mine for wife,” he said timidly. “Now, I think you will find a better woman than K'misi; also it is said that Bulagongo is a place haunted; also six wives you have had, Tigibini, and where are they? Their cooking-pots are broken, for they are dead.”

“Women die very easily, M'kuru,” said the suitor, baring his white teeth in a quick, hungry smile. “And who am I, to speak vile words about ghosts and devils, for are they not, like fleas and grass, in all places?”

“Lord Tigibini,” said M'kuru humbly, “there is a young man of my own people who desires this woman——”

Tigibini interrupted him. “Ten bags of salt and a thousand rods I bring,” he said. “What young man will bring you that? The woman shall have a great brass collar about her neck, such as none of my women have ever had. Now, I say to you, M'kuru”—he stood over the other, his great legs straddled, his big arms braceleted from wrist to elbow in shining steel, a sinister but commanding figure—“I desire this woman, and you shall give her to me; for you are a solitary man, of no tribe, living alone and spearing fish, and my young men say that you have a bad fetish that frightens the fish away.”

“Lord,” said the alarmed M'kuru, “I have no fetish!”

“Some day they will dance,” said Tigibini significantly, “and on that day who shall call them back to their huts?”

M'kuru passed the back of his hand across his dry mouth.

“Tigibini,” he quavered, “take the woman.”

So the headman had placed the girl in his canoe, and had passed beneath the overhanging branches of the trees which fringed the little river, and M'kuru secretly smeared dust on his breast and crooned the death-song of the Akasava, which begins “Spirit here is an axe for trees, here is a bowl for water.”

K'misi learnt her duties in three lessons, and each lesson ended with a beating, administered with thin and pliant hippo skin, which is at once painful and shocking.

On the fifth day of her marriage she went into the forest—in defiance of her lord's

command that she should not leave his hut during his absence—and after a long search she found a plant with flowers of a gorgeous blue. This she carefully pulled from the earth, broke off the radish-shaped root, which she thrust into her cloth, and resumed her search. She came back to her hut with half a dozen roots, and these she hid in a hole which she dug.

She was beaten that night more severely than before, because the fish had changed their water and had gone down nearer to the junction of the great river; and since Tigibini must needs follow, and as necessarily be absent for two days, it was inevitable that he should give his wife something to occupy her thoughts.

“Woman,” he said breathlessly, as he shut his eyes and flung his thongs behind him, “if you throw your whip before you and see it, be sure you will one day feel it. This night I go a journey, and you shall remember me.”

The shivering heap on the ground moaned and drew herself to her feet.

“Lord,” she said in a low voice, “I shall remember you.”

This is the truth about Tigibini’s wives—that they had died because they had no desire to live. Yet though a scandalous man, and the reproach of every fishing village up and down the River-that-comes-from-the-forest, so powerful was he, and so much dreaded were his forty young fishermen, with their too-quick spears, that none spoke openly of his crimes.

Once he had had forty-one young men, but the forty-first had been bold.

“O Tigibini,” he had asked, “why do you beat your wives until they die?”

Tigibini glowered up from the fire at which he was squatting, but did not answer, and the next morning the young man had disappeared. His body was washed up on the shores of the great river, and that was all, save that none of his men ever questioned him again.

The headman, leaving a quivering K’misi to her thoughts, passed down the river, and in the morning came to a fishing of his father-in-law, and there he sat him down to spear, his young men taking possession of the small village and ousting the timid people of M’kuru from their huts with little ceremony.

“They shall sleep in the forest,” he said to his perturbed relative, “for they are common people and most of them are mad.”

“Lord,” said the diffident M’kuru, “if you shall take this fishing, how may I live? For is it not the law of the river that all waters ten spears’ throw to the left and right are proper fishing for villagers?”

“There is no law on this river but the law of the spear,” said Tigibini, “and that law I bring. For your evil fish have called my fine fish away, and I spear for my own.”

“Also, lord,” said M’kuru, “there is talk amongst my young men that Sandi is in the forest behind”—he waved his hand at the olive-green gloom of the hinterland—“that he is travelling with many carriers, and holds a palaver with the Inner N’gombi, and, if he should come here, it might be shameful for you.”

“Sandi is a white man,” said Tigibini, contemptuously spitting on the ground. “I am too great for Sandi, because I know the secret of white men who bewitch us and secretly sell our bodies for cloth.<sup>[E]</sup> Also, M’kuru, all men know that Sandi never walks, but comes on his white ship, so I think you are making a mock of me.”

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[E] It is a legend with most of the Coast savages that the cloth or calicoes, prints, etc., which come into the country are made from the dead bodies of natives which are smuggled out of the country, are thrust into a deep hole, from whence presently issues the end of a cloth, which is pulled and rolled until a sufficient length is obtained, when it is cut off and sold back to the natives.—E.W.

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He turned to his insolent young men, who stood an amused group, behind him.

“Tie M’kuru to a tree,” he said.

So they bound the naked body of the old man to a gum tree, and Tigibini flogged him with his right hand and his left till the old man’s shrieks and moans died away in silence.

“Let all men see this,” said Tigibini, appealing to the frightened villagers who gathered round, hugging themselves in an ecstasy of apprehension.

“I see,” said a voice.

Tigibini whipped round. A man was looking at him, a wiry man of medium height, dressed in khaki, his big white helmet set squarely on his head, his brown hands twirling an ebony cane. But it was a look in the cold grey eyes that made the headman’s mouth go dry.

“Lord Sandi,” he stammered, “I have had a bad palaver with M’kuru.”

“A bad palaver for you, man,” said Mr. Commissioner Sanders. “Let every one leave his spears in the ground,” he said, and the reluctant young warriors of Tigibini thrust their spear-heads deep and fell back.

One of Sanders’s guard of Houssas collected the spears to a bundle. Two other men first released M’kuru then strapped Tigibini in his place.

“I have heard of you, Tigibini,” said Sanders, “also of your forty young men who love you and do evil things.”

He took up the rhinoceros thong and beckoned one of the forty.

“Strike once,” he said, “and, if you strike lightly, be sure I shall see.”

One by one the forty came forward and wielded the thong, and Tigibini accepted the punishment without a sound, for he knew that this was the end of his lordship, and that the men who flogged him would presently vanish for fear of him, and he would be left a leader without a following. When the punishment was over, and the sick M’kuru had been carried to his hut, the thongs about Tigibini’s wrists were untied.

“Go back to your village, Tigibini,” said Sanders. “In two moons will come the rain, also will come one of my officers collecting taxes, for you shall give him not only his due, but twice his due, for it seems to me that many moons have come and gone since you brought your full palms to the Government.”

“Lord, I am your man,” said Tigibini in a low voice, and without another word walked down to the river, stepped into his canoe, and went alone to his village.

His wife did not expect him so soon, and he all but surprised her in the act of kneading together with great labour and patience a certain flour which she had extracted from the roots she had furtively gathered. She had wrapped the mess in some green leaves, and was

thrusting it into its hiding-place, when Tigibini strode into his hut.

She folded her arms meekly and waited for the blow of his whip, but to her surprise it did not fall.

“Get me food,” he said, and she sidled past him into the open.

Now, Tigibini, after the fashion of native men, was usually naked to the waist, and she thought it strange that, with the beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, he wore over his back a robe of monkey-skins. It was stranger to see him wince now and then, when a movement surprised him into an expression of pain.

But the greatest mystery of all was that he did not beat her, neither then nor in the morning.

He rose at the first grey streaks of dawn and crept from the hut, and she, who had not slept all that night, watched him and presently followed. She found him at the edge of the river, bathing his hurts, and seeing the wales across his broad shoulders, and guessing from what cause they came, her heart leapt in fierce exultation. She crept back and prepared his morning meal, which he ate in silence. When he had finished and stood up, he said—

“K’misi, I think you have a bad ju-ju, for since I have bought you I have had no fortune. My fish have gone away and my young men have left me. Also Sandi has put me to the greatest shame.”

He looked at her long and thoughtfully, and her keen native instinct told her that he was planning her death. Nevertheless, she sat imperturbable, giving no sign of her knowledge.

That night Tigibini spent in his canoe. He made a journey down the little river, calling—an unwelcome guest—at the fishing villages *en route*. Some had heard of his disgrace; others, through the accident of their isolation, had heard nothing, and at one of the latter Tigibini learnt that Sanders had joined the boat at that very village and had gone northward toward the Ochori.

“O man,” he said to the fisher chief, “how many soldiers had Sandi?”

“He had the tax soldiers—four and four,” replied the little chief; “also there went with him Tibbetti who sits to-night at the village of the Four Pools, for to-morrow Ukusu, the N’gombi man, will ask Tibbetti in full palaver that his wife may be put away from him because of her naughtiness.”

Tigibini had intended returning to his deserted village when his inquiries were through, but now he changed his plan.

“Of Tibbetti I have heard, but him I have never seen,” he said. “Men say that he is the son of Sandi.”

“Of that I have heard,” said the little chief wisely.

Tigibini, squatting over the fire, smoking a native pipe, seemed to be taking counsel with the flames, for his bright eyes never left the glowing logs.

“The woman who is the mother of Tibbetti,” he said at last, as he knocked out the ashes from his pipe, “must be very beautiful in Sandi’s eyes, for Tibbetti, his son, is always with him, and, as the saying goes, ‘To fondle the son is to love the mother.’” He paused. “I sleep this night with you,” he said decisively, which he did, sleeping on the

chief's bed.

Eight miles away Lieutenant Tibbetts slept as soundly, and rose at dawn to take his bath—a function which it was his most earnest desire should be of a private character, but which was, in fact, witnessed by all the little boys and girls in the village, who gathered about his hut and, thrusting their fingers through the reed walls, brought Bones and his rubber bath within the focus of twenty bright pairs of eager eyes.

“*Alepo! Zar! Go away!*” roared Bones.

He splashed the apertures with handfuls of water, but water has no terrors for the young people of the river. Bones tried another tack.

“I have a ju-ju,” he said hollowly. “Presently, when you pull your faces away, you will leave your eyes behind you!”

This terrifying threat gave him time to garb himself hastily before he did his great constitutional, four times up and four times down the village street at the rate of six miles an hour—a practice with which the villagers were quite familiar, and the reason for which was popularly believed to be that, if Bones stood still his knees, would grow together—a disquieting affliction to which white men were subject.

He had been left with one soldier as an escort to unravel a certain matrimonial tangle which had been the talk of the countryside for four months. For the wife of Ukusu was, not without reason, in some disfavour with her husband, and Bones sat under the thatched cover of the palaver house throughout the day, and heard all that Ukusu had to say, all that his wife had to tell—there were some hair-raising countercharges which need not be enumerated—and he also took the evidence of Ukusu's mother—the villain of the piece according to Ukusu's wife—Ukusu's wife's father—who had a bitter grievance against Ukusu regarding the quality of the goats which formed the purchase price of Mrs. Ukusu—and divers willing and voluble neighbours who had been eye-witnesses of certain suspicious incidents—incidents which occurred when the witness should have been in bed and asleep—and all this evidence was told with a freedom and a frankness which sometimes caused Bones to look up at the thatched roof of the palaver house and pretend he was not there.

From nine o'clock in the morning till half-past ten that night witnesses came and went. Sometimes they would break off in the midst of their narrative to go home and cook the family meal, and another would be called to take their places, but at ten-thirty by Bones's watch the verdict was delivered.

Ukusu received the equivalent to a decree nisi with the custody of the goats, whereupon all the witnesses, especially those who had lied themselves livid on behalf of Ukusu's wife, came forward and congratulated him in their naïve way upon the justice of his finding, and Bones went to bed with a sense of a day well spent.

He called his orderly.

“To-morrow, in the first light of the day, let the chief's canoe be ready with twenty paddlers, for I go to my lord Sandi, who waits for me in his big ship by the Isisi River.”

He took the cup of tea the orderly prepared for him, said his prayers, and went to bed.

The guest hut was at the edge of the village, within a dozen paces of the path which followed the bank of the river. As Bones stretched himself, he could hear the swish and swirl of the fast-running waters, a pleasant sound to accompany a man to the land of

dreams.

In the middle of the night he woke suddenly and sat up in bed. He did not know why, for there was no sound save the rush of the water and the regular snore of the soldier who slept outside his hut. Bones swung his legs from the bed, pulled on his mosquito boots, and walked to the door of the hut.

There was a bright moon, and he could see the village streets and the huts as clearly as in daylight. The village was silent. At odd intervals he saw the dull red of dying fires. He looked down at the sentry.

“My dear lad,” he said softly, “you are making a noise like a jolly old pig.”

He kicked the man gently, but the sentry was too deep in sleep, the sleep that comes to soldiers when they lie down conscious of security. Had they been camping in the forest, the lightest word of Bones’s would have wakened the man.

“I must have been sleeping on my back,” thought Bones, and was half turned to re-enter the hut, when he lost consciousness.

He did not feel the blow which struck him on the nape of the neck, he experienced no pain, only that the world went suddenly black and he collapsed.

Tigibini caught him in his arms, lifted him cautiously past the sentry, and, hoisting the limp body to his shoulder, he strode along the river path into the bush. His canoe was waiting, and he dropped Bones to the bottom, jumped in at the stern, and swung the head of the canoe to midstream. The river was running swiftly. Long before dawn came, and the escort entered the hut of his master, to find it empty, Tigibini had reached his village.

Bones had half returned to consciousness in the boat. He wholly recovered his faculties in the hut of his captor. His legs and hands were tightly bound by ropes of pith. His head ached terribly for a while but somebody gave him water, and with that the acute pain passed, and Bones blinked his eyes open and stared around. At first he thought he was in the hut where he had laid down, but slowly it dawned upon him that he was elsewhere. He tried to move first his hands and then his feet, and only then realized his bondage.

He looked round, to find a girl sitting on her heels by his side, her hands clasped between her knees, watching him without sympathy, but with interest.

“O woman,” said Bones thickly, “where am I?”

She put her fingers to her lips, rose and moved stealthily to the door, and looked out. She stood at the door as she spoke, one eye upon the path down which her husband must come.

“You are in the hut of Tigibini of Bulagongo,” she added in a low voice, “and Tigibini has gone into the forest to make ready the young trees for the killing.” She did not use the colloquial word for “killing,” but employed the compound phrase which means literally “the fly-apart death.”

If you take four young saplings and bend them down so that their heads meet, and secure them all to one rope, and then you take a human being and fasten his two ankles and wrists by ropes to the bent saplings, and then you cut the master rope which frees the tree-tops, they leap back to their naturally erect positions, carrying with them such portions of your anatomy as are attached to their feathery heads.

“Oh, lor’!” said Bones in dismay. Then in Bomongo: “How long will Tigibini be?”

She shook her head.

“He is very strong,” she said, “but the saplings are stronger, and the sun will be in this hut before he is finished.”

Bones made a rapid mental calculation, and decided that he had about six hours to live.

“Why does Tigibini do this thing?” he asked.

“Lord,” said the woman bitterly, “who knows the heart of Tigibini? He does not tell me because I am his wife, but I know he hates Sandi. Also he said you were the son of Sandi.”

“Oh, lor’!” said Bones again. Then again in the native tongue, “O woman,” he said, “If you cut this rope and let me go, I will give you riches. Also Sandi will be a shield for you in all things.”

She shook her head.

“Lord, if I did this,” she said, “Tigibini would see me. For though he cannot look inside the hut, yet from where he stands he can see all who leave the hut, and he has his killing spears, and, lord, you have nothing, and I think you had better wait.”

Her caution was justified, for five minutes later she slipped softly across the room and sank down on her knees, and almost immediately after the great bulk of Tigibini filled the doorway.

He looked down at Bones.

“I see you, Tibbetti,” he said.

“I see you, Tigibini,” replied Bones. “This is a very shameful thing, and be sure you shall suffer.”

“Tibbetti, when I suffer you shall know nothing of my suffering,” said Tigibini, “for you will be dead.”

He swung his thick whip in his hand, but he did not attempt to strike his prisoner. He sent the lash flying across the naked shoulders of the girl.

“I am hungry,” he said, and she slipped out of the hut on to her knees before the fire and the black cooking-pot which swung over it.

He said no more to Bones, but went out and ate a prodigious meal.

“Presently I shall come again,” he promised, wiping his mouth on his hand preparatory to taking up his gruesome labours, “and then, Tibbetti, Sandi will have no son.”

The girl changed her position. She now sat in the doorway cross-legged, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her palms, looking wistfully down the bush path to where now and again she caught a glimpse of her husband. From time to time she spoke to Bones across her shoulder.

“He has finished,” at last she whispered, “he has finished!”

There was a note of anguish in her voice which awoke surprise even in Bones in his then perturbed and preoccupied state of mind.

Tigibini came in, looked at his prisoner, hitched up his waist-cloth, and swung Bones to a sitting position. The young man’s head swam, and he would have fallen over, but

Tigibini helped him.

“Tigibini!”

The big man turned in surprise. The audacity of the address stupefied him, for a woman never calls her husband by name save in affection or sheer insolence.

“O Tigibini,” she said, “when you have ended Tibbetti, what of me?”

“You will wait, K’misi,” he glared at her, wrath and indecision in his eyes.

“O beater of women, what of me?” she said again.

With a howl of rage he sprang up, dashed from the hut and sped back along the path.

“Where has this man gone?” asked Bones.

“Lord, he has gone to get his whip,” said the girl calmly.

Tigibini came blundering back, the whip in his hand, and for three minutes Bones winced and raved as the sharp thong rose and fell against the unprotected body of the girl.

He beat her till he was tired, then flung down the whip; but she rose on her elbow and smiled at him.

“O beater of women,” she mocked, “where is your fine axe?”

“It is in the forest, woman. Presently I will return with it,” he said hoarsely.

“Go now,” said the girl, with a smile. “Or do you fear because this white man shall see?”

“That you shall know,” said Tigibini, and again left the hut.

The girl pulled herself to the doorway and stared out, and Bones, from where he sat, could follow the direction the man had taken.

He disappeared into the thicket, and after a while they saw him come out. He did not immediately return. He stood for a moment leaning on the long haft of the axe. When he moved he seemed to reel. The girl flung herself upon Bones.

“Quick, Tibbetti!” she said between her teeth, and slashed away at the ropes with a knife.

Bones rose with a groan and staggered to the entrance, and the girl was before him.

Tigibini was on his way back, half running, half walking, but swaying all the time from left to right. They watched his progress. He came nearer and nearer. Once he fell to his knees and scrambled up again; then with an effort he pulled himself together, staring at the man and the woman who now stood before his hut.

“I see you!” he yelled and leapt. Then he fell on his hands and knees, slipped over to his side, and the axe fell away from him.

The girl walked to him and looked down.

“Let us go away, Tibbetti,” she said, “for to-night I think Tigibini will die.”

In truth, Tigibini was not dead even the next morning, when Sanders came upon the spot, for aconite—even aconite crudely obtained from the roots of the wild flower—kills slowly, though it stupefies very quickly.

“It seems incredible,” said Sanders, “but it is obviously true what the girl says—that she took her beating to give the poison time to work, and every blow she accepted was to save your life.”

The inquiry was held on the deck of the *Zaire*, and the girl looked from one to the

other, for she could not understand this strange tongue.

“Tell me, Tibbetti,” she said, “does Sandi say I have done an evil thing?”

Sanders shook his head.

“You have done well, K’misi,” he smiled, “and I will give you many presents.”

“Lord, I did not do this for reward,” said the girl, “but because Tibbetti is your son.”

“In fact, sir and Excellency,” said Bones, who had long since recovered his good spirits, “it was for dear old mother’s sake.”

“Don’t let us keep you, Mr. Tibbetts,” said Sanders coldly.

## CHAPTER XI

### KING ANDREAS

THERE were four generations of Secondis, each one richer than the last. They moved in the best English circles, but they did not stay permanently in any. Two of the generations were exceedingly presentable persons, were Bachelors of Art and of Science, and a great deal besides. They endowed cottage hospitals and made generous contributions to charities. They had boxes at the opera, owned and ran race-horses, were to be seen at Cowes and at Ascot—though never in the royal enclosure—and one at least appeared in the Divorce Court.

Even to the fourth generation there was on the finger nail of every Secondi a liver-coloured half moon just where nail and cuticle meet, and this was probably one of the explanations of Society's reluctance to clasp the Secondis to its bosom; and though there was a Baron Secondi of the Holy Roman Empire—Julius of that clan secured the distinction—not even the most careless of Society writers really believed that Secondi was an ancient Italian title.

There was native blood in the family, as the finger nails betrayed, and there was bad blood, too, for there were at least four members of the family of whom the Baron never spoke, and as to whose fate there was some mystery. They had been traders on the Coast for twenty generations, they had been millionaire traders for four. Their stores filled the fore-shores of twenty ports. They had agents from Dakka to Masamones. They owned railways and ships, distilleries and slipways, whilst their mineral and forest rights mottled the intimate maps of five colonial foreign offices.

Andreas Secondi, a brilliant young man—Scholar of Corpus Christi College, first-class Classical Moderations, second-class Lit. Hum., Barrister of the Outer Temple—had a career before him of the greatest promise. His wealth, his attainments, and his excellent manners were most certainly wasted in a one-horse Coast town which consisted of two hundred deplorable hovels, a strip of sand, two habitable houses, and the acrid scent of synthetic rum, which came from the low-roofed shacks in which Secondi Ltd. maintained their stocks.

All sorts of theories had been put forward as to why Andreas Secondi came to the Coast, but neither the most romantic nor the most uncharitable were well founded. Andreas left London and established himself in the gaunt white trading house because this hot, damp land called to him through his blood. The dominant voices of twelve unmentionable generations spoke to him in the decorous silence of his library in Hans Crescent. They whispered alluringly of firm, golden sands, of tossing palm fronds, of great heart-swelling forests, of broad sunlit rivers, of a licence and a freedom he had never experienced. Dark eyes laughed at him; the smoke which rises straightly from the fires of dawn were a sign and a summons, and he came to the Coast and lived what to him was a desirable life, at a temperature which ranged between one hundred and one hundred and four in the shade. All this was natural and proper, though wholly inexcusable from the point of view of his sometime friends.

He had arrived at Little Masam with an enormous equipment, including trunk-loads of clothing specially designed for wear in the tropics, patent tents, filters, mosquito destroyers, rifles—in fact, everything that a man who had designed a holiday in that most unlikely part of the world could need.

It is a curious fact that, although he was ordinarily abstemious—he had no sooner arrived on the Coast than he developed a taste for gin—a spirit which he had never drunk in his life. He sent home by the first mail steamer a requisition for the very choicest brands of this spirit, and consoled himself, during the time of waiting, by testing the quality of that strange liquor which was contained in square bottles also labelled “Gin,” but which was especially manufactured for native consumption. He found it very hot and breath-snatching, but wildly exhilarating. When, three months later, many cases of the real article were landed on the beach and were duly sampled, he discovered the genuine article to be insipid and tasteless compared with that which was literally the gin of his forefathers, for on this square-faced poison the second generation of the millionaire Secondis had added enormously to his wealth.

He lived alone and, what was worse, he drank alone. There were two white men on the station, who were the merest creatures of his house, the sort of men you buy for sixteen pounds a month and their “chop.” He found them very dull, and their crudities offended him. So he removed from himself what might have been a brake.

Many representatives of the Secondi family remonstrated with him, writing, cabling, doing everything, in fact, but coming in person; but their remonstrances were mild, because he was the richest of the Secondis, and nobody wished to offend him. For his part, he took no notice of these letters and cablegrams, which he kept on his table, using as a paper weight a full bottle of “square-face.”

About this time he began to draw heavily on his account which he kept at Cape Coast Castle. He had brought with him a hundred-ton petrol yacht, which was sent regularly every week to collect letters and exchange his cheques for gold and bank-notes. Why he should want money at all was a mystery, because the only store at which it could be spent was his own.

He made several excursions into the bush, unaccompanied by white men, and there were stories of dances and drink palavers which the Secondi family subsequently paid a great deal of money to suppress.

Twelve months after his arrival he rose from his bed, shaved and bathed, and sent for the store manager, whose name was Brown.

“I am going away, Mr. Brown,” he said quite calmly.

He was sitting at breakfast, hollow-eyed and a skeleton of his former self, and the hand which carried the glass to his lips shook violently.

“Going away, sir?” said Mr. Brown, his heart full of happiness as his face was full of simulated woe. When you buy a man for sixteen pounds a month, you buy an actor, because people earning that salary cannot afford to show their feelings.

“I am afraid I have been a nuisance to you,” said Andreas Secondi apologetically, “but naturally, during the time of my probation, I was a little nervous. One never quite knew how the examination would go off.”

“Quite so, sir,” replied Mr. Brown, to whom the reference was incomprehensible.

“I haven’t been very sociable—” said Andreas, looking out of the window, “but then some of the papers were fearfully hard—the one I did last night particularly so. But thank goodness, it’s all over!”

Mr. Brown murmured his conventional sympathy.

“I am going to give you a thousand pounds,” Andreas went on, “and I want to give your assistant five hundred. I have the money here.” He pushed over a pile of notes neatly fastened together with a rubber band. “I think you will find it correct.”

“But—but——” stammered Brown.

Mr. Andreas smiled.

“It is a little present,” he said, “and I should be glad if you would make the presentation to the other man, because I am too bored to see him. Tell my engineer to load up the *Seagull* with petrol and sufficient food to last a week, and any letters that come for me you may return to the London office. I think that will do.”

Mr. Brown, who had never had a thousand shillings of his own in his life, was moving light-headedly out of the room, when Andreas called him back. He turned, and saw on his employer’s face a queer little smile.

“I must show you—I’m sure you will be interested,” said Andreas. “I nearly showed you last week. Do you remember I had a package from Cape Coast Castle?”

“Yes, sir, I remember,” said Brown; “it came by registered post. It was very heavy.”

“You will understand why,” said Seccondi.

He took a bunch of keys from his pocket, walked to a big unpainted cupboard which hung on the wall, and after many painful attempts he inserted the key in the lock and opened the door. He put in both his hands and took something out and placed it on the table, and Mr. Brown gasped and stared, as well he might, for the object which was being displayed to his astounded eyes was a crown.

From its jewel-encrusted rim to the emerald that glittered above its red velvet it was a rare and beautiful thing.

“It cost twelve thousand pounds,” Andreas volunteered, “and I was in an awful state last night, for fear I didn’t pass. Of course, it would have been absurd,” he said, with a little deprecating smile, “if I had got it out here, and then was ploughed at the last minute.”

He pulled open a drawer in the table and brought out a thick wad of papers. They were covered with writing in his boyish hand, and Brown, who had had a fairly good education, recognized some of the problems. As Andreas turned the sheets, he saw that one “paper” was an essay on the Scandinavian Sagas.

“A little folk-lore,” said Mr. Andreas in explanation. “One has to work that up, because really there is very little difference between the folk-lore of the Viking and the folk-lore of the Coast. Thank Heaven I pulled through!”

He replaced the papers and lifted the crown to his head, and stood for five minutes staring at himself in the glass; then this, too, was replaced in the cupboard and the door locked.

“I think you understand now,” he said.

“Quite so, sir,” said Mr. Brown untruthfully. “Naturally, sir.”

“When you come to think of it,” Andreas went on, half speaking to himself, “it is

much better to rule a great kingdom like this than to occupy a minor position in a purely artificial society.”

Mr. Brown quite agreed, and when Andreas told him that the object of his projected trip was to make treaties of alliance with neighbouring states, he nodded gravely.

“There are so many things to do, I hardly know which to do first,” said Andreas. “Of course, if I am to be king, I must have some sort of state, I have arranged for the building of a new palace at San Merthe. The difficulty I am in is to arrange a marriage. You see, Brown, it is impossible for kings to marry anybody but people of our own class, and the people here have so inter-married that it is just as impossible to discover a pure line. I am hoping, however, during the course of my trip, to eliminate that difficulty.”

When Mr. Secondi sailed in the *Seagull*, with his one native engineer and his own high thoughts, he did not take with him a single drop of liquor, a fact which Brown remarked upon. Moreover, before he left, Secondi not only destroyed his own stock, but insisted upon every barrel of rum and every case of gin which was in the store of the company being destroyed.

“Drink does a great deal of harm to the country,” he said, “and I am determined that it shall cease.”

Mr. Brown stood upon the beach watching the *Seagull* until it was out of sight, and then he walked slowly back to his hut, carefully concealed his money, and drafted a cablegram to the second greatest of the Secondis in London.

A hundred miles away Lieutenant Tibbetts, of the King’s Houssas, had a platoon in the forest, wrestling with some brand-new tactical exercise invented in the Cameroons and cursed fluently by all commanders of native infantry, from Dakka to Massi-Kassi. Therefore it was cursed in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and even in Cape Dutch by commanders of native police on the Rhodesian border.

The man who invented these peculiar tactics is now in heaven, for his name was Konrad von ze Hoffenzoll, and he was smitten sorely by a French 75 shell at the intaking of Bomsubisi; but because in his life his system of rearguard defence in forest retreat had caused great annoyance to the enemies of his country, those enemies—and certain neutrals—sat down and elaborated his system, reducing it to cold print in five languages, in the wistful hope that they, in turn, would successfully employ the new system against the enemies that time would produce.

The Hoffenzoll rearguard defence concerns this story to this extent, that it caused Lieutenant Tibbetts, of the King’s Houssas, to feel that the hand of the world was against him, that every door was shut in his face, and that he was the least considered of all junior officers.

On the third day of the exercise Captain Hamilton his superior, strolled out to examine what was technically known as a checking redoubt.

He went over the work carefully; he inspected the trenches, the barricades, the machine-gun emplacement, the observing post and fire-direction platform, and when he had finished he said—

“The trenches are too shallow, the barricades should be protected by a spiked ditch, you have not given your machine-guns a good field of fire, and you should have cut down all the underbrush which would hide the approach of a flanking attack. In fact, my dear

Bones, you have not displayed the foresight which is the essence of this system.”

Bones listened with compressed lips. He had worked like a galley slave for three days. He had got wet to the skin, the night before, in a tropical thunderstorm; he had a bout of fever on him, and he was conscious of the fact that the point chosen for the establishment of the checking redoubt had been chosen—and ill-chosen—by Hamilton himself.

“Altogether, Bones,” said Hamilton cheerfully, “it isn’t a very creditable performance. It lacks foresight and imagination. To plan a successful rearguard action—well, you know what I mean—one must always know what the other fellow will do.”

“I see, sir,” said Bones.

Hamilton sensed the resentment and something of the genuine bitterness in the tone, and wished he had taken another line. Also he knew that he himself had been partly responsible for whatever error there was in the construction of the defence.

“I suppose it’s my fault as much as yours,” said Hamilton.

“Not at all, sir,” said Bones, with icy politeness.

“March your men back. You’ll be in time for tiffin.”

Bones fell in his men, checked the entrenching tools and the equipment, and marched back to headquarters.

“I’m afraid I’ve peevd Bones,” said Hamilton.

He was sipping at a long lemon squash before lunch.

“Poor Bones!” said his sister. “Is he awfully tired?”

“He hates things,” said Hamilton, “and he hates me worst of all.”

Sanders strolled out to them.

“How did Bones acquit himself?” he asked.

“Very well, sir, really. I chose the wrong place for the redoubt—I saw that the moment I arrived. The ground is bad—full of tree roots—and he couldn’t very well get a field of fire for his Maxims without demolishing half the reservation forest. Hullo, here’s his factotum! I suppose old Bones is sulking.”

Ali Abid, the stout Arab who was to Lieutenant Tibbetts secretary and privy council, came to the stoep with a salaam.

“Sir,” he said soberly, “Lieutenant is seriously imposed with supernormal temperature and accelerated pulsation. He excuses his society for grub.”

“Is he ill?” asked Patricia anxiously.

“Leave him alone,” smiled her brother. “He’ll feel better later in the day. Poor old Bones. I’ve made him raw.”

The girl looked dubiously from Ali to her brother.

“Don’t you think we ought to do something—get him some chicken broth——”

Hamilton growled.

“Chicken! If you take any notice of Bones and his sorrows, you’ll have no time for anything else. Come along—there goes the gong!”

Bones was not peevd in the ordinary sense of the term—he was genuinely hurt and genuinely unwell. He laboured under a sense of injustice which hit him in a moment of physical depression, and he was in that state of mind when less normal men think of

suicide.

Ali Abid, with his profound knowledge of human nature, could see only one panacea for his master's distress. He busied himself over a ragout which was his great speciality. By the time Bones had finished a very excellent dinner in the solitude of his hut he felt a little better physically and, as it naturally follows, in a more tolerant frame of mind. Nevertheless, the sting of the morning's interview had not wholly passed, and if he had the energy, he had not the desire to stroll back to the Residency, as he had so often done, and over coffee slip back to his proper place in the smooth-running social machine. He lit a cigar, read the last mail papers through and, taking his stick from a stand, he made his way to the beach, intending to enjoy a long walk along the hard, level sands.

He came through the little bit of bush and rock which hides the beach from the reservation, and stopped. He saw a big white motor-boat, her nose grounded on the sand, and walking slowly toward him a young man well and carefully dressed. Such an unusual sight caused Bones to forget all his own personal troubles and quicken his steps toward the visitor.

"Good evening!" drawled the new-comer. "This is Mr. Sanders's headquarters, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," said Bones, scrutinizing the wan face in a vain effort to identify the visitor.

"You don't know me," smiled the man. "My name is Seccondi. I dare say you have heard the name. We are rather a nuisance to you people."

"Oh, the traders," said Bones in surprise.

"The traders," smiled the other "I have not come to trade, but just to pay a little call. I am Andreas Seccondi."

"Glad to meet you," said Bones, and offered his hand.

He had all the white man's aversion to that blood which was the distinguishing feature of the Seccondis.

The native he understood and loved. The white man splashed with tar raised all his hackles. But, as against this, the Seccondis were a little different, and represented the phenomenon of inter-racial marriage. They were unique, not because they were very rich, not because the word of a Seccondi had before now blasted the career of a promising official, but because they were undoubtedly brilliant.

He wondered what brought the supertrader to the Territories, for Sanders did not encourage the Seccondis, and had successfully fought off every attempt they had made to exploit the hinterland. The young man appeared to divine his thoughts.

"I suppose you wonder what I'm doing up here," he said, as he fell in by Bones's side on his way to the Residency. "I have a particularly interesting mission. It is hardly fair to tell you that much without telling you the whole," he laughed, "and I dare say you will hear about it in time."

He shot a swift glance at Bones, but in his present mood the young Houssa officer was not inclined to pretend to a knowledge which he did not possess. He was a little embarrassed that he should be compelled to go near the Residency at all, but his state of mind may be best judged by the very fact that his embarrassment was so slight that he was able to give a cool unhumorous reply to the facetious little smile with which Hamilton greeted him. But the coolness of Bones was as nothing to the icy politeness of Mr.

Commissioner Sanders.

“This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Seccondi,” he said in a tone that left no doubt whatever that nothing could be more unexpected than any pleasurable sensation at meeting the young man. He waited for Andreas to disclose his business.

“Can I see you alone for a little while?” asked the latter.

Sanders nodded and led the way to his private bureau.

“I don’t like that man,” said Patricia Hamilton when he had gone; “there is something peculiar about him. Who is he?”

Hamilton waited for Bones, but Bones was silent, and the captain of Houssas briefly sketched the history of the house of Seccondi and the career of this, its most polished representative.

“They have coloured blood, of course, but I believe Andreas is rather a smart fellow, a barrister, and, so far as I know, remarkably well behaved.”

“I have heard of him,” said the girl. “He was staying with Lord Clayborough when I was at Henley and I think I did meet him. Are you feeling better, Bones?”

“Never better in my life,” said Bones cheerfully. “I don’t think you want me, sir,” he said, turning to Hamilton.

“Now, look here, Bones,” said his superior, “I am awfully sorry for what happened this morning. I was in a very bad temper, and I was very unjust. You must admit, Bones, that you are at times rather a short-sighted ass——”

“I’ll admit anything you wish, sir, if you will excuse me,” said Bones freezingly, and, touching his hat to the girl, he strolled leisurely back to his hut.

Hamilton looked after him, shaking his head.

“I have got rather into the ribs of Bones, I’m afraid,” he said.

“You’re not exactly tactful, my dear,” said his sister. “An apology with reservation is a new affront.”

“Oh, blow Bones!” grumbled her brother.

“You’re very rude,” said Patricia tartly.

The family jar did not develop any further, for at that moment Sanders came out with the young man.

“I am sorry I have no sleeping accommodation to offer you,” Sanders was saying.

“That’s all right,” said Andreas easily. “I have my yacht here, and she has very excellent accommodation. I will see you in the morning.” He lifted his hat to the girl and made his way back to the beach.

“I cannot understand that fellow,” said Sanders. “And what he is doing here, Heaven knows.”

“Didn’t he tell you, sir?”

Sanders shook his head.

“He has some kind of scheme on, about which he was frightfully mysterious. I know no more now than I did when I took him into the office. All I do know is that he is staying here for a few days. I had to ask him to come and take his meals with us. I hope you won’t mind?”—he turned to the girl.

“I do not object at all,” she smiled. “You see I have not lived long enough on the Coast to share your feelings about the little patch of colour. I don’t like him, but that is unreasoning feminine prejudice.”

Sanders nodded slowly.

“I trust unreasoning feminine prejudice,” he said “before my own judgment. In this case my judgment coincides with your instinct.”

Andreas came to breakfast next morning, and was most interesting. He talked learnedly and modestly of things and people, was deferential to Sanders, polite to Hamilton, courteous and restrained in his attitude toward the girl, and made an honest attempt to be friendly with Bones, but Bones was not inclined to be friendly with anybody.

“I have heard a great deal about you, Mr. Tibbetts,” said Andreas. “I am told you are one of the coming men on the Coast.”

Bones glared at him.

Presently he tried again.

“You are an Etonian, aren’t you, Mr. Tibbetts? My younger brother was at Eton, and has often spoken of you.”

Bones mumbled something, but gave no further encouragement.

On the second day of his stay Andreas sought out Bones and carried off that unwilling young man to the forest.

“Mr. Tibbetts,” he said, “I am afraid I have annoyed you in some way.”

“Not at all,” said Bones stiffly.

“I wanted to discuss a matter with you,” Andreas said, “because you have initiative and judgment, and you have got just the qualities which I want.”

“I think we are going to have some rain,” said Bones.

“You have just the qualities I want,” the other went on. “In fact, in this little Arcadian spot I have discovered the two things for which I have been seeking in my mind for the past six months.”

“You surprise me,” said Bones.

“The first of these,” Andreas went on, taking no notice of the sarcasm, “is the man to control my troops.”

“Your what?” Bones stopped and looked round at him in surprise.

“My troops. You know, of course, that I have had the authority of the British Government to raise ten thousand native soldiers?”

Bones gaped at him.

“Now, I can make you an offer,” Andreas went on slowly. “You know the island of San Marthe?”

San Marthe was a tiny island about four hundred miles from the mainland, and chiefly remarkable for the fact that it was the property of Messrs. Seccondi, Ltd. There had been a great talk about the use to which this fertile little land would be put and some talk of a company being floated to cultivate cocoa palms. So far as Bones knew—which amounted to the sum of the information he had obtained from occasional visitors to the island—it

was at present an uncultivated spot, inhabited by a docile tribe of natives, who supported body and soul with very little trouble, since the ground was wonderfully fertile, and fish and flesh and fowl were in abundance.

“I see you know it,” Andreas continued. “I have built a villa there, and I am establishing the state which is naturally and properly mine. I want somebody to organize the army which I am raising, and you are the man for the job. As to the other matter”—he paused, fingered his chin irresolutely, and smiled—“I think we can get over the other matter,” he said briskly. “Now what do you say.”

“My dear old Secondi person,” said Bones irritably, “what the deuce has your army got to do with me?”

“Would you raise it and train it if I made you commander-in-chief at a salary of five thousand pounds a year?”

Bones stared at him blankly.

“Not for five millions a year. I don’t know what your little game is, and I don’t want to know. In the first place, San Marthe is not a British possession, and, in the second place, I am a King’s officer, and have no desire to change my boss.”

“I was afraid you’d say that,” said Andreas, turning back with a little shrug. “You see, I have everything cut and dried, all except the other matter.”

“What is the other matter?” asked Bones, his curiosity getting the better of his repugnance to share the other’s confidence.

“The other matter is the matter of the queen,” replied Andreas soberly. “Naturally, if I am to be a king, I must have a queen. I hope to secure her by negotiation, but it seems unlikely that I shall succeed. We monarchs, Mr. Tibbetts, have a way of our own.”

He spoke quizzically; his eyes, fixed on Bones, held a little gleam of laughter, and Bones was puzzled.

“I don’t quite get you, my dear old Highness,” he said, “but I gather that you are going to start a little Ruritania of your own, and you are thinking of getting married. Is that the idea?”

“That’s the idea,” said Andreas.

They were nearing the Residency now, and Andreas stopped, as though he wished to complete his disclosure before they joined the little party on the step.

“Well, what the dickens has it got to do with us—your getting married?” asked Bones. “Of course, you’re a very nice fellow, and all that sort of thing, but really, my dear old sportsman, we don’t know very much about you, and we are not passionately interested in your private plans.”

“That I realize,” said the other; “it is great pity.” He sighed and shook his head. “I thought you might assist me in the other way. Can’t be helped!” he laughed, turned abruptly away, and walked towards Sanders.

At dinner that night the conversation turned upon the speed of ships. Andreas was a mine of information on the subject, as was natural, since he owned the bulk of shares in two companies possessing between them a fleet of thirty vessels.

“Of course, you will never get the speed and the carrying capacity at one and the same time,” he said. “Now, the *Seagull* is faster than the fastest destroyer.”

“You mean your little yacht on the beach?” asked Hamilton in surprise.

He nodded.

“I can get thirty-eight knots out of her. Why don’t you let me run you round the bay?” he asked.

Bones noticed that, as he made this suggestion, Secondis’s eyes dropped to his plate.

“Oh, do!” said the girl suddenly. “I have never been in a fast motor-boat.”

Hamilton hesitated.

“I shall be glad,” he said. “I suppose you would like to go, wouldn’t you, Pat?”

“Oh, rather!” she cried. “It will be great fun!”

The prospect of the novelty overcame her feeling toward the man—a feeling which had worn off a little in the few days of their acquaintance, for his attitude had been faultless.

“Will you come, Bones?” she asked.

“I’m sorry I’ve a lot of work to do,” mumbled Bones.

“Rubbish!” said Hamilton. “Come along!” But Bones was adamant.

He went to his hut that night, closed the door, lit the lamp, and sat down. He went over and over again his conversation with Andreas. It had left a curious uneasy feeling in his mind. There was something vaguely sinister in the revelation which Secondi had made. He sat for two hours smoking, until the hut was blue with fumes, then rose, put out the lamp, opened the door, and walked out into the cool night air.

The sky was laced with stars; a screech of a distant night-bird and the roar of the river were all the sounds he heard. From the men’s quarters came the hum of voices. Bones looked toward the Residency then toward the hidden-beach. He scratched his head, hesitated, then turned and walked slowly in the direction of the beach. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

“Bones!”

There was no answer.

“Bo-ones!”

The reservation wood echoed “O-ones!” but the cheery, albeit raucous, voice of Lieutenant Tibbetts, of the King’s Houssas, was not heard in the land.

“Where the dickens has he gone?” demanded Hamilton wrathfully, and, indeed, his wrath was justified. For Captain Hamilton had walked on to parade for a miniature, “general inspection” of his company, and instead of being greeted by two lines of men standing stiffly to attention behind a subaltern doing polite things with a drawn sword, Hamilton had found the company slackly “at ease.”

As for the sworded subaltern, he was nowhere to be seen.

Therefore was Captain Hamilton compelled, contrary to King’s Regulations, and to the immeasurable loss of his dignity, to search hut and Residency, and finally to go hotly to the edge of the still woods and—in his own language—“whoop for stragglers like a bally teacher at a Sunday-school picnic.”

Hamilton came back by way of the Residency.

“Found him?” asked Sanders.

“I can’t understand it.”

“Here comes his man,” said Sanders.

Stout Ali Abid, a linguist and a scientist, was waddling across the square.

“O Ali,” greeted Hamilton, “where is my lord Tibbetti?”

“Master,” said the man, “I regretfully report that Tibbetti is *non est*. Sleeping machine untenanted and pyjamas noticeably unoccupied.”

“Hasn’t he been in the hut all night?”

“Indications support that hypothesis,” said Ali seriously.

“I can’t understand that,” said Hamilton, troubled. “I wonder if the young devil has gone up the river? Bones is rather hating me, I think. I shall have to speak to him rather plainly. This is not the game.”

Mr. Seccondi noticed the absence of Bones, which Hamilton excused in the terms of his theory.

“A very pleasant young man,” said Andreas. “I was hoping that he would go out with us.”

Hamilton observed that Mr. Seccondi was brighter and more cheery than he had been before, and, so far from the absence of Bones depressing him, it added considerably to his gaiety. After breakfast was over they made a move to the lower of the quays, where ordinarily the *Wiggle* was berthed. That staunch boat was now high and dry on a slipway, and undergoing repairs, and in her place were the long, beautiful lines of the *Seagull*.

“I have had a truant, too,” smiled Andreas, as he stepped on board. “My engineer has taken a holiday. But you need have no fear; I understand this boat much better than Master Jacob.”

He went down to the well of the boat, into the glass-covered engine-room, and Hamilton and his sister followed. The beautiful Deissler engine was a picture of burnished steel and glittering glass. Mr. Seccondi explained the functions of the various parts.

“She is one of the few engines fitted with a selfstarter,” he said. “I can control everything, even to the regulation of the petrol and oil supply, from the forebridge.”

He led the way forward, past a handsome little cabin, with its glass skylight and a glimpse of luxurious furnishing. Foward of the cabin was a semicircular dais, protected by rails and a thick canvas screen.

“This is the navigating bridge” the proud owner explained, and showed them the rods and switches which controlled the engine, uncovered a jewel of a compass, and invited Patricia to test the small brass wheel.

Sanders had stood on the quay. He was not greatly interested in luxurious motor yachts, and had merely accompanied the party as an act of courtesy.

“I am afraid your helmet will blow off,” said Andreas, suddenly turning to the girl. “Have you a motor veil?”

“There is one in my room.”

“I’ll get it for you,” said Hamilton. “I had better get my cap.”

“You will need it,” said Andreas pleasantly.

Hamilton stepped ashore, and Andreas walked slowly along the alley-way on the side nearest the quay, all the time talking pleasantly to the Commissioner. The girl had strolled forward and seated herself amidst the cushions of a big cane chair, one of two which had been placed before the bridge.

“I flatter myself,” said Andreas—as he strolled leisurely aft and threw off one of the mooring-ropes, “that this is a boat worthy of a king.”

He strolled as leisurely toward the nose of the boat, and, stooping, unhooked the second mooring-rope.

“Be careful,” warned Sanders. “The river is running very strongly, and you will swing to midstream before you know where you are.”

His warning was justified for a space rapidly grew between the boat and the quay.

“My dear sir,” drawled Andreas, “I know exactly where I am.”

“Captain Hamilton will find it difficult to get aboard,” warned Sanders again.

“He will find it exceedingly difficult to get aboard,” said Andreas in his slow, even tone. “I repeat. I know where I am.”

He stepped on to the little platform and turned a switch. Instantly the engine-room buzzed and hummed, and a streak of white froth appeared at the stern.

“I am in the company of the loveliest woman in the world, whom you shall know as the Queen of San Marthe,” he said.

The truth flashed on Sanders and left him white. He dropped his hand to his side, but he was unarmed. He measured the distance. It was too far for a leap, but he made the attempt. He fell a few inches short, and dropped like a stone into the water. When he came up to the surface, the little vessel was rushing seaward with ever-increasing speed.

“Where is my brother?” said the girl. “What has happened?”

Andreas did not reply. He walked aft, scrutinized the engines, and favoured them with an approving nod. Leaning over the rail of the little “bridge,” he looked down at her.

“My queen,” he said, “you are on your way to your kingdom.”

“What do you mean?” she gasped.

“I have found my kingdom. I have raised, or am about to raise, my army. I need only a queen, and the choice my pretty lady, my Helen, my Cleopatra, has fallen upon you!”

He was not offensive, but there was something in his mien which was terrifying. She stepped back.

“Don’t come near me!” she cried in a panic.

He laughed.

“I shall not hurt you, and whoever hurts you dies!” he smiled. “That is the order of King Andreas.”

He walked toward her, fastening the wheel, and leaving the boat to follow a straight course to sea. She put out her hands to ward him back, and found her wrists gripped.

“Your cabin is waiting,” he said.

With a quick movement he flung his disengaged arm around her and drew her toward him. His lips were at her cheek when she heard a voice.

The man spun round and faced the level barrel of a revolver, and that revolver was in

the hand of Bones. With a quick twist the man placed the girl between himself and danger.

“I fear we must die together,” he said pleasantly—“a possibility which I had foreseen, Mr. Tibbetts. I suppose you know that you are trespassing and that you have no right whatever on my yacht, and that you are liable to very heavy damages? You will, however,” he went on, “be able to testify that my queen and I died royally, locked in one another’s arms.”

He edged the girl nearer to the rail, and, though she struggled, she was a child in the powerful grip of the madman.

Bones had a second to act. To shoot the man across the girl required a quality of marksmanship which he felt he did not possess. He had reached the control platform, and now, swift as a flash, he threw down the lever which he knew would stop the engine.

There would be no hope of rescuing the girl, once she was in the water, and there was only one chance, and that chance lay in disturbing the uncanny equanimity of the man.

Bones thrust forward his jaw, and into his eyes came that look of scorn which Andreas could not mistake.

“You infernal nigger!” snarled Bones.

The man stepped back as if he had been shot, and the girl stumbled forward to Bones’s feet.

“You—you——” breathed Andreas, and dropped his hand to his hip.

Both revolvers cracked together, and Andreas Secondi dropped limply to the white deck.

\* \* \* \* \*

“I don’t know how to thank you, Bones,” said Hamilton brokenly. “Poor old Pat! And yet I am awfully glad you didn’t kill the poor brute. How did you come to be on board?”

“Dear old sir and officer,” said Bones easily—he had recovered all his old jauntiness—“a little astute detective work, dear old sir, forethought and foresight. If you had been wandering about the beach at two a.m., and heard a semi-native gentleman instructing his wholly native engineer to make himself scarce in the mornin’ and you had sneaked on board the yacht and seen a dark-looking white gentleman drinking champagne, with a golden crown on his head, and admirin’ himself in an expensive looking glass, and if you had looked through a skylight and seen him drawing up a marriage advertisement for *The Times*, employing a highly-respected lady’s name, you would have drawn your own conclusions, hidden yourself in a locker, and waited the moment to pop out. It’s foresight, dear old fellow. You’ll never get it, not in a thousand years my poor old Ham; it’s a gift that only comes to keen students of the Hoffenzoll rearguard defence.”

“You are entitled to rub it in,” said Hamilton, and it was very true.

## CHAPTER XII

### BONES AND A LADY

YEARS ago, before any tangible form of government came to the lands which form the watershed of the Big River, there was a missionary who was not like other missionaries, for he combined the rare qualities of zeal for his dark brethren with the possession of great wealth. He was the son of a rich New York financier, and was, in consequence, able to gratify his every whim; whilst his brother's took the form of ballooning—at that time regarded as the smartest of hobbies—Henry T. Fellin's peculiar eccentricity lay in the belief that the difference between black men and white men was largely a matter of colour and environment.

He spent an exciting year in the Akasava district. His departure was rendered necessary by the failure of his brother's parachute to open at the psychological moment. He arrived in New York with two small boys, one from the Isisi and one from the Akasava, and the heartless reporters of the city suggested that he had brought his mourning with him.

One of those small boys died with the first shrivelling blast of winter, but the other thrived and justified Henry T. Fellin's experiment to a most remarkable extent. At the age of nineteen he had already won considerable distinction as a lecturer, and at twenty founded the Pan-Ethiopian movement and that remarkable chain of schools and colleges throughout the United States which was later to fall into some disrepute as a result of the Bouzier conspiracy, and was liquidated by order of the Supreme Court. Professor Zeburn, as Mr. Fellin's *protégé* was called, was undoubtedly a great educationist, and one of the most remarkable coloured teachers of all time.

Long before this story opened he left America "for his health." Then one morning a tall, thin, emaciated native, in a ragged pair of duck shorts, had stood before Sanders on the stoep of the Residency, and had explained, between paroxysms of coughing, that he had come back to the land to die.

"O man," said Sanders gently, "that is a bad end; yet you have seen many wonders in the far world, and you have memories."

The thin face of the returned exile twitched in a smile.

"Lord, that is so," he said simply, "and I am wise with the wisdom of vast peoples. For I have been to schools great and small, and I have learnt medicines and many tongues, yet none of these things is as wonderful as the sight of elephant grass by the river, and the weaver birds chattering in the Isisi palms."

Sanders had looked compassionately upon the man, for Sanders loved his people, and at this moment he appreciated the innate delicacy of the wanderer in refraining from the employment of English. He went away, this thin man, in a Government canoe laden with the provisions and the books he had brought from the great world beyond the blue waters. Sanders saw him rarely in the years that followed, for he chose for his habitation the banks of a forest stream, and took to himself a wife, one Sigibi, daughter of a certain genial chief of the Lower Isisi that veritable home of ghosts and superstitions.

Sanders was sitting one afternoon on the stoep before his house. His feet were elevated to the rail on the verandah, and he was dividing his time between killing flies with a long-handled wire whisk, and reading a colourless report on the condition of the district, by an administrator who feared fever worse than the Devil, and had written his views on the Isisi from a distance.

Suddenly, for no apparent reason, Sanders brought his feet to the ground and stood up swiftly. There was not a soul in sight. The big garden which fronted the bungalow danced quiveringly in a heat haze. The broad, yellow path which led to the Houssa quarters was deserted, and between the thatched huts set in four lines, not so much as a dog stirred.

The Commissioner stood, a frown on his face, his head bent, listening. The harsh cry of parrots, the distant ruff-ruff-ruff of the breakers on the golden beach, the thin, shrill chirrup of a cicala—these things were the tone of a normal day. But piercing through the day noises came a faint rattle of sound, as though in the woods to the north some musician was rattling his drumsticks upon an upturned saucer. It was no more than a faint metallic tinkle, sustained and urgent—a mad little tattoo, half heard, half missed. Sanders blew a shrill blast on his whistle and there was a faint patter of footsteps along the back verandah as Sergeant Abiboo, his orderly, came running.

“O Abiboo,” said Sanders softly, “a *lokali* is sounding.”

Abiboo might have said that the hollow tree trunk by which village signals to village does not sound in the daytime, but on the river there are few precedents which are not upset from day to day, and he bent his head, listening.

His ears, sharper than his master’s caught and translated the sound.

“ ‘Men fighting on river,’ ” he read. “ ‘Sandi’s-man-in-canoe-running-from-spears.’ ”

Sanders’s eyes narrowed and his eyebrows met in a frown of perplexity.

Then, nearer at hand and more distinct, he heard the hollow rattle of another *lokali*.

“Lord,” said Abiboo, “this *lokali* says, ‘one man flies and many follow’; also that ‘he runs in the Eye of Sandi.’ I think it is Ahmet, your lordship’s spy.”

He swung round, and his high-pitched voice rang across the square.

The guard-house disgorged six hesitating men, until Abiboo’s voice put life and direction into their limbs. Then they ran, each man gripping his rifle, each making for the Residency wood.

Presently, from that part of the river which the woods concealed, came the “click-clock, click-clock!” of Mauser rifles, and then into sight there swept a long, narrow canoe, and the man who sat in the middle paddled with the weary energy of desperation.

Left and right and to the rear of the canoe, little fountains of water spurted from the river, and the rattle of the Mausers was now incessant till——

Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

From the hidden jetty where the *Zaire* lay berthed rapped the staccato laughter of a Maxim gun, and Sanders heard the shrill whistle of its bullets.

“Bones!” said an admiring voice at his elbow. “Good old Bones!”

“But the rifles—the rifles!” said Sanders, with a gulp. “In the name of Heaven, who gave the natives rifles?”

The man in the canoe had reached the bank and run ashore. He leapt out, not troubling

to secure his craft—which turned slyly and drifted out to midstream—and walked with bent head and shoulders across the parade ground.

Sanders hurried to meet him.

“Peace on your house, Sandi *baba*,” said the man thickly. “There is a bad palaver in the Lower Isisi, and the people have guns.”

He stumbled, and Captain Hamilton of the Houssas caught him.

He was bleeding from three wounds, for the marksmanship of his mysterious assailants had not been wholly unskilful, and Hamilton lifted him and carried him to the cool shade of the verandah. The rattle of rifles still continued in the forest, but the shots came more leisurely and at longer intervals now.

Abiboo, who had been sent to superintend the defence, came back with a story of four war canoes, each with twenty paddlers and two riflemen, which had turned about and were going upstream at full speed.

“Shall I get steam in the *Zaire*?” asked Hamilton. “I could overtake them before night falls.”

Sanders shook his head.

“They will take to the bush at the first sign of the boat,” he said. “Whatever solution there is, must come from our friend.”

Ahmet, the spy, was sitting with his back resting against the walls of the hut.

“O Ahmet,” said Sanders gently, “what is this bad palaver in the Isisi?”

The man drank eagerly from the cup of water which Patricia Hamilton, brought to the scene by the rattle of musketry, extended to him, and then spoke.

“Lord,” he said, “there is a certain woman in the Isisi who has made a secret palaver with the Araby,<sup>[E]</sup> and has bought guns for her young men. This I found by the favour of God, for the Araby came over the border from the old king’s land, and she met him with her young men, and traded ivory and rubber, and day by day in the Forest of Devils, where no man goes, she taught her young men certain drills.”

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[E] The Arab Trader. “Arab” is a word used rather loosely to describe alike the true Arab and the Zanzibarii.—E. W.

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Sanders frowned.

“What woman is this, Ahmet? For I know no woman on the whole of the river who has such magic with men since D’rona Bululu died.”

“Lord, she is the chief M’Soba’s daughter, and the widow of the wise man Z’buri.”

A light dawned upon Sanders.

“I see,” he said. And, giving orders to Abiboo for the care of the man, he turned abruptly into the bungalow, beckoning, with a jerk of his chin, the Captain of Houssas to follow him.

He went through the big dining-room to his little bureau, and Hamilton, waiting without—for Sanders’s office was a holy of holies—heard the click of a key turning in the

safe. Presently Sanders reappeared with a sheet of paper in his hand.

“Look at this,” he said.

Hamilton took the sheet. It was covered with fine writing, written in a perfect hand.

“DEAR MR. SANDERS,—

“My husband, Dr. Z’buri, wishes me to explain that, owing to his long illness, he has been unable to collect the necessary hut-tax, and he trusts that you will agree to exercise the authority provided for in the 38th Clause of the Territories (Taxation) Law, and remit this levy.

“Yours very sincerely,

“SIGIBI Z’BURI.”

Hamilton gasped.

“When did you get this?” he demanded.

“Six months ago—before Z’buri died. I nearly had a fit.”

“But, good lord, it’s not possible!” expostulated the Houssa captain. “A native woman—I remember her as a slip of a child!”

“I used to wonder how Z’buri passed his time, now I know,” said Sanders. “He was a wonderful teacher, and in his freakish humour he has educated the girl. You could do much in five years. Now, what are we going to do?”

“You can’t go, of course,” said Hamilton. And then, as a thought struck him: “Look here, sir, this is a woman palaver; let’s ask Pat.”

He went out of the room and returned with the girl.

“It’s war, and the worst kind of war,” explained Sanders. “If I go up, I must take every Houssa you have.” He looked at Hamilton. “It may mean sending to headquarters for another battalion, and that is one of the things I have no wish to do.”

“Send Bones,” said Patricia Hamilton.

“Bones!” repeated her brother disapprovingly. “My dear girl, what can Bones do?”

“You’ll laugh at me,” said the girl earnestly, “but I have great faith in Bones. Bones has a star.”

“My dear girl!” protested Hamilton, with a smile.

“Now please don’t be superior, dear,” she said. “I somehow feel that Bones will blunder into the right kind of attitude, and the people of the Lower Isisi are very fond of him, and he is young, and, after all, it’s a woman he has to deal with, even though she is a native woman.”

The two men looked at each other thoughtfully.

“I don’t like to do it,” said Sanders quietly. “It may mean the end of Bones, and I would never forgive myself.”

“Don’t you think I care, too?” asked the girl. “Here he is. Let’s ask him.”

Bones strutted into the dining-room beaming. He clicked his heels and saluted, and his chest was swollen with pride.

“There is no cause for apprehension, dear old Excellency, ladies and gentlemen,” he said. “Single-handed I have destroyed, by barrage, important enemy forces which

attempted to reach our lines. At first hint of danger the jolly old machine-gun officer, sleepin' with one eye open by the side of his battery, leapt to arms. Certain elements which obtained a footin' in our advanced line were annihilated. On the rest of the front there is nothin' to report."

He saluted again.

"I heard your gun going," said Hamilton. "Did you hit anything?"

Bones eyed his chief with scorn.

"Oh, no!" he said sarcastically. "Oh, dear, no—oh, no, certainly not!"

"You did splendid, Bones," said the girl. "I am sure that you were wonderful. But Mr. Sanders wants to tell you something."

Clearly and concisely Sanders reduced the situation to a few sentences, and Bones, with an unnecessary hand to his ear and with his face screwed up to represent his appreciation of the importance of the news listened with no other interruption than an occasional "Bless my life!" and "Dear, dear dear!" which he thought the occasion warranted. When Sanders had finished, he rose from the chair on to the edge of which he had sunk, carefully wiped the interior of his helmet with a gaudy bandanna, replaced his head-dress, and looked thoughtfully at the floor.

"Tact," he said.

"Exactly," said Hamilton. "That is what I am afraid of."

"Tact is my long suit, dear old sceptical captain," said Bones complacently. "I shall treat this good lady firmly, but gently, realisin', if I may say so, that I alone am qualified to deal with a most embarrassin' situation."

"You leave at dawn to-morrow," said Sanders, as the girl, at his inquiring lift of chin, rose from the table. "Do your best, Bones. If it is warm send for me *haec dum*—I'll have the pigeons put aboard. If it is possible, disarm the men—they have eight rifles between them—and remove the women to headquarters."

Bones left at daybreak the next morning, after bidding an officious farewell to everybody. With a large leather portfolio under his arm, he made what he was pleased to term "official visits" to Patricia, Hamilton, and Sanders.

"I am sure, Bones, that you will be awfully diplomatic."

"We Shall Do Our Best," replied Bones, in capital letters.

Hamilton was writing in the orderly-room when his subordinate appeared.

"His Excellency Lieutenant Tibbetts, Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary," announced Bones.

"Good luck, Bones," said Hamilton, extending his big hand. "Don't make an ass of yourself."

"We Shall Do Our Best," murmured Bones, and bowed his way out.

Sanders was on the quay when the *Zaire* swung out to midstream.

"Anything but war, Bones," he said.

Bones waved a superior hand.

"We Will Do Our Best," he said.

Sanders waited until the boat was out of sight, then called his orderly to him. A few

minutes later, with a very tame pigeon scientifically held in the waiting Abiboo's hand, the Commissioner wrote rapidly in the crabbed Arabic of the Coast, and this was the message that the wheeling bird carried to the north—

“In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

“From Sandi, where the river meets the sea.

“To Bosambo, Paramount Chief of the Ochori, in his city by the river.

“Peace upon your house. This day, the third before the rind of the moon, the lord Tibbetti goes to make a palaver with Sigibi, the daughter of M'Soba, of the lands near the Isisi, and the widow of Z'buri the wise. Now, I hear there is to be war and a joining of all the peoples against my King, because of this woman. This to you, Bosambo, my friend: You shall take your spears near to the Forest of Dreams, which is by M'Soba's village, where this woman is, and if a call comes from Tibbetti, you shall strike without mercy, and destroy all the fighting men of M'Soba and the woman Sigibi also, and you shall put their villages to the fire, and hold their women and goats for my disposal and I will be strong for you and be your shield against all men.

“Written at my large house of Government.”

The *Zaire* made the bend of the river where the Isisi divides the N'gombi from the lands of the Good Chief, and no mishap befell her, in spite of Bones's system of navigation. He arrived in the dark before the dawn. It was a propitious hour to arrive, by the Isisi reckoning, for at this moment of half light all devils and ghosts die, and the stranger cannot import foreign and disastrous spirits.

Bones took counsel with his bodyguard and factotum, one Ali, whose youth had been well spent in the laboratory of an eccentric scientist on the Coast, and whose language was, in consequence, not only English, but the English of technology.

“Tact,” said Bones, “is the only weapon in the jolly old armoury of the Diplomatic Service. Ali, you're going to see your employer an' patron in a new light.”

The solemn fat-faced “Arab”—so he called himself, though, in truth, he was no more than a Coast boy with a touch of Kano blood—turned his glassy eyes upon Lieutenant Tibbetts.

“Tactful application of philosophy represents theoretical syllogisms,” he said deliberately; “but if subject of tact should work adversely by violent demonstrations against tactor or tactist, precautionary loadment of artillery armament painfully desirable.”

Bones shook his head violently.

“No war, Ali, you bloodthirsty old rascal—tact an' diplomatic pressure.”

“Sir,” said Ali gravely, “just as swordfish (*Xiphies gladius*) is provided with elongation of superior maxilla to combat shark (*Carcharius vulgaris*) when diplomatic intercourse *non est*, so Government artillery——”

“No war,” said Bones loudly.

He dressed with extreme care, packed his portfolio with many virgin sheets and a fountain pen, and, with an escort of two Houssas, started off to interview the magic woman with rare confidence.

Ali met him at the gateway.

“No, Ali,” said Bones sternly, “you’re a naughty boy! I’ve told you this is a diplomatic \_\_\_\_\_”

“Sir,” said Ali, and slipped the loaded Browning pistol he carried into the coat-pocket of his employer, “in periods of peace preparations for belligerency are not only admirable, but demandable.”

Bones walked through the village, and noted little cause for apprehension. The women were about their cooking-pots, the children were gathering sticks for the fires, and such men as were to be seen were engaged with their fishing nets. But if the serenity of the village was encouraging, there was this remarkable circumstance—his arrival had excited no unusual attention. The little crowd which gathered on the beach to welcome the *Zaire*, at whatever hour she arrived, was entirely absent. There was a sense of unreality—of careful rehearsal about the proceedings which caused Bones a certain uneasiness, since, for all his vagaries, he had that instinct which is the peculiar possession of all who have dwelt in authority in native lands.

He crossed the broad village street to a man he knew, and the native did not raise his eyes from the net in his hand.

“O N’lema,” said Bones, “why is it that none came to the beaches to welcome the *puc-a-puc* of Government?”

“Lord,” said the man, without looking up, “the woman Sigibi has said that all things should be as they are. And now this woman speaks the truth, for she was born on a night of storm and nursed through a bad harvest. Also two great Isisi ghosts are related to her.”

“Where may this woman be?” asked Bones, accepting this impressive evidence of Sigibi’s infallibility as inevitable, for as the saying goes, “As the hunter without a spear, so is the Isisi without a ghost.”

The man pointed.

“Master, she waits for you; also her great soldiers with guns.”

Bones followed the outstretched finger with a curious little tickling of his spine.

At the far end of the street were the chief’s huts, and to the right of these a clearing had been made, and one great new hut stood in lordly isolation. But it was not the thatched dwelling-place that attracted Bones’s attention.

Before the hut stood a girl, slim and straight. A length of blue silk was wound about her to breast level, and around her waist was a girdle of leopards’ tails. He saw, as he approached slowly, that she was finer of countenance than any native woman he had seen. Her skin was chocolate-brown, the lips were full, but not negroid. About her short hair was a fillet of brass, whilst round her neck were three rows of pearls which Bones judged to be imitation, such as traders sell.

She looked at him with big, sad eyes, and came to meet him.

“O Sigibi,” said Bones, in the Bomongo tongue, “we hear of your power and your fine soldiers, and my lord Sandi desires that you shall come to him that he may learn many things; also that you shall bring to him your warriors.”

The girl smiled—a smile that transfigured her face. Bones looked round out of the corner of his eye for the riflemen, but they were nowhere to be seen.

“My dear Mister Tibbetti,” she drawled in English, “how perfectly charming of you to

visit us! I hope Mr. Sanders is enjoying his customary health?"

Bones looked at her in blank dismay. All his confidence, his inbred assurance, departed from him in a flash. Sigibi, the native woman, he could handle, be she witch or devil, but a proposition which drawled the conventional phrases of polite society had him beaten before he started.

"I hope you will stay to breakfast," said the girl. "Don't you find the weather fearfully trying? I suppose you've been hearing fearful stories about me."

She fanned herself with a tiny *abanico* she drew from the bosom of her primitive gown.

"The natives are so amusing," she smiled; "they exaggerate, and they are so awfully credulous—are they not?"

Bones opened and closed his mouth like a fish out of water.

"My dear husband," she went on easily, as she led the way to the far side of the hut, "used to say that they were children who never grow up, and really they are no better."

Behind the hut was a table, which was unusual. It was covered by a white cloth, which was wonderful, and there was spread a respectable breakfast—steaming coffee, eggs, chicken ragout, and white bread.

Bones seated himself like a man in a dream. Throughout the meal he was silent. He took every dish the girl urged upon him without even worrying whether he was—as he was—covered by the rifles of his concealed enemy.

"I hate Browning," she was saying; "he is so elusive. Tennyson is sugary, don't you think?"

"My heaven an' earth!" said Bones involuntarily.

He knew—as though the written record were before his eyes—that there was danger. He felt it in the air, he sensed it in the averted glances of the native woman who waited at table. And he was helpless. Once or twice she looked at him keenly, and once she approached the subject with a directness which took his breath away.

"You do not believe that there is going to be a rising, Mr. Tibbetts?" she asked. "It is so absurd, but quite a lot of people think so."

At a sign one of the women disappeared into the hut and came out with a chubby little boy.

"Come, Harold," she said—Bones nearly swooned—"recite that little piece about 'La Marguerite sans peur.'"

That recitation was never to be given.

Bones made a desperate bid for the initiative.

"Sigibi," he said in the native tongue—it was his only hope of retaining her at a distance from which he could operate—"much is said. Now I tell you I will see the chief, your father, for he is a good man and the loyal servant of Government."

She laughed softly.

"He is asleep in his hut," she said. "Presently you shall see him."

A shrill cry trembled in the air—the shriek of a man in agony. It came from the river end of the street.

Bones jumped up, but before he was on his feet came a thunderous crash that seemed to split the heavens.

Bones knew that sound—it was the crash of the Hotchkiss gun on the *Zaire*.

He leapt into the middle of the street, his Houssas behind him, and he heard the switch of their breech-blocks open as they loaded.

The street was alive with armed men. Bones turned and saw the smile on the girl's face. He shut his eyes tight, then opened them to their fullest extent.

“My dear Mr. Tibbetts——” He heard her mocking tone, and then his pistol rang out, and he saw her drop.

“As per instructions!” he groaned, and broke for the king's hut.

It was the hut of the dead. The good chief had been speared in bed, and with him all the people of his household.

“O Mahmut,” he said to his one remaining Houssa—the other lay dead, transfixed with a throwing spear—“fire carefully at their stomachs. I think I have killed the woman.”

“Lord, she is alive,” said the man. “I saw her running when Tipoo fell.”

The *Zaire* was in the hands of the enemy—that Bones was sure. He could not see the boat from behind the breastwork he had created.

It puzzled him that the spearmen did not attempt to rush him, but the explanation came when he saw the slim figure of the girl approaching. She carried a branch of palm and showed no evidence of fear.

She came closer until Bones raised his Browning, when she stopped.

“I'm afraid you have been inconvenienced,” she drawled, “and please don't raise your pistol, because if you do, you will be killed by my people. Mr. Tibbetts, I fear you are in a sad position, for my soldiers have your little ship.”

Bones stood facing the girl and thinking rapidly. If ever there was a moment for the exercise of that quality of diplomacy on which he prided himself, that moment was the present.

“O Sigibi,” he said mildly, “this is a very bad palaver.”

“Speak in English,” she smiled, but Bones Ignored the request.

“If you kill me as you have killed my men, be sure Sandi will come, and there will be an end of you all.”

She laughed, but nodded to him to continue.

There was only one chance for Bones, and it was in the faintest hope of seizing that chance that he continued his oration in the native tongue.

“Be sure, too, O Sigibi,” he said, “that I have a powerful ju-ju, more terrible than M'shimba-m'shamba.”

“How childish!” she murmured, but kept her eyes on his. “My dear Mr. Tibbetts, how can you be so ridiculous?”

Yet there was something in her tone—an uneasiness, a tremulous petulance. Bones went on with relish.

“My ju-ju has eyes like great suns and a mouth like a pool of rocks, and when he speaks the river runs up the hills, and the big trees crack and shriek, and sickness falls on

the land.”

He saw the men behind her shrink back, their knuckles to their teeth; but, most wonderful of all, he saw her eyes open wide in a panic of terror, and her shaking hand go up to her heart.

“Tibbetti,” she cried hoarsely, “this is a lie! Mr. Tibbetts—absurd! O Tibbetti *baba* \_\_\_\_\_”

Bones’s voice rose to a squeak.

“*Iwa!*” he cried, and at the dreadful name of “Death” the girl’s knees trembled and bent. “Famine and sickness my ju-ju shall bring—death to the child and the woman and the man——”

With a shriek she flung herself grovelling on the ground before him, and when Bosambo’s war canoes came sweeping down the river to save or avenge him, the Chief of the Ochori found his lord complacently sipping lemonade on the newly-washed bridge of the *Zaire*, eight Mauser rifles stacked before him, and a wild-eyed native woman hugging a naked child who alternately snivelled and recited scraps of “*La Marguerite sans peur*” in a shrill monotone.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE LITTLE PEOPLE

**I**N A COUNTRY where gossip runs from village to village as quickly as fire flicks from straw to straw you may maintain a small force of spies, and yet never know of most important events which happen almost at your front door. For, though your native man, and no less your native woman, is a born gossip, there are certain secret things about which he does not talk, and there was a time when half the Akasava was fighting half the Isisi and no one was the wiser, because both sides had tacitly agreed that the riparian villages which were directly under the white man's eye should preserve the semblance of peacefulness, and Akasava and Isisi folk bartered and traded with one another on the beaches, and men went from one country to another in perfect security, though ten miles in the interior the flower of their fighting men were at death-grips.

Thereafter Mr. Commissioner Sanders was wont to probe into the "bush" sending small parties of Houssas on long journeys into the forest, to test the condition of public sentiment. Further than this he made it known in grand palaver that the sins of the interior should be visited upon the river villages, and that he would exact reprisals of a peculiarly drastic character whenever these—to the native mind—innocent deceptions were practised.

The natives did not believe him, because they have few theories and no abstract philosophies; but after a few river villages had been burnt, and a few headmen summarily sent to penal servitude, the people of the river changed their views. Nevertheless, this did not put an end to secret fighting, because war is a biological process, which cannot be eradicated by legislation until you eradicate the desire in the savage animal to defend his mate and his young from the attacks of enemies. When men reach a point where they can gaze unmoved upon the danger to their women, they have arrived, not at a high development of civilization, but are far down the opposite slopes of mental and moral degeneracy.

There were two communities which dwelt upon the B'sumbi River. One of these was of the Akasava, and the other of the Isisi nationality, and theoretically they dwelt together in harmony, though they were far from the great river and the vigilant observation of Mr. Commissioner Sanders.

The chief of the Akasava village, one K'soga sent secret word to the countryside that the spirit of his father had moved him to hold a Grand Feast. He sent out gifts of chickens, goats, and dogs to the headmen—this being the form that important invitations take—and on a certain night the countryside gathered in the village and watched the Dance of Young Hearts, performed by forty-two boys. There is, from the white point of view, something amusing in the spectacle of forty-two sturdy urchins with beards made of red goat-hair gummed to their fat little faces, and there is something even admirable in the excellent discipline of the boys as they strut and stamp and sway in line and in circle through this mystic measure.

But after the boys have done their part, there is a great drinking of palm wine and a

certain beer which is brewed from maize, and Sanders had placed the ceremony amongst the prohibited festivals. This particular Dance of Boys—each representing an arrogant and masterful familiar of the Akasava nation—lasted for a day and two nights, and on the dawn of the second day K'soga gathered his spears and raided the Isisi village, killed a few men, carried off a few women and many goats, and returned in triumph. His success was made more easy by the fact that the chief and most of the men of the ravished Isisi village were away hunting when the raid occurred.

Two days later K'lavo-bolo, the chief in question—well descended from high fighting men—came southward through the Little-by-the-Big-forest where the B'sumbi forest throws out a tangled promontory and with him came his two own brothers, three other brethren by his father's other wives, and a cousin named M'Kema.

They went at a gentle jog-trot along the forest path, in single file, each carrying a wicker shield of great size and significant design, and the arms that were thrust through the wooden brackets of the shields grasped fistfuls of throwing spears.

At the Wishing Water, that green and stagnant pool, the breeding-place of tsetse and gnat, K'lavo-bolo halted to sluice his spears.

“That K'soga of the Akasava may meet us without his brothers, and that he may die swiftly,” he prayed; “that Sandi may never hear of K'soga's end; that Militini, the soldier, may sleep and no word come to him; that Tibbetti, the young one, may pass without looking.”

His own brother swept the pool's surface with his broad spear.

“That no spy of Sandi shall hear of our great killing, nor carry word to the soldiers; that K'soga's ghost shall not walk in the forest nor frighten us,” he said.

Each of the men had his prayer for vengeance and security.

“Let us sleep by the pool,” said K'lavo-bolo. “To-morrow our young men will come, and then we shall meet K'soga, for his boys will dance this night, and we shall catch him when he is asleep.”

The next morning they were joined by an Isisi fighting regiment, and, descending upon the Akasava, their prayers were more or less answered, for they crucified K'soga before his own hut, drove the women to the forest and burnt the village.

“Now let us make an end of these boys,” said the own brother of K'lavo-bolo, “for they will carry stories to Sandi, and he will come with his soldiers.”

K'lavo-bolo looked at the ludicrous little group of children who were huddled together in the midst of his warriors and shook his head.

“If Sandi comes,” he said, “he will not hang us for what we did in hot war. If we kill these children, I think we shall hang. Let us drive them into the B'sumbi, where they will all die, and then we can tell Sandi that we have not seen them.”

So some thirty-eight small boys—four had made their escape—with tear-stained faces and red goat beards, were marched out of the village, and the great forest swallowed them up.

\* \* \* \* \*

Captain Hamilton, of the Houssas, came swinging across the parade-ground, and

Bones, who saw the vicious way his superior was twirling his cane, felt a sudden sinking of heart, and hastily reviewed his delinquencies.

Suddenly he remembered.

He had forgotten to mail the monthly pay-roll,—in duplicate—to divisional headquarters.

“Oh, lor!” said Bones dismally.

He stood rigidly to attention and saluted with great humility as Hamilton took the steps to the stoep in one leap.

“Hello, Bones!”

Hamilton turned upon his lieutenant with an unpleasant glitter in his eyes.

“Hello, and good mornin’,” replied Bones rapidly, “Everythin’ correct an’ no jolly old defaulters. Moral of troops excellent an’ health of the army good.”

“Hello, Bones!” repeated Hamilton softly, and his stick whirled more furiously than ever. “I want to see you about something.”

“Certainly, Captain Hamilton, sir,” said Bones, with badly-simulated surprise, “though what on earth it can be about—— I’ve had several bouts of fever lately, an’ my poor old head isn’t all it might be——”

“Do you, by any chance,” interrupted Hamilton, with sinister deliberation, “contribute character sketches of your superiors to *The Reading County Star*?”

A great light dawned upon Bones.

“Did they put it in, dear old Ham?” he demanded eagerly.

Captain Hamilton drew from his pocket a newspaper and glanced at the column which it was folded to expose.

“There is an article here,” he said with studied calm, “entitled ‘Types I Have Met.—No. 2. The Martinet, by Senob.’ ”

“That’s ‘Bones’ spelt backward,” the young man explained complacently.

“Any ass can see it is ‘Bones’ spelt backward,” snarled Hamilton. “What I want to know is, did you describe me as a middle-aged man of irascible temper?”

“Did,” stammered Bones guiltily—“now, *did* I, dear old officer?”

“And again,” continued his remorseless chief, reading, “ ‘The tropical heat early saps the vitality of men whose lives have not been all they might have been. Alas! Drink! How many a promising career hast thou blighted!’ ”

Bones made no reply. He stared round-eyed at the top of Hamilton’s left ear, and sniffed.

“Did you write that?” demanded the wrathful Captain.

“It was purely—allegorical,” said Bones incoherently, “intended, dear old officer, to point a moral and adorn a tale—nothing further from my thoughts—don’t misunderstand me, sir an’ commander.”

He gulped, saluted, and hurried from the scene.

“I’d have kicked him, for tuppence,” said Hamilton, describing the interview.

Mr. Commissioner Sanders smiled.

“That was Number Two. Did you see Number One?” he asked dryly.

“Good Heavens, no! Who was the subject—not me as well?”

Sanders shook his head.

“I was the victim,” he said. “Bones described the Territory fairly well, but went on to prove that what was needed was young blood.”

“Well, I’m——”

Sanders laughed, which was a rare occurrence.

“Young people should not be allowed to handle dynamite or fountain pens,” he said. “Yet *scribimus indocti doctique!* When I was new to this strange continent, I wrote voluminously. Novelty of surrounding and an ardent temperament have produced more literature than any of the vital phenomena of life. There never was a tourist who went to Switzerland who did not describe his emotions at the sight of Pilatus.”

Patricia Hamilton came later to tiffin, and quoted the absence of Bones.

“In disgrace?” she said, in surprise. “What has Bones done?”

“He has adopted a literary career,” said Sanders, “and has faithfully described your brother. Show your sister the paper, Hamilton.”

The girl read the offending article, punctuating her reading with delighted little gurgles of merriment.

“Poor Bones!” she said, wiping her eyes. “You aren’t really cross, are you dear? And it is all so beautifully spelt.”

“I was a little annoyed,” admitted Hamilton, “and my annoyance was aggravated by the discovery that the silly jack—the stupid fellow had forgotten to forward the pay-roll to H. Q.”

He chuckled.

“I’ll bet the printer had a bad quarter of an hour with Bones’s spelling!” he said.

The object of his scorn was at that moment sitting on the edge of his bed, leaning forward with clasped hands between his knees, a picture of dejection.

“Sir,” urged his factotum, “consumption of food necessary for subject. Unless subject revitalizes tissues by administration of proteids to stomach, subject suffers in cranium from feverish symptoms.”

Not in vain had Ali Abid served as assistant to an eccentric bacteriologist who had made his home and pursued his studies of tropical diseases at Grand Bassam.

“Don’t talk about food, dear old Ali,” said Bones testily. “This is a case where a gentleman either chucks the service or shoots himself. What’s that?”

He sniffed the pleasant fluid in the bowl which Ali held.

“The juice from a young he-chicken enveloped in boiling water flavourably enhanced with onions,” said Ali alarmingly, but with detail.

“I’ll try to pick a bit,” said the melancholy Bones with remarkable briskness, “an’ whilst I’m doin’ it, put out my writing-case.”

He “picked a bit” to such purpose that Ali was a thoughtful man when he brought the last plate to the Houssa orderly to be washed.

“Truly Tibbetti is the son of a wolf and the great grandson of a vulture,” he said bitterly, “for he hath left me a skeleton and a scent!”

Bones squared himself before his writing-table and made four ineffectual starts at his letter.

Spelling was not his strong point, for he had been on the mathematical side at school, and had never understood why words should not be written as near phonetically as possible.

“SIR (began the letter),—

“I have the honour to submit for your favrable attention, for your favrable attention, my resignation, from the Army, the Army. I feel that, under the circumstances, I can do no less than ask you to forward the same to the proper quaters. Dear sir and friend (of other, other days), believe me I am sorry that I wrote in the beastly paper in a wild moment, in a misguided moment. I did not describe you—that was far from my thoughts, far from my thoughts. It was rather a *melanje* (mix-up) of various fellows I had met. The male leaves leaves on Tuesday, and I shall begin packing at onse. My sorrowful regards to your sister and respectful salaams to our dear old Sanders.

“Yours ever,

“BONES,

“Augustus Tibbetts Lieut.

“P.S.—Ali makes simply ripping chicken soop soop; you aught to get Abiboo to take a few lessuns.—B.”

Hamilton received the letter with the afternoon cup of tea that woke him from his doze. He finished his tea and went across to interview his subordinate. He could hear Bones singing long before he reached the hut. It was a song sung in a cracked falsetto, and Bones, who was not quite sure of the words, and was ignorant of the time, filled up the deficiencies as he went along.

“Oh, ma honey!

Ain't it fun-ny?

Di diddle dumpty doo de di de day!

When we meet in Tennessee—

Oh, tumpy tumpy tee!—

We'll be so happy all the day!”

The song broke off suddenly, and when Hamilton knocked at the door, it was a weak voice that bade him enter.

Bones was sitting limply on his bed in his shirt-sleeves, his banjo thrust hastily under the pillow, and artlessly, but only partially, covered by a large bath towel. He rose feebly to his feet and saluted.

“Not feeling well, Bones?” asked Hamilton, with spurious sympathy.

“Touch of fever, sir,” said Bones, in a hollow voice. “Afraid I've been overdoing it. Six months in England will pull me round. Then I must find some sort of job to occupy my mind.”

“Why not go on to the staff of *The Reading County Star*?” suggested Hamilton

blandly.

Bones made a deprecating gesture and shook his melancholy head.

“I deserve it, dear old sir. Rub it in,” he said brokenly, “hit a fellow when he’s down! Have no mercy on the jolly old blighter!

“Rattle old Bones  
Over the stones,  
Diddly, diddly, diddly Jones!”

Hamilton said nothing, and then, after a while, he said—

“I had your letter.”

“Ah, yes.”

Bones shrugged his shoulders with the most despairing shrug he could muster at short notice.

“There’s nothing else for me to do, dear old captain. I had to send in my resignation or shoot myself, an’ I don’t want to use Government ammunition on a purely private job. That wouldn’t be honest, dear old sportsman.”

“Yes, I have had your resignation,” said Hamilton, “and I have decided to accept it.”

All the weariness, all the dejection and the gentle unhappiness with which Bones was clothed fell from him like a cloak, and he stood bolt upright.

“You have accepted my resignation, jolly old friend?” he said incredulously.

He looked at his superior with a searching eye.

“Dear old captain,” he said gently, “you are not well. You’ve been standing in the sun.”

He took the wrist of his indignant superior in his hand and began counting rapidly.

“One, two, three, four, five, six—temperature up, pulse racing like a jolly old paddle-wheel, eye bilious. Off you go to bed, my palid old sir. Bones will look after you.”

So confident was his tone that Hamilton was almost deceived.

“What the dickens do you mean?” he demanded and felt his own wrist. “There’s nothing wrong with my pulse.”

“Patient suffers from illusions,” murmured Bones, “hears strange singing noises in his jolly old nut. Very bad, very bad, old officer! You go right to bed.”

Hamilton recovered himself.

“I think this arises out of the fact that I have said I will accept your resignation,” he began.

“Sit down on the bed, dear old Captain Hamilton,” soothed Bones, patting his commander’s hand. “You’re all right—feelin’ better? Shall I sing you to sleep?”

“No!” said Hamilton hastily. Then: “Seriously, Bones, you’ll have to give up writing to the papers. In the first place, it is against King’s Regulations, and, in the second place, it makes your pals look silly. You’re in the Army to fight, not to write——”

Sergeant Abiboo stood in the doorway of the hut, his hand raised rigidly to the salute.

“Lord,” he said, in the Arabic of the Coast, “it is the order of Sandi that your high lordships shall go to him, for the *chika chik* has brought a great message.”

Hamilton hurried out of the hut instanter, for a telegraphic message from Administrative Headquarters was an event, and portended big happenings. Before he had reached the verandah Bones was hopping and skipping in his wake, buttoning his tunic as he ran, and bawling for him to “slow down.”

Sanders sat in his big cane chair, two telegram forms, closely filled with the crabbed writing of the operator, upon his knees, and these he was regarding with a scowl.

“Anything wrong, sir?” asked Hamilton.

Sanders made a wry little face.

“Headquarters have opened an ethnological branch,” he said dryly.

He looked up.

“What do you know of the B’sumbi?”

It was Hamilton’s turn to frown. He knew the B’sumbi forest, but as to what lay within its depths neither he nor any man who had lived in the Territories could say for certain. It was less of a forest than a swamp, or, rather, it was a series of islands, peninsulas, and isthmuses connecting lands thickly covered with virgin forests and separated by marshes which were infinitely more difficult to negotiate than open water.

A few intrepid travellers, Sanders included, had penetrated into the B’sumbi, but had done no more. The frontier line between the Territories and a certain friendly Power ran somewhere through the forest in a straight line. In theory that line was definite. In practice neither the Government of the Territories nor the Government of its friendly neighbour could actually say whether this or that village was on one side of the line or the other.

The forest had never been surveyed. It was extremely difficult to take any kind of observation, and in places—particularly in the more dense forests of the Inner B’sumbi—impossible.

“I know as much as most people,” replied Hamilton slowly. “It is a filthy country, full of wild people.”

“Have you ever heard of the Negrito?” asked Sanders, and Hamilton shook his head.

“Negrito, dear old Excellency,” began Bones, bursting into the conversation like a whirlwind, “the jolly little Negrito! I have shot hundreds of them, dear old sportsman. Funny little thing, like a squirrel—very good eatin’, if you know how to cook ’em.”

“The Negrito,” said Sanders calmly, “is a race of dwarf negroes who inhabit certain parts of the Philippine Islands.”

“Ah,” said Bones, greatly relieved, “the Negrito! I thought you said the Negreto! Of course, everybody knows the Negrito. He lives in the Philippine Islands, dwelling amongst the swamps and feeding on the herbage——”

“The Negrito,” said Sanders patiently, “is a negroid race living in the high mountains of the Philippines.”

“Then they are not the kind of Negrito I have met,” said Bones, unabashed.

“Just shut up for one moment, Bones,” snapped Hamilton.

“Anybody knows where the Negrito come from,” murmured Bones gently.

“They have all the characteristics of the pygmy of the Ituri,” Sanders went on, “and the pygmy of the B’sumbi.” He tapped the telegram in his knees. “Administration wants somebody to go into B’sumbi and make a report on these people, their customs, and their

habits. It sounds a perfectly horrible job, but it has got to be done.”

“Perfectly beastly job,” said Bones, and looked at Hamilton with a speculative eye. “Well, dear old Ham, when do you start?”

“The only thing,” mused Sanders, looking up to the roof of the verandah thoughtfully, “the only thing is that I want to secure a really good report. It must be written by some one who is accustomed to writing—somebody who can reduce to fluent English all he sees and hears.”

Bones coughed.

“Naturally,” he said.

“It ought to be a man with a style of his own,” continued Sanders, “a man respected by the natives, some one quick and alert, and some one who can master the new dialect—which he will have to learn—and some one, moreover, who can inspire confidence in these little people, who are rather shy.”

“Why didn’t you say ‘Bones’ at once sir?” demanded that gentleman. “Of course I’ll go!”

“It must be a man with an iron constitution,” Sanders went on, “who doesn’t know what illness is, a quick observer, a man of resource——”

“You are quite right, sir,” interrupted Bones, shaking his head. “Our dear old Ham would never do for this job. I will ready be in ten minutes.”

As a matter of fact, it was not until two days later that H.M. Launch *Wiggle* set forth on her adventurous voyage.

In a green dell far in the interior of the B’sumbi forest thirty-eight disconsolate little boys sat in a circle, in the fashion of their fathers, and held a palaver. For more than a week they had lived upon their resources by trapping monkeys and by the digging of edible roots.

They had held many palavers, but this was the most serious of all, because their bush instinct told them that they were nearing a wholly unfriendly people. It was a cheerless assembly, since none saw reason for merriment in the fact that each of the dancers had industriously regummed his goat-hair beard to his face. Since each was the representative for the time being of a domestic devil of great potency, it was necessary for their salvation that their parts should be maintained.

One, Titu, who had suggested that the facial adornments should be removed, had been met with such a volley of scorn that he had almost wilted from the circle.

“Titu is a fish,” piped a small boy insultingly, “for, whilst we are devils, no other ghost will attack us.”

“But the B’sumbi people are not devils,” protested Titu feebly, “and they will chop us.”

“Wa!” said the chorus with such unanimity and alacrity that it was easy to understand what was uppermost in each small mind.

Buku, the boy who had assumed leadership, shook his head.

“We shall frighten them with our terrible faces,” he said confidently.

One of the circle jumped up, a terrified expression on his face.

“I hear!” he whispered agitatedly.

They were all on their knees, their ears to the ground. There was no mistaking the continuous pad of bare feet. But the difficulty was to know from what direction the sounds came.

The boy Titu suddenly jerked himself erect.

“There is a wooden foot,”<sup>[G]</sup> he said.

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<sup>[G]</sup> A shod foot—*i.e.* a man in boots.

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“Perhaps it is Sandi.”

They listened again in complete silence. The trained ears of the boys easily detected the sound of shod feet. It must be a white man, for no other wore boots in the forest.

“If it is Sandi, he will beat us because the Dance of the Boys is against the law; and if we tell him everything, then he will beat our fathers, and they will beat us. Now, I shall not speak when Sandi comes.”

Titu had stolen from the group and had moved rapidly, but noiselessly, along the forest track in the direction of the sound. It was he who first sighted Bones at the head of his carriers, and passed the word to the conspirators.

Bones, coming suddenly upon a silent watching circle, stood still and gaped.

\* \* \* \* \*

The complaint that Sanders made about Bones’s report was that three-quarters of it was devoted to a description of the incidents of a perfectly commonplace journey, for the adventurer had insisted upon recording everything that had happened to himself, irrespective of its intrinsic importance or its bearing upon his quest. After wading through sheet after sheet in Bones’s vile fist—containing such thrilling items as “11.27, bitten by large fly on rist; applied first-aid by sucking, cotton wool, iodine, etc.”—Sanders at last reached that portion of the report which Bones had been sent to make. He had described his meeting in the forest, sixty miles farther west than he had expected to come upon any trace of the people he had been sent to study, and went on—

“The pygmy of the B’sumbi is, in my well-considered judgment, judgment, a pure Negrito type. His average height is three foot seven, and he wears a long red beard (detachable). Very intelligent, but dumm, but dumm, crys when smacked, but very fond of sugar. Eats cake from hand, but very taim, but very taim, taim. Also playful.”

There were many other characteristics which Bones mentioned in the course of his report, but none which so excited the curiosity of Sanders as—

“Unlike other natives of Territory, they accepted all gifts readily except sope.”

In a far-away Akasava village Buku narrated to his admiring relatives such as had survived the great raid, the story of his adventures.

“As for Tibbetti,” he said grandly, “he gave us many wonderful things which were good for the stomach, and these I ate, also my friends. But this one cruel thing he did, that he made us wash ourselves with a certain white stone which made the eyes very painful;

but *baba* though he told us many times to do the thing, we would never wash our necks, for the water made us feel unhappy.”

Boys of all races and colours have much in common.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE NORTHERN MEN

PATRICIA HAMILTON awaited Bones by the wire gate which leads to the Residency woods. She sat on a camp stool, fanning herself with the brim of her big white topee, and the gentle breeze which blew in from the sea sent her fair hair straying.

She had changed very little since the day she had arrived and had been so unceremoniously greeted by Lieutenant Tibbetts. She was of the kind that takes the sun evenly. A little browner of face and hands, and a little finer, perhaps—only Sanders noticed this, curiously enough—she had lost none of her vigour, nor had the hot days and the evening mists brought to her that state of lethargy which her friends had warned her would accompany a year's residence in a coast town.

She was a little distrait this morning, for the end of her stay was in sight, and although her visit to England would only be in the nature of a break, and she had resolved to return at the end of six months, she grudged those one hundred and eighty odd days in which she would sink into insignificance amidst some forty millions of people.

Ordinarily, she would have been very angry indeed with Bones for keeping her waiting, but to-day she welcomed the opportunity for melancholy meditation on the edge of the little forest, every yard of which she knew. Bones, an angular figure in white duck, sprinted across the square, his helmet on the back of his head, a fishing-rod in one hand and the lunch basket in the other. On his face was the look of one in pain, and now and again he would check his gait to hop on one leg.

"Bones, you've kept me waiting," she said sternly.

Bones, with an agonized expression, was searching gingerly in his trousers pockets.

"Fish hooks, dear old sister," he explained breathlessly. "I thought I'd forgotten 'em, but—ouch!—I haven't. Come out—ooh!"

He extracted them one by one.

"Rush of business, jolly old miss," he said in answer to her reproach. "Beastly old forms an' requisitions, pay vouchers and company accounts. Oh, Ali!"

He whistled vulgarly to his dignified servant, who was sailing majestically in his wake.

"He'll carry everything," said Bones, and dropped basket and fishing-rod as though they were hot coals.

"You're lazy, Bones," she said.

"It's not laziness, dear old friend," said Bones, falling in by her side; "it's—well, it's something else. I haven't the heart to do any kind of work. I'm just desperate, dear old Hamilton's sister, I'm reckless—I don't know what I shall do to-night!"

"What can you do?" she asked, unimpressed.

Bones shrugged his shoulders.

"Drink," he said sombrely, "take opium, gamble——"

“Don’t be silly, Bones,” she laughed. “There’s nothing to drink but lime juice, and Mr. Sanders wouldn’t give you opium, and who could you gamble with?”

A staggering question for a man bent upon a career of vice.

“Ali plays a good game of double dummy bridge,” he said hopefully.

“You don’t take enough exercise, Bones,” she said gently; “your liver is out of order.”

“Don’t be indelicate, dear old friend,” he begged and heaved a great and jerky sigh.

He scarcely spoke again until they were seated on the river bank, their lines cast upon the placid surface of the blackwater, where, according to legend the edible river fish most do congregate. Presently, and after an unusually long silence, Bones cleared his throat.

“Dear old Patricia, you’re going away,” he said huskily.

“Yes, Bones. Aren’t you glad?”

“Oh, very,” said Bones dismally. “Ha, ha! Hear me laugh!”

“You’ll frighten the fish,” she warned. “But I have been an awful nuisance to you all.”

“Pull yourself together, silly old Miss Hamilton. Why, you’ve been a jolly old beam of sunshine on a dark an’ dreary day. You’ve been primroses on a dust-heap!”

He put down his rod, and, diving into his inside pocket, he drew forth a sheet of blue official paper. He hesitated before he placed it in her outstretched hand.

“You won’t laugh?” he said, more huskily than ever.

“Oh, Bones, how could you think I would?” she reproached him.

“It’s dashed off. I’m not sure the spellin’ is all that it ought to be, but the soul, dear old \_\_\_\_\_”

He choked and sniffed, and, thrusting the paper into her hand, he rose and strode away.

Patricia opened the paper and read it. It was obviously poetry, because every line began with a capital letter.

Dear old Miss Hamilton, farewell!

What I suffer, nobody, nobody can tell.

(Bones had a trick of repeating words, and even sentences, in the agony of his compositions.)

Far away ore the briney foam

You’re going, dear old Miss Hamilton, home.

Leaving Sanders, Ham, and Bones.

Making noise of moans, of moans and groans.

The spring is coming, and the flowers are blooming gaily—

it went on surprisingly—

And we are dreading the hour, the hour.  
The hour of your departure daily.  
Oh, Love! How strange it seems to be!  
Has it come at last—can it really be?  
I, who was adermant, addimant, adoment to feminine charms,  
At last I fall in the monster's arms!  
Farewell! But not good-by, but not good-by,  
If you don't come back, I'll gladly, gladly die!

The girl read it through, and her eyes were dim with tears.

"Have you finished?" demanded the muffled voice of Bones, who stood with averted head a dozen yards away.

"Yes, Bones," she said gently.

"Did you laugh?"

"Oh, Bones, you don't think I was such a pig?"

Bones turned his red face to her and walked slowly to where he had dropped his rod.

"Of course," he said gruffly, "it's not playin' the game—writin' poetry, an' all that—but—but I know you're too sensible to have your jolly old head turned."

She checked the laugh, divining something of his distress.

There was a long interval of silence.

"You wouldn't like to marry anybody, would you?" he asked, his face still averted.

"I don't think so, Bones," she answered softly.

"You wouldn't like to marry a silly ass, ugly ass, awkward ass, or anything like that, I suppose, dear old—dear—Miss Hamilton, I mean?"

"I shouldn't like to marry even as brave and kindly a gentleman as you Bones," she said.

"I meant me," said Bones, in surprise.

"I guessed that," she said, without a smile.

Again the silence.

"I'm not much," said Bones, with a sigh; "I'm a pretty good shot, a whale at languages, a bit of a scientist, an' I can write—whatever else I can't do, I can write."

"You write very nicely, Bones," she said meekly.

"In the military line of business" he went on, in tones of comfort, "I can give points to some of those jolly old professors at the Staff College—I've got tact an' initiative an' a knowledge of navigation."

"You have everything you really want, Bones," she said, rising.

She crossed to behind where he sat and put her two hands on his shoulders.

"You're a dear, Bones, and when you're a little older you'll make somebody very happy."

"My young life is ended," said Bones miserably, "an' if it wasn't for the fact that jolly old Sanders couldn't get along without me, an' your dear old brother, who, if you will excuse the criticism, dear old friend, is like a child without me, I'd—I'd——"

“Get up, you humbug!” she said, and Bones rose with what he hoped was a sad, wan smile, but which in reality was a very broad grin.

“That is for all your sweetness,” said Patricia Hamilton, and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

It was noticeable all that day that Bones walked about with his head in the air, and that his attitude towards equals and superiors alike was one of arrogant condescension.

He assumed toward Patricia Hamilton an attitude which might only be described as one of ponderous protection. Sanders—a busy man preparing for Patricia Hamilton’s farewell trip—remarked upon this evidence of sinful pride.

“Perhaps he has a boil on his neck,” suggested the practical Hamilton.

Whatever was the cause—which we may well guess—Bones was cheerful enough, and went to work whole-heartedly to assist in the organization of Patricia’s “joy ride.”

The *Zaire* was to go the full journey to the Ochori, and Sanders was to utilize the occasion to hold three State palavers.

“There should be four,” he explained to Hamilton. “Borbini, of the Northern Ochori, has been selling slaves across the mountains to the Great King. Bosambo has very wisely kept out of the palaver, because it could only end one way. There will be a struggle one of these days between the north and the south, and I am not anxious to bring matters to a head—at least, not on this trip. Once your sister is out of the country, we will have a clear-up in the north.”

It was a joyful holiday party which sailed at dawn the next day, and no shadow of the northern feud lay over them.

On the river they have a cumbersome saying which, literally translated, runs: “Long-sun-much-sweetness; sun-road-sweeter; no-sun-road-evil; beware-short-sun-road (or way).”

Made into a passable epigram for white consumption this saying is: “Beware of the northern men, for little sunshine makes them sour.”

The Territories which Sanders rules lie partly upon and partly to the north of the equator, and there is very little difference between the river mouth and far borders of the Great King. It is astounding that an unlettered people should realize that there is any difference at all, yet the saying stands, and has stood, perhaps, for a thousand years, as a rough generalization.

The northernmost State on the Territories is the Ochori, and the northern lands of that country invariably supplied the insurgent elements of its population. In the days when the Ochori were a slave-folk and easy prey to the Akasava, Bomongo, and Isisi tribes, the northern section of the country never fell under the influence of the invader. One Akasava chief had led an army into the broken forest country of the north, and had returned most thankfully. His shattered army straggled home at intervals. Then Bosambo, a prison-breaker, a Krooman of Krooman, had come upon the scene, and had usurped the rights of kingship over the timid southern Ochori. From that day the Akasava had been checked, raids on the goats and women of the Ochori had ceased, and Bosambo had made of his folk the most feared and the best hated of all peoples.

The northmen accepted his kingship with amused tolerance; they had sent him tribute and nominal taxes. Sometimes they would send him nothing. On such occasions

Bosambo, a very tactful man, who recognized the delicacy of the situation, and the extreme disfavour in which Mr. Commissioner Sanders viewed anything like civil war, had a way of his own.

The main communication between the Upper Ochori and the outside world was the Machengombi River, a deep, narrow stream which emptied itself into the Great River twenty miles north of the Ochori city.

When news came that, on one excuse or the other, no tribute might be expected, Bosambo acted.

The canoes of the northmen, laden with skins, rubber and gum, on their way to the Government trading posts on the Lower Isisi, would find their progress blocked.

On a certain day, following a very prolonged abstention from tribute, there arrived at the Ochori city a northern chief named K'feri. He was the son of the greatest of all the northern chiefs, Borbini-M'shimi, and he came with an imposing array of councillors.

Bosambo held a great palaver, for he recognized the importance of the visit.

"O Bosambo," said K'feri, a tall, forbidding man, who spoke as to his equals, "I talk for my father, Borbini, the chief paramount of all lands from the swamps to the borders of the Great King, the friend of chiefs and of kings."

"A squeaking rat may speak for a leopard," said Bosambo, "yet I should hear no more than a squeak."

K'feri scowled at the tittering people who squatted about the palaver house.

"Lord," he said, "if I am a rat, you shall hear my great squeak, for there is shame in my stomach for all that you have done. When the moon was full, Borbini, my father, sent twenty canoes to the Great River, and midway between the village of K'nama and Sugundi they found many trees felled so that they lay across the river, and the canoes could not pass."

"M'shimba-m'shamba has been abroad with his fearful lightning," said Bosambo glibly. "Who can check the strong one who plucks trees as men pluck grass?"

K'feri's nose wrinkled in a sneer.

"M'shimba-m'shamba is very wise," he said, "but he does not take an axe to the trees, nor fasten them with ropes. Now, Bosambo, my father knows that you have done this thing because he sent you no rich gifts."

Bosambo rose and kicked away the carved stool on which he had been sitting, and K'feri drew back apprehensively, for the overturned stool had a special native significance.

"K'feri," said Bosambo gently, "I am the king of this land, and take no gifts from little chiefs. I may take tribute, and so much I keep for myself, and so much I send to my lord Sandi, who is my king and friend. This I shall take for my lifetime, and he who follows shall also take it, and so for ever."

K'feri drew his mantle of monkey tails about his generous person and delivered his thunderbolt.

"Chief," he said boldly, "we people of the north know no king and send no more tribute—thus says the paramount chief, my father. This also he says——"

So far he got when the nearest missile within Bosambo's reach—which was a carved

stool—struck him full in the chest, and he went down with a little hiccough.

“Who touches K’feri dies quickly,” said Bosambo, and balanced his light spear in the palm of his hand.

He stood now with his back to the entrance of his great hut, a tall figure of a man, muscled and like an Andalusian bull.

Out from his hut came the brown-faced Kano girl who was his wife, his high shield in her hand, the hide belt of his heavy elephant sword slung over her bare shoulder. With not so much as a glance at the scowling men about him, she passed the shield and its armoury of spears to her husband, and deftly strapped the belt about his waist. He glanced at her with the light of great kindness in his eyes, then fixed the group—the northerners ripe for murder, the southern people a little awe-stricken.

K’feri lay gasping on the ground, half conscious and wholly helpless.

“Which man of you calls K’feri his chief friend,” demanded Bosambo.

There was an awkward pause, and then the little chief of a northern village stepped forth hesitatingly.

“Lord,” he said sullenly, “I am that man.”

Bosambo dropped his left hand and whipped out the broad elephant sword. He gripped the keen blade and offered the hilt to the reluctant man.

“Strike!” said Bosambo.

The other licked his dry lips, and looked from left to right, then, raising the sword, he brought it down with a deep “Huh!” across the neck of the prostrate K’feri.

Bosambo took back the sword amidst a dead silence.

“O people,” said he, “here lies K’feri, who spoke evilly to my face, and would act worse, since he would lead the Ochori to war. Who follows him? Speak now!”

But there was no speech. They carried away the dead man and buried him in a shallow grave.

Within a week Borbini, chief of the northern Ochori, collected a thousand spears and struck southwards in a hot rage, for K’feri had been his favourite son.

“There shall be a great killing,” he promised his headmen, “and as for Bosambo he shall die very slowly, for he is Sandi’s spy, and carried the story of the women we sold to B’slanogoso of the Big Hills.”

He went by the River Machengombi in fifty great war canoes, halted half a day to remove the tree-barriers which lay across the stream, and struck the big river at sundown.

To attack directly from the river was impossible, since there were fishing villages to be passed, and these could sound a *lokali* alarm which would put Bosambo on his guard. Borbini camped for the night and started at dawn.

That same daybreak saw one of the river watchmen at the door of Bosambo’s hut, and his low call brought Bosambo into the chill morning air.

“Lord,” said the watchmen, “Sandi’s great *puc-a-puc* has passed northward.”

“You are a mad goat,” said Bosambo, “for if Sandi came, he would tie up at my beach.”

“Listen!” said the watchman.

Bosambo bent his head.

Faintly, but well defined, came the “puc-a-puc-a-puc,” as the broad paddles of the stern-wheeled *Zaire* struck the still waters of the river.

“Sha-a!” said Bosambo, in dismay. “Now this is bad. For if Borbini is not bringing his spears to a killing, then I am a fool. Go quickly and rouse my paddlers.”

“Lord,” said the philosophical watchman, “who shall overtake the *puc-a-puc* against the stream?”

“I am afraid,” said Bosambo. And a few minutes later his big war drum was rolling its summons to the sleeping warriors of the Ochori.

Patricia Hamilton stood on the bridge of the *Zaire* by Sanders’s side, dumb in the presence of the wonder of dawn. The high trees that fringed the bank were indigo against the pearl-grey of the pallid heavens. She had seen dawn on the Lower River, but here there was a savage wildness, a menacing freedom, a challenging violence of composition and colour which kept her silent. Here was Nature in a passion, with gaunt black rocks upflung from the bed of the river, with a riot of undergrowth writhing about the stems of great trees. Here was a silence as of death, for this world was too big for the whispers which came with dawn.

“Isn’t it wonderful?” she whispered. “You wouldn’t think that these people would venture——”

“Which people?” asked Sanders quickly, and, following the direction of her outstretched finger, he saw the canoes ahead.

Hamilton heard the agitated ring of the engine telegraph, and felt the quiver of the *Zaire*’s hull as she forged ahead at full speed. Bones, completing his toilet, heard a familiar sound and went pale.

It was the thud and cough of a man stricken to death, and the thud was against the door of his cabin.

He lifted down his revolver belt and stepped into the little alley-way over the dead body of a native deck hand, and ran forward.

The air was a-whir with flying arrows, and the girl was crouching in one corner of the bridge, her white dress stained red with the blood of a dead steersman.

Sanders alone stood erect, staring grimly ahead, his eyes glued to the river for a sign of sand banks.

“Stay where you are, Pat.”

Bones heard Hamilton’s voice and half turned. That motion saved his life, for a long steel-tipped arrow just missed his face and snicked into the woodwork of Sanders’s cabin.

“Get that Maxim working, Bones!”

The young man was at the gun before the order was completed; and the girl even in her fear recognized a new Bones—a Bones wholly alert, with a quaint little smile in his blue eyes and a mouth set very firm.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!” laughed the Maxim, and jammed.

“Damn!” said Hamilton.

Bump!

The *Zaire* jumped up and settled again.

“We’re stuck,” said Sanders, as the boat swung round broadside on. “I don’t know what it is all about, but I rather fancy this is our Waterloo.”

He looked down at the girl and smiled, and his smile was infinitely tender. Then he turned and walked to the side of the boat and held up his bare palms.

A big war canoe swung out of the ruck, the flight of arrows ceased, and Sanders looked down into the painted face of Borbini.

“O white man, I see you,” said the chief insolently, “and this is a good day for me, for, behold, I came to slay the dog, and I have taken his master.”

“Here am I,” said Sanders calmly “and it seems that you want no more than me. Therefore, Borbini, let your young men push my boat into deep water, that I may send my friends away, and, as for me, you shall do what is your wish.”

Borbini was shaking with excitement. “This is a good day for me,” he repeated. “O Sandi, I have always hated you, for you put Bosambo over me. Also you have fined me and hung my own cousin, Tegili of B’fusumaro.”

“All these things I did,” answered Sanders cheerfully, “and you shall have your man. Now take me and send my friends away.”

Borbini leapt to the deck of the *Zaire* and stood with arms akimbo, surveying his prisoners.

Patricia Hamilton stood by her brother and Borbini came peering at her, his scrubby white beard pushed forward.

“O ko!” he said. “There is a hut in my house for this woman.”

It was death to move. The broad bladed spears of the chief’s escort touched the men’s breasts, and those spears were as sharp as razors.

“There shall be a palaver,” said Borbini gleefully. “O Sandi, this is the palaver you promised me!”

He brought his prisoners to land, and in a big forest clearing, which the lumbered trees and the crushed undergrowth marked as an elephants’ playing-ground, and sat down to administer justice, his fifty war canoes bobbing and swinging at the beach.

Beneath a great oak sat Borbini, Chief of the north, and his lined face worked and twitched in his excitement.

“O people,” he cried, “here is Sandi the Feared! Here is Sandi the Great One! He brings soldiers, and men tremble; he speaks a word, and chiefs die. Now I speak, and he dies!”

This was the beginning of a speech which lasted for the greater part of half an hour, for time has no value on the Great River, and men are judged by the quantity of their oratory.

“I’m afraid this is the end,” muttered Hamilton. “Pat—Sanders—can nothing be done?”

Sanders nodded. He sat between the girl and her brother, and presently he half inclined his head to her.

“Pat,” he said softly, “do you understand?”

“Quite,” she answered as softly. “You won’t leave me to——”

“No, nor Borbini, either,” he said. “But— there’s something else.”

She saw him trying to frame the words, and turned hot and cold.

“You—you love me, don’t you?” she whispered and leant against him.

They were unbound; there had been no necessity for further restraint than the surrounding spears offered, and Sanders put his arm about her.

Suddenly the chief’s oration ended, and he stood up.

“Now!” muttered Hamilton, and set his teeth.

“O chief!”

It was Bones who spoke—Bones erect and a-quiver with excitement. His skinny finger pointed to the river behind him.

“This I say, Borbini,” cried Bones shrilly, “that my powerful ju-ju is abroad this day, for the rocks are walking!”

A thousand pairs of fierce eyes glared across the river.

“Look well, people,” screeched Bones, “and tell me if I lie! My great ju-ju is with me, and two rocks are moving!”

There were certainly two rocks on the farther shore, but, though the assembly strained its eyes, there was no sign of movement.

“O Tibbetti, you lie!” said Borbini. “This is——”

“Look—look!”

Again the heads were turned, and Borbini himself took a step forward, shading his eyes.

Bosambo stepped from behind the trees to whither he had made his way by short rushes, whilst Bones engaged the attention of the gathering, and the sword that slew the son smote the head from the father’s body.

“Kill!” bellowed Bosambo, and suddenly the woods were alive with men.

\* \* \* \* \*

The girl woke up to find herself in her cabin, and Sanders was sitting at her side.

“I don’t know how much of your unconsciousness was fainting and how much was sleeping,” he said.

“Is—are——”

“Everything is all right,” he smiled; “you’ve been dreaming.”

She drew a long breath.

“How much was dream?” she asked.

He did not reply immediately.

“All that you wish,” he said.

She put out her hand and took his.

“You know the part I want to be real, don’t you?” she asked, in a low voice.

“I hope so,” he said, and met her eyes.

The *Zaire* was under way, moving swiftly down river.

There came to them the voice of Bones.

“What I want you to understand, dear old Ham,” it said, “is that I instantly grasped the situation—I see things in a flash. It’s a—a——”

“Disease?” suggested Hamilton lazily.

“A gift—it runs in the family. Of course, I don’t want to be thanked, dear old feller, an’ the knowledge that the jolly old party owes its lives to me is sufficient reward, but if you happen to recommend me for a D.S.O., jolly old officer, you might put somethin’ in like this——”

“I’ll toss you who makes a lemon squash,” said Hamilton.

A silence, then—

“Heads,” said Bones, “heads an’ brains, dear old Ham—an’ I’ve won! Do I get a D.S.O. or a good cigar?”

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Lieutenant Bones* by Edgar Wallace]