TOM WILLOUGHBY'S SCOUTS

Title: Tom Willoughby's Scouts
A Story of the War in German East Africa

Author: Herbert Strang

Release Date: June 03, 2012 [eBook #39912]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TOM WILLOUGHBY'S SCOUTS ***

Produced by Al Haines.

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REINECKE FLUNG UP HIS ARM.

TOM WILLOUGHBY'S SCOUTS

A STORY OF THE WAR IN GERMAN EAST AFRICA

BY

HERBERT STRANG

ILLUSTRATED BY WAL PAGET

HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON, EDINBURGH, GLASGOW
TORONTO, MELBOURNE, CAPE TOWN, BOMBAY
1919

PRINTED 1918 IN GREAT BRITAIN BY R. CLAY & SONS, LTD.,
BRUNSWICK STREET, STAMFORD STREET, S.E. 1, AND BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

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CHAPTER I–TANGANYIKA

Among the passengers who boarded the *Hedwig von Wissmann* at Kigoma on Lake Tanganyika, one June day in 1914, there were two who engaged more particularly the attention of those already on deck. The first was a tall stalwart man of some fifty years, with hard blue eyes, full red cheeks, a square chin, and a heavy blond moustache streaked with grey. He stepped somewhat jerkily up the gangway, brought his hand stiffly to his brow in response to the salute of the first officer, and was led by that deferential functionary to a chair beneath the deck awning.

The second presented a striking contrast. Equally tall, he was slim and loosely built, with lean, sunburnt, hairless cheeks, a clean upper lip that curved slightly in a natural smile, and brown eyes that flashed a look of intelligent interest around. He walked with the lithe easy movements of athletic youth, turned to see that the porter was following with his luggage, a single travelling trunk and a rifle case, and satisfied on that score, picked up a deck-chair and planted it for himself where the awning would give shade without shutting off the air.

Both these new arrivals wore suits of white drill, and pith helmets; but whereas the elder man was tightly buttoned, suggesting a certain strain, the younger allowed his coat to hang open, showing his soft shirt and the cummerbund about his waist.

The gangway was pulled in, a seaman cast off the mooring rope, and the vessel sheered off from the landing-stage with those seemingly aimless move-

ments with which a steamer, until she is well under way, responds to the signals from the bridge. In a few minutes the *Hedwig von Wissmann* was heading southward down the lake, on her three-hundred-mile voyage to Bismarckburg.

The younger of the two passengers lit a cigarette and unobtrusively took stock of his fellow-travellers. The tall man before mentioned was already puffing at a long black cigar, and a steward, with marked servility, had placed a glass of some lemon-coloured liquid on a table at his elbow. Beyond him four men of middle age, also provided with cigars and glasses, were playing cards, not in dignified silence, like Sarah Battle of immortal memory, but with a sort of voracity, and a voluble exchange of gutturals. Sitting apart, smoking a dark briar pipe, sat a grizzled and somewhat shabby passenger who, though the brim of his panama was turned down over his eyes, had nevertheless watched and drawn conclusions about the two strangers.

"H'm! Public school–nineteen, perhaps–griffin–nice lad–clean," his disjointed thoughts ran. "T'other fellow–Potsdam–goose step–beer barrel–don't like the breed."

For a while he sat smoking, giving a little grunt now and then, and now and then a glance at the young Englishman. Presently he heaved himself out of his chair, tilted back his hat, and waddling a few steps, planted himself with legs apart in front of the youth.

"Harrow or Rugby, sir?" he said without preamble.

"Neither, sir," replied the other with a smile. "I was at quite an obscure grammar school–not a public school in the–well, in the swagger sense."

The old man's grey eyes twinkled.

"H'm!" he ejaculated. "Don't get up." He took a chair that stood folded against one of the stanchions and drew it alongside.

"Name, sir?"

The youth looked into the face of his questioner, saw nothing but benevolence there, and thinking "Queer old stick!" answered–

"Willoughby–Tom Willoughby."

"H'm! Not Bob Willoughby's son, by any chance?"

"My father's name was Robert, sir."

"Takes after his mother, I suppose," the old man murmured to himself, but audibly. "Hasn't got Bob's nose. I knew him," he went on aloud. "Saw in *The Times* he was gone: sorry, my lad. Haven't seen him since '98, when I was in Uganda. Haven't been out since; wanted to run round once more before I'm laid on the shelf. Going to Rhodesia, I presume?"

"No: only as far as Bismarckburg: my father was interested in some land on the edge of the Plateau."

"German land, begad!"

"Well, you see he was partner with a German: went equal shares with him in a coffee plantation seven or eight years ago."

"H'm! Why didn't he stick to mines?" said the old gentleman in one of his audible asides. "And you step into his shoes, I suppose?"

"Not exactly, sir. He left his property to my brother and me jointly. We decided that Bob–he's twenty-four–had better stick to the commission business in London, and I should come out and learn planting, or at any rate see if it's worth while going on; the plantation has never paid, and it's lucky for us we don't depend on it."

"Never paid in eight years? It's time it did. What's your German partner about? I'm an old hand; my name's Barkworth, and I was a friend of your father. My advice is, if your coffee hasn't paid in eight years, cut your losses and try cotton."

"It may come to that; that's what I'm out to discover; but my brother thought it at least worth while looking into things on the spot with Mr. Reinecke—-"

"Curt Reinecke?" said Mr. Barkworth abruptly.

"Yes."

"I know him–or did, twenty years ago. *He's* your partner. H'm!" He blew out a heavy cloud of smoke. Tom looked at him a little anxiously.

"Mr. Reinecke has had a lot of bad luck, sir," he said. "He was always hoping the tide would turn, Bob suggested that he might be incompetent, but my father had complete confidence in him."

"Reinecke incompetent! Bosh! He's clever enough."

There was something in Mr. Barkworth's tone that caused Tom to say–

"I've never met him myself, and I should really be glad of any information, sir. You see, it's rather awkward, dealing with a man old enough to be my father, I mean, and—-"

"Yes, of course. Reinecke is a clever fellow; I've nothing against him, but I recommend you to go carefully. I don't like him, but then I don't like Germans."

"I can't say I do," said Tom. "I spent a year in Germany. But I've met a few jolly decent chaps, and seeing that my father thought so highly of Mr. Reinecke—-"

"You're predisposed in his favour. Naturally. Well, keep an open mind. Don't be in a hurry to decide. That's an old man's advice. I'm nearly seventy, my lad, and the older I get the more I learn. With people, now–there's the man who falls on the neck of the first comer, and wishes he hadn't. There's the man who stiffens his back and freezes, and then finds that he's lost his chance of making a friend. Don't be like either: 'prove all things'–and men–'and hold fast to that which is good.' H'm! I'm beginning to preach: sure sign of dotage.–You haven't

seen a view like that before."

It was indeed a new and an enchanting experience to Tom Willoughby, this voyage on the vast lake, or inland sea, that stretches for four hundred miles in the heart of equatorial Africa. Looking eastward to the nearer shore, he beheld a high bank richly clad with forest jungle, fringed and festooned with lovely creepers and climbing plants. Below, the blue waters, tossed by a south-east breeze, broke high upon a wilderness of rugged rocks; above, masses of cloud raced across the green heights, revealing now and then patches of bare brown rock, now and then the misty tops of distant mountains. The coastline was variegated with headlands, creeks, and bays; southward could be discerned the bold mountainous promontory of Kungwe. Here and there Arab dhows with their triangular sails and the low log canoes of native fishermen hugged the shore; and birds with brilliant plumage glittered and flashed as they darted in and out among the foliage or swooped down upon the surface in search of food.

Tom feasted his eyes on these novel scenes until a bugle summoned the passengers to luncheon. He would have found it a slow meal but for his new friend. They were placed side by side at some distance from the captain, the intervening seats being occupied by the Germans. The planters talked shop among themselves, and Tom was amused at the obsequious gratitude they showed to Major von Rudenheim, the newly arrived German officer, when he dispensed them a word now and then, as a man throws a bone to a dog. The major had the place of honour next the captain, whose bearing towards him was scarcely less deferential. Through the meal the two Englishmen were almost ignored by the rest. Afterwards, however, when the planters had returned to their cards and Major von Rudenheim and Mr. Barkworth had both disappeared, Captain Goltermann came up to Tom where he sat alone on deck.

"Fine country, Mr. Villoughby," he said pleasantly. "I hope you like zis trip."

"Thanks, captain, it's quite charming; but I'm not what we call a tripper."

"So! It is business, not pleasure, zat bring you? But zere shall be pleasure *and* business, I zink. If I can assist you—-"

"Thanks again. I expect Mr. Reinecke to meet me at Bismarckburg."

"Mr. Reinecke! He is great friend of mine. You are lucky to go to him–as pupil, perhaps?"

It seemed to Tom that the amiable captain was trying to pump him, and he smiled inwardly.

"I daresay I could learn a good deal from Mr. Reinecke," he said, guardedly, but with great amiability.

"Zat is certain. He is a most excellent man of business, and as a planter zere is no one like him. Zat I ought to know, because I carry his goods. Yes, truly, many fine cargoes haf I carried from Bismarckburg to Ujiji. Zere vill vun vait

me, vizout doubt. Yes, my friend Reinecke is ze model of efficiency–of German efficiency. Ze English are great colonists–so! no vun deny it; and zey are proud zey know how to manage ze nigger–yes? But I tell you–you are young man–I tell you your countrymen cannot make ze nigger vork—ve Germans can."

Tom was to learn later the methods by which the Germans achieved that desirable end: at present he was slightly amused at the Teutonic self-satisfaction of the speaker. It was so like what he had encountered during his year in Stuttgart.

"Ze German kultur," the captain proceeded–"it is carried verever ze German go. Yes; viz our mezod, our zystem, ve create for our Kaiser a great empire in Africa. In ten, tventy year ze Masai, ze Wanyamwezi, ze Wakamba, ze Wahehe, and all ze ozers–zey shall become Germans–black Germans, but ze colour, vat is it? It is of ze skin; I speak of ze soul, sir."

At this moment there was a great hubbub on the lower deck forward, where a motley assortment of natives and Indian traders was located. The captain hurried away; the planters left their cards and flocked to see what was happening. Tom followed them. Looking over the rail, he saw a young negro being dragged along by two petty officers, who cuffed and kicked him between their shouts of abuse. They hauled him on until they stood below the captain, and then explained in German that they had found him hidden among some bales of cargo: he had not paid his passage and had no money.

"Throw him overboard," cried the captain. The planters laughed.

"Only a stowaway," said one, and their curiosity being satisfied, they went back to the awning.

Whether the captain had meant what he said or not, he had turned away, and the officers were apparently about to carry out the order. Tom, understanding German and knowing something of Germans, was nevertheless amazed. Acting on the impulse of the moment he hurried after the captain.

"I say, captain, I'll pay for the boy," he cried. "Let him go."

Captain Goltermann smiled.

"Ze nigger? You are good Samaritan, sir. Vell, it is your affair, not mine. Pay if you please; you fling money avay."

He called to the officers, who gave the boy a parting kick and shot him into the midst of the crowd of shouting negroes before them. Tom paid the passage money, and went back to his chair. Had he made a fool of himself? It was really absurd to have supposed that the Germans would have drowned the boy. "I wonder what Mr. Barkworth would say?" he thought. And then he sprang up and hastened to find the purser: he had suddenly remembered that if the boy had no money for his fare, neither could he pay for his food. "No good doing things by halves," he thought. He told the purser to charge the boy's keep to him, adding: "and don't make a song about it."

CHAPTER II–PARTNERS

Tom Willoughby's first impression of Curt Reinecke had an element of surprise. Conspicuous on the landing-stage at Bismarckburg was a thin wiry man of middle height, clad in the loose white garments affected by planters, with a large white linen hat, its brim turned down helmet-wise. The coppery hue of his face was accentuated by a huge white moustache, which projected at least two inches beyond the outlines of his shaven cheeks. He might have passed for a South American president.

"That's Reinecke," said Mr. Barkworth, as he stepped on to the gangway in advance of Tom. "Hasn't altered a jot. His moustache was white twenty years ago; and he was as bald as a bladder. Good-bye, my lad: we may meet again: we may not: God bless you!"

Mr. Barkworth had already explained that, as the *Hedwig von Wissmann* would remain two or three days at Bismarckburg to unload, he was going to complete his journey to Kitata in Rhodesia by sailing boat. They shook hands cordially and parted.

It was impossible for Reinecke to mistake the lad he had come to meet. Among the passengers who landed there was none so young as Tom, no other who bore the stamp of Englishman. Reinecke came up to him with a smile, lifted his hat, revealing for an instant his smooth pink crown, and said–

"Mr. Villoughby, vizout doubt. A tousand hearty velcomes."

"How d'you do, Mr. Reinecke?" responded Tom. "Glad to meet you."

"Ve shall go to ze hotel for to-day; I shall see to your baggage. To-morrow ve go to ze plantation. Zat zhentleman you part viz–I zink I know his look, but his name–no, I do not remember: it is–no, it vill not come."

"Barkworth."

"Ach! So! Barkvorce. Yes, of course, of course; I remember: it is long ago—-"

He stopped abruptly, and gazed after the broad shambling figure with a look that Tom could not fathom. Then he turned to Tom again, begged him to excuse his absence for a moment, and went up the gangway on to the steamer.

Returning after a minute or two, he explained that he had arranged for Tom's baggage to be sent to the hotel, and had invited Captain Goltermann to visit the plantation while the vessel remained in harbour.

"I can gif you good shootings," he said, smiling again. "You English are all good sports, eh? And my friend ze captain also is expert viz ze gun."

Tom felt that he had nothing to complain of in the warmth of his reception, and glowed with anticipation of diversifying his business inquiries with sport of a kind new to him.

He learnt that the plantation lay at a distance of about twenty miles from the lake-side, on the Tanganyika Plateau, and could only be reached by a rough path over the hills, impassable for wheeled traffic. But he would not be expected to walk. The journey would be done by *machila*, which turned out to be a light canvas litter slung on a pole and borne by two strapping natives. Reinecke had brought three pairs of porters, in addition to a dozen who would convey certain bales of stores which had come by the steamer. It was thus a large party that left early next morning, the three white men in their litters going ahead, the porters following at some distance under the charge of an Arab overseer armed with a long whip.

Within half an hour of leaving the port the path entered hilly country, much overgrown with forest vegetation. The air was still, hot and humid, and Tom, though this novel means of locomotion, over rough ground, had its discomforts, reflected that he would have been still more uncomfortable had he walked. Innumerable insects buzzed around, seeking to pierce the protective curtains that enclosed him. Through the meshes of the muslin he saw gigantic ferns, revelling in the moist shade of huge trees, festooned with lianas and rattan. He heard monkeys chattering overhead, the soft notes of doves and the shriller cries of partridges and guinea-fowl; and but for the teeming insects he would have liked to spring from his litter and go afoot, where every yard brought some new beauty, some novel form of life, to view. After three hours the caravan halted, for the purpose of refreshing the Europeans with cool lager beer from bottles carried in ice-packs by one of the natives. It was drawing towards evening when they arrived at a clearing beyond which there was a dense and impenetrable thorn hedge about eight feet high. The path led to a wooden gate set in the midst of the hedge. This Reinecke opened with a key, and he stood back with a smile and a bow as he invited Tom, now on his feet, to enter.

"Zis is our estate," he said. "Vunce more I bid you tousand velcomes, and I vish your visit bring us good luck."

"Thanks very much," said Tom, noticing at the same time that Reinecke's eyes were fixed on the peculiarly stolid face of Captain Goltermann.

"Yes, viz better luck you shall be rich man in a few years, Mr. Villoughby,"

said the captain. "Zere is no man zat knows like my friend Reinecke ze–ze—-"

"Ze ups and downs of coffee," suggested Reinecke. "A good season–yes, zere shall be zree or four tousand kilos ze acre; but a bad season–ah! disease come–who can stop it? Vat physician haf ve for ze cure? Zen–ah! it break ze heart."

Tom looked about him with interest. As far as he could see, extended row on row of coffee plants in straight lines about six feet apart. Between them, at the same interval, were dug shallow pits some eighteen inches deep. He had arrived just at the time when the fruit was ripe, and a number of negroes were busily picking it from the bushes. Here and there among them stood tall Arab overseers, all armed with whips.

Presently the party came to a couple of machines resembling cider presses, which Reinecke explained were pulpers for separating the beans from the reddish pulp that covered them. Then they passed two large brick vats, in one of which the beans were fermented, in the other washed and dried. Beyond these were sheds where the coffee, now ready for market, was stored and packed. And then, in a separate clearing, laid out like a European garden, they came to Reinecke's bungalow, a brightly painted structure of wood, with a long verandah and a thatched roof. A table was laid on the verandah, and a few minutes after his arrival Tom was seated with his host and his fellow-guest at a meal, prepared and served by native servants, which reminded him, with a difference, of the meals he had known the year before, when his father had sent him to Germany.

Finding that Tom understood German, Reinecke conversed in that language, dropping into English now and then to explain technical terms. He related to his interested guests the story of the plantation: how the land was first cleared by cutting down the timber and uprooting the bush: how this was burnt and the ashes mixed with the soil: the months of hoeing: the sowings in the seed beds: the planting out of the seedlings in November, when the rains began: and the tedious three years' waiting before the young plants started to bear. Those three years he had utilised by planting a thorn fence about the whole clearing of some hundreds of acres. Tom supposed that this fence had been erected to keep out wild beasts, for depredations by human marauders were not to be feared in a district where German authority was established. Reinecke assented; but Tom was to discover before many days were past that the fence had another, even a sinister purpose.

The next two days were spent very agreeably in shooting expeditions into the wild country beyond the plantation. Captain Goltermann turned out to be a crack shot, and the greater number of the antelopes and buffaloes which the sportsmen brought down fell to his gun. Tom was all anxiety to get a shot at a lion or even an elephant, which Reinecke told him were to be found in parts of the

Plateau; but the Germans were indisposed to take the long journeys that were necessary to reach the habitats of these more dangerous game: Goltermann's visit was to be only a short one.

One trifling incident of these days was to have an important bearing on Tom's fortunes. Captain Goltermann had shot an antelope, but, with less than his usual skill or luck, had only wounded it. Determined not to lose his prey, he followed, accompanied by the others, over a stretch of hilly country, dotted with bush, tracking the animal by its blood-stains into a deep nullah through which a stream flowed. The sportsmen caught sight of it at last, drinking at the border of a lake, the source of the stream. Goltermann had just raised his gun to give the *coup de grâce* when the antelope suddenly sank into the water and appeared no more.

"We have provided a meal for a crocodile," said the captain with a shrug. "The slimy sneaking reptile!"

"It was bad luck for you, Goltermann," said Reinecke. "The beast was hopelessly trapped; there's no exit from this end of the nullah. Our long tramp for nothing!"

Naturally, it was not until the captain had left that Tom broached the business that had brought him from England.

"Now that we have come into my father's property," he said on the third morning at breakfast, "my brother and I thought it just as well that I should take a trip out and see things on the spot. He explained that in his letter."

"Naturally," said Reinecke. "It is what I should have done myself."

"Of course," Tom went on, "I've only had a year's business training–in Germany, by the way: and I know nothing whatever about coffee: but I know two and two make four, and I'm sure if you'll be good enough to go into things with me, I'll soon get the hang of them. If the plantation can't be made to pay, there's only one way out–sacrifice our interest. On the other hand, if there's a chance of success, I thought perhaps I might stay on here and become a planter myself: it's a life I think I should take to."

"Excellent," said Reinecke. "I am very glad you have come. And if you can suggest some means of making the place pay–well, need I say I shall be delighted. What with poor crops and low prices, and the heavy costs of carriage, it is difficult to wring from it even the small, and I confess unsatisfactory margin which I have been able to show since the plants came into bearing."

It crossed Tom's mind that this pessimistic attitude was hard to square with Captain Goltermann's enthusiastic praise of Reinecke, and his remarks on the valuable cargoes that he had carried; but he remembered Mr. Barkworth's advice to "go carefully," to "keep an open mind," and at present he had no material on which to form a judgment. Nor could he yet decide how to estimate Reinecke.

The German had been cordiality itself. He had left nothing undone for his guest's comfort; his manner had every appearance of frankness; yet Tom was conscious in himself of an instinctive reserve, a something undefined that held him back from complete confidence.

"You will see the books, of course," said Reinecke, rising to unlock his desk. "They are kept in German, but after your year's training in Germany that will be no difficulty to you. Here they are: the stock book, the cost book, the ledger: on this file you will find the vouchers for the quantities of beans we have shipped from Bismarckburg. My clerk is very methodical: he is a nigger, but trained in Germany, and in spirit a true German: you will find all in order. I will leave you to examine them at your leisure, and anything you want explained–why, of course I shall be delighted."

Tom spent the rest of the morning in digesting the figures that Reinecke had placed before him. It was a task that went against the grain; he hated anything that savoured of the part of inquisitor; but he reflected that it was purely a matter of business, and being thorough in whatever he undertook he bent his mind to the distasteful job, resolved to get it over as quickly as possible.

As Reinecke had said, everything was in order. There were records of the total quantity of beans produced; he compared the vouchers for the consignments with the entries in the stock book, and found that they tallied. The other books gave him the costs of production, which included wages, provisions, upkeep of buildings and so on; duplicates of the invoices dispatched with the goods to a firm in Hamburg; records of bills of exchange received in payment, and the hundred and one details incident to an export business. Balance sheets had, of course, been sent to his father: here was the material on which those sheets were based, and everything confirmed the position as he already knew it: that the plantation did little more than pay the not inconsiderable salary which Reinecke drew as manager. His and the Willoughbys' shares of the profits were minute.

Tom could only conclude that Captain Goltermann, knowing nothing of the details of management, had drawn erroneous conclusions from the facts within his knowledge. His vessel conveyed a certain number of bags up the lake at certain seasons: that was all. It was easy for a seaman to make mistakes in such a matter. If so, then, what was wrong? Were the costs too high in proportion to the out-turn? Was the acreage under cultivation too small? Was there something faulty in the methods employed? Tom felt that these questions carried him beyond his depth. Would it not have been better to send an expert to make the necessary investigations? That might still have to be done: meanwhile here he was; he must learn what he could, spend a few months in getting a grip of things, keep Bob at home informed, and then go back and consult with him.

When Reinecke returned to lunch, Tom complimented him on the perfect

order in which his books were kept, and frankly told him the conclusion to which he had come.

"That means that I must trespass on your hospitality for some months, at any rate," he added. "I shall see the results from this season's crops, your preparations for next, and fresh sowings, I suppose. Of course I can't expect to learn in a few months what has taken you years."

"That is so," said the German, and Tom fancied that there was a shade less cordiality in his manner, which was perhaps not to be wondered at in view of the prospect of having a stranger quartered on him for an indefinite period. "Still," Reinecke went on, "it is with knowledge as with wealth. The heir inherits thousands which his father has laboriously amassed; the pupil enjoys the fruits of his master's long and concentrated study. I think you will be an apt pupil."

He said this with so pleasant a smile that Tom dismissed his feeling of a moment before as unwarranted, and reflected that Reinecke was really taking things with a very good grace.

Next day he accompanied Reinecke to the outlying quarter of the estate where the workers were lodged in huts and sheds constructed by themselves. They were shut off from the outer world by the ring fence, which consisted of quick-growing thorn bushes so closely matted as to form a practically impenetrable barrier many feet thick. There were more than a hundred adult negroes, men and women, employed on the plantation. A number of children playing in front of the huts stopped and clustered together in silent groups when the two white men appeared.

"I suppose the workers get a holiday sometimes?" said Tom, whose schooldays were only eighteen months behind him.

"Of course," said Reinecke. "There are slack times, in the early part of the season between the hoeings, when there is little to be done."

"But I mean, they go away sometimes?"

"Why should they? Where should they go? There is only the forest, and the port. They would be eaten in the forest; they would eat up the port." Reinecke laughed at his joke.

"Then they are practically prisoners?"

"My dear Mr. Willoughby, this is Africa. In Europe you put fences round your cattle: the negroes are just cattle. Break your fences, and your animals stray and are lost. So with the niggers."

"But that is slavery."

"Words! words!" said Reinecke lightly. "They are no more slaves than the apprentices who are bound to their masters for a term of years. They are indentured labourers. They are paid; and there's not a man among them but accumulates enough to make him rich when his time is up."

"They can go to their homes, then, when their time is up?"

Reinecke shrugged.

"As they please," he said. "They have a long way to go. See, Mr. Willoughby, I give you a page from German colonial history. Twenty years ago, in our early days, our brave pioneers of empire had enormous difficulties to contend with. There was one savage tribe, the Wahehe some two hundred miles north of us here, that resisted our civilising mission with especial pertinacity and violence. On August 17, '91, they gained a victory over our much-tried soldiers. They dispersed as we approached, but when the column of Captain von Zelewski was passing through a rugged and densely-grown country it was attacked along its whole length by thousands of the treacherous dogs. Zelewski was among the first to fall; taken at a disadvantage his column was almost annihilated. Ten Germans, sir–ten Germans, I say, as well as over three hundred askaris and porters, were slain. The gallant Lieutenant von Tettenborn fought his way back with a few survivors to Kondoa, and thence reached the coast."

"We've had many incidents of that sort in India and elsewhere," said Tom. "I suppose there was a punitive expedition?"

"There was, sir; but not until three years had passed. For three years those treacherous swine were allowed to flout the German might. Then, in October '94, we captured and destroyed Iringa, their principal village, and were again attacked in the woods on our way to the coast. Some of the petty chiefs held out against us for years, but the German destructive sword is very sure. Finally they were terribly subdued, and some hundreds of them were transported into this Tanganyika country and compelled to earn their living by peaceful toil. My people here are Wahehe. I have one of the very chiefs who opposed us–one Mirambo, a great hunter in his youth. I need not say that I find his woodcraft very useful when I go hunting. By the way, he carried Captain Goltermann's gun the other day. And now you see, Mr. Willoughby, how well off these people are. They might have been treated as rebels; they might have suffered as prisoners of war. Instead, they are indentured labourers, engaged, for pay, in producing a useful commodity–with no profit to their employers, mark you. My dear sir, it is philanthropy."

Tom did not venture to say what he thought. In these early days it was useless to enter into a dispute with Reinecke. But to his British way of thinking the condition of the labourers was simply slavery, however the German might seek to disguise it, and he would make it his business to find out for himself the natives' point of view. If they were contented with their lot, it would be folly to disturb them. But if not–and he remembered the whips he had seen in the overseers' hands–a new system must be introduced, with or without Reinecke's consent.

CHAPTER III–THE VOUCHER

During the next two or three days Tom went about the plantation, watching the negroes at their work of picking and pulping the fruit. Reinecke left him in perfect freedom to go where he pleased, and see anything and everything. The natives worked industriously: there was no lack of talk and laughter among them, no indication of discontent or ill-treatment. Tom's misgiving was dissipated; he concluded that the overseers' whips were wands of office rather than instruments of correction. The negroes gazed at him with a certain curiosity and interest. Some smiled, in unconscious response to the charm of his expression, of which he was equally unconscious. One of them, he noticed, a lad apparently about seventeen, looked at him with a peculiar intentness. Once, when, in lighting his pipe, he dropped his box of matches, the young negro sprang forward, picked it up, and handed it to him with a sort of proud pleasure that so trifling a service hardly accounted for.

"Thanks," said Tom, and the lad's face beamed as, admonished by a severe look from the overseer with whom Tom had been talking, he went back to the bush which he had left.

"I hope you will pardon my leaving you so much to yourself," said Reinecke one day. "There is little to be learnt at this season, except what you can see with your own eyes. In seedtime, if you still favour me with your company, I shall have more opportunities of giving you definite instruction. And now what do you say to a little relaxation? Shall we go shooting to-morrow?"

"I shall be delighted."

"Very well. I will give orders that Mirambo and another man shall accompany us to-morrow. We shall find wild geese and snipe at the stream a few miles south; possibly a hippo, if, like most youngsters, you've a fancy for big game."

When they started next morning, Tom looked at the German's gunbearer with a good deal more attention than he had shown previously. It was strange that this humble negro had once been a chief. Mirambo was a well-built man past middle life, quick in his movements, and with large eyes of piercing brilliance. With him was a youth whom even a white man, not easily able to distinguish

one negro from another, could hardly fail to recognise as his son. Reinecke gave them their instructions in their own tongue, and with a bullying manner that Tom secretly resented. They received them silently, with an utter lack of expression, displaying none of the interest or alacrity which an English gamekeeper would have shown in similar circumstances.

The party of four set off, the negroes leading. Their destination was one of the rare streams that traverse this part of the Plateau, and make their way in devious course and with many cascades to the great lake below. The morning was still young. By starting early, Reinecke had explained, they would make as large a bag as the men could carry before the midday heat became oppressive, and after a brief rest could stroll leisurely back to a late lunch. Tom reflected that this attitude evinced no great enthusiasm for sport, and concluded that Reinecke was really rather a good fellow in taking so much trouble for the sake of a guest.

It was not until they were well in the forest that Mirambo showed any animation. The instincts of the old hunter awoke. His keen eyes moved restlessly, alert to mark the spoor of beasts in the woods and on the open park-like spaces dotted with acacias, euphorbias, and the wild thick bushes known as scrub. At one spot he became excited, pointing to fresh marks in the soft soil.

"The tracks of a wart-hog," Reinecke explained. "The beast evidently went to his hole not long ago."

"I've never seen one," said Tom. "Couldn't we track him and have a shot?"

"We couldn't carry him home. We're out for birds. Still, I daresay the niggers could dispose of him. You can try your hand if you like."

To Tom's surprise, the negroes, instead of following the tracks in the direction in which the animal had apparently gone, went in the opposite direction.

"They're going away from him," he said.

"No, no," said Reinecke with a smile. "Speak low–or better not at all: he's close at hand."

He halted, bidding Tom stand by with his rifle ready cocked. The two negroes stole forward, and within about fifty yards posted themselves one on each side of a hole in the ground. Then together they began to stamp heavily with their feet, uttering no sound, and keeping their eyes fixed on the hole. Wondering at this strange performance, Tom looked inquiringly at Reinecke, who shook his head and signed to him to be on the alert. Presently there appeared in the hole the ugly tusked snout of a wart-hog. He grunted with annoyance at his slumbers having been disturbed by a shower of falling earth, heaved his ungainly body out, and began to trot away on his short legs directly across the white man's line of fire.

"Now!" murmured Reinecke. "Behind the ear."

Tom shouldered his rifle, took careful aim, and fired. But whether owing to

excitement, or to the fact that the animal, through his protective colouring, was almost indistinguishable from the background of brownish bush, his shot missed the vital spot and inflicted only a gash in the shoulder. The infuriated animal wheeled round and charged across the open space. But he had covered only a few yards when a well-planted shot from Reinecke's rifle stretched him on the ground.

[image]

TOM TOOK CAREFUL AIM AND FIRED.

"Don't take it to heart," said the German, noticing Tom's crestfallen expression. "Everyone misses his first shot at a wart-hog. I remember a famous sportsman once having to dodge round a tree for a quarter of an hour to escape the tusks of a beast he had only wounded. Better luck next time."

"But why didn't he charge the negroes? He passed within a few inches of them."

"They stood a little way back from the hole, you noticed; and besides, the beast is very short-sighted. You were surprised that all the tracks apparently lead away from the hole instead of towards it. That's not cunning, as it was in the case of that cattle-stealer, wasn't it? in classical story who pulled oxen into a cave by the tails. It's sheer necessity. That hole was once the dwelling of an ant-bear; the wart-hog had appropriated it. But his head and shoulders are so much bigger than the rest of him that he has to go in tail first."

The negroes had rushed to the animal as soon as it fell, lifted the head slightly, and tied it to one of the hind legs with thongs of creeper. Then Mirambo tore a strip from his white loincloth and attached it to the wart-hog's horns.

"That's to scare vultures away until our return," said Reinecke. "In the rainy season myriads of flies would be at the carcase already, but in this dry weather it will probably not suffer much before the niggers get back to cut it up. Hyenas and other scavengers don't prowl till night. Now let us get on."

The negroes, whose pleasure is always rather in the quarry than in the chase, were delighted at having secured, without trouble to themselves, a quantity of fresh pork to carry home, and went on with alacrity to the stream a few miles away. Here, in the course of a couple of hours, the two white men had shot as many geese, quail, and guinea-fowl as the negroes could conveniently carry slung about their bodies, with the prospect of the addition of a good many pounds of hog's flesh later. Tom was disappointed of his half-cherished hope of bagging a hippo; but his morning's sport had been sufficiently exciting to form

an interesting part of his next budget of news for his brother.

A negro carried the mail to Bismarckburg once a week, and Tom had already dispatched his first letter, giving a description of the plantation and a running account of his experiences so far. He had confined himself to statements of fact, saying nothing about the problems he found himself faced with–the character of Reinecke and the conditions of the negro labour. Until he should have arrived at definite conclusions on these matters he felt that it would be unwise to trouble his brother with them.

In his second letter he related further sporting expeditions, in some of which he had been accompanied by Reinecke, in others only by Mirambo and other natives. He had shot several hartebeeste and waterbuck, which Mirambo was accustomed to skin and cut up on the spot. On these occasions Tom was tempted sometimes to question the negro directly about the conditions of his employment; but he was held back by a sense of loyalty to Reinecke. Pending further light on the man himself, he would rely solely on his own observations.

It was at the end of the third week of his stay that the first really disquieting incident occurred. Reinecke had gone to Bismarckburg, and Tom, having time on his hands, had made up his mind to write a long letter home. Going to the desk to get some paper, he discovered that the drawer in which he had usually found it was empty, and he tried the drawer below. This, however, would not open fully: it stuck half way. He put his hand in, thinking that something had probably become wedged between the upper part of the drawer and the one above. It was as he had supposed. By pushing in the drawer a little, he was able to work out the obstruction, which turned out to be a paper, half folded and much creased. On the portion that was not folded down he saw a series of figures like the numbers on the vouchers which were kept on a file.

"An old voucher," he thought; and unfolded it to see if it were worth keeping. To his surprise it was dated Nov. 17, 1913, and evidently belonged to the series which he had examined in connection with the accounts of the past year. But that series had corresponded exactly with the entries in the stock book–or had he made a mistake? To reassure himself he got out the file, turned to the vouchers for November, and once more compared them with the book. There was no discrepancy. The book showed that on Nov. 17, 1913, a consignment of 1000 kilos was shipped on board the *Hedwig von Wissmann*, and there was a voucher corresponding. The voucher he had just found was for a consignment of 1000 kilos.

This was odd. The numbers on the two vouchers were consecutive: clearly they did not refer to the same consignment. Yet there was only one entry of that date in the book. If one had been a duplicate or a carbon copy of the other, the matter would have been easily explicable; but both were originals, and written

in the same clerkly hand.

Troubled, for it was impossible to crush down a suspicion, Tom put the voucher into his pocket, and went out into the plantation.

"I'll write to Bob to-morrow," he said to himself. At the back of his mind there was the feeling that he might have more to say than he had expected.

Reinecke was in good spirits when he returned about sunset.

"I've just made an excellent contract with a dealer representing a new house," he said. "He'll take all next season's crop, at a good price. I hoped your visit would bring us good luck, and this is the best."

"Capital news," said Tom. The German's manner was so frank and cordial that he was almost ashamed of his suspicion. "By the way, I found this to-day: it was stuck between two drawers. Is it any good?"

He handed Reinecke the voucher, folded. The German opened it, and said instantly, with a smile–

"At last! I wondered what had become of it. It is a voucher I lost, and I got the shipping clerk to give me another. You found that on the file all right?"

"Yes."

"You don't know how I worried about that lost voucher. And you found it wedged between the drawers? Extraordinary way things have of disappearing! Well, we don't want it now. But I'm glad you found it."

He tore it across and threw the pieces into the waste-paper basket.

"Now for dinner," Reinecke went on. "I hope your appetite is as good as mine. And how have you put in your time to-day?"

The German's explanation was so natural and reasonable, so ready, his manner so free from embarrassment, that Tom was for the moment quite reassured, and chatted unconstrainedly until bedtime–and Reinecke appeared to take great pleasure in making him talk. But later, in the privacy of his room, some rather troublesome questions suggested themselves. Was it not unlike a shipping clerk to issue a duplicate without writing "duplicate" upon it? How was it that duplicate and original bore consecutive numbers, when at least two or three days must have elapsed between them? It was very odd that no consignment from another firm should have been shipped in the interim. And then suddenly Tom flushed. "By George!" he thought. "I'm hanged if the duplicate hasn't got the earlier number!"

Then he wondered whether he was not mistaken. Saying to himself, "I must find out for certain," he went back to the living-room to examine the fragments in the waste-paper basket. He passed the door of Reinecke's room, and heard his host splashing within.

The basket had been emptied.

The discoveries he had made kept Tom awake during a good part of the night. They were very disturbing. Reinecke's explanation had been plausible enough, and it was possible Tom was mistaken in his recollection of the numbers on the vouchers. But the German's haste in disposing of the contents of the basket bred an ugly suspicion. Were there other such "duplicates" in existence? Did the books account for only a part of the consignments? Had Reinecke, in fact, been systematically robbing his partners? Tom felt worried and perplexed. Here, thousands of miles from home, young and inexperienced, he was hardly in a position to deal with a clever rogue, if Reinecke was in truth a rogue; and he wished that he had some older person at hand, some one like blunt, rugged old Mr. Barkworth, to whom he could turn for advice. He was not likely to find any help among the Germans in Bismarckburg, and inquiries of the shipping clerk would probably be fruitless. Of course, he might question Reinecke's own clerk, but that course had very obvious disadvantages.

He concluded that he could do nothing at present except mention the matter in his next letter to his brother, and be more than ever alert in studying his host. To play the part of detective was abhorrent, but there seemed to be no help for it, and he writhed inwardly at the idea of living under the same roof with a man whom he distrusted but with whom he must try to keep up an appearance of friendship.

When the next mail day came, his feeling of mistrust prompted him to give his letter into the hand of the negro postman just as the latter was starting. Reinecke's correspondence was as usual placed in a padlocked bag. The man had gone about a mile on his way from the plantation when Reinecke overtook him, carrying two letters.

"I forgot these," he said. "Put down your bag."

He unlocked the bag, dropped his letters into it, and took up the voucher slip bearing the number of letters enclosed; this would be signed at the post office and brought back with the incoming mail.

"That letter of Mr. Willoughby's had better go in too," he said. "Give it to me."

The man took it from the folds of his loincloth, and Reinecke appeared to drop it into the bag. In reality he put it into his pocket. Having altered the figures on the slip, he relocked the bag and dismissed the man. Twelve hours later the postman returned and delivered his bag as usual into his master's hand.

Next day, in going about the plantation, Tom, as was natural enough, sought the negro, to ask him whether he had duly posted the letter entrusted to him in so unusual a manner. But he could not find the man, and on asking where he was, learnt that he had been sent on an errand to Bismarckburg. It was

nearly a fortnight before he returned to the plantation, and by that time Tom was no longer in a position to make any inquiry of him.

CHAPTER IV–TRAPPED

"You talked of slavery," said Reinecke one day. "Our niggers were no better than slaves! Have you seen anything to confirm that rather scandalous suggestion?" His tone was lightly sarcastic.

"If you mean any signs of positive ill-treatment, none," said Tom. (He was not aware that Reinecke had given the overseers strict orders not to use their whips while the Englishman was on the spot). "But I had always understood that the negro is naturally a cheerful person—-"

"Well!" interrupted Reinecke. "Don't they laugh enough? Don't they make noise enough?"

"The youngsters do make a great row," Tom confessed smiling; "of course children always are noisy and happy; they don't understand. But the older men seem rather apathetic. Apart from actual ill-treatment, of which I do you the justice to say there's no sign, the mere loss of liberty must be horribly depressing. You admit that they can't leave if they want to."

"Not at all. Some have at times cut a way through the hedge. They've repented of it." He smiled grimly. "But now, what would be a convincing proof to you that things here are after all not so bad?–that the life has some attractions, even for the freedom-loving negro?"

"The return of one who had escaped, I suppose."

"That's a proof I can hardly give you, because the few who have escaped–or run away, as I should put it–have either been caught and brought back or have no doubt come to grief in the forest. But I can give you an instance of a nigger coming here of his own accord, and being apparently quite content to remain."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and, strangely enough, he arrived on the same day as you. You won't suggest that *you* are the attraction?"

Tom resented this unmannerly remark, still more the tone in which it was uttered, but he said nothing.

"As you may imagine," Reinecke went on, "I don't know all the people. My Arabs look after them. And I shouldn't have known anything about this voluntary slave but for the fact that I mistook him for Mirambo's son, and one of the overseers corrected me. It appears that when we landed our stores from the *Hedwig von Wissmann* that day, we were one porter short, and this fellow, a sturdy lad, was hanging about and appeared to have nothing to do. He was engaged and came up with the others and stayed on–works well, and is quite cheerful, I'm told. He's astonishingly like Mirambo's boy. Some of these niggers claim to be descended from their old kings or chiefs: Mirambo himself does; and it's quite possible that this youth comes of the same stock. There's a jotting for your note-book, if you are making notes, and I daresay you are."

Again there was a covert sneer in the German's tone. Tom felt that he would soon have to quarrel with his host. As soon as he should have come to a definite conclusion about the man's integrity he would cut his visit short.

It seemed, indeed, as if Reinecke was determined to make him feel that he had overstayed his welcome. Once or twice, when he asked that Mirambo or his son might accompany him shooting, Reinecke declared that he could not spare any of the men; it was the busiest time of the year, not a time for amusement.

"But there's no reason why you shouldn't go alone, if you find idleness boring," he added once. "There are no dangerous beasts in our immediate neighbourhood. I'd only warn you not to go too far."

Tom was glad enough to take him at his word. While the fruit-picking was going on, there was nothing for him to learn, and Reinecke had been so ungracious lately that companionship was impossible. So he went occasionally into the woods alone, never straying more than a mile or two from the plantation, and taking even more pleasure in quietly watching the smaller animals–the tree-lizards, chameleons, iguanas–than in shooting pigeons or teal. His hope of big-game hunting was apparently to remain unrealised.

One day on returning he found Reinecke in a particularly good humour.

"I have had a visit to-day from a high German officer, Major von Rudenheim," he said: "an excellent soldier. He came on the boat with you, of course: did you have the pleasure of conversing with him?"

"No. He seemed to me too much of what we call a big pot."

"True: our German officers are very much above civilians. In any case, however–you are not aware that I hold the rank of Captain of Landwehr? So we met, as it were, on equal terms, though he is a step higher in rank. And I have

another piece of news for you. Eland have been seen near that small lake where we shot buck with Captain Goltermann, you remember. Would you like to add elands' horns to your trophies?"

"I should indeed," replied Tom, again wavering in his estimate of Reinecke. "He really isn't a bad sort at times," he thought.

Next morning happened to be mail day, and as Reinecke had letters to write, Tom feared that he was to be disappointed. But the German was again in excellent temper.

"You can start without me," he said. "I shall be through with my letters in an hour or so, and I'll follow you and meet you near the edge of the lake–you remember, by that fallen tree where we ate our lunch. Don't startle the game away: it will be a little practice in stalking for you. I'll bring the men along with me."

Tom set off, determined to show that the woodcraft he had picked up during the past few weeks was not inconsiderable. He reached the appointed spot, and ventured to cast about in various directions, without, however, finding any traces of the eland. Returning to the rendezvous, he was there joined by Reinecke, alone.

"I'm afraid the bird has flown," he said ruefully. "I haven't seen a sign of them."

"I will show you," replied Reinecke with a smile. "We shall have to stalk them, and we'll see what we can do without Mirambo's assistance. He'll bring up some men presently to carry home the game."

He set off along a faint native track, so long disused and so much overgrown that Tom by himself would hardly have discovered it. They pushed their way through the vegetation, and after about a quarter of an hour Reinecke whispered to Tom to stop and be careful to make no noise.

"We ought to find our quarry in a glade just ahead," he said. "I'll go on: follow when I call."

He disappeared among the undergrowth. In a few minutes Tom heard a shot, then a faint call, and hurried eagerly on. The track widened a little, and Tom was quickening his steps when he suddenly felt the earth give way beneath his feet, and next moment found himself lying at the bottom of a deep pit, amidst a litter of earth and brushwood, and conscious of a sharp pain in the calf of his left leg. Almost stunned by the fall, he lay for a moment or two scarcely able to realise what had happened. Then he shouted for help.

There was no answer. All was silent except for the hum of insects and the rustling of some small animals which his sudden descent upon their lair had disturbed. He shouted again, more loudly; then, supposing that his voice from the depth of the pit had not penetrated to Reinecke's ears through the vegetation above, he reached for his rifle, which lay beside him, and fired a couple of shots

into the air. Not yet seriously uneasy, he stooped to see what caused the pain in his leg, and found that it had been gashed by one of some half-dozen sharp-pointed stakes that were planted in the bottom of the pit.

"A native game-pit," he thought. "Reinecke might have warned me."

Standing up, he discovered that his right ankle was sprained.

"They'll have to carry me home," he thought, "and the sooner the better; the stuff here must have been rotting for years. I wish to goodness Reinecke would come."

Once more he shouted, then tried to scale the wall of the pit; but this was perpendicular, and it was evidently a case of cutting notches in it–a tiresome job to a man who could scarcely stand. It struck him that he had better bind up the gash in his leg as well as he could. When the men came he would get them to carry him to the lake and bathe the wound. How lucky it was that he had escaped with only one wound, and that in no vital spot! Looking at that ugly array of spikes, he shuddered at the thought of the hideous injuries they might have inflicted.

While tying his handkerchief tightly round his leg he shouted from time to time. Was it possible that Reinecke had met with a similar misfortune? For the first time Tom felt really uneasy. Reinecke's call to him had been very faint, and had not been repeated. If they were both in the same predicament there was no hope of relief until the negroes came up from the plantation. To make sure of their not missing him, he shouted and fired at intervals, until almost all his cartridges were gone. Still there was no response.

He looked up the wall of the pit. It was eleven or twelve feet high. If only he could raise himself high enough to get his arms on the edge, the rest would be easy. It should not take very long to cut a few notches in the earth: one of the spikes would form a serviceable tool. He worked one out of the ground, and rose to his feet, wincing with the pain that shot through his sprained ankle. To his chagrin, the earth of the pit wall was friable. It crumbled as he drove the spike into it; so far from making a hole that would afford him a firm foothold, he succeeded only in breaking down a part of the wall.

"Fairly trapped," he thought, and sat down again to ease his aching legs.

His watch announced midday. The men ought to have arrived by this time. They would carry food and drink, and he was very thirsty. The rendezvous was well known to them: surely they had not mistaken Reinecke's instructions. And then at last he was startled by a suspicion that sprang up suddenly in his mind–a suspicion so horrible that he strove to crush it. Reinecke might have lied to him about the vouchers; was he villain enough to have decoyed him deliberately to this cunningly concealed trap–deliberately schemed to clear finally out of his path the man whom he regarded as a stumbling-block on his way to fortune, the

discoverer of his crimes?

The thought, terrible as it was, would not be stifled. Tom recalled the gradual changes in the German's manner–the descent from almost excessive cordiality to stiffness, sarcasm, positive rudeness: then the sudden return to geniality, the apparent eagerness to indulge his guest. For the first time he was struck with the peculiar arrangements for the day's shooting expedition–the sending him on alone, the absence of gunbearers. This train of thought, once started, was carried on remorselessly by Tom's active imagination. Granted the man's intention of putting him out of the way, how easily one detail fitted into another! How naturally the Englishman's disappearance could be explained! It was known to every one on the plantation that he had sometimes gone shooting alone. Reinecke could say, and his statement could be corroborated, that his guest had started alone on this morning, he himself being engaged with correspondence. He had followed later, according to arrangement, but had failed to meet the Englishman at the appointed spot. He had searched for him, and after some days had found the poor fellow's remains at the bottom of an old, long disused game-pit. How plausible the story would be! Bob, thousands of miles away, would grieve: the story might get into the papers: people would read the paragraph, perhaps sigh, and pass on to a scandal nearer home, or to the latest news of the trouble in Ireland. In a few weeks Tom Willoughby would be only the shadow of a name.

Impatient with himself at the length his imagination had carried him, Tom shouted again, fired off another cartridge–the last but one. "I must keep one for emergencies," he thought. He made another attempt to cut holes in the wall, and threw the spike from him in disgust at the second failure. It occurred to him to heap up debris at the foot of the wall, to form a mounting block; but at the stirring of the putrid mass innumerable insects, beetles, reptiles, foul nameless things issued forth, causing him to shudder with loathing, and to shrink at actual pain from their bites and stings. Overcome with nausea, he retreated to a far corner where this creeping population had not been disturbed, and for a time, weary as he was, sickened by his increasing pain, he leant against the wall, rather than sit down again, until sheer fatigue compelled him to make an uneasy seat of his slanted rifle.

With the passage of time his thirst became a torture, and the shouts he uttered ever and anon sounded cracked and harsh from his parched throat. A sort of lethargy settled upon him: not a stoic resignation, a calm acquiescence in fate's decree, but a numbness of the senses and the mind. For a time he was scarcely conscious of pain, of the things moving at his feet, of the gradual cooling of the air as evening drew on. Then he roused himself with a start, and heedless of stings and the loathsome touch of obscene creatures, he gathered up heaps of rotted leaves and twigs and the litter that had fallen under him, and began with

frantic energy to pile them against the wall. His weight crushed them into half their former bulk, and he fell exhausted on the futile pillar.

Night came on. Alternately he dozed, and awoke to a sharpened keenness of apprehension. Now and then he heard noises above–the harsh persistent note of the nightjar, the hollow melancholy scale of the hornbill, the horrid whine of hyenas prowling in quest of prey and calling to one another with increasing frequency as the night stole towards dawn. A sudden raucous cry, apparently near at hand, caused him to seize the spike for defence in case some unwary beast should stumble into the pit. Once he beheld a pair of eyes, glaring with greenish light upon him from the brink. He uttered a hoarse cry: the eyes disappeared: and he seemed to hear a creaking rustle among the trees above.

Slumber again sealed his senses, and when he awoke, the pale misty light of dawn threw green rays into his prison. His limbs were numb with cold. His dry throat gave forth only a whistling croak when he tried to shout. Scarcely able to move, he watched the mouth of the pit and the sunlight filtering through the foliage and dispersing the mist. Listless, unconscious of the flight of time, he was just aware of the lengthening day as a sunbeam climbed down the side of his prison. All at once he was shaken into attention by a sound overhead, and while he was feebly trying to call, a shadow fell across the opening. A man's form appeared, and with a gasp of unutterable thankfulness he saw Reinecke peering down upon him. He struggled giddily to his feet: surely the bitterness of death was past.

But what was Reinecke saying? What words were these, that struck upon his ear in spasms, as it were?

"You came to spy ... enjoy your visit ... mad English ... war with Germany ... learn what it means to provoke the German."

He tried to collect his bewildered senses. It was Reinecke. What was he talking about? "Expedition to conquer Rhodesia ... months before I return ... a safe resting-place ... gather remains ... nothing but bones ... white bones."

Had Reinecke gone? The voice had ceased; the sunlight fell unchecked: and Tom, in a last flash of illumination before the darkness of unconsciousness enshrouded him, realised that Reinecke had betrayed him and had left him here to die.

CHAPTER V–A FRIEND IN NEED

On the previous evening, when the day's work on the plantation was over and the workers had returned to their homes, a young negro left the large dwelling which he shared with a number of other unmarried men, and betook himself to the hut where Mirambo was supping with his family.

"Have you eaten already, Mwesa?" asked the old hunter.

"No. I am not hungry. He has not come back."

The lad's eyes were wide with anxiety. No one could have failed to notice how strongly he resembled Mushota, the slightly older lad squatting by his father's side.

"Has the Leopard come back?"

"He came back at midday. The Antelope will never come back."

"Why so, Mwesa?"

"There has been whipping to-day."

Mirambo's face clouded. There had been no whipping since the Antelope, as Tom Willoughby was known among the negroes, had come to the plantation. The Leopard was their name for Reinecke. The negro is very shrewd, and it had not needed certain information brought by Mwesa to make the people connect the cessation of corporal punishment with the presence of the young stranger. That information, however, given first to Mirambo, had spread through the whole community, and was talked of freely among themselves. But it had never reached the ears of the Arab overseers: oppression is always met by secrecy. Neither they nor Reinecke knew that the young negro who had marched from Bismarckburg among the porters, and had remained a willing worker on the plantation, was not the chance recruit he had seemed to be. The stowaway of the *Hedwig von Wissmann* had come of set purpose; and when Reinecke sarcastically asked Tom whether he supposed his attractions accounted for the boy's staying on, he had unwittingly hit upon the truth. Mwesa had stayed as a starved and beaten dog will stay with one who has been kind to him.

Quite unaware of the interest he had excited among these simple negroes, Tom had been watched, all his movements commented on, from day to day. Whether by observation or by instinct the negroes knew that there was some intimate connection, obscure to them, between him and their taskmaster. They judged that the young Englishman was an object of respect or fear to the German, for Mwesa had told them that he was English and that the English did not whip their workers, except perhaps in punishment for crime. The Leopard had some reason for drawing in his claws.

Mwesa, like others, had seen the Englishman start, unattended, with his gun. He had done so before: those who saw him go marked the fact as they marked all that he did, but thought no more about it–except Mwesa, who watched all day for his hero's return. He had noticed, moreover, the going and the coming of Reinecke, also with his gun; and he had been troubled when the German returned alone, and when at sunset the Englishman was still absent.

"The Leopard has killed," said Mirambo after an interval of gloomy silence.

Mwesa burst into tears.

When he left the hut later, after eating a bowl of manioc, he carried a long sharp knife. Stealing along behind the huts, he made his way in the darkness to a remote spot, climbed up into a tree, and disappeared. Half an hour later he crept back to Mirambo's hut, restored the knife, which the man would have to account for next day, and then returned to his own lodging, and slipped in unperceived by his fellow inmates. His exit was prepared, but no negro travels willingly by night.

Next day, at the time when the negroes had their midday meal, he was about to make his escape from a place no longer endurable to him, when he caught sight of Reinecke leaving by the gate, again unattended. Mwesa looked around; no one else was in sight. He shinned up the tree he had climbed the night before. A few minutes later he was running like a wild animal through the scrub outside the fence. He posted himself among the trees at a spot where he could not fail to see Reinecke as he left the gate. When the German had passed, the negro followed him with the stealth of one come of a long line of hunters, tracking him over the course he had pursued on the previous day, without revealing himself by so much as a rustle among the leaves or the crack of a fallen twig.

As Reinecke approached the pit, no guardian spirit told him of the watcher whose eager face was looking at him out of a frame of green foliage, whose keen ears pricked up as he heard his master speaking to some one below him. When the German, his eyes alight with malign triumph, turned to retrace his steps there was nothing to show that he had been found out; the face had disappeared. Nor could Reinecke suspect that he was dogged back to the plantation, and that when the gate had closed upon him, a negro lad, lithe as a young antelope, bounded

back to the pit, and peered anxiously into the depths.

Tom had relapsed into a state of half-consciousness. He was roused by a voice, and looking up, saw a black shiny face gazing down upon him. Two rows of white teeth parted, two big eyes danced with delight when they saw the white man glance upward.

"Sah, sah!" called the voice.

"Who are you?" Tom murmured faintly.

"Me Mwesa, sah; me come back bimeby, you see."

The lad ran back into the forest. Tom lay as in a dream. Who was this negro that spoke negro's English, and had called him "sah"? He had never heard any of Reinecke's slaves use English, yet what negro in these parts could be other than one of Reinecke's slaves? Where had the boy gone? What was he going to do? Tom felt almost too weak and listless even to hope.

After what seemed a very long time the negro came back, carrying a long green rope which he had plaited from strands of creepers. His face beamed with excitement and joy. Making one end of the rope fast to a sapling that grew near the edge of the pit, he threw the other end down and laughed when he saw that a long coil lay at the bottom. Then he swarmed down until he stood over Tom, and exclaimed:

"Sah climb; all right now."

"Who are you?" Tom asked again.

"Me Mwesa. No talk now: talk bimeby. Dis bad place."

But climbing was easier said than done. Tom was amazed to find how weak he was after only twenty-four hours' confinement in the pit. "Have I so little staying power?" he thought. But twenty-four hours in heat and squalor, without food or water, with a wounded leg and a sprained ankle, and a mind racked with anxiety and foreboding, would have put a tax on the strongest.

He found himself unable to climb. Whereupon Mwesa knotted the rope about his waist, swarmed up the rope again, and hauled until sweat poured from his body. As soon as Tom was safely over the brink, the lad let himself down once more into the pit, and returned with Tom's rifle and a couple of the sharpened stakes.

"Come 'long, sah," he said: "me find place."

Tom allowed himself to be helped along, asking no questions, content for the present to have regained freedom after the horrors of the past twenty-four hours. Mwesa led him along the old native track, in the opposite direction from the plantation. Presently they came to a brook tumbling over rocks. Here he bathed his aching limbs and drank deep draughts.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked.

"No savvy, sah: all right bimeby," replied the boy.

They started again. Mwesa kept carefully to the track, tracing it unerringly even where it was almost obliterated. The forest was thick all round, and Tom, at another time, might have felt uneasy at this apparently aimless wandering. Now, however, one way was as good as another, so long as it did not lead back to the plantation.

Mwesa had no doubt guessed that the track would sooner or later lead to a clearing. After more than an hour's painful walk, Tom found himself at the edge of what had once been an open space, but was now an expanse covered with scrub and forest trees of recent growth.

"Stay dis place, sah," said the negro.

Tom was ready to stay anywhere. He sank down on the ground, and lay, resting and watching the further proceedings of his rescuer. The lad cut down a number of young pliable branches, trimmed them to the same length, and stuck them into the ground in a circle, at equal intervals apart, bending them at the top until all met. Then he wound long grasses and tendrils of creepers in and out around the whole circumference, until in a surprisingly short space of time he had fashioned a rough and ready circular hut at the corner of the clearing, which was almost completely hidden by rank growths of vegetation. He smiled with pride in his handiwork when he invited Tom to enter.

"Come back bimeby," he cried, and darted away into the forest. When he returned he brought a wild gourd full of water and a handful of berries.

"No can get nuffin else," he said deprecatingly.

"They will do very well," said Tom, who indeed could have eaten sawdust after his long fast. "Now tell me who you are, and how you found me, and why you are helping me."

The smile that spread over the lad's face awoke in Tom a dormant memory. Surely this was the boy who had rushed so eagerly to pick up his match-box a day or two after he had reached the plantation.

"Sah sabe Mwesa, Mwesa sabe sah," said the negro, happily.

"Save! What do you mean?"

"On boat, sah: German man kick, say frow me in water: sah pay cash, all right all same."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom, feeling a touch of embarrassment. That little unconsidered act of kindness had surely not won such devotion as to bring the boy into slavery for his sake? "Tell me about yourself," he said.

The negro's story, told in his strange English, took a long time in the telling, so roundabout was the course of the narrative, so much broken by explanations and cumbered by trifling details. But the gist of it, as understood by Tom, was as follows–

Mwesa was the son of Miluma, once a notable chief of the Wahehe, and

one of those who had sustained for a long time the resistance of his people to the Germans. At length he had fallen into the enemy's hands, and had been among the first batch of labourers who had cleared the ground for Reinecke's plantation. Miluma's wife and two of his children had died under their hardships, and the chief, left with Mwesa alone, had fled with the boy, and, more lucky than other negroes, had neither been recaptured nor killed in the forest. He had fallen in with an English trader, with whom he had taken service, accompanying him in his journeys through the country of the Great Lakes, and living at other times among his native household at Zanzibar. Mwesa, only a few years old at the period of the escape, had at first remained in Zanzibar during his father's absence, but at the age of twelve he, too, had travelled with the Englishman's caravan, and had picked up a smattering of English as well as of the dialects of the tribes through whose countries he had passed.

Then his father died, the Englishman returned to Europe, and Mwesa, now seventeen, was left alone in the world. Having a little money in his possession, he bethought him of his uncle Mirambo, whose large family had prevented him from escaping at the same time as Miluma, and of whom his father had often spoken. He would return to the plantation, see if his uncle were yet alive, and perhaps help him, or any of his family who were still living, to escape with him to British territory. He took passage in a dhow that was sailing down the lake, but the vessel had been blown ashore, and the shipwrecked crew and passengers robbed of all they possessed by predatory natives. Mwesa and one other had got away, and after an adventurous journey had arrived at Ujiji. Learning there that a steamer was expected at Kigoma, Mwesa had made his way to the port and smuggled himself on board.

On arriving at Bismarckburg he had found that the young Englishman who had befriended him on board the vessel was going to the plantation which was his own goal, and had at once sought employment among the porters. It seemed to him that the presence of an Englishman was a good augury for the success of his mission. He had remained at the plantation, always on the watch; and it was not long before he suspected that Reinecke had a grudge against his benefactor. Slight signs that might have escaped the notice of anybody who had not a personal interest in the Englishman had betrayed to him and to Mirambo the real feelings of the German; and Mwesa had now a double motive: the rescue of his uncle and the care of the white man. For the sake of the latter uncle and nephew had concealed their relationship, awaiting the day when, as they expected, the Englishman would leave. On that day they, too, would go. But the crisis had come in an unforeseen manner. The disappearance of the Englishman and Reinecke's strange movements had intensified their suspicions, and Mwesa had stolen out to discover what the German had done with his guest.

Tom thanked the boy warmly for what he had done for him. He was a good deal troubled in mind, and passed many hours of the night in that grass hut in anxious meditation on his position. Mwesa had rescued him from a lingering death, but to what end? If it was true, as Reinecke had said, that Britain was at war with Germany, that already a German expedition against Rhodesia was in preparation, the immediate future was very black. He dared not go to Bismarckburg; the nearest British territory was forty or fifty miles away; how was it possible to accomplish so long a journey through difficult country and hostile people? At present, indeed, his injuries precluded even a much shorter journey. Until he should have fully recovered he must remain in hiding. How was he to subsist? There was game in the forest, no doubt plenty of vegetable food in the shape of berries and nuts, though only a native could distinguish the edible from the poisonous. Mwesa would help him–but Mwesa was himself a complication. Tom felt that, the boy having done so much for him, he was bound to consider the boy, and Mirambo; his lot seemed to be knit with theirs. It would not be just to appropriate Mwesa, and leave his relatives in the slavery from which the boy had come to deliver them. Yet how helpless he was to do anything either for them or for himself!

He fell asleep with these problems all unsolved. When he awoke the boy was gone. Tom supposed that he was seeking food, but as time slipped away and Mwesa did not return he grew uneasy. Then, however, common sense asserted itself. The boy who had already dared so much, who had built him a hut and brought him food, would not desert him. There must be some good reason for his absence.

A little after mid-day Mwesa came back, looking more pleased with himself than ever. A rabbit dangled from his waist; slung over one shoulder was a native grass bag stuffed with cassava; in one hand he carried an axe, in the other a sporting rifle, which Tom recognised as the property of Reinecke. Mwesa threw his load down, and emptying his bag, revealed, under the cassava roots, a number of cartridges. He chuckled with delight.

"You have been back to the plantation?" said Tom.

"Yes, sah: me go back; nobody see."

He went on to explain that there were strange doings at the plantation. Reinecke had called the negroes about him, and told them that war had broken out between England and Germany; that the Germans were going to seize all the English lands in Africa; that he himself was a great officer in the German army, and had been ordered to turn every able-bodied man into a soldier. The gathering of the crops being finished, such work as was necessary on the plantation must be done by the women and the older men. He was going to Bismarckburg to arrange for supplies of arms. During his absence the overseers would exercise

the men.

Taking advantage of the excitement that followed this announcement, Mwesa had managed to possess himself of the articles with which he had come laden.

"Me now sah him boy," he said gleefully.

Tom looked at him with a ruminating eye. It was well to have a companion in this forest solitude, and he felt instinctively that Mwesa's fidelity might be relied on. But was he entitled to involve the boy in his own misfortunes, or to separate him from his new-found relatives? He reflected that the boy would be useful to him in helping him to find his way into British territory; and when Mwesa emphatically assured him that he was determined not to go back to the plantation, or to be drilled to fight against the English, he made up his mind to accept the service thus volunteered.

"Very well, Mwesa," he said, "you are my boy. Whatever comes, we will share it."

Mwesa was already skinning the rabbit, and Tom having a box of matches, the boy kindled a fire and prepared to cook a meal for his new master. Meanwhile Tom took earnest thought for their future. Until he had recovered from his injuries it would be hopeless to attempt to reach Abercorn; but it struck him that to remain in his present position, only a few miles from the plantation, might be dangerous. Reinecke might revisit the pit, and finding it no longer tenanted, would almost certainly hunt for him in the neighbourhood. It was necessary to find a secure refuge where he could rest until he was able to undertake the journey. Almost as soon as the idea occurred to him, he remembered that he had passed this way with Reinecke and Goltermann, on the day when he had first made distant acquaintance with crocodiles. The nullah and the lake in the hills lay a few miles to the east. The former, with its windings, its overhanging rocks, its patches of dense scrub, would furnish a safe hiding-place. Game was plentiful in the adjacent forest; the lake would be an unfailing water supply; and though he would have to guard against falling a prey to the reptiles that infested its shores, Mwesa's knowledge of their ways would no doubt serve him well. The neighbourhood was wholly uninhabited, and it was so far from the plantation that Reinecke and his people were unlikely to visit it.

Could he find it? Having gone there only once, before he had had any experience of forest travel, he knew that unassisted he would have been completely at a loss. But he hoped that Mwesa would discover the track leading to it, and when, as he ate his dinner of roast rabbit, he mentioned the matter to the negro, the latter instantly started up and ran off in the direction Tom pointed out. In twenty minutes he was back, and declared with his invariable smile that he had found the track. He proceeded to dismantle the hut and to obliterate the traces

of the fire; then, loading himself with their few possessions, he begged Tom to lean on him and make for their new home at once.

Tom limped along, anxious to reach the nullah before night. On the way Mwesa told him more about the morning's scene at the plantation. Reinecke had boasted that the English were to be driven into the sea. All their possessions would become the booty of the Germans, and the Wahehe, if they served him faithfully, should share in it. They had once been great warriors; now they would learn how to be askaris, and under German leadership do great deeds and amass great riches. The negroes had listened to him in silence; and only when he had left them did their sullen discontent find expression. They remembered that they had always fought against the Germans, not for them; and some of the elder men said they would rather fight against them again. But there was no open revolt; cowed by years of oppression, devoid of leadership, they could only accept their destiny.

With great difficulty Tom managed to drag himself along for two or three miles; then he declared that he could go no farther. It was already late in the afternoon. Mwesa at once constructed a temporary hut, and there they passed the night.

Next morning, after again covering their tracks as completely as possible, they set off again. Even with Mwesa's support, Tom could only crawl along at the rate of little more than a mile an hour. The almost disused hunter's path was sometimes hard to find: here and there it was overgrown with thorns through which Mwesa had to cleave a way; and in the middle hours of the day the humid heat was so oppressive that Tom had to take long rests. Towards evening, however, they came suddenly upon a dip in the ground which Tom thought he recognised.

"Run ahead," he said to Mwesa, "and see if the nullah is in that direction."

The boy sprinted away, returning in a few minutes.

"All right, sah!" he cried. "All right ober dah."

They went on. Emerging from the forest, they crossed an expanse of scrub and came to the mouth of the nullah, which was like a deep cutting in the hills. A thin stream trickled down the middle: Tom could not doubt that the lake must be only a few hundred yards farther, and, in spite of his fatigue, he struggled on to make sure that he had reached his destination. There at last was the lake, still, not a breath of air bending the rushes on its banks, or stirring the trees on the island in the centre.

Mwesa had just time to rig up a slight shelter of branches near the margin of the lake before darkness fell. He cooked some manioc for Tom and himself; and when Tom sank into heavy sleep, the boy kept watch all night by the fire.

In the grey light of dawn, when Mwesa also was asleep, Tom was awakened

by a rustling at the entrance of the rude hut, across which Mwesa had thrown a rough barrier of thorns as a defence against a chance marauder. Starting up on his elbow, he saw dimly some dark shape apparently edging its way between the lower part of the barrier and the ground. For a moment or two he was unable to distinguish what it was; then he gave a sudden shout, seized the shot-gun which lay by his side, sprang to his feet and fired.

Awakened by his shout, Mwesa had jumped up and come to his master's side. There was a violent commotion in the thorny barrier. Next moment the slight hut collapsed, and both occupants were half buried by the boughs. Extricating themselves from the tangle, they peered out at the interlaced branches of thorn. Nothing was to be seen.

"Wat dat noise, sah?" whispered Mwesa.

"I think I saw the snout of a crocodile," replied Tom.

Mwesa clicked in his throat, caught up his axe, and rushed out. But the crocodile had disappeared.

"He berry much 'fraid, sah," said the boy, when he came back. "Gun make him berry sick. He go tell no come dis way no more: oh no!"

CHAPTER VI–MWESA'S MISSION

Tom could not help laughing as he surveyed the ruins of Mwesa's little building, and the negro himself put his hands on his hips and roared with merriment.

"Silly fella tink all same proper house," he said, alluding to the crocodile. "Me show him."

It was clear that their first task, if they were to remain for any length of time in this spot, must be to construct a more substantial dwelling, and after a light breakfast they set forth to survey for a site. Tom found that his long tramp on the previous day had caused his injured ankle to swell, and he could only

get along by hopping on his sound foot. Fortunately he had not far to go before lighting on a suitable situation in a spot above the shore of the lake, where a few isolated trees in the form of a rough circle enclosed a clear space some twenty yards across. Here, after bathing his ankle and tying his handkerchief tightly about it, he sat down to watch Mwesa set about building him a "proper house."

The boy cut down with his axe a number of straight saplings, trimmed them, cut them to the same length, and then planted them in a circle in the centre of the space. After a search along the banks of the stream he returned with a load of withies cut from tough creeping-plants. With these he bound the upright poles together: first in the middle, then two feet below, and finally the same distance above. He worked with such astonishing speed that early in the afternoon the framework of the new hut was complete, standing up like a cage or a circular crate. After a short rest he started on the roof. He gathered together a number of flexible saplings, which he laid down on the floor of the hut so that they radiated from the centre like the spokes of a wheel. Then he fastened the ends together, lifting the saplings one by one until the structure resembled the ribs of an inverted Chinese umbrella. When it was finished he drew the loose ends together, turned it upside down, and pushed it up through the open roof space, the ends, when released, resting on the tops of the poles. The skeleton of the hut was complete.

Tom envied the boy's dexterity. All his measurements had been made with the eye alone, and Tom reflected that the work would have occupied a white artisan, provided with a foot rule, probably twice or thrice as long. Mwesa promised that another day's work would finish the job.

Next day he filled up the interstices between the poles with damp mud, which he carried in his wallet from the edge of the lake. He left a space about three feet square at the entrance; and built up with mud, in the interior of the hut, a long bench some three feet high. The mud dried rapidly in the heat of the day, and when the bench had hardened, he mounted upon it, and wove long grasses in and out among the rods composing the roof, until this was fairly impervious. It would give slight protection against heavy rain, but the rainy season was not yet due, and Tom agreed that the hut would form a very serviceable shelter during the short time he expected to occupy it.

It occurred to him, however, to suggest a means of doubly securing themselves against intruders, human or other. The trees surrounding the open space could be turned into an effective zariba by planting poles between them, and interlacing the poles with strands of prickly thorn. Mwesa fell in with the notion at once, but this was a much longer task than the construction of the hut had been, and in fact it occupied him off and on for nearly a week.

Meanwhile the food he had brought from the plantation had long been consumed, and he spent part of every day in snaring birds or small animals for

the subsistence of himself and his master. It appeared that vegetable food was not to be obtained in this part of the country, and Tom grew somewhat uneasy as to the effect of an uninterrupted diet of flesh. He was uneasy, too, about his injuries. The wound caused by the spike was healing well, but the swelling of his ankle was but little reduced, and it gave him great pain to hobble even a few yards. It was clear that without the ministrations of his faithful and indefatigable boy he would starve.

Often as he lay at night, on rushes strewn upon the bench, listening to the cries of night-birds, the bark of distant hyaenas, the coughs of the crocodiles in the lake, the grunts and snarls of beasts that came prowling around the zariba, but never attempted to penetrate it, scared by the fire kept constantly burning within the enclosure–as he lay listening to these eerie sounds he pondered plans for the future. His dearest wish was to make his way to the frontier as soon as he was fit to travel, and to join the British forces which, he supposed, were gathering to resist the German invasion. The news that Germany and Britain were at war had scarcely surprised him. Recollections of what he had heard and seen during his year in Germany seemed to give corroboration enough. He remembered in particular one young German baroness, who had been to school at Cheltenham, and was continually boasting of what the Germans would do when "the Day" came. He remembered, too, how his father scoffed at the warnings of those who foretold that Germany was only awaiting an opportunity for making her tiger-spring, and how he and his brother had been rebuked for heeding the "alarmists." And now the Day had come at last. He wondered what spark had exploded the European powder-barrel, what pretext Germany had alleged for the attack which, he believed, she had long been secretly cherishing and preparing for. In the only letter he had received from England since his arrival, Bob had said nothing of trouble brewing. Whatever the ostensible reason was, he had no doubt the war had sprung from Germany's lust for world-power, and with the easy confidence which too many Englishmen felt in those early days, he believed that the British Navy would square accounts with the Germans before many months had passed. He did not know that Germany had cast her gauntlet in the face of half the world, did not suspect that she had already set the bases of civilisation staggering.

As for Africa, he took it for granted that German possessions would soon be wiped off the map. It would have been difficult for a true-born Englishman to think otherwise. All that he wished and hoped for was that he might reach Rhodesia before the last act was played.

When about ten days had slipped away, and even Mwesa had nothing to occupy him except the daily search for food, Tom began to fidget for news. He was still unable to walk without pain; inaction irked him, and ignorance of what was going on at the plantation and beyond gave him a fit of the blues. His de-

spondency did not escape the keen eyes of the negro, who at last asked what was troubling him.

"I want to know things, Mwesa," he answered: "what Reinecke is doing, whether fighting has already begun–all sorts of things. And I want to get away from here and join my own people."

The boy's anxious expression cleared; his eyes brightened.

"Me go; one day, two, me come back tell sah," he said.

"Do you think you could go safely?"

Mwesa looked hurt at the suggestion. Had he not already stolen in and out of the plantation? Why should his master suppose that he could not do it again? He would set off at once, as soon as he had provided food and water for a day or two, and he would come back stuffed with news.

The boy was so eager that Tom let him go. He took nothing but his wallet and a knife. By nightfall he would reach the plantation. There he would learn all that was to be learnt from Mirambo: his master would be only one night alone.

It was not till the dense blackness of night brooding over the nullah deepened his feeling of solitude that Tom doubted whether he had done right. The boy might not return: who could tell what mischance might befall him? In daytime he might escape the many perils of the forest; but what if he were discovered in his furtive passage of the thorn fence and impressed into the ranks of the recruits? "Without Mwesa what will become of me?" The troublesome question gave Tom no rest as he lay in the hut, listening to the outer noises to which darkness adds mystery and horror. Alone, almost helpless, what could a white man do in the wilds of Africa? Tom was not ordinarily a victim to "nerves"; but the series of shocks he had recently suffered had quickened his imagination in proportion as it had reduced his physical vigour, and the sensations of that night were one long nightmare.

At dawn, limp and haggard, he got up, crawled out of the hut, and sat down with his back against a tree-trunk, listening for the return of the negro boy. He heard rustlings among the trees, the call of a quail, the snorting grunt of some animal prowling round the zariba. But neither rustle nor footfall caught his ear when Mwesa suddenly appeared at his side.

"Come back all right, sah," said the boy cheerfully.

"But how? I didn't hear you. How did you get in?"

"Climb tree, sah; come like snake."

He had dropped thus into the enclosure to avoid making a gap in the fence. As before, he came laden with food. Welcome as this was, Tom was more eager to have his tale of news; but before Mwesa would relate his discoveries, he produced from his wallet, with much show of mystery, a small bundle with a covering of leaves tied with grass thread. Opening this with an expression of

great solemnity, he displayed a lump of some substance olive-green in colour, and of the consistency of putty.

"Good medicine, sah. Mirambo my uncle: berry clebber pusson. Me make sah well."

Dropping to his knees he unwound the handkerchief from Tom's injured ankle, pinched off a small portion of the plastic medicament, and rubbed it gently over the joint, muttering strange words. It gradually softened to a greenish oil. When the joint was thoroughly anointed, the boy bound it again with the handkerchief, jumped up, and, smiling away his look of intent earnestness declared:

"Sah, one time better; two time better; t'ree time all same well."

Then he unslung from his shoulder a small iron cooking-pot, and sat down to tell his news.

At the plantation drill was in full swing. Some askaris had come from Bismarckburg under the charge of a German non-commissioned officer, the former as guards and examples, the latter to train the new recruits. Drill went on all day and every day, the German giving his commands in a Bantu dialect which was hard to understand, with the result that he frequently lost his temper. The negroes who were slow were stimulated by the whips of the overseers. A few rifles had been brought, and some of the quicker men were already being trained in aiming and sighting: as yet they had fired no shot. They were all sullen and resentful; but cowed by the presence of the armed askaris and in constant fear of the whip, they gave no utterance to their feelings in face of their taskmasters, pouring out their hearts only in the seclusion of their own huts and sheds.

Reinecke himself was now seldom at the plantation. Mirambo believed that he was busy at headquarters at Bismarckburg. The askaris had said that a great force was being prepared to attack the English in Abercorn, and had boasted of the terrible things they were going to do and the great riches they would soon enjoy. They told of many battles won in the white man's country far away; of many great cities which the Germans had taken; how the King of England and his war chiefs had been hanged by the people, enraged at defeat. Soon there would not be a single Englishman in the whole of Africa.

"Do they believe that stuff?" said Tom. "It's all nonsense."

Mwesa was not at all sure that he had not believed it himself, for how was a simple African to deny what was told him with such assurance? Indeed, even among the Germans, settlers and soldiers alike, in those early days of the war, no rumour was too fantastic to find easy credence. Conceit is a hotbed for credulity. But Tom's vigorous assertion that it was all nonsense was enough to convince Mwesa.

"Dey silly fellas, sah," he said scornfully. "Mwesa him English: he know all right."

Tom knew nothing of the relative strength of the British and German forces in East Africa; but having a Briton's invincible faith in the British Navy, he could not believe that the German colony, cut off from Europe as it must be, could really measure itself against the resources of the British Empire. But he remembered how, in the past, British carelessness and want of foresight had bred disasters only painfully retrieved, and he felt no little anxiety as to how far Northern Rhodesia was prepared to resist the expedition which the Germans were organising.

He was only the more eager to join his fellow-countrymen, and take his part in the fight, if fight there was to be. At school he had been colour-sergeant in the cadet corps, and looked back with reminiscent pleasure on the field days, when, in the intervals of business, he had munched apples in a farmer's orchard or solaced himself and his squad with junket in a dairy. "Rummy," he thought, "if all that swat were to turn out useful after all. But here it will be minus the apples and junket."

This being his state of mind, he was doubly curious about the healing properties of the stuff"–Mirambo's plasticine, he called it–that Mwesa had brought from his uncle. He was aware almost at once of a lessening of the pain in his ankle. After the second application the swelling was sensibly reduced; within a week he found himself able to walk freely. Mwesa took the cure as a matter of course.

"What's the stuff made of?" Tom asked him.

Mwesa shook his head gravely.

"Berry good medicine: Mirambo him savvy all same."

And that was all that Tom could get out of him.

CHAPTER VII–TOM SEIZES THE OCCASION

Tom had many occasions during the next ten days to rejoice in the possession of

an excellent servant. Mwesa was everything in turn–hunter, cook, valet, hospital orderly; and in every capacity he was efficient. His snares and traps stocked the larder; the grain, he had brought from the plantation was eked out with wild fruits gathered in the forest; and out of the one simple cooking-pot he produced as great a variety of good things as a conjurer out of a hat. Always with the same gravity and the same muttering of spells, he anointed and massaged Tom's ankle daily, and never failed to sing the praises of his uncle Mirambo. His constant cheerfulness acted as a tonic on his master's spirits, and with reviving health Tom felt braced to endure whatever hardship the future might bring.

At last the day came when he declared that he was ready to start for Abercorn. He had talked over his plans with Mwesa, handicapped, however, by the fact that neither he nor the negro knew the route or the character of the country to be travelled. The extent of his information was that Abercorn lay somewhere to the south-west, and from a hazy recollection of a map glanced at during his voyage from England he guessed that the town was forty or fifty miles away. Under the most favourable conditions he could hardly hope to cover that distance in less than three days: if the country was specially difficult the journey might last even weeks.

It was unfortunate that Reinecke's plantation lay across the direct route. In order to avoid it, he must make a considerable detour, which would add he knew not how many miles to the journey. And then he would have to cross the main German road connecting Bismarckburg on Lake Tanganyika with Neu Langenburg about twenty miles north-west of Lake Nyassa. This, the only practicable highway, might be crowded with transports and would certainly be patrolled; but he hoped by careful scouting to discover some part of its great length where, either by day or by night, he could safely make the crossing.

Deciding to attempt a start at dawn on the following day, the two made their simple preparations. Mwesa stuffed into his wallet all the edible fruits he could gather, and after cooking the last meal, took his pot to the lake, and washed it thoroughly. He filled with water a couple of gourds, one of which he fitted with a grass thong for slinging over Tom's shoulder. Tom cleaned his rifle, bathed in the lake, keeping a wary eye open for crocodiles, and washed out his only shirt, with a sigh for the contents of his travelling case, now, he supposed, appropriated by Reinecke.

They were about to turn in early that evening when Mwesa jumped up suddenly and darted out of the low entrance to the hut. Tom, surprised, followed him, and found him standing in an attitude of expectancy just outside. A few moments later he heard a human cry, faint and muffled, as if coming from a great distance. Mwesa was greatly excited.

"Two time," he cried, turning his head in the direction from which the sound

had come.

"You heard it before?" Tom asked.

Mwesa held up his hand enjoining silence. They waited. A minute or two passed; the cry was repeated, and Mwesa, still more excited, said:

"Mhehe call; man belong me."

"One of your own people! It must be some one from the plantation. Answer him ... No, wait. Reinecke may be setting a trap for us. Perhaps he has visited the pit and discovered my escape, and guesses I may be somewhere in the forest."

Again they heard the cry.

"Who knows you are with me, besides Mirambo?" asked Tom.

"Mushota, no more, sah. Mirambo say no tell: berry wise man, Mirambo."

"Then I think we had better answer: it may be Mirambo himself. But we will not call here; let us get away from the hut. It will not do to risk bringing an enemy here."

It was now nearly dark. Adopting Mwesa's precaution, they climbed one of the trees that formed the boundary of their enclosure, dropped to the ground outside the zariba, and made their way into the nullah. The cry was repeated once more; this time it was louder. When they had walked nearly a quarter of a mile down the nullah, Tom ordered Mwesa to answer, and the boy let out a curious series of notes, like the dropping scale of the hornbill. There was a shout in response.

"Mushota, sah," cried Mwesa, his big eyes gleaming. "He say what place me be."

"Tell him."

Mwesa directed his cousin, and in a few minutes the lad, so strangely like him, came bounding along in the middle of the watercourse. The two negroes embraced, and Mushota, his features and arms working with excitement, poured out a story in a torrent of clicks and gurgles, every now and then glancing at Tom, who stood a little apart.

Mwesa's expressive countenance showed that the story affected him deeply. He turned to his master, and seemed to strive to find English words in which to repeat what he had heard.

"Come, let us get back to our hut," said Tom. "We can only just see to find our way. You can tell me all about it as we go."

Tom had two natural gifts rare in one who was little more than a schoolboy–patience and sympathy. He could be stiff enough with his equals in rank and education; but with this faithful negro lad, ignorant, struggling to express himself in a strange and difficult language, he was so patient that Mwesa's stumbling utterance became more coherent as he told Mushota's story, and Tom was able to grasp its essentials.

It concerned Mirambo. The old hunter, once a chief and a warrior of renown among his own people, had not taken kindly to the methods of the German drill-sergeant. Day after day he had been flogged by the overseers for slowness of movement or some other fault in drill, and at last the German sergeant, who had hitherto left punishment to the Arabs, had kicked the man in the presence of the whole company of recruits. Mirambo had retaliated with a swift blow that knocked the German off his feet. The sergeant, when he got up, was on the point of shooting the negro; but the head overseer, interposing, explained that Mirambo was Reinecke's best hunting man, and the sergeant had then ordered him to be chained up until Reinecke returned from Bismarckburg. Only a few days before, a negro had been shot for a similar offence, and Mushota feared that his father would suffer the same fate. Knowing the whereabouts of the white man who had befriended his cousin, he had stolen out at midday when even the indefatigable German rested, and had come to beg the m'sungu to save his father.

"But why come to me? What can I do?" asked Tom, astonished at the confidence with which Mwesa put his cousin's plea. It was almost laughable that they should seek help of him, a fugitive, one whom Reinecke had tried to kill, a single man without resources in an enemy's country.

"Sah English," exclaimed Mwesa. "Sah savvy big medicine, white man medicine. Sah boss, no fear."

Touched by this childlike faith in the power either of the English name or of "white man medicine," which he supposed to mean some magic art, he was at a loss what answer to make. He was willing enough to help, but quite unable to see how. It seemed best to temporise–to refrain from immediately dashing the negroes' hopes, and to explain to them presently how impossible was the feat besought of him.

"We will talk it over in our hut," he said, and was then sorry he had deferred the inevitable disappointment, for Mwesa clapped his hands and laughed, and said to Mushota a few words that set him laughing too. His caution had only strengthened their belief in him.

The two negroes chattered together the rest of the way to the hut, and Tom was left to his by no means pleasant reflections. How could he break the unpalatable truth to these simple souls? What would be the effect on them? He could enter into their feelings through the recollection of an incident of his own childhood. His father had promised him, a child of five, the present of a horse, and he remembered the bitter tears he shed when the horse turned out to be a wooden toy instead of the expected creature of flesh and bone. The negro is always a child.

And then he found himself thinking: "Why not risk a visit to the plantation? It's running my head into a noose, perhaps; but after all I owe to Mwesa I

may at least show him that I'm ready to do what I can. He can get in and out: why shouldn't I? Reinecke is absent. I don't suppose he ever confided to the Arabs his pleasant intentions with regard to me; perhaps I might venture to tackle them (provided the drill sergeants aren't about), and get them to release Mirambo.... What tosh! of course that's impossible: still, I might at least reconnoitre, and I'll be hanged if I don't."

It was dark when they reached the hut, but the slight glow from the fire that Mwesa had kept always burning in the enclosure revealed to Tom the look of hopeful contentment on the faces of the two negroes. They all squatted at the entrance, and Tom asked:

"When will Reinecke be back?"

Mwesa translated to his cousin. The answer was, "To-morrow night."

"How many Germans are at the plantation?'

"One: the other had accompanied Reinecke."

"And how many askaris?"

"Six; the others had gone to Bismarckburg."

Tom pondered this information. He had no chance if he was caught; the likelihood of his being able to release Mirambo had almost vanished. And what if the man, by some lucky stroke, were released? Would he consent to escape without his family? There were five in all: the larger the party, the more difficult to evade pursuit. "It's all utterly hopeless," thought Tom. "They will see it for themselves if I go and talk to them on the spot."

He told the boys what he proposed to do, at the same time warning them that no good would come of it. The promise overshadowed the warning: the m'sungu would go; every other good thing would follow. Half vexed, half amused by what seemed sheer unreason, Tom bade them sleep: perhaps with morning they would see facts as they were.

Before the glimmering dawn had penetrated the nullah, when the four-footed creatures had slunk to their dens and the birds were beginning to stir, the three clambered down on the outside of the zariba and started on their long tramp. Tom wished to reach the plantation before mid-day; he would then perhaps see for himself how the German drilled his dusky recruits.

On arriving in the neighbourhood of the plantation, Mwesa struck off to the left, and led the way stealthily through dense bush where there was no path, and none but himself could have found the track of his own previous journeys. They came presently to the stream that supplied the plantation with water. Climbing down the steep moss-covered bank, they crept quietly along the bed until they reached the thorn fence, which formed an impenetrable barrier across the stream. In the bank, just on the outside, Mwesa pulled aside a curtain of rank grass, revealing a hole scarcely larger than a drain pipe. Mushota crawled into

it, Mwesa signed to Tom to follow him: he himself entered last, having remained to see that the grass fell naturally over the entrance to this narrow tunnel.

The passage through the tunnel took less than a minute, but Tom felt almost suffocated before he reached open air again. He said to himself that it was like crawling in a grave. Some day, he thought, the earth will fall in; he wondered that such a tunnel, made with no art, had not collapsed long ago. Its inner end opened into the hollow trunk of a tree. Climbing until his eyes were on a level with a small hole scooped out of the wood, he looked out upon the plantation.

The tree was a few feet within the thorn fence. Some little distance to the left were the huts and sheds occupied by the negroes. In front of these was the broad, clear, level space that was the usual playground of the children and the promenade of the elders when work was done. Now, however, no children sported upon it. Some sixty sturdy negroes, ranging in age from sixteen to forty and upwards, were drawn up in ranks. At each end hovered an Arab overseer with his whip. And facing the recruits, some yards away from them, stood the German sergeant, a stiff, thick-set, bull-necked soldier, differing from hundreds of his kind whom Tom had seen in Germany only in his uniform, which, more suited to the African climate, was less complimentary to the sergeant's tight figure. The sergeant bellowed an order, in words that seemed to be German acclimatised; the negroes hesitated, then, each interpreting the command in his own way, became a mob instead of a half company. The German stamped and roared; the overseers cracked their whips; and the scared recruits scrambled back somehow into their original formation.

The sun beat fiercely down upon the scene, and the perspiring sergeant, a martyr to duty, drew a finger round the inside of his coat collar and tried again. Brandishing the light cane he carried, he hurled abuse at the negroes in his hybrid dialect, and having thus let off steam, repeated his sharp words of command. It was evident that he was attempting to teach the recruits how to form extended order from fours, and Tom almost sympathised with him as the men blundered in the simplest movements. They appeared to be unable to distinguish "right turn" from "left turn"; and even those who had once moved correctly seemed to be unable to remember for five minutes what they had learnt.

"Mirambo no dis place, sah," whispered Mwesa over his shoulder.

The words recalled the purpose of his visit. Mirambo was no doubt tied up in the hut which Reinecke used as a jail for refractory labourers. It was at the further end of the row of huts, in full view from every part of the parade ground. An askari was standing at ease outside it. Tom's sense of the hopelessness of any attempt at rescue was deepened. Surely Mwesa himself must realise it. Sorry as he was, Tom felt that there was nothing to be done.

A sudden commotion drew his attention once more to the drilling. The

sergeant, incensed by the repeated blunders of one particularly stupid negro, had lifted his cane and dealt the man several vicious cuts across the face. Yelling with pain and rage, the victim had sprung upon the sergeant, hurled him to the ground, and seized him by the throat. Two of the overseers had just rushed to the spot, and were dragging the negro from the prostrate German. There was much chattering and excitement among the other recruits and the negroes who were looking on from the huts.

The sergeant rose stiffly to his feet, and with apoplectic fury ordered the Arabs to tie the culprit hand and foot. As they were doing so, Tom, who had been boiling with indignation at the German's brutality, had one of those sudden inspirations which are often turning-points in a career. Bidding the two lads follow him, he clambered up to the fork of the tree, let himself down to the ground on the rear side, and ran, under cover of a line of bushes, until he was some thirty yards nearer the body of recruits. Then, stiffening himself, he emerged into the open, rifle in hand, and advanced with quick martial strides across the parade ground. Until that moment he had not been seen; the sergeant and the Arabs had their backs towards him; but the sudden silence that fell upon the negroes as they beheld the young m'sungu, who had been absent so long, followed by the two boys, attracted the German's attention. He swung round to see what it was that all eyes were fixed on so intently, and stared with amazement when, from the lips of the tall young white man within a few paces of him, came the sharp command in German–

"Sergeant, release that man."

The instinct of military obedience on which Tom had reckoned did not fail. The sergeant saluted; at a word from him the Arabs released the negro from his bonds; the recruits broke their ranks and rushed towards Tom with yells of delight, and from the dwellings along one side of the parade ground the whole negro population, men, women and children, trooped forth shouting welcome to the m'sungu, and utterly regardless of the overseers. The sergeant's authority had vanished. A few seconds before he had had behind him the prestige of German rule; in yielding to the command of an Englishman (whom he did not yet know as an Englishman) he had become a thing of naught to these impressionable Africans.

[image]

TOM MAKES A DIVERSION.

Before he had collected his muddled wits he was surprised to hear that he

was under arrest, and found himself on his way with two of the Arabs to the jail hut, under guard of two of his own askaris. Tom, wondering how long the man's stupefaction would last, followed to the hut, ordered Mirambo to be released, and the door to be shut and bolted.

As he turned away, he saw one of the overseers bolting across the parade ground in the direction of the gate.

"After him, Mwesa," he cried, and the boy, who had followed him like a shadow, instantly darted after the runaway, accompanied by a troop of his fellow negroes. The Arab, whose whip had formerly been a terror to them, was chased across the plantation, and, just as he reached the gate, was seized by a score of sinewy hands and hauled back with yells of triumphant glee, to join the other prisoners in the lock-up. Tom, with Mwesa as interpreter, ordered Mirambo to collect all the men on the parade ground, and there wait for him. Then, astonished and a little intimidated by his own success, he hurried to the bungalow. Reinecke was expected to return that evening. It was now past noon; within the next five or six hours there must be some hard thinking if this unexpected development was to be turned to the best account.

CHAPTER VIII–REINECKE RETURNS

At the bungalow the native servants received Tom with smiles of welcome. It seemed that Reinecke had given out that his guest had gone away only for a time; that the war, a distant and unreal thing to them, could have turned apparent friends into enemies was as yet beyond their comprehension. Quickly and cheerfully they prepared a meal; and while Tom enjoyed food that, after the experiences of the past weeks, was incredible luxury, he bent all his wits to the solution of the amazing problem with which he was now faced.

Here he was, within a few minutes transformed from a fugitive and a wan-

derer into the absolute master of several hundreds of negroes. His lightest word would be law to them. The simple people were incapable of perceiving how precarious was his authority; to them he was just the m'sungu whom they admired and who had at a stroke altered the conditions of their existence.

The sergeant and three of the Arabs were for the present safely locked up. The remaining overseers, somewhere in hiding, could not leave the plantation, the gate being locked, to give warning to Reinecke on his homeward way of what had occurred. The askaris, always submissive to authority, probably took the newcomer for a German officer, and supposed the sergeant to have been guilty of some fault. And as for the negroes, there were something over a hundred able-bodied men who before long would have been askaris in the German service–unwilling recruits, but, in spite of their difficulties with drill, the raw material of excellent soldiers. That, at any rate, must be prevented.

How? Only by the immediate migration of the whole community. "A large order," thought Tom, knitting his brows. Yet not so difficult as it first appeared. These negroes had no possessions that they valued except their cooking-pots. Their natural life was the free open existence of the forest and the plain; they could build themselves huts in a day, and needed no furniture. The implements of their plantation work would be useful to them until they had made for themselves bows and arrows. A race of hunters, they would not want for food; besides, there were the plantation stores which could be conveyed away.

But in what direction could they go? Bismarckburg was only twenty miles distant; some ten miles nearer was the road to Neu Langenburg, no doubt studded with German military posts, and patrolled. As soon as the mutiny became known, a force would be dispatched from Bismarckburg, or a telegram sent along the road warning any troops that might be moving up for the projected attack on Abercorn. Thus a migration into British territory would be impossible. The Wahehe country was far to the north, within the German boundaries; there could be no safety for them there. For the moment the problem seemed to be, to find a temporary refuge in some spot difficult of access, where the people might dwell in comparative security until the course of events became clear.

What better place could there be than the nullah he had lately left? It was within easy marching distance, yet far enough away, for while only about fifteen miles from the plantation, it was nearly twice that distance from Bismarckburg, and in the heart of the forest. Between its steep banks a much larger body than these few hundred people might take shelter. It was near water; the forest provided food to supplement what might be removed from Reinecke's storehouses. Within this natural fortress, strengthened by such art as the negroes under guidance were capable of, they might bid defiance to any but a well-equipped force, which circumstances might not allow the Germans to organise, and which in any

case it would take time to set on foot. In the interval he might attempt to get into communication with the British beyond the border.

After half an hour's cogitation Tom had made up his mind. To ward off suspicion among the servants, he ordered them to hasten preparations for the meal which Reinecke would expect on his arrival, then hurried back to the negroes' quarters, his brain busy with his plans.

It was fortunate that he had in Mwesa a quick and efficient interpreter, and in Mirambo a devoted henchman whose former rank in his own country lent him authority with the rest of the natives. Through these two, uncle and nephew, he made arrangements for the exodus with a celerity that surprised himself. And if his brother Bob had been able to transport himself on a magic carpet to this spot in Central Africa, that hard-headed man of business would no doubt have been amazed at the qualities shown in this emergency by one whom, in his elder-brotherly attitude, he was accustomed to call "the kid." The truth is, of course, that some people are happily born with the gift of organisation, though it may lie dormant, unsuspected, until occasion rouses it.

Tom's first measure was to arrange for the immediate evacuation of the women and children. Led by Mushota, and escorted by a band of the elder men, they were to leave the plantation and push on as far as possible on the way to the nullah while daylight lasted. At nightfall they would camp, and their escort would be at no loss to protect them until the dawn. Nor would they go empty-handed. Each woman, each child, would carry such household gear as would be useful, together with provisions for a meal or two.

While the women were merrily making their preparations, Tom got the men together, and set them to empty the store-sheds; to bring all the foodstuffs into the open, and divide them up into loads, under the direction of the men who were accustomed to serve as porters to and fro between Bismarckburg and the plantation. In one of the sheds, whose padlocked door he forced open, he was delighted to find the Mauser rifles which had recently been imported for the arming of the new recruits, together with a stock of small-arm ammunition. He set Mwesa to discover which of the men had had musketry instruction by the German sergeant, and arranged that these should have the rifles and a few rounds of cartridges when the packing was finished; and he warned them that if they fired without orders the rifles would be taken away and they would have to carry extra loads–a threat that was likely, he thought, to prove effectual. There were enough rifles to arm also a few of the older men, like Mirambo himself, who had had previous experience of firearms; and though their experience dated back a good many years, and the Mauser was a very different weapon from the old trade musket which they had formerly handled, he had no doubt that with a little practice they would soon outdo many of the recruits, whose instruction

could not yet have been carried very far.

The half-dozen askaris looked surprised when they were ordered to lay down their arms and assist in the baling of the food; but Tom's air of assured authority imposed upon them, and they appeared to have no suspicion that he was a usurper until the women and children were ready to march out. It was not till then that Tom, feeling in his pocket for the duplicate key of the gate which Reinecke had given him, discovered that he had lost it, probably in his fall into the pit. The only other keys were in the possession of Reinecke and the principal overseer, and the latter, arrested in his attempt to escape, was locked in the prison-shed. Tom went to the shed to get this man's key, opened the door, and was amazed to find the place empty. All three Arabs and the German sergeant were gone. They had wrenched away some of the poles that formed the rear wall of the shed, and escaped unnoticed in the bustle attending the preparations for departure.

This discovery gave Tom an unpleasant, even an alarming shock. The loss of the key was a small matter; the gate could be forced; but if the men were already well on the way to give the alarm to Reinecke, as was only too likely, the whole scheme of escape was in danger of being utterly ruined. Without an instant's delay Tom hurried back, selected a dozen men whose build promised fleetness of foot, armed them with hoes and mattocks, and ran with them down to the gate, intending to burst the lock with a rifle-shot. He found, however, that the Arab, in his haste to escape, had left the key in the lock. The gate was open. Tom dispatched the natives along the road to capture the runaways. At this hour Reinecke was probably within eight or nine miles of the plantation, a distance which his bearers would take at least four hours to cover; but if the fugitives reached him, he would no doubt spring from his machila and hurry forward on foot, accompanied by his armed askaris. It seemed, then, that the evacuation of the place must be completed within three hours at the most.

Luckily the women were ready, and Tom ordered them at once to set off. It was then that the askaris became suspicious, and began to put their heads together; but Tom stamped out any spark of mutiny that might have been kindled by separating the men, and assigning to them places among the natives who were now preparing to mount their loads. Disarmed, with armed men around them, the askaris dared not disobey; and within a few minutes after the departure of the women they were marching out among the first contingent of the Wahehe, each bearing a weighty bundle upon his head. Mirambo had selected the steadiest of his fellows to form this first band, who were to follow the women, lay down their loads at the proposed camping place, and then return at once for more. Meanwhile the other three overseers had been rounded up, bound, and placed under guard: there must be no more fugitives.

While Mirambo was superintending the packing of the remainder of the stores, Tom was wrestling with another problem. Reinecke would arrive about sunset. He would find the gate locked as usual, and the silence of the plantation would not awaken suspicion, for work hours were over, and he would suppose the workers to have returned to their distant quarters, out of earshot from the central road and from the bungalow. But as soon as he reached the bungalow the fat would be in the fire. He would expect the principal overseer and the German sergeant to be awaiting him, to give in their reports. Not finding them, he would send one of the servants to fetch them. In ten minutes, or little more, all would be known. What would he do? Perhaps lead his askaris in pursuit, perhaps dispatch a runner to the nearest post on the Neu Langenburg road to bring up reinforcements. In either case the flight of the people would be harassed; they might be caught before they had reached their defensive position. Tom saw that to gain time was of prime importance.

How could he gain time? It would be possible to ambush Reinecke and his party in the woods close to the plantation. Even if they had been warned by the fugitive overseers and the sergeant, they would probably not suspect that the Englishman would attempt, with untrained natives, to trap seasoned soldiers. But an ambush would involve the necessity of firing without warning, and Tom was too raw at the game of war to adopt so cold-blooded a course.

Another idea suggested itself which, hazardous as it seemed, had a certain attractiveness that commended it to Tom's sense of sport He called up Mwesa.

"What does Reinecke do when he comes back from Bismarckburg with askaris?" he asked.

"Him eat all too much," replied the boy.

"Yes, but I mean what does he do before that? Where does he dismiss the askaris?"

"Dey all go to house, sah; stand outside; den he make um say one, two, three; den dey go home."

Tom gathered that Reinecke was accustomed to hold a sort of inspection parade before dismissing the men to their shed several hundred yards away. From his own experience he knew the method of procedure with the porters. These brought their loads to the bungalow; the goods were checked off by Yakoub, the native clerk, then carried to the store-sheds.

"Very good, Mwesa.... Here come my scouts–without prisoners. See what they say."

The twelve men he had sent in pursuit of the runaways reported that they had run almost to Bismarckburg–a typical native exaggeration at which Tom smiled. They had seen Reinecke and his party coming slowly up the road: neither the overseers nor the sergeant were with them. Since the African has no measure

either of time or distance Tom could not discover exactly how far away Reinecke was when the men saw him; but on his asking when the party would arrive, the spokesman pointed to the sun and then stooped and moved his hand along just above the ground.

"At sunset, as I thought," said Tom to himself. "Then we have about two hours."

An hour later the second contingent of the people left, well loaded up. Tom locked the gate behind them, then set forty men whom he had retained to remove all litter and other traces of the exodus from that portion of the road which must be traversed in approaching the bungalow. This done, he gave rifles and a round or two of ammunition to twenty of the men, and ordered the other twenty to arm themselves with implements of their daily work. It still wanted half an hour of sunset. Tom allowed the men twenty minutes to make a good meal; then he divided each band, posting ten riflemen and ten of the others in the bushes near the gate, and the rest under cover in the grounds of the bungalow, where they commanded the open space in front of the entrance. This last disposition was made very stealthily, in order to avoid attracting the attention of the household servants, who, however, were busy in their outbuildings at the back, making final preparations for their master's dinner.

Having given his men their orders, Tom entered the bungalow, clapped his hands for one of the servants, asked him if dinner was ready, and reminded him that Herr Reinecke always liked a drink as soon as he returned home.

"Take it to the dining-room," he said, "and one for me too."

He then went into the room Reinecke used as an office, opened a drawer in which there was usually kept a revolver, assured himself that it was loaded, and taking it to the dining-room, slipped it half underneath the edge of a wide fruit dish. The servant brought in two large tumblers of a claret-cup of Reinecke's invention. Tom drank his off, then sat down and helped himself to a confection of rice and fruit. But now that the critical moment was approaching he found himself without appetite. To steady his nerves he lit a cigarette, and changed his position slightly, so that he had a good view through the window of the approach to the bungalow.

Tom was smoking his fourth cigarette, and the brief twilight of Equatorial Africa was already half spent, when he heard the tramp of marching men, and saw the expected party filing into the grounds of the bungalow. First came two askaris, then Reinecke and a native N.C.O., then a number of porters with bales on their heads, finally a dozen askaris. Reinecke was in uniform–white helmet and tunic, khaki breeches, and leggings.

The number of askaris was greater than Tom had looked for. He noticed that the hand that held his cigarette was trembling a little, drew a long breath,

and waited. The atmosphere seemed to be highly electric.

Reinecke ordered the askaris to halt and ground arms, the porters to lay down their loads. Then he called for Selim and Sergeant Morgenstein, who ought to have been awaiting him, and cursed them volubly in German. He shouted a few words in Bantu to the native corporal, and strode into the bungalow. He was evidently in a bad temper.

Turning into the dining-room he gasped and started back. Tom dropped his cigarette into the ash-tray, laid his hand near the butt of the revolver on the table, and, smiling grimly, said–

"No. I'm not a ghost, Herr Reinecke–nor a skeleton."

Reinecke, standing in the doorway, had quickly recovered himself.

"So!" he laughed. "But it is clear: you are a fool."

"I *was* a fool–to trust you," said Tom, standing up.

"You *are* a fool–to come back here," said Reinecke, with another laugh. He advanced a step into the room and laid his helmet on a chair.

"That's as may be. You will consider yourself my prisoner, Herr Reinecke."

The German stared, then with a derisive guffaw, cried–

"Your prisoner? Are you a madman as well as a fool? Ha! ha!–your prisoner! We are at war: yes, you realise it. But *your* prisoner! Why, you foolish child, don't you realise that you are *my* prisoner?–that I can have you shot as a spy?–that that is exactly what I shall do?"

"We seem to be talking at cross purposes." Tom grasped his revolver, and with a quick movement pointed it at the German's head. "Not a word," he added swiftly, as Reinecke, after a moment's paralysing astonishment, was turning towards the door, and at the same time fumbling for the revolver slung across his shoulder. "Understand: if you call out, or make a single suspicious movement–drop your hands, sir–I shall fire, and if I fire it will be a signal to my men who are waiting to settle accounts with your askaris. Take off your pistol strap: lay it on the table: your left hand, please: be careful not to touch the button."

Reinecke, taken all aback–what did the Englishman mean by "my men"?–removed his strap and laid it on the corner of the table Tom pointed to.

"Now your sword-belt."

The German obeyed.

A servant came through the inner door carrying dishes.

"Not yet," said Tom: "we are not quite ready."

The servant smiled, started as he saw the revolver in Tom's hand, then backed hurriedly.

"Remain in the kitchen till I call," added Tom. "Now, Herr Reinecke, you will precede me–I am not bluffing–to the place where my men are hidden. I don't wish to kill your askaris, but any madness on your part will provoke a volley from

my men. It will avoid trouble, then, if you order yours to pile arms. Remember this revolver. If you make a mistake in the word of command it will be fatal to you as to them. Lead on."

The German turned without a word. Outside, the askaris were standing at ease: Yakoub, the native clerk, had just finished checking off the porter's loads. Reinecke ordered the askaris, in a voice unlike his own, to pile arms and reassemble two deep. At Tom's bidding he told Yakoub to go to his hut and remain there. A call from Tom brought Mwesa bounding from behind a shrub.

"Get the men to collect these arms," said Tom.

The negroes came from their hiding place and seized upon the askaris' rifles. The amazed porters, standing by their loads, broke out into eager questioning, and the replies set them shouting, laughing, leaping with glee. The askaris, equally astonished, looked in a puzzled way from Reinecke to Tom, and made no resistance when the Wahehe were ordered to tie their hands behind their backs. Reinecke, standing within a yard of Tom, gnawed his moustache in impotent rage.

"Keep these men under guard," said Tom, and Mwesa summoned forth the concealed riflemen. "Now, Herr Reinecke, you shall have your dinner. Make the most of it. It will be a long time before you get such a meal again."

CHAPTER IX–A DELAYING ACTION

Damocles, at the sumptuous banquet of Dionysius of Syracuse, no doubt ate with a very good appetite, for Dionysius was his friend, and the sword hanging over his head at the end of a single hair was merely a playful illustration of the insecurity of princes, and no object of fear. It may be supposed that the Greek, sitting within reach of the weapon held by a resolute hand, would have found the dishes offered him savourless, or his throat perhaps too dry for degustation.

Curt Reinecke, however, was a German. He flashed one evil look at the tall, grim young man who sat, grasping a revolver, across the corner of a table opposite; then he bent his eyes upon his plate, and applied himself with customary ardour to the appeasement of nature's cravings. The servant went to and fro, silent, scared.

"Get ready to come with me, Mirami–you and the rest," said Tom when the man had brought coffee. "Light all the lanterns you have."

Reinecke had not spoken during the meal, complete *ab ovo usque ad mala*. Now, however, having gulped down his coffee, and the liqueur which the admirable Mirami served as usual, though with shaking hand, he cleared his throat and hesitatingly put a question.

"Where are you–are we–going?"

"That you will see."

The German, primed to attempt a parley, sat back in his chair, and said, in the manner of one appealing to good sense:

"The frontier is closed. It would be madness to attempt to cross the Neu Langenburg road."

"You might be shot by your own countrymen, you mean?"

"What I mean," rejoined Reinecke, generously ignoring the insinuation, "is that you are playing a fool's game. You have the whip hand now; you have, I suppose, raised a mutiny among my people—-"

"Our people, they used to be: they are mine now."

"Ach! what folly it is!" said Reinecke, with a gesture of impatience. "You are in German country; within a few miles there are hundreds of well-trained troops; are you mad enough to think that these raw blacks, who hardly know one end of a rifle from the other, can reach British territory? It is impossible–impossible."

"Well?"

"Then why attempt the impossible? Look at the matter reasonably, calmly."

"I don't think I am agitated, Herr Reinecke. But go on."

"The position–what is it? You British are outnumbered. You have no forces equal to ours, even as they are; and I tell you we shall have ten times as many in a few months. Paris has fallen: your empire is broken up: your navy is defeated—-"

"Come now, Herr Reinecke, don't draw the long bow."

"I assure you the news has gone all over the world," said Reinecke emphatically. "What can you do? We shall shortly capture Abercorn: already we have taken Mombasa and Nairobi; there will soon be no more British East Africa. It is certain. Well now, I make a proposition. I wish to be fair. The plantation is of course confiscated; it will now be mine, solely. That is the fortune of war. But you are young, hot-headed. I would do something for the sake of my late partner. Abandon this folly, then, while there is time; and I give my word to send you safe

into British territory."

"And you make that proposition to me!" cried Tom, enraged by the mention of his father: "you, the man who has systematically robbed your partner, falsified the books, tried to murder me! I should be a fool indeed if I placed reliance on the word of a man like you. Save your breath, Herr Reinecke.... Ah! it is time for us to go." Mwesa had just appeared in the doorway. "Get up! don't try any tricks: I have given you fair warning."

Mwesa had come to report the return of the first contingent of Wahehe. They had established a camp some eight miles from the plantation.

"Very well," said Tom. "Let them take up as many of the remaining loads as they can carry. I shall soon be with you."

He clapped his hands. Mirami entered.

"Bring the lanterns, you and your fellows, and meet me at the front door," said Tom.

Then, urging Reinecke before him at the muzzle of his revolver (and the German seemed to be genuinely astonished at the rejection of his offer), Tom went out to his men. The askaris he ordered to join the ranks of the carriers, each man with a load. To the household servants were given light articles, such as candles, matches, paraffin, drugs. Among the supplies just brought from Bismarckburg were some cases of ammunition. These were entrusted to their original bearers. By the time the party was ready to start, the plantation had been pretty well ransacked of all portable and useful stores.

Darkness having now fallen, the column was headed by two men carrying lanterns. In turn came the porters, two more lantern bearers, the three Arab overseers under guard of riflemen, then Reinecke, followed immediately by Tom and Mwesa, and finally two lantern bearers. Apart from their use in lighting the way, the lanterns gave confidence to the natives, for whom a night march had nameless terrors.

So strange a procession, at dead of night–the lights flickering on the trees, the negroes chattering in loud tones to keep their courage up–must have startled the furred and feathered inhabitants of the forest. Birds clattered out of the foliage, insects swarmed around the lanterns; no four-footed beast came within sight.

It was about midnight when they arrived at the camp, pitched on one of those wide bare spaces which break the continuity of the upland forest. Fires had been kindled at several points of the circuit. Within was a scene of great confusion–women, children, and bales of goods lying helter-skelter. Hopeless of evolving order at this hour, Tom contented himself with posting three sections of six men each as sentries on the southern border of the camp, where alone danger might be feared. An attack seemed to him improbable. The plantation had

been cleared of men; and even if the fugitive Germans and Arabs had succeeded in reaching a German post, there was little chance of an armed force coming up while night lasted. Nevertheless, the sense of responsibility and the need of keeping a close watch on Reinecke, whom, out of respect for the white man's dignity, he had left unbound, prevented Tom from getting any sleep. Indeed, few of all those there encamped, except the children, closed their eyes. The negroes, for all their weariness, talked excitedly, hour after hour, of the wonderful change that the m'sungu had wrought in their lives, and speculated on the fate in store for their late master. Watching them, Tom could not help questioning within himself whether he had done right, whether they would be able to defend and maintain their new-won freedom; but with the hopefulness of buoyant youth he dismissed his doubts, resolving that, so far as lay in him, nothing should be left undone to safeguard them. After all, British territory was only forty miles away.

An hour before dawn the camp was astir. Everybody was fed: then, just as light was stealing over the scene, the women and children were sent off under escort, scouting parties dispatched southward; the unarmed men gathered their loads and departed. Mirambo and a score of the elder men with rifles accompanied the latter, with orders not to allow the askaris to approach within half an hour's march of the nullah. They were to drop their loads at a convenient spot and return under guard for more. Tom remained at the camp, keeping the prisoners and the remainder of his armed men.

It was about two hours after the departure of the women: the carriers had not yet come back: when Tom heard a faint sharp sound from southward, which, unexpected as it was, he believed to be a rifle-shot. For some few minutes there was no repetition of the sound: then there came half a dozen cracks in succession, a little nearer–unmistakably the reports of rifles. Tom at once dispatched two men to follow in the track of the scouts and see what was happening. It seemed unlikely that a German force had already been dispatched in pursuit of him; but it was clearly necessary to be prepared for any contingency.

The shots had roused some excitement among the Wahehe; Reinecke and the Arabs did not disguise the spring of hope. Tom recognised that his men were ill-fitted to cope with trained troops, in the open or even in the bush. The nullah, on the other hand, about six miles away, offered many facilities for defence, and his plan had been to post his non-combatants far up towards the lake, and to employ the men to strengthen the position below. He had reckoned on being unmolested for a whole day, and the shots gave him not a little uneasiness. The progress of the laden carriers would necessarily be slow: it was essential that the enemy, if enemy it was, should be delayed at least until the stores had been safely conveyed to the nullah. He must fight and run.

Hoping that it might turn out to be a false alarm, he nevertheless sent for-

ward a runner to urge the carriers to their utmost speed; then selected a score of the older men, who in their day had fought the Germans, and ordered all the rest to hurry on with as much as they could carry of the remaining stores. Mwesa he kept as interpreter.

As soon as the camping-place was clear, he sent Reinecke and the Arabs on, guarded by half a dozen men, and followed closely behind them with the rest of his party, to discover a suitable position for making a first stand if pursuers were really on his tracks. He had been marching less than half an hour through the forest when some of his scouts overtook him, and reported that a large force of askaris, under German officers, was pushing on at great speed. Knowing the hopelessness of getting from the natives a sound estimate of the enemy's numbers, he asked no questions, but pressed forward as rapidly as possible for another ten minutes. Then, on the further side of a comparatively clear space, about two hundred yards long and twice as wide, he saw a dense belt of trees, fringed by low bushes, which seemed to offer advantages for a delaying action. There he decided to await the enemy's arrival.

He looked at his watch. Allowing for the slow pace of the children and the laden men over difficult country, he calculated that the head of the straggling column had probably covered two-thirds of the distance to the nullah. It would be at least another hour before they reached its entrance, and a second hour before the people and the stores were far enough up to be out of harm's way. The question was, then, could he check the pursuit for two hours?

By the time he had posted his men just within the belt of trees, where they commanded the whole space in front, he had been rejoined by all his scouts. The report of the last comers was even more alarming than that of the first. According to them, a great throng of ferocious askaris, like a swarm of wild bees, was dashing on with the speed of antelopes. Though he was aware of their habit of exaggeration, Tom was conscious of a consuming anxiety, but had self-command enough to present a calm and smiling front to the natives, in whom the least sign of wavering on his part would have started a panic. Through Mwesa he gave them the order not to fire until he whistled, resolving at the same time to cut himself a wooden whistle at the first opportunity.

The men had been posted barely twenty minutes when, through the thinner woodland on the opposite side of the clearing, Tom caught sight of a few scattered negroes in uniform. "Scouts feeling their way forward," he thought. The askaris moved rapidly, but cautiously, flitting from tree to tree in a series of short rushes. Marking one of them, Tom fired. The man instantly slipped behind a trunk; his fellows had all disappeared.

Analysing later his frame of mind at the moment of firing, Tom had to admit that his aim had been intentionally bad, and justified his action with the

excuse that his object was merely to delay the enemy. At bottom, however, he was really loth to kill his man–a feeling which has, no doubt, seized many a young officer in his first fight. In after days he often debated with himself and discussed with others how far humanity is compatible with war, and the conclusion that he came to was that war must be abolished, or humanity would perish. If man must kill man, whether the agent be bullet, shell, bomb, poison gas, or any other abomination, logically there is nothing to choose between them: the vile thing is war itself. But at this moment he had no time for reflection: he acted purely from a humane instinct, not realising what war meant, ignorant of the methods in which the enemy was prepared to wage it.

His ill-aimed shot had not been without effect. The enemy had vanished, and Tom's men, in their simplicity, whooped with delight. Tom however, was under no delusion. One or more of the askaris had no doubt stolen back through the wood to report that they were in touch with the fugitives; the rest were still lurking among the trees.

As the minutes passed without further movement, Tom's anxiety increased in proportion with the natives' elation. What numbers had he to deal with? Would his little force of untrained men be swept upon and overwhelmed? He would have been spared a period of racking suspense if he could have divined the facts which he was not to know till much later. Sergeant Morgenstein and the Arabs, having escaped from the plantation, did not take the twenty-mile road to Bismarckburg, but struck southward to the highway to Neu Langenburg, a distance only half as great. On this road they met a half company of askaris marching towards Bismarckburg. The German officer in command, on learning what had happened at the plantation, tapped the telegraph wire and asked for instructions. Ordered to make a forced march and deal with the mutiny–what resistance was to be expected from a mob of undisciplined blacks?–he pushed on to the plantation, only to find it deserted. Darkness forbade instant pursuit; but at the earliest glimmer of dawn he started to follow up the very plain tracks of the absconded rebels.

It was perhaps twenty minutes after the disappearance of the enemy scouts when Mwesa detected a movement deep in the thin woodland opposite. Tom fixed his eyes intently on the spot the boy pointed out, and presently saw several forms moving forward amid the brushwood. There were signs that others were coming up behind them. They were scarcely distinguishable in the shade of the trees, and darted so quickly from cover to cover that even a crack shot could hardly have picked them off.

Tom felt that an attempt to check the advance while the enemy were still in the wood would be sheer waste of ammunition. The most of his men had not handled fire-arms for years; they had probably lost whatever skill they might

once have had; the younger men had only begun their musketry course. He must at least wait for the inevitable rush across the open; then, perhaps, the negroes, unskilled though they were, might be lucky with some of their shots. If the enemy were in no great strength, the mere show of resistance might achieve his end–delay.

The askaris, finding their advance unopposed, gained confidence, were less careful in taking cover, and presently formed up in line just within the forest fringe. Suddenly a white helmet showed itself above them, a little in their rear; a word of command rang out, and the askaris, twenty strong, charged with a wild yell in double line across the open. Tom gave a shrill whistle, marked his man and fired. His shot was followed by a ragged volley from his men. This time his aim was true; one or two askaris fell to the shots of the negroes; the rest wavered, and at a second volley scurried back into the forest, losing another on the way.

Tom had not fired a second time, but had watched the forest. It was plain from movements he observed there that the German had held part of his force in reserve. The slight losses suffered in feeling for the opposition had probably reassured him as to the character of the resistance he had to meet; the next attack would be made in strength.

Ignorant of the numbers opposed to him, Tom thought it prudent not to await a second attack, and gave his men the order to retire quietly. They marched on for about half a mile, and then came to a rocky ridge flanking the track, which it commanded for a considerable distance. Here Tom determined to make a second stand.

It was nearly half an hour after he had posted his men before there was any sign from the enemy. Then he heard in the distance the sharp crackle of a volley, followed by shouts. He guessed that the askaris were charging across the open space under cover of strong rifle fire. Abruptly the sounds ceased, and Tom could not help chuckling as he saw in his mind's eye the blank faces of the askaris when they found their entrance into the forest unopposed.

But he remembered that he had a German officer to deal with. A trained soldier would be put on the alert by the disappearance of his enemy. He would probably suspect that he was being lured into a trap, and Tom desired nothing better. The German would feel his way forward cautiously, slowly, fearing an ambush in every gloomy spot. He might take an hour to cover the distance of a few minutes' walk.

Tom seized the opportunity of making good his retreat to the nullah. Putting on their best speed, the little party overtook the tail end of the column of carriers at the spot where the askaris had been ordered to drop their loads. Now that he was himself able to keep an eye on them, Tom made them mount their bales again, and march on towards the nullah. He left two good men to watch

for the enemy, and followed with the rest.

Tom with his rearguard of riflemen had come within half a mile of the nullah when Mushota came bounding along the column towards him, jostling any carrier who was in his way. The lad spoke excitedly to Mwesa, who turned a crestfallen face to his master and said–

"He gone; all same run away."

"Who?"

"Old massa, sah."

"Reinecke?"

"Yes, sah. He grab rifle quick, fella no can do nuffin. He shoot one man, den go bang into forest, no can catch him. He gone sure nuff."

Tom's manner of receiving the news was a surprise to the negroes. Far from being agitated, storming, threatening punishment for the unwary guards, he smiled. Reinecke's escape was in a certain degree a relief to him. It had been necessary to remove the German from the plantation; but after the people had reached the nullah he would have been an incubus.

"Good riddance," thought Tom. "I hope I have seen the last of him."

CHAPTER X–A BREATHING SPACE

On arriving at the entrance to the nullah, Tom found that Mirambo had already herded the women and children beyond the first bend, something less than a quarter of a mile away, and was superintending the bestowal of the stores still farther up, on natural ledges in the steep bank.

At the southern extremity the nullah was about sixty yards wide. In the middle a shallow stream rippled over the rocky bottom, disappearing in places beneath tangled masses of vegetation. Trees of many kinds grew on the steep walls, acacias and euphorbias predominating, and on both sides of the stream

there were many patches of scrub, mimosa, and thorn, rendering the passage by no means easy. But these natural obstacles must be supplemented by art if the place was to be made even tolerably secure, and Tom lost no time in putting the necessary works in operation.

He first posted a score of riflemen in the scrub about two hundred yards south of the nullah, putting Mirambo in charge of them, with orders to fire one volley if the enemy appeared, and then to withdraw. Next he set all available men to clear away, with the tools brought from the plantation, all the bush that grew thickly in front of the entrance, in order to give a field of fire. The negroes, many of whom had been employed in clearing the ground for the plantation, were experts at the job, and when more than a hundred men work with a will the result is almost magical. In half an hour the space was free from every stump and root.

Allowing them a few minutes for rest, during which the men who had shared in his delaying action delighted the rest with very tall stories of their prowess, he set them to fell a number of trees with which to construct a barricade across the entrance. While they were thus engaged, Mwesa came to him.

"Haroun say want speak, sah."

"Haroun is one of the overseers, isn't he? Well, bring him down."

Mwesa soon returned with one of the prisoners, whom Tom knew by sight– a tall, lean Arab, with strongly marked features and piercing eyes. Addressing Tom very humbly in broken German, he begged to be allowed to take service with him. He had not been long in Reinecke's pay; indeed, he had been reluctant to accept employment with the German; nay more, he had actually been forced to do so, for he was headman of an Arab village on the Great Lake, and his village would have been destroyed if he had not obeyed the call of the German "big master."

Tom did not much like the look of the man, but, true to Mr. Barkworth's counsel to "keep an open mind," he decided not to stand on mere prejudice; and after learning from Mwesa that the Wahehe had nothing against this latest comer among the overseers, he accepted the Arab's offer, and instructed him to superintend the erection of the barricade.

Time would not allow of the construction of a regular stockade, with poles properly cut and trimmed, and deeply planted in the ground. It seemed to Tom that the most effective barrier that could be quickly raised would consist of small trees with their foliage, set as closely together as might be, with their crowns pointing outwards, in the form of a rough *chevaux de frise*. The men were set to work on those lines. Some felled or uprooted young trees from the slopes of the nullah, others hauled them to the bottom, and a third gang arranged them side by side across the entrance. Meanwhile a party of boys was employed in cutting

brushwood and piling it here and there among the trees where the foliage was thin. A single gap was left on the east side as a gateway for the scouts.

The work had only just been roughly accomplished when a scattered volley from Mirambo's party apprised Tom that the enemy had at last appeared. Immediately afterwards he saw his men running back from the line of bushes, and they had no sooner gained the entrance to the nullah than a regular volley flashed from the cover they had just left.

Tom posted his men along the inner side of the barricade, ordered them to kneel, pass the muzzles of their rifles through the brushwood, and fire at the legs of the enemy askaris when he gave the word. Haroun the Arab begged to be entrusted with a rifle: but Tom, remembering another of Mr. Barkworth's maxims, "Prove all men," refused the request until he should have tested his new recruit. A turncoat has to win confidence.

The enemy, however, did not repeat their volley. Apparently they were daunted by the aspect of the barricade which had sprung up so unexpectedly, and which, in the distance, looked formidable enough. Their hesitation to storm it was reasonable, especially if they were in no great strength; and Tom, though he could see nothing of them through the screen of bushes, had come to the conclusion that the vast number his scouts had reported was a figment of their lively imagination. No German, in command of any considerable body of disciplined men, would have been so sluggish in following up a horde of untrained negroes.

Near the barricade the sides of the nullah sloped up steeply, but were easily scalable. It occurred to Tom that the enemy might wait until nightfall and then attempt to turn his position. That, however, would involve obvious difficulties and dangers; the German could hardly afford to divide his force, if it were indeed a small one. At any rate such an operation could be defeated by unremitting vigilance, and meanwhile there was all the rest of the day, supposing his conjecture were well founded, in which to push on with his defensive works. Posting, then, some of the riflemen under cover of the vegetation on either slope, Tom set the other men to fill up the gaps in the barricade. They worked with the eagerness of those who have faith in their leader, and before the sun set Tom had the satisfaction of seeing his wall complete–a rough, slight defence, indeed–but likely to be effective against nothing worse than rifle fire.

By the time darkness fell, he had begun to realise that the position of a commander-in-chief is not one to be coveted. In his own small sphere he had had, as he frankly put it to himself, quite enough of it. The physical and nervous strain of the last few days; the sense of responsibility for the welfare of the people who had so readily put their trust in him; above all, perhaps, the want of sleep; had almost, in his own words again, knocked him out. Yet he dared not even sleep while the enemy was at hand. Without him the Wahehe would be simply

an unorganised mob. There was nothing for it but to reconcile himself to another wakeful night, to ensure that his sentries were alert, and to leave the organisation of the people, in their retreat up the nullah, to a hoped-for leisure.

The night passed undisturbed, except for false alarms. Unaccustomed to night watching, the negroes more than once declared that they heard footsteps, and even saw faces. One of them fired off his rifle in nervous excitement at the dangers his imagination had conjured up. Their fears proved to be baseless; and in the morning, when Tom warily climbed the slope to a point from which he could overlook the ground beyond the bushes, there was no sign of the enemy. A little suspicious, he sent Mushota out to creep round the position, and, if the enemy had indeed decamped, to follow them up and see what they were about. In an hour the lad returned, elation beaming from his broad smiling face. He reported that the askaris were marching swiftly back towards the plantation; in fact, they were running away! Tom did not contradict him: the belief that the enemy had fled would encourage the people; he himself thought it likely enough that they had been recalled for more important work than rounding up a gang of mutinous recruits. But Reinecke had escaped, and Reinecke, he felt sure, would never rest until he had made a bid for vengeance on the man who had committed the crime that a rascal never forgives–found him out.

"Pity he's gone, after all," thought Tom.

Now that no immediate danger was to be feared, he allowed himself the indulgence of a couple of hours' sleep, leaving Mirambo in charge. Refreshed by this all too brief rest, he went up the nullah to see how the greater part of his people were getting on. Not at all to his surprise, he found that nothing whatever had been done by way of organisation. The negro at best has little initiative, and these emancipated slaves, in unfamiliar surroundings, had taken no thought except to feed themselves, which they had done uncommonly well. Tom was not prepared to follow his mother's prescription with a new housemaid: give free run until they made themselves ill. Economy might be vitally necessary: he saw that his first task must be that of food controller. He called up Reinecke's head servant, a fat negro from one of the coast tribes.

"I want you to listen to me, Moses," he said. "You see what has happened. I have brought the people away for two reasons: first, to free them, then to prevent the men from fighting for the Germans. You are no longer Herr Reinecke's servant, but my prisoner–unless you like to take service with me. I tell you frankly I can't pay you, at present; but the Germans are going to be beaten, you understand; don't make any mistake about that; and when I get to Abercorn I will pay you your full wages, and something extra if you serve me well. Think it over."

Now Moses, like all the other servants, had fallen under the spell of Tom's personality. To put it shortly, Reinecke frowned, Tom smiled. Further, he had

been greatly impressed by the stories told him by the Arabs and by Mirami: the moral victory over the German sergeant and the humbling of Reinecke were events that specially struck a negro's imagination. If all Englishmen were like this one, it was not at all incredible to Moses that the Germans would be beaten indeed. Why not serve the Englishman, then–and get extra pay? It seemed worth trying.

Moses thought it over while Tom was counting the rifles and cases of ammunition. His choice was made.

"Very well," said Tom, when the man came to him. "Now I want you to take stock of the provisions, and tell me how long they ought to last if we are careful. The people have been helping themselves freely, I see. We can't have that."

Tom's use of the plural flattered the negro's self-importance. He set about his first task with alacrity, and reported presently that the food would last six or eight weeks if the women were kept in order. Tom delighted him by arranging that each head of a family and each independent man should come to Moses once a week for his supply of food.

"We'll see how it works," he thought.

He had made up his mind to release and dismiss the askaris; they would only be so many useless mouths to feed. But when he told them they were to go they looked by no means pleased. They gazed blankly at him and at one another, then withdrew in a knot and talked among themselves. Presently one of them came back, and said that none of them wished to go. They hated the Germans: they would rather serve the Englishman.

Tom looked at them squarely.

"Don't make any mistake," he said. "You will not have an easy time if you stay with me. You will have to work hard."

The man asked if they were to fight.

"I can't tell you that. You will not have rifles, at any rate, until you have shown that you are faithful."

Would they have to drill?

Tom smiled. He had watched recruits in barrack-yards in Germany, and he made a shrewd guess that the African askari did not find the German drill-sergeant a very gentle taskmaster.

"You may have to do my drill," he said. "You don't know what that is? Then you had better stay a few days and look on while I drill the Wahehe. If you don't like it, you shall be free to go."

The askari's artless question drew Tom's thoughts to a survey of his position. He had brought the people away. For the present, apparently, they were safe. What course was he to lay down for them and for himself? He was handicapped by ignorance of what was happening on the border forty miles away.

From a remark let fall by Reinecke during that unforgettable dinner in the bungalow he surmised that the British in Northern Rhodesia were likely to be on the defensive at the opening of the campaign. The Germans, he knew, had a much larger military force on the frontier, and from what Reinecke had said, they were energetically raising new levies among the natives. It would be unlike the British, an extraordinary break-away from their traditions, if they were not taken by surprise, not slow in waking up, not tenacious and successful when fully aroused.

Tom's conclusion was that he must sit tight. He might try to open up communications with the British, with a view either to a dash across the frontier, or to joining them if they should advance into German territory. Meanwhile, though for some reason unknown the small force that had followed him up had drawn off, he was virtually besieged. His first task, then, was to put his position into as thorough a state of defence as was possible, and to establish such order among the little community as would further his ultimate design.

"And I've got all my work cut out," he thought, somewhat drearily. Then he smiled as he remembered his brother. "Wouldn't Bob grin! By George, though, if we're at war Bob will want to be in it! Of course he will! The business will go to pot. What a rum world it is!"

CHAPTER XI–TOM'S NEW ALLIES

The more Tom thought over the probabilities of the case, the less likely it appeared to him that the Germans, if engaged in serious operations on the frontier, would spare a force for dealing immediately with mutineers who might be rounded up at leisure. At the same time the situation was so uncertain that he could not afford to neglect the opportunity of preparing for a possible attack. It was equally important that he should get timely notice of the enemy's approach, and that could be secured only by starting an efficient system of scouting. As

soon as he had dealt with the askaris, therefore, he got Mirambo to choose a dozen active and trustworthy young men, and arranged that they should go out in parties of six on alternate days, to reconnoitre as much ground south of the nullah as they could cover between dawn and dark. He could not yet entrust them with rifles uncontrolled: they had no other arms than the agricultural implements; but while the first six were absent, the second could fashion wooden spears which would suffice for protection against wild animals. There were no villages in the immediate neighbourhood of the nullah, or between that and the plantation, so that collisions with hostile tribes were scarcely to be feared.

Tom then passed to the consideration of the problem of the camp. Accompanied by Mirambo and Mwesa he explored the whole length or the nullah between the bend and the lake, a distance of perhaps half a mile. The width varied a good deal; the sides were almost perpendicular; and the stream, being the outflow from an upland lake, descended in a series of cascades. At present there was little volume of water; but in a couple of months, with the opening of the rainy season, the level of the lake would rise, and what was now a trickling rivulet might become a raging torrent. Tom hoped that by that time his occupation of the nullah would be at an end. Preparing for the worst, however, he came to the conclusion that the ground on either side of the stream would be an insecure camping-place, and decided to plant his temporary village around the spot where he and Mwesa had found a refuge a few days before. It was in the heart of a wood, where the nullah broadened out to more than three times its average width, and was defended on the northern side by the lake. The building of huts would take a considerable time, because the wood must be cleared of beasts, and the able-bodied men must be employed in completing the defences lower down the nullah; but certain parts of the work could be done by the younger women and the elder children.

While some of the people were engaged in preparing this *ex tempore* village, Tom set others to strengthen the barricade across the nullah. As he watched them, it occurred to him that the position would gain in security if he used the stream to form a moat, and he at once started two gangs digging at the extreme ends of the breastwork, a foot or two in front of it. At the close of the next day the moat was finished–a ditch six feet broad by four deep, extending right across the nullah except where the stream flowed in the centre. A man might easily leap over it, but his leap would land him amid the branches of the trees. It would be useful in checking a rush, especially if it were unnoticed until the enemy were actually upon it; and when, on its farther side, a number of low bushes and clumps of long grass had been planted, Tom found by experiment that the water was not seen until he came within half a dozen yards of it.

The defences of the slopes right and left then engaged Tom's attention.

There were not enough trees on the spot to form effective barricades, and the only means of checking the enemy if they scaled the low heights was to dig trenches. The labour would be long and toilsome, for the ground must first be cleared of the brushwood; but in no other way could the enemy be prevented from swarming down into the nullah. At the end of a week the western and eastern slopes, for about thirty yards from the end of the nullah, were each scored with a deep trench, fortified with a parapet constructed of the earth that had been removed.

A second line of defence might be necessary, and for this there was no better position than the bend of the nullah, nearly half a mile to the north. The sides being here steep, almost perpendicular, it was impossible to haul trees from the forest above for a breastwork like that at the entrance; so Tom had the bed of the nullah cleared of cover for a space of about two hundred yards, and a trench with a strong parapet carried from side to side.

The work was still unfinished when one day the scouts, for the first time, reported that they had sighted the enemy. About ten miles away they had seen a band of young natives marching towards Bismarckburg in charge of a German officer and a small party of askaris. It seemed clear that these negroes were recruits for the German forces, and Tom, relying on the scouts' statement that the askaris were few in number, decided to make an attempt to prevent the natives from being turned into what Captain Goltermann had called "black Germans."

The party, when sighted, was marching very slowly, following a native path that wound through dense bush, and crossed the track between the plantation and the nullah. Tom calculated that if he started at once he would arrive at a position where he might ambush the enemy just before they reached the road to Bismarckburg. With his untrained men he could not risk a stand-up fight; but he hoped that the advantage of surprise, if the patrol was really so small as the scouts declared, would enable him to achieve his end without fighting.

Selecting twenty of the men who had been with him in his little action in the forest, he led them out, with Mwesa, and followed rapidly on the heels of the scouts. In about an hour and a half they came to the spot he had fixed on, and while he posted the men in the bush on both sides of the track, he sent the scouts to worm their way eastward and watch for the enemy. The interval before they returned was long enough for the men and himself to regain breath. It was perhaps half an hour later when they came quietly through the brushwood with news that the enemy were in sight.

At the place where Tom had posted himself the track ran fairly straight for more than a hundred yards, and he was able to take stock of the party with which he had to deal while it was still distant. First came two unarmed natives, evidently guides; then a German non-commissioned officer; behind him two Ger-

man privates, followed by a string of negroes. The tail of the party was out of sight.

Seeing how few were the armed men at the head of the column, Tom instantly resolved on a bold course. His own men were concealed among the bushes; they had their orders. He stepped out on to the track, accompanied only by Mwesa, just before the negro guides reached him. They halted in surprise, and looked round towards the German thirty yards behind.

"Tell them to come on, Mwesa," said Tom.

The boy called to them, and they at once hastened on. Tom spoke to them in German, but they evidently did not understand him. Meanwhile the German sergeant had quickened his step, and hearing German on the lips of the stranger, he approached unsuspiciously, halted, clicked his heels together, and waited, as a well-trained subordinate will, for his superior to address him.

"Halt your men, Sergeant," said Tom.

The sergeant started. Quicker-witted than the sergeant whom Tom had so easily disposed of at the plantation, he detected a foreign accent in the stranger's speech. Tom gave him no time to consider.

"Your life depends on your keeping cool," he went on quickly. "Don't make a sound. Keep your arms still and face me. The bush on both sides is lined with troops who will fire at the slightest hostile movement. Halt your men."

The sergeant hesitated for the fraction of a second, then called to the privates a few yards away to pass word along the column.

"They are halted," he said; "but there is something I don't understand here." He looked incredulously around him. "I don't know who you are, but if you are bluffing—-"

"Let me convince you."

Tom parted a clump of thick bush on one side of the track, disclosing a negro kneeling, with his rifle pointed straight at the German. In a bush on the other side, nearly opposite, he showed another man. Moving half-a-dozen paces down the track he revealed yet another man, finger on trigger, to the astonished sergeant.

"Your position is quite hopeless, you see," Tom went on. "You had better surrender quietly. Give me your revolver."

The German threw a glance over his shoulder at the privates, standing at the head of the column of negroes.

"At once! Don't hesitate!" said Tom. "Your men will be shot down if they attempt resistance. Your revolver."

The man handed over the weapon sullenly.

"Now tell those men of yours to come forward one at a time and lay their rifles down on the track in front of me. Don't say another word."

The sergeant gave the order. The men, with a look of mingled curiosity and wonderment, advanced, laid down their rifles, and at Tom's command walked a few yards along the track, then halted.

"Mwesa, go and tell those natives to come past me, slowly, and then turn into the bush and wait. Tell them nothing else.... You have men at the rear?" he added to the sergeant.

"Yes."

"Who are they?"

"Askaris."

"How many?"

"Twenty."

"Then when they come up behind the negroes you will give them the same order as you gave your Germans. Stand here by me."

The negroes, all strong young men, defiled past Tom in silence, their eyes wide with anxiety and dread. He counted sixty. In their rear came the twenty askaris. One by one they laid down their rifles and passed on, looking with surprise at their officer's glowering face.

"That is all?" asked Tom.

"All."

"Then we will go. Give me your whistle."

The sergeant unslung the whistle from his shoulder. Tom blew a shrill note, and his men started out of the bush and lined up on the track. The German cursed when he saw that they were less in number than his own men; Tom felt that he would have writhed had he known that none of them was trained. At the present moment he was lost in wonderment at the fact of a young white man, in German territory but clearly not a German, having at his command negroes who were just as clearly not German askaris, but possessed German rifles.

The order of the march home was quickly arranged. Half Tom's men went ahead, carrying the captured rifles. They were followed by the liberated natives, who, imagining that they had only exchanged one servitude for another, trudged on in gloomy silence. Tom's motive in not dismissing them at once was to link them to the British cause by means of the impression which he hoped they would gain from his defensive measures at the nullah, and he knew that they would break away the moment they realised that they were free. Behind them marched the askaris, then five more of his riflemen escorting the German privates. He kept the sergeant by his side, and the rear was brought up by Mwesa and the rest of his men.

The capture of a German prisoner gave Tom an opportunity of learning something of the course of events on the frontier. He considered how best to open up the subject with the sergeant, and decided that perfect frankness would

probably serve him best.

"You are naturally surprised, Sergeant," he said, "at finding an Englishman on your side of the border."

"An Englishman!" growled the sergeant. "I thought you were a Belgian."

"Indeed! Are you at war with Belgium too?"

"There is no Belgium. It belongs now to the Kaiser."

"Dear me! I understand that Paris has fallen: you have therefore France and Britain against you; but Belgium–did she break her neutrality?

"I don't know anything about that; but I do know that Belgium and half France are now in our hands; your Navy is defeated; and London will soon be at our mercy."

"You make me tremble! And what about Abercorn?"

The sergeant blinked.

"London is rather far away," Tom went on. "I am much more deeply interested at present in places nearer at hand. You were going to attack Abercorn, I understood. No doubt you took it as easily as your troops took Paris."

The German's frown relieved Tom of his anxiety. Smiling, he continued:

"Come now, Sergeant, you may as well tell the truth, you know. You have nothing to lose by it. You found Abercorn a harder nut than you expected, eh?"

"You seem to know a lot," said the German gloomily. "Did you come across from Rhodesia?"

"No: I came from Kigoma on the *Hedwig von Wissmann*."

"Ach!"

"What is the matter?"

"There are always misfortunes; we can't win everything."

"You don't mean to say—-"

"I mean to say that the other Wissmann boat, the *Hermann von Wissmann*, allowed itself to be surprised at Sphinxhaven on Nyassa."

"And was captured? Really we must take that as a set-off against your defeat of our Navy–in the North Sea, I suppose. But to come back to Abercorn."

"You know as well as I do that we were beaten off. The English were four to one: what else could be expected?"

"I see! That explains why you have been ranging the country for recruits. But I understood that your forces in East Africa hopelessly outnumbered the British."

"So they do, but not everywhere. In the north we have cut the Uganda Railway, captured Mombasa and Nairobi, and are sweeping the English into the sea."

"Well, they'll be quite at home there! It's our native element, you know. These successes must console you for your failure at Abercorn: they'll lighten

your captivity, Sergeant."

"That is true," said the German, blind to irony. "And I shall not be your prisoner long."

"I hope not, I'm sure."

"It was a trick. You would never have beaten me in fair fight; and the English, when they win at all, only win by trickery. Everybody knows that."

"Trickery, and superior numbers, as at Abercorn! Don't you think the Kaiser had better throw up the sponge, then? It would save trouble."

The sergeant was so much horrified by the suggestion that he launched out into a violent denunciation of England and all things English, and painted a dismal picture of the dismembered British Empire. Tom let him run on: he had heard something like it in Germany, and had taken it then, as he took it now, as the raving of impotent envy. He would probably have listened to the German with less serenity had he known to what lengths the pitiless logic of militarism had carried the Kaiser's helots on the stricken fields of Europe.

They were welcomed at the nullah with shouts of joy by the people, who had thronged behind the barricade and on the slopes. Astonishment sat on the faces of the Germans when they were admitted by the single gateway and marched up the nullah, past the trench, to the village growing by the lake.

"You keep us here, with niggers?" said the sergeant.

"Yes: until I have the pleasure of escorting you to Abercorn," replied Tom. "You are white men: I don't want to have to tie you up: but I shall do so unless you give me your word not to attempt to escape."

To avoid the ignominy of being kept in bonds the Germans gave their parole readily enough. Tom arranged with Moses for their rations, then returned to the rescued negroes whom he had left under guard lower down. They, meanwhile, had been regaled with stories, freely embroidered, of what the m'sungu had done, and when he appeared among them their downcast expression had been replaced by looks of hope. He learnt from Mwesa that they had been collected from several villages to the eastward, near Lake Rukwa, some fifteen miles away. Mwesa brought to him a young negro whom he introduced as the son of M'setu, the chief of the largest of these villages.

"Tell them they can all go home," said Tom. "This young man may take his father a message from me. The Germans will no doubt raid the villages again for men. It is not likely I shall be able to help them a second time. M'setu, then, had better march away with all his people into British territory and remain there until the war is over."

The negroes laughed, leapt, embraced one another when they heard that they were free. Without delay they poured out through the gate and flocked away towards the east. Not even the chief's son stayed to thank their rescuer.

But the incident had a strange sequel two days afterwards. About midday one of the scouts came running back to report that a large body of spearmen, led by a great chief, was marching through the forest in the direction of the nullah. They were not on a warlike expedition, for behind the chief three men led each a goat, which could only be intended as peace-offerings.

"Go and see who they are, Mwesa," said Tom. "They are not to come across the clearing until I know what they want."

Presently Mwesa returned, smiling with even more enjoyment than usual.

"Him M'setu, sah," he said: "come for talk with sah."

"Very well. Bring him along; he can come in with six of his men: the rest remain outside."

Mwesa ran back into the forest, and soon reappeared at the side of a powerful negro of middle age. A throng of negroes about a hundred strong followed him to the edge of the clearing. There at his order they squatted in a long line, and the chief himself, accompanied by his son and five other men–three of whom led milk-white goats bleating dolefully–marched at Mwesa's heels towards the gate, where Tom stood waiting.

"Him M'setu, sah," said Mwesa, by way of introduction.

Tom at once stepped forward and grasped the chief by the hand, an act which brought a smile of pleasure to the face of his six companions and a shout from the men watching intently two hundred yards away.

M'setu began to speak. After one sentence he paused, looking to Mwesa to interpret.

"Him say sah him fader and mudder," said Mwesa.

Tom acknowledged the compliment with a smile.

The chief began again, inquiring after Tom's health, the health of his father, mother, wife, children, cattle, and so on, until Tom felt rather overwhelmed by his politeness. By and by he came to business.

"Him say berry glad sah him good send back men all same. Him say bring goats for sah him pot, berry nice goats. Him say come alonga sah: what for? sah kill all dem Wadaki, so M'setu him came alonga sah kill Wadaki all same."

"You mean that I am to kill all the Germans, and he will come and help?"

"Dat just what M'setu say," said Mwesa, delighted that his master had understood him so well.

"Well, you must tell him that that's not my job. I couldn't rid the country of Germans if I tried, but the British will come across the border by and by and eat them all up. Tell him that."

M'setu's response was very long-winded. The gist of it was that he expected another recruiting visit from the Germans. He had heard that they had been thrown back across the border by the British, and was therefore not in-

clined to go to the trouble of removing all his people from their villages, but would rather stay and defend himself, with the assistance of the m'sungu, who had already rescued his young men.

Tom was a good deal perplexed how to deal with this ingenuous offer of an alliance. M'setu's warriors, armed only with spears, would be wiped out by a single machine-gun, and Tom could do nothing to help them: outside his nullah he would be as much at the Germans' mercy as they. On the other hand, the chief's men, familiar with a wider stretch of country than the Wahehe from the plantation, could do inestimable service as scouts, and might give him early warning of movements of which otherwise he would be unaware. Through Mwesa he explained as clearly as he could the difficulties of the situation, and in the upshot made an arrangement with M'setu by which the chief guaranteed to provide a company of skilled scouts, and Tom in his turn promised to lend assistance to M'setu if he was threatened, and in the last resort to give his people shelter in the nullah.

M'setu departed, well satisfied with the result of his interview.

"What time sah eat goats?" asked Mwesa.

"Eat them! I'm not going to eat them," said Tom. "Take them up to Moses and tell him to look after them. We'll have some milk by and by."

CHAPTER XII–THE DESERTER

"Come now, Reinecke, you have been away two months or so. What is the truth of things? We are fed here with what I am convinced are false, or at any rate too rosy, reports. Coming from the centre you ought to be well informed, and I want to know exactly how matters stand."

Major von Rudenheim bent forward and fixed his hard blue eyes on Reinecke. They were sitting in the major's quarters. Reinecke had just returned from a mission which had carried him right across the country, and after delivering

dispatches at headquarters had lost no time in visiting his friend the major.

"What is the truth?" said Reinecke, flicking the ash from his cigar irritably. "Who knows? They said that Paris would fall before the British Army got across the Channel; now it is said that Paris has not fallen, though the British Army has been annihilated."

"And the Fleet?"

"The British are skulking in their harbours and won't fight. We have bombarded most of their commercial ports out of existence, but they had been laying in such enormous stocks of food in anticipation of the war that it will take a year or so to starve them out. So it's said."

"But surely if the ships won't fight we command the sea and can bring them to terms. It ought to be over by Christmas."

"Yes, the Kaiser is to eat his Christmas dinner in London. But the fact is, Major, we're living on rumours. The British smashed up our wireless installation at Dar-es-Salam, and we haven't had any really authentic news from Germany since a fortnight after war broke out. As for this country, we are not doing so well as we ought to have done. We've taken some places inside their frontier, but they've put up a surprisingly good defence, and at present it's stalemate. Apparently they are bringing troops from India—-"

"In spite of our Fleet?"

"Yes, in spite of our Fleet. Tirpitz deserves to be cashiered."

"But, my good friend, if they can get reinforcements and we can't, where are we? And then, I thought the English had to send troops to India to put down the rebellion there. Isn't that true?"

"I don't know what's true. I'm sick of the whole thing. Here's my plantation going to rack and ruin: that wretched young cub of an Englishman having the audacity to run off with my workers; and when I ought to be bringing him to book I'm packed off to Tabora. Heaven knows what has happened in my absence."

"I know a little, too. Your young cub is a pretty lively one, and has pretty good claws. A few days after we were beaten back at Abercorn—-"

"That's true, then. I didn't believe it."

"What could be expected when all our best troops are in the north? We were outnumbered."

If Major von Rudenheim believed what he said, he must have been singularly ill-informed. On September 5, when the Germans attacked the little town of Abercorn, its defenders were forty members of the native police, its commandant the postmaster. There happened to be a machine-gun at hand, and this was so well manipulated by the postmaster, Mr. Bisset (who might have been expected to be more at home with the telegraph instrument) that the tiny garrison was able

to hold off the enemy, four times its strength, until reinforcements of Rhodesian planters arrived. Mr. Bisset's name deserves to be recorded on the illustrious roll of civilians turned soldiers who have at critical moments helped to make and to save the British Empire.

"As I was saying," the major went on, "a few days after our unlucky reverse at Abercorn, your young cub pounced upon one of our recruiting patrols and carried every man of them to his lair somewhere in the forest."

Reinecke swore a good old German oath.

"It's not true," he declared.

"You forget yourself, Captain," said Rudenheim, severely. "I am not a Berlin newspaper, or even the Wolff bureau."

"I apologise, Major, but really–a German patrol, with German soldiers?"

"A sergeant, two privates, and I don't know how many askaris. They all vanished."

"Then it can't be known that this English pighead captured them: how could it?"

"My dear captain, a recruiting patrol recruits. These unfortunate Germans were returning with their bag–how large I don't know: your cub released them all. When the patrol was some days overdue, a party was sent out in search. They found the villages towards Lake Rukwa absolutely empty of able-bodied men, which seems to show that this British lion-cub has set up a pretty efficient system of scouting, or the niggers could hardly have had warning. But by adopting the usual methods they wrung the story out of one of the old men, burnt down a few houses, and returned with the news."

"And you hunted the wretch?"

"We had something better to do. The English, reinforced by Belgians, have kept things rather lively on the frontier, and we have had no men to spare for cub-hunting."

"But–but–it is preposterous; it is an insult to the German flag; to allow a nest of mutineers to exist–yes, and to make raids–within a couple of marches of a German town. The young fool is alone—-"

"With all your plantation hands, I understand."

"Raw niggers—-"

"But armed with Mausers we can ill spare."

"They don't know butt from muzzle."

"Possibly your cub is not such a cub after all. The English schoolboy nowadays has a cadet's training, I believe. Perhaps this youngster might drive a little military gumption even into the nigger's wooden head."

"Really, Major," cried Reinecke impatiently, "you speak as though–as though you think the English good for something, whereas we all know they

can't possibly be. They've no efficiency; they're slack; they—-"

"Yes, we've been told so," the major interposed drily. "It's just possible that we're mistaken–believe what we want to believe. And I've seen this boy, remember."

Reinecke got up and stalked about the room.

"It is absurd; it is scandalous," he cried. "A young whippersnapper kidnaps our men, defies us, lowers the prestige of the German name, makes us a laughing-stock—-"

"Stay, stay, Captain. You are a little intemperate. A friendly word of warning: don't talk like that outside this room. It's unwise, unsafe, if you value your commission. I go so far as to say you are unreasonable. You allow personal feeling to warp your judgment. Your dislike of this young Englishman, however natural in the circumstances–" Reinecke flashed a keen look at the speaker–"must not blind you to the facts of the situation. As I have explained, we have been hard pressed on the frontier. The Englishman, it appears, has an extraordinarily strong position—-"

"Where is he?"

"They talk of a nullah—-"

"I know it. It was in my company he learnt of it."

"That must be very annoying."

"Not at all, it is good news. Strong? Why, it is a cul-de-sac. At the north it is blocked by a lake. The cub has trapped himself."

"You are a little impatient, Captain. I was about to tell you that a half company of askaris went in pursuit of him the same night he left your plantation–while you were making your way here. You left next morning, you remember, or you would have known that our men were checked in the forest—-"

"Checked? By a horde of untrained niggers?"

"Commanded by your cub of an Englishman. They were checked; only temporarily, of course; the lieutenant did not know what force he had against him, and acted with prudence as a good soldier should. But when he pushed on to the nullah, he found that fortification had already been begun. The entrance of the nullah was defended by a formidable breastwork, and to capture the place would have taken a longer time than he had to dispose of: he was under orders for Abercorn."

"But surely—-"

"Let me finish, Captain. There was a breastwork, as I say; and I am very much mistaken if between then and now the boy has not added to his defences. It is a mistake to despise one's enemy, Reinecke, even an Englishman. Lieutenant Obermann's opinion–and he is a good man, you know–is that the nullah, properly defended, could not be reduced by less than a couple of companies of good

troops–unless it could be surprised; and since the fellow draws scouts from all the niggers in the neighbourhood there's little chance of that. Two companies could not be detached from our frontier posts without a risk which the colonel was unwilling to run. He is not blind to all the considerations you put so forcibly just now; but his decision was, to wait until the general situation eased, then to take measures to stamp out your Englishman and his mutineers as one would destroy a nest of vipers."

"Yes, hang the lot."

"The Englishman?"

"Why not? He is a spy. The spy's fate is to be hanged."

"Quite so. And I am sure we can depend on you, Captain, to supply a good rope–even for your partner."

Reinecke turned angrily towards the major, whose attitude throughout the interview had been very unsatisfactory, and in whose tone he had caught a hint of contempt. But the explosion that seemed imminent was prevented by a knock at the door and the entrance of the major's servant.

The man saluted formally, and announced that an Arab was enquiring for Captain Reinecke.

"Send him in," said the major: "unless you would prefer to see him at your own quarters, Captain."

"No. Why should I meet an Arab secretly?" said Reinecke with irritation. "Let him come in."

There entered a lean, haggard Arab, in worn and tattered dress, with one arm in a sling. He bowed to the officers.

"Haroun!" cried Reinecke. "I hardly knew you ... It is one of my overseers, Major ... Where have you been?"

The man, in his broken German, poured out a long story, which keenly interested the officers in different ways. He said that, after having been removed from the plantation, he had been forced to take service with the Englishman, and been cruelly treated by him. Lifting his tunic, he turned his back, and displayed a few weals. He escaped, and was fired at and wounded in the arm. After several terrible days in the forest, he had managed to crawl into Bismarckburg, and what with hunger and pain was now at the point of death.

"Flogging a German subject!" cried Reinecke. "Another nail in the Englishman's coffin."

"A knot in the noose, let us say. Your Arab had better have something to eat: he may then tell us a good deal that we want to know. His arm can be attended to afterwards. He is not so near death as he thinks."

The man was given into the charge of the major's servant, to be fed.

"Your Englishman, I suppose, dealt with the Arab as he had seen him deal

with your niggers," remarked the major.

"He saw nothing of the kind," replied Reinecke with an air of malicious triumph. "While he was at the plantation I forbade the use of the whip. You see, Major?–the English boasted humanity is sheer cant and hypocrisy: what we do openly they do on the sly."

"Hardly that, Reinecke. You forget there are German prisoners in the nullah. They probably saw the flogging."

"And shared it, I daresay. The English are capable of any atrocity. But we shall find the man useful, Major. Nothing could be better. And the nullah is so near that though the rains have started we might crush the vipers soon: there'll be a pause in the operations on the frontier."

The Arab returned, refreshed and clean. Reinecke questioned him eagerly, and drew from him many details of what had happened since the flight from the plantation. The German prisoners, he said, had been placed on the island, where a hut had been built for them. Food was conveyed to them on a raft. As the man described the defensive works at the nullah, Reinecke drew a rough diagram in his pocketbook, and marked the positions of the trenches and the camp.

"The youngster has a good headpiece," said the major, looking with interest at the diagram. "His name? Willoughby? I'm afraid we can't claim German ancestry for him."

"A machine-gun will smash him," said Reinecke.

"A machine-gun would not be very effective against defences like these, and it would be a terrible business to get up anything heavier across such country, at any rate while the rains are on. He seems to have made good use of his time during the last two months in training his niggers, and unfortunately has won over our trained askaris. A frontal attack would be very costly, my friend."

"I can show another way into the nullah, Herr Major," said the Arab.

"Why didn't you say so before?" cried Reinecke. "Where is it?"

"The Herr Hauptmann will take me back into his service?"

"Dog, would you bargain with me? By your own confession you deserted to the enemy."

"I was compelled."

"You deserted all the same. Deserters are shot. Your only chance of escaping the penalty is to assist us–to show us the way into the nullah. You'll do that, and if you fail you'll be shot."

The Arab protested that he was sure of his ground, and would faithfully lead the troops to an entrance into the nullah which was at present wholly unsuspected by the Englishman. He described its position, and Reinecke's eyes sparkled with anticipation as he turned to Rudenheim and said–

"We have him, Major! We'll capture the place at little cost, and then—-

Haroun, go and show the doctor your arm, and come to my quarters to-morrow."

"A moment," said the major. "You were flogged: what for?"

The Arab appeared to be for a moment disconcerted by the German's swift question. Then he answered:

"Because I would not work as hard as the Englishman wished, Herr Major."

"So! You may go ... The man is a liar, Reinecke. You will find that there's nothing much wrong with his arm, if anything at all. All the same, that northern entrance is genuine enough, I think; and we must certainly catch your cub. But I don't think we'll hang him; he's the kind of man I like to make a prisoner of war."

CHAPTER XIII–HUNTED

Major von Rudenheim's surmise that "the cub" had been busy was correct: Tom had never before been so fully occupied, and, as he afterwards confessed, he had never been happier in his life.

The northern end of the nullah had now the appearance of a prosperous native village. Tom had felt certain misgivings on the score of cleanliness and health; but he found that the Wahehe, like all tribes that inhabit inland and mountainous districts, away from the corrupting influences of the coast, were tidy and orderly, and under the authority of their old chief, Mirambo, the people settled down to a comfortable existence. The one drawback was the limited range of movement; but even in this respect the people were little worse off than they had been on the plantation, and their rooted belief that before long the Germans would be utterly driven from the country gave them bright hopes for the future. Moreover, the women and children in a native village rarely stray far from their homes, and as for the men, they had movement enough.

To begin with, Tom organised a regular body of scouts, incorporating some of his own men with those furnished by his new ally, M'setu. Always keeping in mind his alternative ultimate designs, either to trek into British territory or

to hold his ground until the British overran the border, he determined, when the scouts became proficient, to patrol the whole country between the nullah and the Neu Langenburg road. The defeat of the Germans at Abercorn was very heartening: clearly they were not to have the easy conquest that Reinecke had apparently expected. At the same time, it was only too likely that their preparations were much more advanced than the British, and he could not hope that the Germans would yield the largest and most precious of their colonial possessions without a bitter struggle. It was also certain that the enemy would at some time or other make a serious effort to crush this mutiny; and while, in such a vast and well wooded country, he could not have commanded every possible avenue of approach even with ten times as many men as were available for scouting, he would at least make reasonably sure that any movement of the enemy on the main tracks should be reported to him.

At first he sent out one of the Wahehe with each of M'setu's men, and practised them in watching the movements of small parties of M'setu's people within a few miles of the nullah. Presently, in order to increase the number of his fighting-men, he accustomed M'setu's men to scout alone. By degrees he extended their field of operations until at length he had established a definite chain, or rather network, of scouting-posts commanding the principal tracks from Bismarckburg, and especially the main frontier road to Neu Langenburg. Within a month no enemy force or convoy could move along the frontier without Tom's hearing of it.

The reports were at first brought to him by runners, and reached him many hours late. Could he not devise some means of saving time and exertion alike? He remembered having read, in a book of travels, how the natives of the mountainous interior of New Guinea were accustomed to shout news from height to height. The hills to the south of his own position would lend themselves admirably to a similar system, and after a few rather heart-breaking experiments he succeeded in teaching the negroes to adopt this plan. Each prominent hill was given a name; the man stationed at any particular post had to shout the name to the next, and within a very few minutes Tom at the nullah learnt that a message had been dispatched by a scout perhaps forty miles away.

Meanwhile he practised the fighting-men in aiming and sighting and fire discipline, giving his commands by means of the whistle borrowed from the German sergeant. These exercises were performed, not only in the nullah, but on the ground cleared in front of the barricade and also in the forest. His stock of ammunition would not allow of much target practice, and he ruefully owned that the greater part of the men could not be expected to become good marksmen. It was more profitable to spend time in giving them cohesion in simple field movements. He divided them into sections of sixteen, and got up sham fights in the

forest: one party advancing, the other retiring. At first the men whose part it was to retire refused to do so, and even came to blows with the attackers: why should they withdraw before men no better than themselves? But after a time they entered into the spirit of the game, and showed considerable aptitude.

Tom found the askaris useful in the course of his various exercises. At first, when he practised his men in the nullah, the askaris looked on with disdain, and roared with laughter at the mistakes made by the negroes. But by degrees they grew interested; they commented among themselves on the contrast between the Englishman's patience and good temper and the rough treatment they had suffered at the hands of their German drill sergeants. Tom, though he affected to disregard them, was all the time keenly watching, and there came a moment when he suddenly turned to them and asked for two volunteers to show the Wahehe the correct way of kneeling to take aim. As he had expected, they were flattered; every man wished to serve as a model. For some days he did not apply to them again, and noticed a certain restlessness and disappointment among them. At length he allowed them to act regularly as guides and markers, but did not admit them definitively to the ranks of his fighting-men until they came to him in a body and begged to be taken fully into his service. They were Sudanese, like the majority of the German native troops. Many of their people were fighting in the British ranks: they preferred his drill to the German; and they were ready to vow fidelity to him.

"What about pay?" asked Tom. "I have no money."

They replied that in the nullah they had no use for pay, but no doubt he would pay them when he had the money–an English promise was good. Tom was rather doubtful of the wisdom of trusting men who so suddenly changed their allegiance, and he suspected that at the slightest set-back they would desert him. On the other hand, these trained men might serve as good stiffening for his untried troops, and ultimately he decided to incorporate them with the garrison of the nullah, but not to allow them to leave it until he had some clear proof of their loyalty.

As time went on, he became somewhat worried about two matters–the approach of the rainy season, and the food supply. The foliage of all the trees had turned red, a sure sign, according to Mwesa, that the rains were at hand. The lake would fill, the stream would become much swollen: would he be flooded out? What would be the effect of the damp upon his health and the health of the people? Hitherto there had been no sickness except minor ailments, which he had treated with such drugs from Reinecke's stores as he knew the use of. Ague and malaria were only names to him, but they stood for something terrible–the more terrible because unknown. He had a good stock of quinine, the great stand-by, he understood, in tropical climates; he would watch for the first sign of fever, and

then dose freely. Fortunately one of the Arab overseers had been accustomed to doctor the workers on the plantation, and this man was gratified by being appointed health officer to the community.

The food question was an even greater difficulty, for while all might not be sick, all must be fed. The provisions brought from the plantation were running low: and though these had been supplemented by small animals trapped in the forest and by occasional gifts from M'setu, these sources were too precarious to be relied on. In order to ease the situation, Tom at last made a habit of going into the forest for a day's hunting once a week, leaving Mirambo in charge of the nullah. M'setu's people were excellent beaters and knew the likeliest places for game; the Wahehe were born hunters; but he could not afford to let them use his ammunition indiscriminately, and when they accompanied him they were armed only with spears. Everything depended on his own gun. In the course of these shooting expeditions he brought down several head of eland, hartebeest, and rhinoceros, the last being a special favourite with the people. The game was cut up and carried home by his own men and by M'setu's people, who were sufficiently paid for their services by the present of certain portions of each day's bag.

It was after one of these expeditions that Tom had had to take disciplinary measures with Haroun. The rationing system, after a little trouble, had worked well. Moses had proved himself to be thoroughly honest, and every one had his fair share. After a time Moses began to suspect that some one was pilfering. Small quantities of food mysteriously disappeared. A watch was kept; Tom called the people together and warned them that any one who acted against the common welfare must be punished; but the thief was not detected until, made bold by success, he forgot caution, and was caught red-handed by Moses. On returning from a day's shooting Tom learnt that the culprit was the Arab who had volunteered his services on the first day at the nullah. In such a man the crime could not be taken lightly, and Tom ordered the man half a dozen strokes of the whip.

A few days afterwards Haroun disappeared. The sentries on guard day and night at the barricade declared that the Arab had not passed them. The nullah was searched; no trace of him could be found. Some of the people reported that, after the whipping, he had sulkily held himself aloof, and used to wander alone by the shore of the lake. At length it was generally believed that he had fallen victim to a crocodile, and his fate was a fruitful topic of conversation among the Wahehe.

One day, accompanied by Mwesa and some two-score beaters and carriers, Tom set off to shoot. The rains had just begun, and Mirambo had told him that with the filling and overflowing of the streams animals would certainly be found

on the swamps thus created. He had usually gone either north or east, as being least likely to encounter enemies in those directions. On this occasion, however, he struck to the west, in order to reach low-lying ground where, according to M'setu's huntsmen, at this season of the year game was plentiful.

A couple of hours' march through the forest brought him to an extensive hollow, covered only with scrub and tall grass, and already showing signs of becoming the impassable swamp which would result from a few weeks' rain. The beaters, marching quietly ahead, soon made signs that they had sighted game, and presently, through the grass, Tom saw the long dark form of a rhinoceros placidly browsing. Stealing round to leeward, he gradually approached the animal until he was within easy range, fired, and had the satisfaction of seeing his quarry fall at the first shot.

The report of his rifle had startled another beast that was wallowing in a pool near by. It rose, sniffed around, then made off with lumbering but rapid gait across the hollow towards a belt of woodland on higher ground. Tom hurried in pursuit with his beaters, leaving Mwesa to guard the animal he had already shot.

The chase was a long one. The rhinoceros, before it recovered from its alarm, plunged through a long stretch of forest and scrub, and was found at last resting in a narrow glade bordered on the further side by tall bushes. Again Tom brought down the beast, this time at his second shot. The natives, with cries of delight, were rushing forward to skin and dismember it for transport when, without warning, there came from the bushes beyond the sharp crack of several rifles, bullets sang through the air, and two of the beaters fell. The rest bolted into the bush on either side, and Tom, a little less precipitately, was about to follow them when he saw a number of German askaris emerge from cover opposite, with Reinecke at their head.

Reinecke's eyes were already gleaming with triumph. He shouted a word or two which Tom could not catch, and then fired his revolver. In face of odds, Tom had already started to make good his escape: but when he heard the German's bullet whistle past him, he snatched out his revolver, wheeled round, and fired. Reinecke flung up his arm, stopped short, and yelled to the askaris at his heels. Tom sprinted across the few yards of open ground, dashed into the bush, and ran, at first blindly, for he heard the askaris close behind: one or two of them were shooting at random in the hope of hitting him as he ran.

He was fleet of foot, and guessed that he could easily outstrip the askaris, laden with their service packs. The danger was that he might lose his way in the forest. All his men had disappeared; they would probably find their way back to the nullah without difficulty. It was important, however, that he should not be long behind them, for if they should report that he was captured or killed, the people might be seized with panic, and all his work be overthrown. He had left

the glade at a different point from that at which he had entered it, and so could not follow the track made by his men. But fortune favoured him. He had not pushed his way far among the trees when he struck a game track, along which, if the askaris also did not discover it, he could make still swifter progress than they, hindered by the bush.

Some few minutes later, the track brought him to a small stream: it had no doubt been trodden by animals in quest of water. He jumped into the stream, ran a short distance in the same direction as the current, then made a long jump into a clump of low shrubs on the right bank. Replacing as well as he could the disarranged vegetation, so as to give no clue to his pursuers, he plunged once more into the bush, in the hope of coming by and by upon a cross track that would lead towards the nullah.

CHAPTER XIV–THE TRAIL

Never before had Tom been alone in the bush. On the few occasions when he had gone shooting alone, during his sojourn in Reinecke's bungalow, he had always followed well-defined tracks. Since then, Mwesa or Mirambo or some other native had been with him. But now he had no guide, and he was seized with a feeling of helplessness. Rain had begun to fall, and the obscure sky could not be read for the points of the compass. Brushwood grew to his knees; thorn bushes threw out tentacles that caught at his clothes and tore his flesh. Dodging obstructions, he sometimes found that he had only worsened his plight, and was forced to tear a way for himself at the cost of bleeding hands. Rarely he came to open spaces; then he quickened his pace, though his wet boots dragged heavily upon his feet. Once, in crossing a grassy glade, he sank over his ankles in morass, and swerved hastily into the bush again, to avoid being engulfed.

Presently, stopping to rest, he thought he heard voices, and hoped that they came from his own men. He dared not call, nor even move towards them, until he was sure whether they were friends or foes. The voices came nearer. At all

costs he must learn who the speakers were, and he sprang up into a leafy tree from which he might get a view of the country around. Spying out cautiously through the foliage, he saw a band of men pushing their way up a bush-covered slope not a hundred yards from his perch. Through the heavy rain he could not at first distinguish them; but as they approached he recognised the deserter, Haroun, leading a couple of askaris. Behind them, out of the bush, emerged Reinecke with his arm in a sling, a younger officer by his side, and a line of askaris following in single file. He shrank back into the tree, dreading lest they should pass immediately beneath him and some sharp-eyed man discover him. But they topped the slope some distance away and passed out of sight.

"I have come in the right direction," he thought. "They must be bound for the nullah."

Waiting a little, to make sure that no more of the enemy were coming, he slipped down from the tree, and with infinite caution followed in their track. If this led indeed towards the nullah, he would presently be on ground that he knew, and might circumvent them and arrive first. He felt somewhat perplexed. The Arab Haroun had certainly betrayed him: why, then, had Reinecke set out with no more than thirty or forty men? Had Haroun so little respect for the defences of the nullah as to imagine that they could be stormed by so small a force? Had Reinecke so much contempt for his ability to train the negroes as to believe that forty askaris were more than a match for three times their number as well armed as themselves? He set his lips grimly: if such were their ideas, he would promise them a rough disillusionment.

For some time he followed them up, always with the greatest caution. At length the sound of voices ahead told him that they had halted. He stopped at once. The rain had almost ceased. In a few seconds he heard a rustling and the squelching of boots not far in front of him, and he dived into the bush at the side of the track and watched. Two askaris tramped past him, in the direction from which they had come. They walked unconcernedly: no suspicion of his presence had brought them back. What, then, was their errand?

Reinecke's party was still halted. Tom heard now and then the lower tones of the Germans mingling with the high-pitched voices of the askaris. What were they waiting for? After perhaps twenty minutes voices came from the other direction. The two askaris reappeared, followed by a string of native porters, some carrying what appeared to be the material of a tent; others, boxes and bales of provisions; others, lumps of freshly killed meat. The explanation of the delay flashed upon Tom. The game he had killed had been cut up; the two askaris had been sent back to hasten the march of the porters. "I might have been nabbed," Tom thought.

When the porters joined the waiting askaris, a German voice gave the order

to march. After a short interval Tom emerged from his place of concealment and followed. On reaching the spot on which they had halted, he found that it was skirted by a track evidently made not long before–almost certainly the path by which his men had come from the nullah that morning. To his surprise, Reinecke and his party, instead of pursuing this track, as they might have been expected to do if their destination was the nullah, had swerved northward and marched through the pathless scrub.

Tom was standing at the angle between the two tracks, hesitating whether to follow the enemy or to take the shortest cut home, when a rustle among the bush behind him caused him to face round quickly, revolver in hand. His eyes fell not on an enemy, but on the ever-smiling countenance of Mwesa.

"Savvy me find sah all right," said the boy, quietly.

"You saw Reinecke?" asked Tom.

Mwesa nodded.

"Haroun too, sah. Him no eat up: how him get away?"

"The sentries must have been napping, I suppose. But how did you come to find me here?"

"Me hear shoot," he said. "Me run find sah: rhino no matter. Sah gone: ebery one gone–all 'cept fellas what cut up nudder rhino. Ah! Mwesa savvy all same. Me run back dis way: savvy sah come dis way bimeby."

Tom reflected that the boy's optimism had been justified by a lucky accident.

"Where are the men?" he asked.

"No savvy, sah. 'Spect dey all run home quick."

"I hope so. Now, these Germans–I thought they were going to our nullah, but it seems that they are not. What is their game? Any suggestion, Mwesa?"

Mwesa did not understand the word, but he tried to look as if he did. Tom, however, did not expect from him any explanation of Reinecke's movements: he was trying to puzzle out one for himself. The sides of the nullah were too precipitous to afford an entrance: and though the enemy might do a little damage by firing from the top down into the camp, that could easily be defeated by moving the people to well-covered places where shots could not reach them. As a means of capturing the position such a course was absurd. Yet Reinecke could hardly intend a mere reconnoitring expedition: his men were equipped as for fighting, and it appeared from the amount of baggage carried by the porters that he expected to camp for at least one night.

Unable to guess at the German's design, Tom came to the conclusion that, even at the cost of a certain uneasiness among his people, he had better follow up the enemy, and see for himself the direction of their march: that might throw some light on their object. With Mwesa he set off in their tracks, keeping a good

look-out ahead for laggards, and stopping frequently to listen.

It was just after one o'clock. Tom was both tired and hungry. His clothes were sodden, and the atmosphere was like that of a Turkish bath. The track wound in and out through the scrub, and presently among forest trees; and it had evidently been traversed before, for no one absolutely strange to the country could have found so well the easiest passage through the scrub.

After walking for nearly two hours, at so slow a pace that no more than four miles could have been covered, Tom found that the track led through the middle of a wooded ravine, which trended, as nearly as he could judge, to the north-east. The ground sloped gradually upwards, and in the distance Tom detected the march of the enemy by the swaying of the bushes and tall grass through which they passed.

He advanced with still greater caution, and well it was that he did so, for in a few minutes the path emerged into a narrow rocky defile, only sparsely covered with vegetation, and here two askaris were posted as sentries. A little beyond them the porters had laid down their loads. Looking out from behind a screen of bushes, Tom saw the askaris and their German officers marching ahead.

Avoiding the sentries by plunging into the bush that skirted the defile, Tom and the negro lad hurried on after the enemy. Well screened by the foliage, they could afford to quicken their pace until they overtook them, and thenceforward kept pace with them. After about ten minutes they discovered that the party had again halted. The men were sitting on boulders and slabs of rock: the German lieutenant sat a little apart. Reinecke and the Arab had disappeared.

Then Tom noticed that the defile seemed to end in the air, as if it had arrived at the brink of a cliff. Creeping cautiously through the bush above the narrow path, they came to the top of the rise and looked over. It was not a cliff, as Tom had supposed; but a somewhat steep and rocky slope, dotted here and there with patches of coarse scrub. Down this slope two figures were moving: Haroun the Arab led, Reinecke was only a few paces behind him.

When they came to the foot of the slope they halted, and talked somewhat excitedly together. Haroun pointed forward and downward; Reinecke stooped, looked over the edge of the slope, shook his head and apparently flew into a rage. Thereupon the Arab went alone over the brink, descended slowly, and passed out of the watchers' sight. Reinecke sat down in a fissure, in the attitude of waiting.

Tom had observed these movements at first with nothing more than a certain impersonal curiosity; but a suspicion of their meaning began to dawn when Haroun disappeared. The air was misty; from the spot where he crouched nothing was visible beyond the margin of the slope except the grey sky. But Reinecke, where he sat, evidently saw something more. Every now and again he bent over, following the progress of the Arab, and also, as it appeared, taking much interest

in the scene below.

"We are above the nullah," thought Tom. "That fellow Haroun must have discovered a way out and in. Our position is to be turned. My word!"

Some twenty minutes passed. Haroun's head reappeared at the edge of the slope. He spoke to Reinecke volubly, using his hands in free gestures, as though demonstrating a point. The German appeared to be convinced. He got up, stepped over the edge with the aid of the Arab's hand, and followed the man slowly out of sight.

CHAPTER XV–THE BACK DOOR

"Run back and see if the askaris are still there," said Tom to Mwesa.

The lad darted away through the bush that clothed the top of the bank of the defile. Returning in a few minutes, he reported that the enemy had not stirred from their position.

"Then we will go on. Keep close to me."

They made their way carefully down the slope. At the bottom they peeped over. A narrow cleft zigzagged down the face of a steep cliff, for the most part bare rock, but with trees and bushes growing here and there where soil gave them roothold. This vegetation and the windings of the cleft hid Reinecke and the Arab from sight; but several hundred feet below they could just discern, through the mist, the still surface of an expanse of water.

Mwesa's eyes opened wide with surprise.

"Don't speak," whispered Tom. "Yes; I think it is our lake."

Reinecke's purpose was now clear to him. He acquitted his sentries of negligence. Haroun had evidently discovered a hitherto unsuspected means of egress from the nullah; on his information Reinecke had brought up his askaris to take the position in reverse, but before committing them to the enterprise had gone

down to test the Arab's veracity. It would take him a long time to climb down the steep and rugged cleft, hampered as he must be by his wounded arm: still longer to climb up again. What would he do when he returned? Would he at once order the attack? Daylight would last just long enough: a night attack was impossible; no sane person would attempt to descend by so precipitous a path in darkness. Would he camp for the night, and attack with the dawn? It seemed to Tom that he would hardly wait unless delay were unavoidable, for there was the chance that rain would fall again, and a tropical storm that might continue for days would render his scheme hopeless. No doubt his decision would depend on the result of his observations below.

To what point in the nullah the cleft led, Tom had at present no knowledge. It might descend to the lake side, or wind away to some spot farther down. He thought rapidly over the courses open to him. He might make his way back through the ravine, plunge into the bush, and hurry along parallel with the nullah until he gained the entrance. Thereby he might provide against the threatened attack and perhaps take measures for a counterstroke. But one consideration told heavily against this idea. At his best speed he could hardly expect to reach the barricade before dark, and meanwhile Reinecke, if he found the secret way so easy as Haroun had apparently declared, might have led his men into the nullah, taken the people by surprise, and overcome what resistance they were able to make without their leader.

What alternative was there? If Reinecke once rejoined the askaris waiting in the defile nothing could avail to check him. It was impossible to slip past him on the narrow cleft, and organise the defence while he returned for his men. Could he be prevented from returning? Without him the German lieutenant would probably hesitate to risk a plunge into the unknown. Tom thought that Mwesa and himself should be a match for Reinecke and the Arab; but if a cry or a shot reached the ears of the men waiting above, all would end in disaster.

The only chance of success seemed to lie in following Reinecke down the cleft and lying in wait for him at some spot where he could be taken at a disadvantage. Tom hurriedly whispered his plan to Mwesa, then stepped down into the cleft and began his careful descent.

The frequent windings of the narrow gully, the patches of vegetation, the boulders that stood up here and there, rendered detection from below unlikely; but Tom moved very warily, peering round every corner, every bush and rock, listening for voices or footsteps. The lower he and the negro descended, the more cautious they were. Once or twice Tom slipped, and had to catch at a tree or a shrub to prevent himself from slithering down. No such mishaps befell the barefooted negro, and Tom wished that his soles were so hardened as to enable him to discard his boots. Step by step they crept downward. Presently they caught sight

of the opposite side of the nullah, a rugged precipice looming through the mist, with a portion of the lake cut off at its base. A little farther down Tom stopped suddenly. Twenty or thirty feet below him Reinecke and the Arab, side by side, were lying on a big rock that appeared to jut out from the cliff, and were peering down. No doubt they were hidden by the rock from the sight of the people below–how far below Tom could not tell, for the camp and the lowest stretch of the cleft were invisible to him.

Mwesa, clutching his knife, looked expectantly at his master. Tom could have shot the two men where they lay; but apart from a natural repugnance to killing them unawares, he knew that the sound of shots would rise to the party above and put them on the alert. Whatever he did must be done without noise.

Drawing Mwesa back, he led him some little distance up the cleft until he came to a shallow recess, partly concealed by a patch of bush. Here they could wait until the men below reached them in their upward climb. Tom withdrew behind the bush, bidding Mwesa stand a little forward and watch: his dark body would be less likely to attract the eyes of the climbers.

It was some time before they heard slow footsteps on the cleft below them, and then ejaculations from Reinecke complaining of the steepness of the ascent. Then Mwesa reported that the German had rounded a bend; the Arab was just behind him. Tom drew the lad back behind the bush.

"Deal with Haroun," he whispered, "when I have dealt with Reinecke."

The two men mounted slowly. Tom waited until the German had come within two or three paces of him, then stepped out into the middle of the narrow path. Reinecke, a foot or two below him, looked up. His face paled beneath the bronze: he recoiled, and fumbled for his revolver. Before he could grasp it Tom sprang at him, and with one deftly aimed blow on the point of the chin hurled him against the side of the cleft. He fell like a log. At the same moment Mwesa darted past his master, and flung himself on the Arab, who had halted in consternation at the sudden onslaught. He stepped back, warded off Mwesa with his arm, and turned to escape down the cleft. Before he had taken three steps the negro had recovered himself, and plunged his knife into the Arab's back.

[image]

MWESA FLUNG HIMSELF ON THE ARAB.

So swiftly, so silently had things been done that no sound could have reached the ears of any one who had chanced to be within a hundred paces.

Tom bent down over the German. He was unconscious. Strange fate, that

had made him for the second time the captive of the man he had wronged!

"Watch him," said Tom to Mwesa. "Call me if he revives before I come back."

He went down the cleft until he reached the rock on which the men had lain. Climbing it, he looked over upon the huts fifty or sixty feet below, the lake near by, and a considerable stretch of the nullah. There were signs of excitement among the people, who were gathered in knots, talking and gesticulating. The German prisoners, standing in front of their hut in the middle of the island, evidently suspected that something had happened, some emergency had arisen, for they were shouting, beckoning to the men nearest the margin of the lake.

"I had better reveal myself at once," thought Tom.

He stood up on the rock, put his whistle to his lips, and blew the signal for "Fall in." The voices, the movements, of the people ceased as by magic. They looked around in amazement, facing down the nullah, from which direction numbers of the fighting-men came running. These asked eagerly where the m'sungu was: they had heard his whistle; he must be among them again. But no one had seen him. Again the whistle sounded. Some of the men glanced upward, and saw Tom standing on the rock. For one moment they were transfixed with surprise; then a great shout broke from their lips; the women and children flocked around them, leaping and screaming with excitement and joy; and Tom wondered what effect the hubbub would have on the enemy waiting in the ravine.

Signalling that he would soon be with them, he returned to the spot where he had left Reinecke and Mwesa. The German gave signs of returning consciousness. In a minute or two he opened his eyes and stared dully up into Tom's face. Recollection came to him gradually; he tried to rise, his hand again seeking his revolver. The holster was empty; Mwesa had taken that weapon, and also his sword.

"You are my prisoner," said Tom. "We will now go down to my camp."

Reinecke cursed him.

"You strike a one-armed, helpless man," he said. "You treacherous hound!"

Tom was taken aback by this strange accusation. He had had so little experience of the German soldier that he did not understand that curious attitude of mind which views everything a German does as right and proper, but the same thing done by others as infamous and base. The charge of treachery from the man who had trapped him, left him to die, and only a few hours before this moment had fired at him when he too had been taken unawares, struck him dumb. Then, curtly, impatiently, he said:

"Come, we will waste no time. You can walk, I think. Mwesa, lead on. Find the way into the nullah. Follow him, Herr Reinecke: I shall be two paces behind you."

Mwesa scampered down the steep descent like a young roe: the others

followed more prudently. When Tom arrived at the rock from which he had viewed the camp, Mwesa was not to be seen. But a moment later his laughing face showed round the base of the rock, like a child playing peep-bo.

"Dis way, sah," he cried; "dis way."

At one side of the rock was the top of a narrow channel that wound down the face of the cliff. So steep was this latter that not even a mountain goat could have scaled it safely; but Nature had so carved the channel that it formed a zigzag pattern, like those paths which the art of man has cut in precipitous cliffs at popular resorts on our coasts. Down this rough path the two men followed Mwesa, hidden from the sight of those below by the contour of the cliff.

About twenty feet above the ground the zig-zagging ceased, and the channel took a sheer drop, almost entirely concealed by bushes. While Tom, standing on a ledge of rock, wondered how the final descent was to be achieved, Mwesa had found the way. Clinging to the tough stems and branches of the bushes, he went down a few feet, then stopped and turned his face upward.

"Ladder here, sah," he called.

The Arab had, in fact, so bent the branches and stems, and so connected them by means of strands of creepers, as to form a light ladder that spanned the last dozen feet of the descent. Hidden by the overgrowing vegetation, it might have been passed and repassed hundreds of times without being discovered.

Mwesa clambered down, and bounded among the excited people who had clustered in expectation of the m'sungu's reappearance. After a minute or two, Reinecke emerged from the foliage, and stood glowering, an image of sullen rage, upon the negroes who had once owned him master. Fingers were pointed at him, yells of derision mocked him: even the children strutted in front of him, as if to vaunt their freedom. One of the elder men stepped forward with menacing gestures: but he was checked by a stern command from Tom, who had just appeared. He was hailed with renewed shouts of triumph; some of the people threw themselves at his feet, as slaves bow to their lord. Tom's lips quivered; he felt a lump rise in his throat. Then he called to Mwesa, who was pouring out an eloquent story to the crowd surrounding him.

"Go down to the barricade," he said. "See whether the guards are at their posts, and bring Mirambo to me."

He signed to the people to fall back to their huts, and beckoned to Moses, who had been hanging on the outskirts of the crowd, looking with a somewhat nervous and sheepish air at his late master.

"Give Herr Reinecke some food," said Tom. "Herr Reinecke, you will remain where you are for the present. You cannot escape: if you make an attempt you will be shot. I will give you proper quarters presently."

The German responded with a glare of venomous hate, and turned away.

CHAPTER XVI–DRAWN BLANK

When Mirambo came up, hard on the heels of Mwesa, he too fell on his face and greeted Tom with an air of mingled humility and gratitude. In the absence of the m'sungu his position had been a difficult one. The men of the hunting party had come dropping in singly and in small groups, and the story they told, magnifying the numbers of the enemy, had struck consternation and fear into the hearts of the people. If the m'sungu was gone, what would become of them? Who would tell them what to do? How could they deal with white men's war-power without a white man to help them? Some of the weaker-kneed among them had talked of fleeing from the nullah and betaking themselves to M'setu, and it had needed all Mirambo's authority to check the panic. He had reminded them of what the m'sungu had already done: how he had escaped the snares of Reinecke, quelled the German drill-sergeant with a look, led them forth with Reinecke himself a prisoner, shown them how to fortify the nullah, driven back the enemy. Surely one who had done all this would not now fall a prey to the evil men; surely he would come back to them.

Strangely enough, as Tom thought, the old chief's arguments had been strongly backed by the askaris, who, as fighting-men, were held in respect by the Wahehe. They expressed the utmost confidence that the m'sungu would return, and declared for holding the nullah at least until it was definitely known what had become of him. No doubt their motive was complicated by fear of the consequences if they fell into German hands and were treated as deserters; but Tom did not know this, and when he heard of their loyalty he abandoned his last objections, and resolved to incorporate them in his fighting force.

He listened to Mirambo's story, interpreted by Mwesa, only for a minute or two, for there was work to be done. During Mwesa's absence he had rapidly made his plans. The German askaris in the ravine above had almost certainly heard the shouts which had greeted his arrival. Their officer would send men forward to discover the meaning of the shouts, and what had happened to Reinecke and the Arab. They would no doubt move with caution, and, unfamiliar with the ground, would take some time in scouting over the rough, steep slopes,

and would probably hesitate to adventure into the cleft which dropped deep into the unknown. If they came so far as to find the body of Haroun, they were more likely to hasten back with the news than to court danger or death themselves by descending lower. What action, then, would the lieutenant take? He would wish to learn his superior officer's fate, probably come down with his men, and, if he discovered the passage into the nullah, might risk an attack.

Tom felt that he must first guard against this. Getting Mirambo to choose a dozen of the best shots, he sent them up the ladder, with orders to post themselves in the cleft behind bushes or boulders, and fire at the enemy if they appeared. Though outnumbered, with the advantage of position and surprise they could probably check the descent. In case they should be driven back, he ordered Mirambo himself to hold thirty men under cover near the margin of the lake, and at the same time to keep Reinecke under guard. Mirambo was the last man in the world to be overcome by any German blandishments.

The non-combatants–old men, women and children–must be protected from harm. He ordered them to withdraw some little distance down the nullah, out of range of fire either from above or from the ground at the foot of the cliff.

For himself, he had resolved on a venturesome, if not a risky, course. There were still a few hours of daylight left–long enough to lead a force out of the nullah, along the foothills above, to the ravine where the enemy were encamped. The probabilities were that, met by rifle-fire as they descended the cleft, they would hesitate to press an attack against unknown numbers, and make their way back to headquarters to report the disappearance of their captain and the necessity of larger forces. Tom thought that with luck he might reach the mouth of the ravine in time to ambush them, cut them off, and capture them all. His men being only partly trained, he would need perhaps twice as many as the enemy numbered, which meant almost all the Wahehe who were able to shoot. But his new-born confidence in his askaris led him to adopt the bold course of leaving them to defend the southern end of the nullah. It was scarcely likely that another hostile force was approaching in that direction: Reinecke had probably been confident of an easy victory through the back door. Yet nothing should be left to chance; and the defence of the barricade might be safely entrusted for a few hours to the askaris and the remnant of the Wahehe, with Mirambo and his party at hand as reinforcements in case of need.

Tom lost no time in making these arrangements, and an hour after his return he led some eighty men out through the barricade, swung round to the right, and climbed the foothills over which the course of the ravine lay.

"They'll have to carry me back," thought Tom, before he had walked a mile. "Didn't know I was so fagged."

Tom, indeed, had been drawing rather heavily on his physical reserves, and to-day for the first time weariness warned him against overdoing it. Now, more than ever, was it necessary that he should not break down, for he felt certain that the difficulties of his people were only beginning.

Having already been on his feet for eight or nine hours, he found that march of a few miles, at the close of the day, more exhausting than he would have imagined. The country was broken and hilly, now bare rock, now soft spongy ground cumbered with tangled vegetation and overshadowed by forest trees. But the chance of trapping the force that had been sent to trap him sustained his spirits; and the mind can, for a time, compel the body to feats beyond its normal strength. His men, fresh, vigorous, inspirited by the return of their leader and the recapture of Reinecke, marched on with eagerness to reach their goal: their enthusiasm was itself a stimulant to him.

There was no path along those rugged, wooded foot-hills. The sun was blanketed by the rain-laden sky. It was possible only to guess their course; and Tom, seeing by his watch that little more than half-an-hour of daylight was left, began to fear that darkness would surprise him before he should have struck upon the ravine. But at this very moment of misgiving he was almost at the edge. A few yards farther brought him to a sharp declivity. He ordered his men to halt, advanced with Mwesa through the low-growing trees, and looking cautiously to right and left, beheld the long hollow that was his journey's end.

It appeared to him that he had hit the ravine at a spot half-way up its length. None of the enemy was in sight. The askaris, if they remained where he had last seen them, were probably some distance to the right; the sentries at the mouth of the ravine must be three or four hundred yards to the left. These latter must be secured if his plan was to have full success; so, returning to his men, he chose four to accompany him and Mwesa, and hastened along through the scrub near the brink of the ravine.

Scouting with circumspection, he arrived at the place where the steep sides fell to the level of the surrounding country. The sentries were not where they had been. He sent Mwesa to worm his way across under cover of the bushes and to see if he could track the men to another post. The boy returned sooner than he had expected.

"Fink all gone, sah," said he.

"The sentries, you mean?"

"All fella askaris, sah. All gone, no fear."

"How do you know?"

Mwesa looked down at Tom's feet.

"Dey hab got big boots like sah. Sah come see."

Tom went down with him into the midst of the long grass and the bushes

that covered the centre of the ravine. Broken twigs and branches and long swathes of trampled grass marked the recent passage of men, and Mwesa pointed out on the damp soil the impressions of heavy boots, and showed him that in the freshest the heels were up, not down, the ravine. A few minutes' investigation in both directions placed it beyond doubt that, not long before, a body of men had marched westward into the forest.

"Too late!" muttered Tom. "But we must make sure. Mwesa, scout along to the cleft. Be quick, for it will be dark soon."

He returned to his party, dragging his weary limbs. In twenty minutes Mwesa came back, hot and breathless.

"All gone, sah. Haroun him stay: big birds dey find him."

Tom shuddered. The vultures were already at work. "Come, let us get back," he said. "Get some of the men to make a *machila*. I can't walk another step, and we can't venture the climb down in the dark."

With two rifles and some pliant tendrils a litter was soon constructed, and reclining on this Tom headed the march home. He was tired and disappointed; the men were crestfallen: some asked why the m'sungu did not pursue the askaris. But Tom was in no condition to follow up the enemy, even if his reason had favoured the idea. He could only guess at what had happened: that the lieutenant, alarmed by the distant shouts, had gone forward, discovered the dead Arab, inferred that Reinecke also had come to grief, and concluding that the game was up, had withdrawn his men hurriedly and in something of a panic. To pursue in darkness would be folly. Tom consoled himself for his disappointment with the reflection that, after all, more prisoners would have been a nuisance–so many more mouths to feed, and a burden to the guards.

The homeward journey was slow and laborious: only by the touch of their bare feet could the Wahehe distinguish in the darkness the tracks they had made as they came. Tom slumbered a part of the way, and when, at a late hour, they regained the nullah, he waited only to hear that nothing had disturbed the peace and to arrange for Reinecke's accommodation during the night, before seeking his hut and throwing himself, worn out, upon the mattress of plaited grass which some of the women had made for him.

Next morning, after ten hours' unbroken sleep, he rose, a little stiffly, to face the work of another day.

"First job, to dispose of Reinecke," he thought.

The German was in a furious temper.

"You wish to kill me," he cried, when Tom came to him. "You put me in a wretched native hut, without a fire, without blankets, to perish of cold, to be struck with ague. As a prisoner of war–you call it war?–I demand proper treatment, according to international law."

"I don't know anything about international law," said Tom; "common law and common sense would set you dangling from a tree, I suspect. But I'm not your judge. While you're here you'll be treated like the other prisoners. You'll join them on the island yonder."

"I must have a separate hut. In Germany officers and men are never lodged together: it is forbidden."

"We are not in Germany," said Tom, curtly. "The hut is large enough to hold you all: there's no room on the island for another, even if time could be spared to build it. If you feel contaminated by the company of fellow Germans you can spend your leisure in making for yourself a partition: there's plenty of material on the island. You can then live in your own first-class compartment: the men will probably prefer it."

Reinecke was patently surprised. The young cub, as he might have put it, seemed to have suddenly grown up. Even at that last dinner in the bungalow Tom had not taken quite this tone with him. He said no more at the moment: his thoughts were his own. In a few minutes he was punted across the lake on the raft, and left on the shore of the island to introduce himself to his fellow captives. Tom smiled as he watched them salute him, then step hastily aside as, without returning their salute, he pushed his way into the hut. In a few moments he came out and, gnawing his moustache, gazed across at the village, and up the side of the nullah. His lips moved: then he wheeled round and re-entered the hut, whence he emerged no more that day.

It was a busy day for Tom. He saw that the failure of Reinecke's expedition was sure to provoke the Germans to a serious attempt to deal with him. They would no longer hold him lightly, and suppose that he could be snuffed out by a handful of Askaris. When they came, they would come in force. It might be in a day or two; it might be perhaps after a week or more; much would depend on the state of the weather. Were the interval long or short, it must be utilised to the full in strengthening his position.

An obvious precaution was to establish scouting posts between Bismarckburg and the scene of the previous day's adventures. Tom went over the ground with some of M'setu's men who were in his regular service as scouts, and fixed on two well-wooded knolls that commanded the track leading to the ravine. He surveyed the ravine itself with a view to fortifying it–or rather of blocking the way to the cleft–and came to the conclusion that this would involve too much labour, even if it could be achieved with any success. A more feasible scheme was to form barricades of rocks and trees at various points on the narrow cleft. These, held by a few men, would interpose awkward obstacles to any force that attempted to attack by the newly discovered back door.

Tom set some of his men to work at once in erecting three barricades, some

thirty yards apart. Then he clambered down by the ladder, and realising that that ingenious contrivance would hardly bear the strain of frequent use, gave directions that it should be strengthened. By this means communication between the nullah and the cleft above would always be safe: while in the event of his men being forced back and followed by the enemy, the ladder could be cut away, leaving the attackers in the air, so to speak, nearly twenty feet above the ground.

All day the sky threatened rain, and distant rumbles of thunder were heard; but the storm held off until these preliminary measures had been carried out. Soon after dark the heavens opened. Thunder growled, cracked, bellowed: the air was one vast shaking noise. A vivid glare rose up from the horizon until all the world seemed on fire. Great bursts of light, now in one quarter, now in another, shot through the sky like gigantic squibs; and dazzling streaks of jagged brilliance rent the firmament. And then, in the midst of this wonderful phantasmagoria, it was as if the fire-maker set out to quench the universal conflagration. Down fell the rain, in sheets, in torrents, in cascades of hailstones as large as eggs. The people cowered, shivering, shrieking, in their huts. Out of the boiling lake the stream poured in angry flood, hissing and raving like a maddened beast let loose. Tingling in every nerve, Tom watched the amazing storm for hour after hour: what were man's puny battles compared with this titanic conflict of the elements? And it was only when the thunder died away in sullen mutterings, and the lightning gave pale flickers and tired gleams, but still the rain roared unceasingly–it was only then that Tom became alive to the very practical question: would huts, stores, barricades, all be washed away?

CHAPTER XVII–A GERMAN OFFER

For the rest of the night Tom got no sleep. Listening to the rush of the torrent through the nullah he waited anxiously for the dawn. As soon as there was

light enough, he went out to see what havoc the storm had wrought. The worst anticipations were not realised, but the damage was serious enough. Some of the huts were broken down; one or two of those nearest to the stream had been washed away; the defences at the bend almost obliterated; and the barricade of trees at the entrance of the nullah showed many gaps. But the slope of the ground and the depth of the channel had been sufficient to carry off almost all the overflow from the lake, and there seemed to be no danger of the village on the higher ground at the north end being flooded out. The prisoners' hut on the island had suffered nothing except from leaks in the roof, and these Reinecke had at once set his subordinates to repair.

The rain had ceased, and as soon as it was possible to dig, Tom ordered his men to reconstruct the damaged defences. More trees were packed into the barricades, the ditch outside it was widened and deepened; the trenches on the slopes were recut and strengthened, and a communication trench was dug from each to the bed of the nullah, so that their garrisons could be reinforced at need, under cover from the enemy's fire. The trench and parapet at the bend were also restored, and at each end, some twenty-five feet above the bed of the nullah, a small blockhouse of rocks was erected, in which half a dozen men, through apertures left for rifle fire, could enfilade any attacking party that advanced on either bank of the stream.

Tom had hitherto made no attempt to communicate with the British authorities beyond the border. He reflected that their hands were full, and while he was in no immediate danger he hesitated to embarrass them. Now, however, when it was clear that the Germans would make a serious effort to deal with him, and major operations were interrupted by the rains, he resolved to try to get a message through to Abercorn, explaining his position. He wrote on leaves from his pocket-book a brief account of what he had been doing, made a copy, gave the duplicated messages to two of the best scouts from M'setu's contingent, and sent them off on successive days. The papers, which they carried folded in their loin-cloths, were addressed "The Commanding Officer, Abercorn." A single man should be able to cross the hills and the Neu Langenburg road without much risk of being caught. The journey might take three or four days, so that it would be at least a week before an answer could be received, even in the most favourable circumstances.

Several days passed, on most of which rain fell. Feeling pretty sure that the enemy would not attack in such weather, Tom took every possible advantage of the breathing space, improving the defences, drilling his men, and shooting game in the neighbourhood, in order to eke out his fast diminishing stores of food. He also practised his scouts in the system of shouting messages, and was not much surprised to find that some of his posts had been deserted: it was hardly to be ex-

pected that M'setu's men, undisciplined negroes, would show fortitude enough to remain at their stations in pelting rain-storms. But since it was of vital importance that the scouting should be efficient, he considered how best to surmount the very real difficulty that had manifested itself. After a good deal of thought, he decided to reduce the number of posts, retaining only those that commanded the main routes, and to have these frequently inspected by Mirambo or some other trustworthy native. With Mirambo he himself made a round of the posts–a task that occupied him for two days–and as the result of this personal visit found himself able to devise a simplified scheme that promised to be successful.

The outermost line of posts was established on the hills north of the Neu Langenburg road, in such spots that any movement on about twenty miles of its course must be seen by at least one of his men. Taking this line as the base of a triangle, and the mouth of the nullah as the apex, he arranged for posts to be held along the sides, and also on perpendicular lines to the sides from the base. While he thus somewhat narrowed the area that was watched, he concentrated observation on the quarters from which danger was most to be expected, and, needing fewer men, was able to give them shorter spells.

On returning one day from a shooting expedition, he learnt that messages had been received not long before from a scouting post near the Neu Langenburg road. The first message was that an armed party had been seen marching from the direction of Bismarckburg; the second, that the party consisted of two white officers with a number of askaris, and had struck into a track which would lead past Reinecke's plantation to the nullah. One of the askaris carried a white flag.

"Parlementaires," thought Tom. "They want to negotiate? Well, I must hear what they have to say."

For a moment he thought of going out at the head of a party of his men to meet the enemy; but reflecting that he had no precise information of their number, and that their object might be to lure him from his defences, he decided to remain behind the barricade.

Presently another message came through his chain of scouts, announcing that the strangers had just passed a post about ten miles from the nullah. After some two hours and a half he learnt that they were now within five miles. Thereupon he ordered his men to take up their allotted positions behind the barricade and in the trenches, and sent Mwesa to the nearest scouting post, about two miles distant, to watch for the enemy's coming, and to run back and tell him how many they were. Mwesa was the only negro whom he could trust to form even an approximate estimate of their number.

In due time the lad came back with the report that the askaris were no more than twenty. Reassured that no attack was intended by so small a force, Tom awaited their arrival with composure.

"But they mustn't come too close," he thought, "or they'll see too much."

He scribbled in German a note on a leaf from his pocket-book–

"Mr. Willoughby presents his compliments," he wrote, "and has the honour to say that he, with ten men, will meet the recipient of this note, also with ten men, at the edge of the forest, three hundred yards from his position. Any attempt to advance across the clearing will be resisted."

"Run and give that to the commanding officer," he said to Mwesa, "and come back with his answer."

"Him say no come back," said Mwesa, looking uncomfortable.

"Not at all. He won't prevent you. Be quick."

The boy ran off, disappeared in the forest, and in twenty minutes was seen speeding back again.

"You have an answer?" asked Tom.

"Him look at paper, den laugh and talk to other man; me no savvy what say. Den he tell me all right."

"In English?"

"Yes, sah, he talk English same as me."

It was not long before a party of men emerged from the forest beyond the clearing, and halted. There were ten askaris, one of whom carried a white flag; and in the tall German accompanying them Tom recognised the officer who had been his fellow-passenger on the *Hedwig von Wissmann* months before.

Collecting the ten men whom he had already chosen, Tom passed out through the barricade and advanced to meet the German.

"Good day, Mr. Willoughby," said Major von Rudenheim, saluting. "You will remember me, no doubt. We were on board the *Hedwig von Wissmann* together."

"I remember you, Major," replied Tom, a little puzzled by this tone of friendliness; "but I was not aware that I had come within your line of vision."

"Oh yes, I saw you," returned the major with a slight smile, "and I have heard a good deal about you since. But you have got yourself into a very awkward position, young man."

He spoke in the tone a benevolent uncle might have used towards a small boy.

"Yes, your people have found it awkward," said Tom, smoothly.

"You take me too literally, Mr. Willoughby. But youth is often adventurous, and thoughtless; you do not quite realise the consequences of your rash actions. It is a pity that a private quarrel should have led you to take steps which bring you into conflict with the military power. The outbreak of war, of course, made you a public enemy; but if you had not been in such haste to pay off old scores it would have been easy to arrange for your departure into British territory."

"I assure you, Major, what you call a private quarrel had nothing whatever to do with my action. We will leave my private affairs out of the question. As you say, I became a public enemy. Well?"

"You do not understand, perhaps, that we should be justified in treating you as a spy." The major's tone was not quite so friendly now.

"I don't understand what you are driving at," said Tom, bluntly. "Hadn't you better come to the point?"

A flicker of annoyance passed over the German's face. It vanished instantly, and when he spoke again it was in the suave tones he had employed at the beginning of the interview.

"I come to make a reasonable–a friendly arrangement. There are certain Germans, I believe, in your hands. I am not sure whether—-"

"To save time–I have a sergeant, two privates, and Mr. Reinecke."

"Ah! And also certain askaris—-"

"Africans, not Germans."

"But in our service, therefore Germans. Also a number of natives who were being recruited for our army–potential Germans. Now, since it is obvious that you cannot maintain your position indefinitely, you will no doubt see the reasonableness of the proposal I put to you, namely, that you surrender the German subjects you hold as prisoners, in exchange for a safe-conduct for yourself and any twelve men you may select, to the British lines."

"And the rest? Besides the men, I have many women and children. What will you do with them?"

"That will be in the discretion of my superiors. The non-combatants will no doubt return to their employment, from which they were enticed away. As for the able-bodied men, technically they are mutineers and liable to be shot. But in consideration of their ignorance they may possibly be pardoned and allowed to re-enlist."

"It is hardly a *quid pro quo*, is it?" said Tom. "You must be aware that I could at any time during the past two or three months have made my way to the British lines with all my able-bodied men without a safe-conduct. You propose that I should save my skin at the expense of handing back those poor creatures to the slavery they have been glad to escape from?"

"What are the niggers to you, Mr. Willoughby? The war, *ipso facto*, has dissolved your partnership with Mr. Reinecke. Your interest in the plantation and its workers has lapsed."

"Far from it: my interest in the workers is greater than ever. I enticed them away, you say; and believing that, you invite me to betray them! Upon my word, Major von Rudenheim, those who sent you with an invitation like that must have so low a standard of honour that I should prefer not to trust to any assurances

on their part."

"You impeach my honour, sir?" cried the German, with an angry glare.

"I take it that you are obeying orders, Major," replied Tom, quietly. "Those niggers, as you call them, are under my protection: I say that any one who proposes that I should abandon them on the terms you offer holds *my* honour very lightly. I don't think there is anything more to be said."

"Only this, sir. You reject a reasonable offer: I have not stated the alternative. The niggers are under your protection! It will not serve them. They will be exterminated, and you—-"

"Yes?"

The major laughed.

"You will fall–on the field of honour!" he said with a sneer, "or be captured and shot."

And with that he turned on his heel and strode off at the head of his men.

CHAPTER XVIII–A GOOD HAUL

The interview with Major von Rudenheim left Tom soberly reflective. There could no longer be the least doubt that he was to be attacked. The attempt to come to terms with him seemed to show that the Germans were now under no illusions as to the strength of his position, and wished to avoid operations which must involve the employment of a larger force than the objective, from a strictly military point of view, warranted. But their prestige was at stake throughout the whole region. The native tribes, always restive under their galling yoke, would run out of hand when it became generally known that the German power was being set at defiance by an Englishman with a handful of negroes, and that Germans were held in captivity. The menace of a great rising of the blacks would grow increasingly serious, and the higher authorities, having proved the uselessness

of light measures, would now organise an expedition in strength.

Tom felt confident in his ability to hold his own behind his defences, provided they were not attacked by artillery; and the country between the nullah and Bismarckburg, at all times difficult, was now rendered so much more difficult by the rains that the transport of guns would be a formidable undertaking. It might prove to be impossible. In that case the attack should fail. Tom had under his command a hundred and forty-seven able-bodied men, of whom a score were trained askaris, some fifty Wahehe were fairly efficient with the rifle, another thirty could handle fire-arms well enough to do considerable execution at short range, and the remainder were expert with the spears they had made for themselves. Behind their fortifications, each man would perhaps be equal to three outside.

On the other hand, the difficulties of the defence were serious enough. Provisions were running perilously low; if the nullah were besieged, the end must come in about ten days. There was, further, the question of the wounded. Casualties were bound to occur; the medical stores brought from the plantation would be of little use in dealing with gunshot wounds: there were no surgical appliances whatever. If Tom had known beforehand what he was to learn before many days had passed, he might have met Rudenheim's offer with a counter-proposal, instead of rejecting it outright. New to warfare, he was ignorant of what fighting with modern weapons means; but he foresaw suffering, and felt some uneasiness in contemplating a possible long casualty list.

It was time to dispatch another messenger to Abercorn. Neither of his former messengers had returned; possibly neither had got through; but with the crisis imminent it was right to put the position clearly before the British authorities. He adopted the same plan as before: sent duplicate notes on successive days, announcing his expectation of attack, and stating his determination to resist as long as his provisions lasted.

Feeling it unwise to leave the nullah himself, he allowed Mirambo to lead short shooting expeditions in the neighbourhood, to replenish the larder. He devoted all his own energies to the maintenance and strengthening of his fortifications, the drilling and exercising of the men, and the allotment of duties to the non-combatants. Of these last every man, and many women, had their definite tasks–to bring food and ammunition to the fighting-posts, to remove and tend the wounded, and so on.

His plan of defence was to post twenty men on the cleft at the north end of the nullah, in case the enemy should again attempt an entrance by the "back door," and to employ all the rest in the nullah itself. Seventy men were told off to hold the first line–the barricade and the trenches on the flanks; the remainder, in support, were to man the communication trench, which led to a fold of the cliff

face about a hundred and fifty yards in the rear, and gave complete cover from enemy fire.

Waiting for critical events always puts a strain upon even the stoutest-hearted. A schoolboy dreads the interval between the "call-up" and the head-master's thrashing more than the thrashing itself. The soldier in the trenches knows more of the agony of fear when he awaits the word of command than when he is actually going "over the top." As day followed day, and no message came through the chain of scouts, Tom found constant activity the only sedative for his overstrung nerves.

Two little incidents relaxed the tension. One morning, just as he was leaving his hut, he heard a terrible shriek from the lake side. Rushing forward, he saw, near the brink, a woman waving her arms frantically, and calling to a little toddling child, who was wading in the shallow water towards a bright flower a few yards away. In an instant Tom saw the cause of the mother's agitation. Just beyond the glowing blossom, a few inches above the surface, lay what appeared to be a log of greenish wood. Tom sprang into the water, caught up the child, and darted back; and the seeming log sank with a gurgle and disappeared. Crocodiles had been rarely seen since the occupation of the nullah; apparently they had been scared away by the noise of so many people, which, however, had now lost its terrors for them. Tom gave the child back to his grateful mother, and, using one of the few phrases in the Wahehe tongue that he had picked up, bade the woman be careful.

It was in the afternoon of the next day that one of the messengers, sent out more than a week before, returned: the other was never seen again. The man was very proud of his success, and exhibited a small brass rod given him as a reward by the m'sungu in Abercorn. Tom was more interested to learn whether he had brought an answer to his message, and the negro produced from his loin-cloth a small dirty envelope. Tearing it open, Tom took out the still dirtier folded scrap of paper, which he recognised at once as a leaf from his own pocket-book. One side bore his message, now almost illegible; on the other he read the few words–

Hold fast. *T. Burnaby, Major.*

"He's short of paper, I suppose," Tom thought; he learnt later that in the army a superior officer writes his reply to a communication from a subaltern on the back. "But he might have said a little more. Doesn't promise anything. Cold comfort, Major Burnaby. Yet it *is* comfort after all. He wouldn't say 'hold fast' if he didn't think there was a chance. Still, I'm glad I sent a second message: hope he gets it."

Towards ten o'clock on the fifth morning after the interview with Major von Rudenheim, Tom was superintending work on the parapets of the trenches when a message came from the nearest of his scouting posts. From hill to hill had been shouted the news that a large column of white men, askaris and porters, was marching along the Neu Langenburg road from the direction of Bismarckburg.

"At last!"

Tom's exclamation had something of relief, from the strain of suspense; something of anxiety, for what was to come. It was not certain, of course, that the nullah was the enemy's objective, but he must act as if it were. Within a few minutes every man had gone to his allotted post.

The source of the message was a hill many miles to the westward of the track by which Rudenheim had come. Two hours afterwards it was reported that the column had reached that track, but had halted in a glade beside the road; the men had thrown themselves on the ground.

"They're taking a rest after their hilly march," thought Tom. "Or perhaps they intend a night attack."

But a few minutes later another message suggested a different explanation. From the further-most eastern post came word that a smaller party was marching from the direction of Neu Langenburg westward. It was formed mainly of porters, with a number of askaris and two white men. Was it not a fair inference that the junction of the road with the northward track had been appointed as rendezvous for both the columns, and that either the one was before its time or the other was late?

Tom made a rapid mental calculation, congratulating himself on the personal knowledge of the road he had obtained in the course of his round of inspection of the scouting posts. When the second column was sighted (that is, only a few minutes before he heard of it), it must have been nearly thirty miles from the rendezvous. Now, the spot where the first column had halted was not the point on the Neu Langenburg road that was nearest to the nullah. Some ten miles east of it there was a scouting post closer to the nullah by about five miles; but the way to it, though shorter, was much more arduous, and for that reason was not at all likely to be chosen by the Germans as the route to their objective. It seemed to Tom that by a rapid march with a light force he might reach this spot on the road before the eastern column, and, given favourable circumstances, prevent this column from joining the other. He had a rosy vision of snapping up the stores it was conveying, with the result that the threatened attack on the nullah would be at least delayed, while his own resources would be increased.

There were two risks to be taken into consideration: the first, that the western column might not await the arrival of the eastern before resuming its march to the nullah; the second, that the road between them would be so closely pa-

trolled as to render intervention impossible. The scouts, however, had not reported the passing of patrols; and as to the first risk, it seemed unlikely that the officer in command would make any further movement until his force was complete. The prize was great, in Tom's eyes well worth the risk, and after a few minutes' cogitation he determined to "put his fate to the touch."

Choosing forty of his best men to accompany him, with Mwesa and two of M'setu's scouts, and leaving Mirambo in charge at the barricade, he started southward. The route he must follow led over very hilly country, covered in parts with forest, through which it might sometimes be necessary to cleave a way. For this purpose he had ordered some of his men to bring axes and bill-hooks, though he hoped that the scouts, knowing the district thoroughly, would find a practicable track, and so avoid the delays which cutting a path must involve.

It was fortunate that since the great storm the rainfall had been light; otherwise much of the ground would now have become swamp, and put him at a disadvantage compared with the enemy on the well-kept high road. Tom had always been known among his friends as a good "foot-slogger," and, hardened as he now was by constant exercise, he had no difficulty in keeping up with his lithe and limber guides. The party covered the first twelve miles in less than three hours, over a track that ran almost due south from the nullah, and was very little obstructed. Then, however, they came into broken country, with steeper ascents and descents and thicker vegetation, where the pace was necessarily slackened. Once or twice the men had to use their implements, and Tom chafed at the delay; but he let no sign of impatience escape him, and found a few cheery words of praise a potent stimulus to his willing negroes.

Presently they came to a hill-stream flowing southward. An idea struck Tom.

"Does this stream cross the high road?" he asked.

The scouts replied through Mwesa that it did.

"Then is there a bridge?"

He learnt that a bridge spanned the stream some distance east of the post for which he had been making. The stream, which was much swollen after a period of heavy rain, had cut a deep and wide channel, and sometimes rose to within an arm's-length of the bridge. Now, however, the rainfall for some days having been slight, it was likely that the water was two men's height below the trestles of which the bridge was made.

This information caused Tom to change his objective. Instead of continuing along the forest track that led directly to the scouting post, he followed the course of the stream, and in some twenty minutes came in sight of the bridge far below. Calling a halt, he sent one of the men to the scouting post on a hill-top invisible from his present position, to inquire of the man stationed there whether he had

seen anything of the enemy's columns, or of patrols. The scout's report being reassuring, Tom led his party down to the road, through the brushwood, rank grass, and bushy shrubs that lined the bank of the stream.

The ground within twenty yards of the road had evidently been at some time cleared of the taller growing vegetation, no doubt to destroy cover. But the lesser plants had sprung up only the more thickly, furnishing safer cover even than the larger shrubs and trees above.

Tom's first idea had been to have the bridge hacked down. This would have effectually checked the march of the columns along the road, and the stream was here so wide and deep, and its banks so steep, that the enemy could not have crossed it until the bridge had been repaired. Second thoughts raised an objection to this obvious measure. The column would almost certainly be preceded by an advance guard, who would discover that the bridge was broken and give warning. The main body would halt, and Tom would have no chance of getting possession of the stores without a fight. Ignorant of the strength of the column, he dared not risk exposing his small force of comparatively untrained men in the open. Unless he should see a fair prospect of dealing the enemy a "knock-out blow," he would do much better to keep his men out of sight, and remain content with having prevented the two columns from joining forces and thus delayed their advance on the nullah. But this would be only partial success: something more was wanted for complete satisfaction; and an examination of the bridge suggested to Tom what seemed a better way.

Having first sent a couple of scouts in each direction along the road to guard against surprise, he set three men with axes to cut nearly through two of the piles supporting the bridge, one up, the other down stream, just on the water line. A dozen others he sent a few yards along the stream to weave two long, stout ropes from rushes and creepers. Expert at this work, the natives in the course of an hour or so had completed two serviceable ropes about thirty yards in length. Tom tested them by means of an impromptu tug-of-war; then, the axe-men having long finished their part of the job, he himself attached the ropes to the weakened piles by means of bowlines in the notches and allowed them to sag into the water. At intervals he weighted them with stones in order to keep them below the surface, and carrying the free ends up stream, hid them in the vegetation at the foot of the bank. All these operations near the bridge were carried out by men wading in the water, in order that no tracks on the ground should betray them to the enemy scouts.

Tom had only just completed his preparations when the scouts he had sent eastward came running back with news that the enemy column was in sight. There were two white officers, and an innumerable company of porters and askaris The negro's inability to estimate number was a constant worry to Tom:

anything above ten might be reported as a host.

Withdrawing all his men about fifty yards up stream, and posting them under cover of the rushes, he gave them precise orders as to what they were to do when he blew his whistle. Until then no one was to whisper or make the slightest movement. Each man held his rifle with bayonet ready fixed. When he had proved that all were invisible from the road, Tom found a spot where, concealed himself, he had a clear view of the bridge.

He hoped that the period of waiting would not be long, for stillness and silence taxed the negroes more than anything else he could have demanded of them. Already there were signs of restlessness among them when, about half an hour after they had taken up their positions, he caught sight of two figures some distance away, approaching through the bush at the edge of the cleared space skirting the road. An urgent whisper reduced the Wahehe to stillness again. The two askaris came on quietly, pausing now and again to peer into the thickets beyond the clearing. Just before they reached the bridge they stepped into the road, and were joined by two more askaris who had emerged from the bush on the other side. The four men crossed the bridge together, separated at the western end, and pursued their way in couples as before.

A few minutes later four files of askaris followed. At a short interval came a connecting file, and then the main body, which consisted of two parties of askaris marching in fours, with a gang of porters between them. With each party there was a German N.C.O. Tom rapidly estimated that the askaris numbered about sixty in all.

When the first party reached the bridge, they broke step and formed two deep to cross. Tom waited until about twenty had gained the other side, then blew his whistle. The Wahehe sprang to their feet. Ten of them fired a volley at the enemy who were upon the bridge, then charged through the thin scrub upon those who had crossed and, startled by the shots and the cries, had wheeled round at the sharp order of their sergeant. Meanwhile twenty men, with Tom at their head, had dashed straight towards the road in the other direction until they had a clear view of the second party beyond the porters, then halted, fired one volley, and charged with the bayonet. At the same time, two groups of five rushed to the spot where the ends of the ropes lay hidden, seized them and hauled with a will. The nearer pile collapsed; the farther held until all ten men tugged at the same rope. Then it snapped like the other, and the whole central part of the bridge fell with a crash into the stream, carrying with it one or two of the rear files of the askaris.

Surprise is halfway to victory. Even European troops could hardly have avoided confusion, however short-lived, when suddenly beset at close quarters by an unsuspected enemy. The German sergeant who had crossed the bridge

hardly had time to bring his men into line before the Wahehe, yelling the war-cry of their tribe, were among them. They were severed from the other party by the broken bridge and the crowd of panic-stricken porters, who flung down their loads and fled helter-skelter into the bush. The sergeant and one or two more stood firm and were cut down; the rest turned and bolted across the road, seeking safety in the woods.

Meanwhile the sergeant in command of the second party, being farther from the bridge, had had a few seconds longer to prepare to meet the attack. Before Tom reached him he had halted his men, formed them up hurriedly, and ordered them to fix bayonets. But the time was all too short. The men were still fumbling when the impetuous Wahehe at Tom's heels had surged from the clearing on to the road. Tom made straight for the sergeant, and thrust at him with his bayonet. The German deftly parried the stroke, but before he could himself take the offensive Tom swung his rifle over and brought the butt up swiftly against his opponent's chin. The man fell like a log. His askaris did not await the touch of cold steel. Some flung up their hands, others took to their heels, the yelling Wahehe panting behind them. Tom became alive to the danger of his own men scattering in the pursuit and losing themselves in the forest. With loud blasts of his whistle he sounded the signal for recall. Some of the men obeyed instantly, but many minutes had passed before all returned, and the weapons of most of them bore witness to the work they had been doing.

Tom lost no time in taking stock of the situation. A few of the askaris had been killed by rifle-shots, a few by bayonets. About twenty were wounded, twelve so seriously that it was clear they could not be moved. Rather more than twenty had surrendered. One of the German was killed, the other lay where he had fallen. All the rest of the column were scattered through the bush.

Examining the loads dropped by the porters, Tom found that about half consisted of food, half of small-arm ammunition, both valuable booty. He distributed the bales among the unwounded prisoners and some of his own men, and sent them off at once on the return march to the nullah. For the wounded he could do nothing. He ordered those who were slightly injured to revive the sergeant with a dash of water from the stream, and to render first aid to their helpless comrades, knowing that help would be forthcoming from the western column as soon as fugitives had reported the disaster.

By this time the last of the Wahehe had rejoined, and Tom set off on the return journey, soon overtaking the carriers. He pressed the pace as much as possible, though the risk of being pursued was slight. Late in the afternoon, tired but jubilant, his men marched into the nullah, amid exultant shouts from their fellows who manned the defences and the non-combatants who crowded about them as they conveyed their spoils to the village.

Tom discovered that only three of his men had been slightly wounded.

"Almost a bloodless victory," he said to himself. "What wonderful luck!"

But the negroes, discussing the affair far into the night, did not speak of luck. They talked of "white man's medicine," and assured one another that their particular white man had better "medicine" than any one else in the world.

CHAPTER XIX–BELEAGUERED

Tom's first business was to examine his spoils of war. Besides a considerable quantity of maize and other foods intended for the askaris, there was a case containing coffee, condensed milk, tinned fruits, biscuits, and a few bottles of wine–articles which were very welcome additions to his private larder. Still more welcome were the boxes of ammunition. One small case held a couple of dozen metal objects whose use he did not know; but unscrewing the top of one of them he saw what he took to be combustible material of some kind, and confirmed his guess with a lighted match. These flares, he thought, might prove very useful in case of a night attack.

A commander's chief preoccupation, perhaps, is to divine the intentions of the enemy. What would the column from Bismarckburg do? Its officers had no doubt learnt within an hour or two what had happened to the eastern column, and it seemed probable that the disaster would have deranged their plans. In the course of the afternoon Tom received a message from the scout who had been stationed on the hill overlooking the enemy's halting place. The man reported that a number of the askaris had climbed the hill on different sides, and he had withdrawn to the next post northward. Tom guessed that the German commander had suspected the presence on the hill of scouts who had given him away, and had wisely determined to get rid of them. The post having been thus abandoned, the enemy's movements could not be known at the nullah until they had come within sight from the next post. That, however, was more than twenty miles

away, and Tom expected to receive warning of their approach in ample time to prepare for them. He conjectured that they would make no move until they had replaced the supplies of which they had been deprived.

He was not one to sit with folded hands, idly waiting. Next day, taking advantage of his largely increased stock of ammunition, he spent a good many hours in giving his men rifle practice. Owing to the nature of the position, firing, when the attack came, was likely to be at point blank range, so that it was unnecessary to instruct the mass of the natives in the mysteries of adjusting sights. But in view of the possibility of having to fall back up the nullah, he gave special instruction in long range firing to a score of the men who had had former experience with firearms.

More than once he had wished for the companionship of a man of his own race. Mirambo was a devoted lieutenant, but consultation with him could only be carried on through Mwesa, and his range of ideas was as limited as the boy's command of English. Tom felt the lack of an equal, a man of like upbringing and education, with whom he might have had those long and intimate talks in which mind reacts on mind with mutual helpfulness. More than ever he wished it now. An advancing enemy should be harassed; but Tom dared not leave the nullah himself, and neither Mirambo nor any other native had the cool judgment and the self-control necessary in the commander of even a disciplined force, much more in one who had only half-trained negroes under his leadership. Pitted against well-drilled askaris under capable German officers, the Wahehe would be hopelessly overmatched; they would almost certainly be outflanked and cut off, and Tom could not afford to lose men. Under a white man the risks would not have been so great. But it is idle to long for the impossible, and Tom realised that the only safe course was to keep the men with him. He gave orders to his scouts to fall back upon the nullah when the enemy advanced, but slowly, and noting their progress from point to point.

It was on the third day after the little action at the bridge that his furthermost scout reported the enemy were on the move. They had marched two miles along the track from the spot on which they had encamped beside the Neu Langenburg road. There was a great host of askaris, a great host of porters, and several white men. Some of the porters were dragging a long green bottle on wheels.

A long green bottle on wheels!

Tom felt a sinking at heart. What could this be but a field gun? The hosts of askaris did not dismay him: their numbers were, no doubt, exaggerated by the natives as usual; but he recognized that his barricade of trees would be a poor defence against shell-fire. There was little time to improvise adequate protection; but he set almost the whole of his men to work at once in digging a deep trench

a few yards behind the barricade.

At intervals during the rest of the day came further reports of the enemy's progress. Their advance was slow; it was clear that they could not reach the nullah before nightfall, and after their long march they would not make an immediate attack. Leaving a strong guard at the barricade, Tom went to his hut to fortify himself with sleep for what the next day might bring forth. But he found it impossible to rest. Now that the critical moment was approaching, his mind went over and over the situation. Had he left undone anything that might have been done? What would be the effect of shell-fire on his men–aye, and on himself? What were the enemy's plans? Would they, after battering down his outer defences, make a fierce charge into the nullah, relying on the defenders' demoralisation by the bombardment? Thinking over these and other questions, he felt that he had done all he could: the rest was on the knees of the gods.

Very early next morning he made a round of inspection, then issued through Mwesa his final orders. At the first sign of hostile action the men were to take up their allotted positions. He warned them that they must expect something worse than rifle bullets; but none were to leave the trenches without permission.

To give notice of the enemy's approach, he had posted scouts on the top of the sides of the nullah. But the first intimation came not from them, but from the enemy himself. About midday there was a dull boom in the south. A few seconds afterwards a shell burst with a shattering explosion on the hill face. A cry of astonishment and fear broke from some of the Wahehe; but Tom, in the centre of the trench with Mwesa at his side, calmed them by asking whether they supposed the shells would destroy the sides of the nullah. The response was an outburst of mocking laughter. It was a big noise, said the men; but the result had been only the fall of broken branches and fragments of rock. All was well.

The bombardment was continued and maintained steadily throughout the day. Some shells fell harmlessly on the steep sides of the nullah, others in the stream or among the bushes some distance up, others on the clearing outside. One struck the barricade, scattering boughs and twigs and making a gap; but none entered the trenches, and no man was hit. By the end of the day the natives had become indifferent to the bombardment, laughing and joking as they watched the smoke and the splinters which did them no harm. With sunset the shelling ceased, and movement in the lower part of the nullah became once more possible. So far, none of the enemy had been seen, and Tom wondered how the gunners had been able to range with even approximate accuracy on their unseen target. He never knew that Major von Rudenheim had not considered the bearing of a flag of truce inconsistent with the taking of careful measurements, by means of which he had fixed on several spots in the forest whence the nullah might be

shelled at known ranges.

It seemed to Tom hardly likely that the enemy would attempt a night attack before they had ascertained how much damage their gun had done. Nevertheless, he kept a large number of men under arms all night, relieving them every four hours. Two of the askaris were selected to light the captured flares and throw them over the barricade if the enemy made a move. In the middle of the night Tom snatched a few hours' sleep, leaving Mirambo in command; and when, shortly before dawn, on returning to his post, he learnt that no sounds had been heard from beyond the clearing, he felt sure that not even a reconnaissance had been attempted, or it would have been detected by the negroes' sharp ears.

It was a misty, drizzly morning, and the trees at the edge of the forest two hundred yards south of the nullah loomed through the murk only as a blurred mass. Tom gave orders to his scouts, before they climbed to their watch-posts above, to be specially vigilant. About seven o'clock a shell burst just behind the trench, and three of his men were slightly injured by splinters. The fact that the shell exploded before the boom of the gun was heard, showed that the gunners had drawn nearer during the night. This was the opening of a bombardment that continued for about three hours. Again little damage was done, most of the shells falling many yards behind the barricade.

Suddenly the firing ceased. The scouts, sharp-eyed though they were, had reported no movement among the trees, when there came the shrill blast of a whistle. Tom had posted himself with his men at the barricade, and he was just able to see, through the mist, a compact line of askaris break from cover. There was no attempt at skirmishing; the enemy rushed straight across the clearing towards the mouth of the nullah. Twenty yards behind them came a second line, and with these Tom saw the white helmet of a German officer.

He had given orders that no man was to fire until he sounded his whistle; but it was too much to expect that all his negroes, in the excitement of what was to many of them their first action, would exercise the self-control of disciplined troops. Only one of them, however, let off his rifle, and the single shot, fired at random, was hailed with a derisive yell by the askaris. Tom waited until they were half-way across the clearing; then he blew his whistle. Along the whole length of the barricade burst a shattering volley, not perfectly in time, but aimed low, as Tom had instructed. At so short a range the effect was inevitable. The first line of the assailants was broken; groans mingled with the shouts; the survivors wavered. The German non-commissioned officer from behind ran among them, threatening them with his revolver, and under this stimulus they charged forward, with the second line at their heels.

Now Tom gave the signal for a second volley. The enemy were barely fifty yards away. Many of them dropped; some flung themselves on the ground. The

few who struggled on found themselves baulked by the unsuspected moat; and the German having fallen, and no supports being at hand, they turned and fled. Before they reached the cover of the trees another storm of bullets swept upon them.

The Wahehe gave rein to their jubilation. They shouted, pranced, slapped their thighs. Some wished to dash out from the barricade in pursuit of the enemy; but Tom sternly ordered them to stand to attention. He was as much pleased as they were that the first assault had failed; unlike them, he knew that this was only the beginning of things. But it was of good omen for the future. Brief though the engagement had been, it had weakened the enemy in numbers, whether seriously Tom, ignorant of their reserves, could not tell. It had encouraged his own men; best of all, it had proved their steadiness. The three shots they had fired were all that their magazines contained; now that he could trust them not to waste ammunition, he could allow them to keep their magazines full.

For more than an hour there was no sign of a renewal of the attack. Then, however, the bombardment was resumed. It would appear that while the defenders' attention was wholly taken tip with repelling their assailants, some of the enemy, unseen in the rear, must have "spotted" for the gun, for the shells now began regularly to pierce the barricade, exploding on impact, and tearing away masses of the leafy boughs. Crouching at the bottom of the muddy trench, the Wahehe suffered no hurt except bruises and abrasions from splinters of wood and metal; and Tom resolved to have the breaches in the barricade repaired during the night.

But nightfall did not bring a cessation of the bombardment. Every few minutes throughout the night the shells cut new gaps. Work was impossible. Tom guessed that the enemy's object was not merely to prevent repairs, but to wear the defenders out by breaking their rest and keeping them constantly on the watch. In one way, however, the persistent bombardment was a source of satisfaction to him. While the shells continued to fall, there was no likelihood that the enemy would again assault. The prospect of a night attack had caused him much anxiety, for the negro's morale is never at its best in the dark; further, in darkness and confusion the weight of numbers would tell heavily against him.

Tom knew nothing about artillery, and began to feel a certain contempt for the gun, so slight was the material damage done by its shells. It was not, however, a field gun, but a small mountain gun, more easily transportable than a larger weapon. After the bombardment had continued for some hours neither he nor the men were much disturbed by the shell bursts, and he felt more and more confident of his ability to hold his own.

But when daylight came again he discovered that the enemy had had another purpose in their shelling. The bombardment continued. The scouts from

their high posts above reported that they saw men's heads in the ground on the further side of the clearing. Unable to make out what they meant, Tom climbed the side of the nullah under cover of the bushes until he reached the trench, and cautiously looked out across the open space beyond the barricade. Some thirty yards in advance of the edge of the forest, on the level of the ground, he saw the heads of several askaris moving up and down. At one moment a dozen heads were in sight, the next some of them disappeared, only to bob up again a few seconds later.

"By George, they're digging," he said to himself.

Quite ignorant of all military operations except those simple manoeuvres learnt in the course of field days with his school cadet corps, he was at first at a loss to understand why the enemy were digging a trench which was apparently to extend from the forest to the nullah. He had perhaps heard the word sap, but it conveyed nothing to his mind. It was not long, however, before he guessed the meaning of this unlooked-for movement. The enemy were digging a means of approach by which they would avoid the inevitable losses of a rush across the open, and the bombardment during the night had been designed partly to cover the sounds of their tools.

Watching intently, he noticed that the direction of the enemy's trench was not a straight line towards the barricade, but a series of short zigzags, obviously to minimise the risk of interference by enfilading fire.

"I ought to try to stop that little game," he thought.

He lifted his rifle, and took a shot at one of the moving heads. Instantly they all sank down; whether he had hit he could not tell; and a fusillade burst from the trees on the other side of the clearing. For some minutes he saw no more of the diggers; then a head and shoulders showed for a moment, a little nearer than the nearest head had been before.

"I can't stop them, apparently," he thought, "but I can delay them."

Hurrying down to the trench behind the barricade, he sent a dozen of his best marksmen, including a couple of the askaris, to the position he had left, with orders to fire at the diggers whenever they appeared. At their first shots there was another fusillade from the forest; then an interval of about a quarter of an hour during which the enemy was silent, though Tom's men continued to snipe. After that the enemy, having located the position of the trench, began sniping in turn; but the men were so well hidden that they suffered no loss. Presently, however, a shell burst a few yards above the trench, scattering splinters upon its occupants; and a few minutes later another shell fell plump on the parapet at the northern end, killing two men and wounding several. Tom at once withdrew the snipers from their position, and sent them into the similar trench on the other side of the nullah. From this they sniped for a considerable time before they were

again detected, and when shells began to fall there also, Tom removed the men to comparative safety in the bed of the nullah. The wounds inflicted by the shells were so severe that he did not feel justified in exposing his willing soldiers to injuries which he was unable to deal with satisfactorily.

The sniping being thus put an end to, and a sortie being out of the question, Tom had to reconcile himself to the inevitable. The bombardment slowed down, either because the enemy were satisfied that it had crushed opposition, or maybe to save ammunition. Several times during the day Tom went up to his observation post, and noted the progress of the zigzags. The sap was so narrow that the enemy would have to advance in single file, and he thought his men behind the barricade would have an easy task in shooting them down when the attack came.

Next morning, however, he saw with something like dismay that the enemy had dug a trench across the clearing, parallel with the barricade, and about eighty yards from it. The full meaning of their work was now clear to him. They would reach the trench by means of their zigzag path. When the word was given, they would swarm out, and though their first wave must suffer from the defenders' fire, the distance they had to cover was so short, and they could be so safely reinforced, that they might overwhelm the defence by sheer weight of numbers. Some of the survivors of the first attack had come near enough to the barricade to see the moat, and no doubt, when the enemy attacked a second time, they would be prepared to meet that not very formidable obstacle.

All that day Tom anxiously awaited the assault. After a quiet morning, the gun opened fire, and for two hours pounded the barricade, until it was breached in many spots. When the shelling ceased Tom expected the attack to follow immediately; but minute after minute passed, and his scouts gave no sign of any movement among the enemy. Taking advantage of this inaction, Tom set some of the men to fill up the gaps in the barricade, but they had no sooner started work than the enemy's snipers, unseen among the trees, began to pick them off. It was clear that the issue of the struggle would depend on the fighting capacity of the men, and not on the strength of the defences.

For the past two days the weather had been dull but dry, and Tom found himself longing for a downpour of rain, which would flood the enemy's approaches. His anxieties were the greater through his ignorance of their numbers. Since the first attack he had seen none of them except the sappers; whether the men biding their time in the forest were scores, hundreds, or even thousands he was utterly unable to guess. If he had known the German's contempt for "cannon-fodder" he might have suspected that their numbers were not very great, for a German officer with large resources would hardly have drawn off at the first check.

Darkness closed down upon the nullah. Tom dared not leave his post,

weary though he was. Lying on a heap of twigs he waited, wondering what the night would bring forth.

CHAPTER XX–RAISING THE SIEGE

Midnight passed: the still hours stole on; and Tom was dozing when Mwesa roused him.

"Noise dis way, sah," said the boy.

Tom sprung up. From the direction of the forest came slight sounds. The enemy were on the move. He sent to the trenches above the men detailed to hold them: the rest he ordered to their posts behind the barricade. Their movements were silent.

The sounds from without were so faint that it was clear the enemy hoped for a surprise. Presently they ceased altogether, and Tom guessed that the men had assembled in their trench and only awaited the word. At each end of the barricade he had placed an askari with flares and matches.

The silence was brief. Suddenly a whistle sounded. The air was rent with a great shout as the enemy askaris leapt from the trench and surged forward towards the barricade. Instantly Tom gave a signal; two blazing flares soared over the barricade and fell on the ground beyond, lighting up a wide space around them. Peering through a gap, Tom saw the line of black men pressing on. Some carried axes, others oblong hurdles–pontoons for throwing across the moat. Only a few seconds after the signal for the attack had been given, another whistle cut the air. From the barricade and the trenches above rifles flashed, and there were gaps in the ranks of the assailants. In the pressure of a moment like this regular volleys were impossible: each man fired as fast as he could.

In spite of their losses the enemy pushed on with scarcely a check. They had not yet fired a shot. Some crossed the moat with flying leaps and began to

hack at the barricade with their axes. Others rushed over on the hurdles, and thrusting their rifles into the gaps, fired at random. The defenders here, having emptied their magazines, lunged at the foremost assailants with their bayonets, while the men in the raised trenches kept up a hot fire on the supports rushing up behind. But the stream seemed never to slacken. If a man fell back from the barricade, another took his place. A big askari forced his way through a gap, and wounded two men before he was transfixed by Mirambo's bayonet. Almost before the bayonet could be withdrawn others of the enemy came through at the same spot, and Mirambo and the men about him found themselves engaged in a fierce hand-to-hand struggle. The same thing happened at many parts of the defences, and though for every man who got through two or three had been hurled back into the moat or among their comrades, it was clear that by pressure of numbers the Wahehe must soon be overwhelmed.

Tom created a temporary lull in the attack by emptying his revolver on the largest group of the askaris. The flares having now gone out, he took advantage of the darkness to sound the signal for withdrawal, and his men, obedient to their training, rushed back into the trench and reloaded. From beyond the barricade the enemy were pouring a hot fire upon the higher trenches, and Tom knew by the sounds that there were still large reserves to deal with. Coming to the conclusion that the position at the entrance of the nullah could not be held much longer, he sent the greater part of his force to take up new positions at the bend, retaining a few to fight a rearguard action. But it appeared either that the first ranks of the enemy were exhausted, or that they had had orders not to push forward into the nullah at once after the entrance had been won. Their officers, who had not yet come into view, probably suspected that the nullah might have many traps and pitfalls for their men in the darkness, and reckoned on an easy conquest in daylight. At any rate there was no immediate pursuit, and within half an hour Tom had withdrawn all his men into the trench at the bend.

A few minutes afterwards a flame burst out at the entrance, spreading across the nullah from side to side. The enemy had set fire to the shattered barricade. None of them were visible in the glare: it seemed that, content with having forced the outer defence, the main body had had returned to their trench to await the dawn, now near at hand.

When Tom numbered his men, he found that thirteen were missing, and some thirty were wounded, many of them lightly. He felt a pang at the thought that some of the thirteen were lying seriously wounded on the field, but it was impossible to search for them.

He realised that he was now in the last ditch. If the enemy once rounded the bend, the village on the high ground a quarter of a mile beyond would be exposed to their fire, and for the sake of the non-combatants it would be necessary to yield.

True, given time, another trench might be dug across the nullah, and the enemy's advance delayed again there; but his men were too weary to start digging at once, and, in any case, it was unlikely that the work could be completed in the short hour before dawn. There was nothing to be done but to hold the trench as long as possible, and inflict such losses on the enemy that they would be compelled to await reinforcements before attempting a final assault. They might even be satisfied with having captured the entrance, and leave the rest to time and famine. Escape was impossible, for, knowing of the "back door," they would certainly take care to block exit that way, which could easily be done by posting a few men at the head of the narrow cleft.

What hope was there of relief from the British border? In reply to his note a Major Burnaby had bidden him "hold fast," a message that seemed to hold some slight promise of help. Would that help come in time? If the enemy were in sufficient strength, a few hours might see the defence overwhelmed and the little community at the mercy of the conquerors. How many days was it since he had received Major Burnaby's message? Three?–or four? He could not tell. He had lost count of time. So obsessed had he been with the problems of the defence that he had given scarcely a thought to what might have been passing in the village. Moses had kept the fighting men supplied with food, sending down carriers under cover of night. The men on guard at the cleft had reported that all was well, and the single sentry who kept watch on the island prison had sent word that the firing had at first caused some excitement among the prisoners. They had grouped themselves on the shore, gazing down the nullah, talking to one another–all but Reinecke, who had stood apart from the rest, and sometimes walked up and down with quick impatient footsteps, twirling his long white moustache. Tom had not seen how the sound of the shells had caused the women and children to huddle together and sit cowering and moaning in their huts. He had not heard their wails when word came that such-and-such were dead, nor their croons of pity and tenderness as they did their little best for those who were wounded. All his thoughts were centred on the one pressing problem: how to hold out, to wear down the enemy, to gain time.

When morning dawned he looked anxiously down the nullah. Its downward slope enabled him to survey its whole length to the entrance without unduly exposing himself. He saw a few figures moving about where the barricade had been, but between him and them none of the enemy was in sight. The vegetation on either side of the stream, growing to the bases of the precipitous sides, would shelter hundreds: had any of them crept up towards him under this cover during the night? He could not tell; nor dared he send out scouts to reconnoitre.

Presently he saw that the men at the entrance had been joined by two white officers. The Germans, who had kept in the background while the askaris fought

at the barricade, had now come forward to inspect the position and direct the further operations. Their intentions were soon made manifest. There was a burst of smoke from the middle of the burnt barricade, and a shell exploded on the cliff-side just behind the trench. Tom at once withdrew his men to the cover of the bushes beyond the bend, leaving only a handful in the trench to fire if any of the enemy showed themselves within effective range. The bombardment thus opened did not greatly disturb him. The bend effectually protected his men from harm, and the gun was not of a calibre large enough to demolish the trench, of which only a portion was visible to the gunners. Some damage was done to the parapet on the eastern side, but the enemy's object was clearly to intimidate the defenders, for the futility of their shots, in a material sense, must have been clear to them.

It was clear, too, that they had learnt to respect the quality of the defence opposed to them. They gave no sign of an intention to advance in the open. The bombardment was vigorous and sustained, but except for the few figures moving about the gun at the entrance, not a man of them was seen. This inaction seemed ominous to Tom. He could not think that they meditated another night attack, for, unfamiliar with the ground, they would be at a disadvantage in darkness. Was it not more probable that, relying on the bombardment to distract the defenders and to drive them under cover, they were creeping through the brushwood nearer and nearer to the trench, and would by-and-by make a rush, with the hope of profiting by surprise? This was the movement that he most dreaded, because the result must depend absolutely on the numbers opposed to him.

Just after mid-day the bombardment suddenly ceased. For a few minutes there was a breathless silence in the nullah: nothing was heard but the gurgling of the stream. Then the storm broke. From the bushes on each side, within a hundred yards of the trench, burst a swarm of men at the double. Tom had already summoned his men to their posts in the trench, and the masses of the enemy had covered only a few yards when they encountered a hail of lead from the parapet. In spite of many gaps in their crowded ranks they dashed forward with ferocious yells, and pressed the charge up to the very edge of the trench. There, however, they came under fire from some of the best marksmen, whom Tom had stationed in the block-houses and also in the bushes on higher ground in the rear. They reeled under the double fire; a few who sprang over the parapet into the trench were bayoneted or clubbed; the rest turned and fled panic-stricken into the cover they had lately left with such confidence, many of them falling to the shots of the triumphant Wahehe.

In the silence that followed, Tom was startled by sounds of firing from the north. It flashed upon him that the Germans had arranged a simultaneous attack on the cleft. The guard of twenty men he had posted there, behind their

barricades, ought to be able to hold their own on ground so favourable to them; but Tom at this moment felt that he must see for himself how they were faring. The repulse of the main attack gave him at least a respite: he would not be absent more than thirty or forty minutes; so leaving Mirambo in command, he hurried up the nullah.

On the way he was met by Moses himself, running to tell him that the men above had sent word that the enemy was upon them, and asking that the m'sungu would come to their assistance. Knowing the nature of the ground they were defending, Tom guessed that the support they craved was rather moral than material. He did not care to send for reinforcements to Mirambo, who might yet be hard pressed; but as he passed through the village he collected half a dozen men who had been slightly wounded in the first action, and ordered them to follow him up the ladder. Unknown to him they were joined by the armed sentry who patrolled the lake-side opposite the island. The man afterwards explained that he was tired of watching prisoners, and wished to have his share in useful work.

Tom found, as he had expected, that the men guarding the cleft had no reason to be alarmed. Posted behind the first of the barricades commanding a difficult passage along which the enemy must come in single file, they could have held the position indefinitely. It appeared that the sight of a white officer among the askaris who had emerged from the end of the ravine had struck them with dread: how could black men stand against a m'sungu? They hailed Tom's arrival with shouts of delight. Being for once unaccompanied by Mwesa, he was unable to cheer them with words; but he managed to make them understand by signs that he trusted them, stayed with them for a few minutes while they fired at the enemy, who showed no eagerness to risk the perils of advancing against a position so formidable; then, confident that all was safe in this quarter, at any rate for a time, hastened back to where the danger threatened.

Just before he came to the rock from which the lake was visible, he heard shouts of alarm and excitement from below. Surely the enemy could not already have broken through? There had been no firing. Hurrying down at some risk of a fall, he halted at the rock in amazement at an extraordinary drama that was being enacted.

Between the island and the shore a crazy raft was rocking in the water, under the paddles, rough branches of trees, wielded in desperate haste by the German prisoners. From Tom's high position the reason of their frantic exertions was only too apparent. He could see far into the clear water of the lake. About the raft it was alive with crocodiles. The hideous reptiles swam round and round, sheering off where the water was churned by the paddles, but pushing their snouts on to the edges of the raft where the paddlers stood.

The scene would have been laughable but for a possible element of tragedy. The raft was so slight, evidently so hastily put together, that it dipped now on one side, now on another, under the strokes of the paddles or the pressure of the crocodiles' snouts. Water poured over it. The men dared not shift their positions, for every moment threatened to make it capsize. Divided between anxiety to gain the shore and the urgency of beating off their horrid foes, they used their futile paddles, now for propelling the raft, now for smiting the reptiles' heads.

"The madmen!" thought Tom. "How do they suppose they can escape? But where is the sentry?"

Women and children, shouting and screaming, thronged the shore, but there was no armed man among them.

Tom watched the scene as if fascinated. The positions of the men on the raft had evidently been arranged with care to ensure its balance, which was disturbed from moment to moment by the violence of their blows. In spite of all, they were making progress towards the lake-side. Suddenly, in a moment, Fate said her last word to Curt Reinecke. Intending to strike a snout that had just slid on to the raft almost at his feet, he overreached himself, the raft tilted, and he was in the water. The shriek that rose from the unhappy man rang long in Tom's ears. At the spot where he had fallen there was a furious swirl as the crocodiles crowded together, and disappeared into the depths of the lake.

For a moment Tom was paralysed with horror. Then collecting himself, he hastened down to the lake, and summoned the women to assist him in launching the large raft on which food was taken to the prisoners. Reinecke's fate had given the others a short respite. Before the reptiles returned to the surface the Germans had transferred themselves from the one raft to the other, and pale, cowed, trembling mortals, were paddled to the shore.

Tom had no time to question them, or to inquire about the missing sentry. The sound of scattered shots drew him at his best speed towards the trench. When he reached it, he found that his men were sniping at individual askaris who were hurriedly making their way, not up, but down the nullah. Surely the enemy were not withdrawing?

"Me hear shots long way off, sah," said Mwesa, running towards his master excitedly.

Tom thrilled from top to toe.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Sure nuff, sah. Mirambo he say no: old ears, sah, no can hear, same as me."

Tom wondered. Could it be true? Was the long-expected relief coming at last? Could there be any other explanation of distant firing? He strained his ears for the welcome sound. He gazed towards the end of the nullah. There were certainly signs of activity there. And then came the sound that could not

be mistaken. Somewhere to the south rapid rifle fire was going on.

For a few moments all other feelings were submerged in overpowering thankfulness. Then the possibilities of the situation struck upon his mind. It was clear that some of the enemy had been withdrawn to meet this attack in their rear. Had they all gone? Had the conquest of the nullah been wholly abandoned? That must be put to the test.

He sent Mirambo out with a dozen sharpshooters to feel his way down the nullah. Stealing along under cover of the bushes, the men had gone nearly two hundred yards before the sound of shots reached the trench. A scout hurried back to report that the whole of the enemy force was retreating. Tom instantly collected all his remaining fighting men, and led them down after Mirambo's party.

Presently another scout came with the news that the enemy had not all left the nullah, but had manned the old trench just within the barricade. Tom felt his way forward cautiously through the bush, and overtook Mirambo where he had halted about a hundred yards from the trench. Southward the crackle of rifle-fire was growing louder and more distinct. It would be a pity to lose an opportunity of routing the troops who still remained in the nullah, dispirited as they must be by the knowledge that a fight was going on in their rear.

Tom jumped at the chance of employing against the enemy the manoeuvre which the enemy had unsuccessfully employed against him. He ordered the greater part of his men to creep through the trees and bush on each side, taking care to avoid making the least noise, and to halt when they came within fifty yards of his old trench, now manned by the enemy. At the same time, to divert attention, he sent word to the men he had left at the bend to fire a shot occasionally, aiming at the cliffs.

When all was ready he gave the signal, and with a vociferous whoop eighty men sprang from their places of concealment and followed him in a whirlwind dash upon the trench. The askaris there, taken aback by this sudden charge of an enemy who had hitherto stood wholly on the defensive, had no ears for the commands of their German lieutenant. Without pausing even to fire one volley, they sprang out of the trench, sprinted over the ruins of the barricade, leapt the moat or crossed by the hurdles, and fled helter-skelter into the forest, flinging away their arms as they ran.

Tom's men dashed after them in a flush of enthusiasm; among the pursuers none were nimbler or more excited than the captured askaris. Tom shouted to them to take the fugitives prisoners, and not to use their weapons except against those who resisted. As for himself, he put every ounce of what little energy remained to him into the chase of the German officer, who, finding himself deserted by his men, had shown a clean pair of heels. Tom was up with him before

he gained the forest. The German, aware that he was outrun, suddenly swung round and half raised his arm to fire his revolver. But he was a shade too late. Tom hurled himself upon him with all the impetus gained in his sprint across the clearing, struck the revolver from his hand with his left fist, and with his right dealt the officer a smashing blow on the chin that sent him headlong backward with a crash.

Leaving him to be picked up by some of the older and less fleet-footed of the negroes, Tom hurried on towards the sounds of firing. He had no need to go far. Fugitives from the nullah had reached their comrades, who were falling back before a force of white men and Rhodesian police advancing on a wide front. Realising that they were between two fires, the enemy gave up the hopeless struggle, and scattered to right and left, seeking safety in the pathless forest. The firing ceased, and within ten minutes of leaving the nullah Tom was grasping the hand of a tall bronzed Englishman who bore a major's crown upon his sleeve.

"Tom Willoughby, I suppose," said that officer, looking with a quizzical smile into the tired brown eyes on a level with his own.

"You're Major Burnaby?"

"Yes. A nice little scoop, eh? Now, we've no time to lose. Take me to your nullah. Your people must trek at once. We've cut the wires on the Neu Langenburg road. Two detachments half a mile apart are holding a place clear for our crossing. With luck we'll get through before they send up troops from Bismarckburg. But we must hurry."

CHAPTER XXI–WILLOUGHBY'S SCOUTS

An hour later a singular procession marched southward through the forest. At the head went a number of Msetu's scouts, with an advanced guard of strapping Rhodesian planters, young and middle-aged. Behind these, a detachment of

Rhodesian native police, their broad black faces shining. Then, a happy throng of women and children, each bearing a bundle. These were followed by a number of white men and black, all wearing bandages about an arm or a leg or the head. Then, twenty or more couples of native soldiers with the Red Cross upon their sleeves, carrying field ambulances on which lay still, bandaged figures, white and black. Next, four Germans, among whom the stiff bulky form of Major von Rudenheim was conspicuous, and thirty odd askaris–prisoners guarded by Rhodesian police. Then Major Burnaby, with Tom Willoughby, Mwesa in close attendance behind. Then a large body of native porters, stepping lightly under the heavy burdens on their heads. Following these marched the whole body of the Wahehe fighting men, led by Mirambo; six of them drew a mountain gun; and finally, at an interval, the rearguard of British planters, volunteers in the service of the Empire.

There is no need to relate the details of their uneventful journey. Next day, in a pelting rainstorm, they crossed the Neu Langenburg road, where their numbers were increased by two small detachments of Rhodesian police under British officers, whose watch upon the road had not been molested. Late on the third day the procession, weary, drenched, but at the top of high spirits, filed up the hill into the little town of Abercorn.

It is perhaps worth while, however, to record two conversations.

When the arrangements for the evacuation of the nullah had been made, Major Burnaby had leisure for a little talk with Tom Willoughby, over a bottle of excellent hock from the case Tom had captured on the Neu Langenburg road.

"Oh, that's all right," said the major, in response to Tom's warm expression of thanks. "You owe it to my old father-in-law, you know–Mr. Barkworth."

"Indeed!"

"Yes: he took a fancy to you on the boat. Dear old man! His heart's as young as it was when I first met him in Uganda twenty years ago–when I was about your age. He was mightily perturbed about you when we got word that the mad dog had broken loose. Wrote off at once to Reinecke, whom he knew long ago, asking him to pass you across the border with a safe-conduct, and became quite ill when Reinecke replied that you had been accidentally killed. He gave a very circumstantial account of your accident, by the way."

"He was a good liar," said Tom.

"Was?"

"Yes, he's dead–horribly. He came to attack me, and I collared him and put him on the island in the lake. I suppose he grew impatient when he heard the firing, couldn't wait for the end, and got his fellow-prisoners to make a sort of a raft. Our sentry deserted his post, with the most praiseworthy intentions, and Reinecke took advantage of his absence to launch the raft. He was attacked by

crocodiles; Reinecke lunged at one, and toppled over. I saw the whole thing: the recollection makes me sick."

"Poor devil! He was a tricky sort of fellow, according to Mr. Barkworth."

Tom related the incidents that had led to his occupation of the nullah.

"He deserved no better fate," remarked Major Burnaby at the close of the story. "Fellows like him make one unjust, perhaps–I mean, one would rather not regard him as a typical German. Unhappily his countrymen are doing their best to make the name of Germany odious."

"What are they doing, sir? What's the war about? Of course I've heard nothing."

Major Burnaby gave an outline of the public events that led to the war–events which all the world knows.

"But the real origin of the war is Germany's tigerish greed," he said. "One can understand that a great nation, flushed with unexampled success, conscious of power and the possession of many good qualities which only an ass would deny, should look with a certain envy and jealousy on our little islands as the owners of a world-wide empire. There are wrong-headed and sentimental people at home who make excuses for her, ask how we could expect her to be content with the present position of things, say we deny her means of expansion, and so on. But they shut their eyes to the fundamental contrast between Germany and ourselves. Our Empire is a gradual, almost an accidental, growth: much of it has been so to speak thrust upon us: you've only to read history to know that. We have taken up the burden of rule in barbarous countries, or countries like India and Egypt, where civilisation had decayed, and which but for us would be either bear's gardens or hotbeds of slavery and oppression. I don't say that our motives have always been of the purest or our methods always the best; but I do say that we have never, as a state, set before us the deliberate aim of grabbing what doesn't belong to us, forcing all civilisations into our particular mould, and subjugating all other nations by sheer brutal terrorism. That is what Germany is doing. She hasn't a notion of honour. She was bound to respect the neutrality of Belgium; a few days before she threw her troops across the frontier she assured the Belgian Government that she had no intention of doing so. She forced on the war when Austria was hesitating, simply because she thought she saw a unique opportunity of gaining a quick and easy victory, smashing Russia, smashing France, grabbing valuable territory, filling her coffers with millions of foreign gold, and reaching a position in which every country in Europe, and ultimately in the whole world, would be her very humble tributary. She will allow nothing to stand in her way: no treaties, no scruples of honour, no considerations of humanity. She is simply Brute Force personified; the whole nation has gone mad in the worship of militarism; and she will never come to a better mind,

there will be no security in this unhappy world, until her idols are broken by the application of the same force in overwhelming measure. That's our job, my dear fellow, and we must go through with it, whatever the cost."

The other conversation took place in a planter's house at Abercorn. Mr. Barkworth had just heard from Tom's lips the full story of all that had happened to him since their parting on the landing stage at Bismarckburg.

"H'm!" ejaculated the old man. "Tom," he said, turning to his son-in-law, "he's your namesake. Eh? Tom's a good name–better than riches! Young Tom must have a commission, eh? Want to fight, young Tom?"

"Not particularly, sir. I mean, I don't want to fight; but there's only one thing to be done with a bully–hit him hard. That seems to be the position; and I'll do my best."

"Sound doctrine, my lad. I'm a man of peace; but I read of a Man of Peace who once flogged a pack of rascals out of the Temple of Jerusalem. No soft words; but stinging whips. Please God, we'll whip Germany into good behaviour. But now, the practical point. Infantry? Cavalry? Artillery? What's it to be?"

"He seems rather good at organising scouts," Major Burnaby put in.

"H'm! Scouts very useful when we get seriously to work in those wilds. Willoughby's Scouts, why not? What do you say, young Tom?"

"I couldn't wish for anything better, sir. The Wahehe will be a nucleus: they're very keen."

"They'll follow you like faithful dogs. I know them! Well, old Tom, you'll arrange it. Smuts is coming: fine fellow, Smuts: I know him. Willoughby's Scouts must be ready–

'TOM WILLOUGHBY'S SCOUTS.'"

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BRUNSWICK ST., STAMFORD ST., S.E. 1,
AND BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

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By HERBERT STRANG

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Illustrated in colour by CYRUS CUNEO.

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