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CHAPTER XVII. A Thrilling Rescue.

I THINK you have had the escape of your life, young fellow, my lad. It was catchin' those Indians that put you clean out of their heads, else they would have been back to the camp for you, as sure as fate, and gathered you in. Of course, as you said, they have been watchin' us from the beginnin' out of that tree, and they knew perfectly well that we were one short. However, they could think only of this new haul. So it was I and not a bunch of apes that dropped in on you in the morning. Well, we had a horrid business afterward. My God, what a nightmare the whole thing is! You remember the great battle of sharp canes down below, where we found the skeleton of the American? Well, that is just under one town, and that's the jumpin' off place of their prisoners. I expect there's heaps of skeletons there, if we looked for 'em. They have a sort of clear parade ground on the top, and they make a proper ceremony about it. One by one the poor devils have to jump, and the game is to see whether they are merely dashed to pieces or whether they get skinned on the canes. They took us out to see it, and the whole tribe lined up on the edge. Four of the Indians jumped, and the canes went through 'em like lightning needles through a pat of butter. No wonder we found that poor Yankee's skeleton with the canes growin' between his ribs. It was horrible—but it was doozily interestin' too. We were all fascinated to see them take the dive, even when we thought it would be our turn next on the spearboard.



Two of His Guards Caught Him by the Wrists and Pulled Him Brutally to the Front.

Well, it wasn't. They kept six of the Indians up for today—that's how I understand it—but I fancy we were to be the star performers in the show. Challenger might get off, but Summerlee and I were in the bill. Their language is more than half signs, and it was not hard to follow them. So I thought it was time we made a break for it. "So I broke away early this mornin', gave my guard a kick in the tummy that laid him out and sprinted for the camp. There I got you and the guns, and here we are." "But the professors?" I cried in conversation. "Well, we must just go back and fetch 'em. I couldn't bring 'em with me. Challenger was up the tree, and Summerlee was not fit for the effort. The only chance was to get the guns and try a rescue. Of course they may scupper them at once in revenge. I don't think they would touch Challenger, but I wouldn't answer for Summerlee. But they would have had him in any case. Of that I am certain. So I haven't made matters any worse by lettin' 'em. But we are honor bound to go back and have them out, or see it through with them. So you had better make up your soul, young fellow, my lad, for it will be one way or the other before events."

men, who watched them closely and made all escape impossible. Then, right out from all the others and close to the edge of the cliff, were two figures, so strange, and under other circumstances so ludicrous, that they absorbed my attention. The one was our comrade, Professor Challenger. The remains of his coat still hung in strips from his shoulders, but his shirt had been all torn out, and his great beard merged itself in the black tangle which covered his mighty chest. He had lost his hat, and his hair, which had grown long in our wanderings, was flying in wild disorder. A single day seemed to have changed him from the highest product of modern civilization to the most desperate savage in South America. Beside him stood his master, the king of the ape men. In all things he was, as Lord John had said, the very image of our professor, save that his coloring was red instead of black. The same short, broad figure, the same heavy shoulders, the same forward hang of the arms, the same bristling beard merging itself in the hairy chest. Only above the eyebrows, where the sloping forehead and low, curved skull of the ape men were in sharp contrast to the broad brow and magnificent cranium of the European, could one see any marked difference. At every other point the king was an absurd parody of the professor.

All this, which takes me so long to describe, impressed itself upon me in a few seconds. Then we had very different things to think of, for an active drama was in progress. Two of the ape men had seized one of the Indians out of the group and dragged him forward to the edge of the cliff. The king raised his hand as a signal. They caught the man by his leg and arm and swung him three times backward and forward with tremendous violence. Then with a frightful heave they shot the poor wretch over the precipice. With such force did they throw him that he curved high in the air before beginning to drop. As he vanished from sight the whole assembly, except the guards, rushed forward to the edge of the precipice, and there was a long pause of absolute silence, broken by a mad yell of delight. They sprang about, tossing their long, hairy arms in the air and howling with exultation. Then they fell back from the edge, formed themselves again into line and waited for the next victim.

This time it was Summerlee. Two of his guards caught him by the wrists and pulled him brutally to the front. His thin figure and long limbs struggled and flutered like a chicken being dragged from a coop. Challenger had turned to the king and waved his hands frantically before him. He was begging, pleading, imploring for his comrade's life. The ape man pushed him roughly aside and shook his head. It was the last conscious movement he was to make upon earth. Lord John's rifle cracked, and the king sank down, a tangled red sprawling thing, upon the ground. "Shoot into the thick of them! Shoot, sonny, shoot!" cried my companion. There are strange red depths in the soul of the most commonplace man. I am tender hearted by nature and have found my eyes moist many a time over the scream of a wounded hare. Yet the blood lust was on me now. I found myself on my feet emptying one magazine, then the other, clicking open the breech to reload, snapping it to again, while cheering and yelling with

pure ferocity and joy of slaughter as I did so. With our four good guns the two of us made a horrible havoc. Both the guards who held Summerlee were down, and he was staggering about like a drunken man in his amazement, unable to realize that he was a free man. The dense mob of ape men ran about in bewilderment, marveling whence this storm of death was coming or what it might mean. They waved, gesticulated, screamed and tripped up over those who had fallen. Then, with a sudden impulse, they all rushed in a howling crowd to the trees for shelter, leaving the ground behind them spotted with their stricken comrades. All the prisoners were left for the moment standing alone in the middle of the clearing. Challenger's quick brain had grasped the situation. He seized the bewildered Summerlee by the arm, and they both ran toward us. Two of their guards bounded after them and fell to two bullets from Lord John. We ran forward into the open to meet our friends and pressed a loaded rifle into the hands of each. But Summerlee was at the end of his strength. He could hardly totter. Already the ape men were recovering from their panic. They were coming through the brushwood and threatening to cut us off. Challenger and I ran Summerlee along, one at each of his elbows, while Lord John covered our retreat, firing again and again as savage heads sprang at us out of the bushes. For a mile or more the chattering brutes were at our very heels. Then the pursuit slackened, for they learned our power and would no longer face that unerring rifle. When we had at last reached the camp we looked back and found ourselves alone. In less than half an hour we had reached our brushwood retreat and concealed ourselves. All day we heard the excited calling of the ape men in the direction of our old camp, but none of them came our way, and the tired fugitives, red and white, had a long, deep sleep. We had imagined that our pursuers, the ape men, knew nothing of our brushwood hiding place, but we were soon to find out our mistake. There was no sound in the woods—not a leaf moved upon the trees and all was peace around us—but we should have been warned by our first experience how cunningly and how patient these creatures can watch and wait until their chance comes. Whatever fate may be mine through life, I am very sure that I shall never be nearer death than I was that morning. I missed one of the Indians who had had fled with us and asked where he was. "He has gone to fetch some water," said Lord Roxton. "We fitted him up with an empty beef tin, and he is off." "To the old camp?" I asked. "No, to the brook. It's among the trees there. It can't be more than a couple of hundred yards. But the bear is certainly taking his time." "I'll go and look after him," said I. I picked up my rifle and stroled in the direction of the brook, leaving my friends to lay out the scanty breakfast.

I Felt an Intolerable Pressure Forcing My Head Back.

forward, I stooped over the body. Surely my guardian angel was very near me then, for some instinct of fear, or it may have been some faint rustle of leaves, made me glance upward. Out of the thick green foliage which hung low over my head two long, muscular arms covered with reddish hair were slowly descending. Another instant and the great, stealthy hands would have been round my throat. I sprang backward; but, quick as I was, those hands were quicker still. Through my sudden spring they missed a fatal grip, but one of them caught the back of my neck and the other one my face. I threw my hands up to protect my throat, and the next moment the huge paw had slid down my face and closed over them. I was lifted from the ground, and I felt an intolerable pressure forcing my head back and back until the strain upon the cervical spine was more than I could bear. My senses swam, but I still tore at the hand and forced it out from my chin. Looking up I saw a frightful face with cold, inextinguishable blue eyes looking down into mine. There was something hypnotic in those terrible eyes. I could struggle no longer. As the creature felt me grow limp in his grasp two white canines gleamed for a moment at each side of the vile mouth, and the grip tightened still more upon my chin, forcing it always upward and back. A thin, oval dried mist formed before my eyes and little silvery bells tinkled in my ears. Dully and faroff I heard the crack of a rifle and was feebly aware of the shock as I was dropped to the earth, where I lay without sense or motion. I awoke to find myself on my back upon the grass in our lair within the thicket. Some one had brought the water from the brook, and Lord John was splashing my head with it, while Challenger and Summerlee were propping me up, with concern in their faces. For a moment I had a glimpse of the human spirits behind their selection masks. It was really shock rather than any injury which had prostrated me, and in half an hour, in spite of aching head and stiff neck, I was sitting up and ready for anything. "But you've had the escape of your life, young fellow my lad," said Lord Roxton. "When I heard your cry and ran forward and saw your head twisted half off and your stonewallers kicking in the air I thought we were one short. I missed the beast in my flurry, but he dropped you all right and was off like a streak. By George! I wish I had fifty men with rifles. I'd clear out the whole infernal gang of them and leave this country a bit cleaner than we found it." It was clear now that the ape man had in some way marked us down and that we were watched on every side. We had not so much to fear from them during the day, but they would be very likely to rush us by night, so the sooner we got away from their neighborhood the better. On three sides of us was absolute forest, and there were night birds in our midst. The brook on the fourth side—that which sloped down in the direction of the lake—there was only low scrub, with scattered trees and occasional open glades. It was, in fact, the route which I had myself taken in my solitary journey, and it led us straight for the Indian caves. This, then, must for every reason be our road. It was in the early afternoon that we started upon our journey. One Indian, a chief, walked at our head as guide, but refused indignantly to carry any burden. Behind him came the two surviving Indians with our scanty possessions upon their backs. We four white men walked in the rear with rifles loaded and ready. As we started there broke from the thick silent woods behind us a sudden great vibration of the ape men, which may have been a cheer of triumph at our departure or a jeer of contempt at our flight. Looking back we saw only the dense screen of trees, but that long dense yell told us how many of our enemies lurked among them. We saw no sign of pursuit, however, and soon we had got into more open country and beyond their power. In the late afternoon we reached the margin of the lake, and as we emerged from the bush and saw the sheet of water stretching before us our native friends set up a shrill cry of joy and pointed eagerly in front of them. It was indeed a wonderful sight which lay before us. Sweeping over the grassy surface was a great flotilla of canoes coming straight for the shore upon which we stood. They were some miles out when we first saw them, but they shot forward with great swiftness and were soon so near that the rowers could distinguish our persons. Instantly a thunderous shout of delight burst from them, and we saw them rise from their seats, waving their paddles and spears madly in the air. Then, bending to their work once more, they drew across the interfering water, beached their boats upon the sloping sand and rushed up to us, protesting themselves with loud cries of greeting before the young chief. Finally one of them, an elderly man, with a necklace and bracelet of great lustrous glass beads and the skin of some beautiful mottled amber colored animal slung over his shoulders, ran forward and embraced most tenderly the youth whom we had saved. He then looked at us and asked some questions, after which he stepped up with much dignity and embraced us also each in turn. Then at his order the whole tribe lay down upon the ground before us in homage. Personally I felt shy and uncomfortable at this obsequious adoration, and I read the same feeling in the faces of Roxton and Summerlee, but Challenger expanded like a flower in the sun. "They may be undeveloped types,"

said he, stroking his beard and looking round at them, "but their deportment in the presence of their superiors might be a lesson to some of our more advanced Europeans. Strange how correct are the instincts of the natural man!" It was clear that the natives had come out upon the warpath, for every man carried his spear—a long bamboo tipped with bone—his bow and arrows and some sort of club or stone battle-axe slung at his side. Their dark, angry glances at the woods from which we had come and the frequent repetition of the word "Doda" made it clear enough that this was a rescue party who had set forth to save or revenge the old chief's son, for such we gathered that the youth must be. A council was now held by the whole tribe squatting in a circle, while we sat near on a slab of basalt and watched their proceedings. Two or three warriors spoke, and finally our young friend made a spirited harangue with such eloquent features and gestures that we could understand it all as clearly as if we had known his language. "What is the use of returning?" he said. "Sooner or later the thing must be done. Your comrades have been done to death. There is no safety for any of us. We are assembled now and ready." Then he pointed to us. "These strange men are our friends. They are great fighters, and they hate the ape men even as we do. They command"—here he pointed up to heaven—"the thunder and the lightning. When shall we have such a chance again? Let us go forward and either die now or live for the future in safety. How else shall we go back unshamed to our women?" The little red warriors hung upon the words of the speaker, and when he had finished they burst into a roar of applause, waving their rude weapons in the air. The old chief stepped forward to us and asked us some questions, pointing at the same time to the woods. Lord John made a sign to him that he should wait for an answer and then he turned to us. "Well, it's up to you to say what you will do," said he. "For my part I have a score to settle with these monkey folk, and if it ends by wiping them off the face of the earth I don't care. I'm goin' with our little red pals, and I mean to see them through the scrap. 'What do you say, young fellow?' " "Of course I will come." "And you, Challenger?" "I will assuredly co-operate." "And you, Summerlee?" "We seem to be drifting very far from the object of this expedition, Lord John. I assure you that I little thought when I left my professional chair in London that it was for the purpose of heading a raid of savages upon a colony of anthropoid apes." "To such base uses do we come," said Lord John, smiling. "But we are up against it, so what's the decision?" "It seems a most questionable step," said Summerlee, argumentative to the last. "But if you are all going I hardly see how I can remain behind." "Then it is settled," said Lord John, and, turning to the chief, he nodded and slapped his thigh.

CHAPTER XVIII. Off to Meet Strange Foe. AT earliest dawn our camp was astir, and an hour later we had started upon our memorable expedition. Often in my dreams have I thought that I might live to be a war correspondent. In what wilder one could I have conceived the nature of the campaign which it should be my lot to report! Here, then, is my first dispatch from a field of battle: Our numbers had been re-enforced during the night by a fresh batch of natives from the caves, and we may have been 400 or 500 strong when we made our advance. A fringe of scouts was thrown out in front, and behind them the whole force in a solid column made their way up the long slope of the bush country until we were near the edge of the forest. Here they spread out into a long straggling line of spearmen and bowmen. Roxton and Summerlee took their position upon the right flank, while Challenger and I were on the left. It was a host of the stone age that we were accompanying to battle—we with the last word of the gunsmith's art from St. James' street and the Strand. We had not long to wait for our enemy. A wild, shrill clamor rose from the edge of the wood, and suddenly a body of ape men rushed out with clubs and stones and made for the center of the Indian line. It was a valiant move, but a foolish one, for the great, bony-legged creatures were slow of foot, while their opponents were active as cats. It was horrible to see the fierce brutes, with foaming mouths and glaring eyes, rushing and grasping but forever missing their elusive enemies, while arrow after arrow buried itself in their hides. One great fellow ran past me roaring with pain, with a dozen darts sticking from his chest and ribs. In mercy I put a bullet through his skull, and he fell sprawling among the aloes. But this was the only shot fired, for the attack had been on the center of the line, and the Indians there had needed no help of ours in repulsing it. Of all the ape men who had rushed into the open I do not think that one got back to cover. But the matter was more deadly when we came among the trees. For an hour or more after we entered the wood there was a desperate struggle, in which for a time we hardly held our own. Springing out from among the scrub, the ape men with huge clubs broke in upon the Indians and often fell three or four of them before they could be speared. Their frightful blows shattered everything upon which

they fell. One of them knocked Summerlee's rifle to matchwood, and the next would have crushed his skull had an Indian not stabbed the beast to the heart. Other ape men in the trees above us hurled down stones and logs of wood, occasionally dropping boldly on to our ranks and fighting furiously until they were felled. Once our allies broke under the pressure, and had it not been for the execution done by our rifles they would certainly have taken to their heels. But they were gallantly rallied by their old chief and came on with such a rush that the ape men began in turn to give way. Summerlee was weaponless, but I was emptying my magazine as quick as I could fire, and on the farther flank we heard the continuous clicking of our companions' rifles. Then in a moment came the panic and the collapse. Screaming and howling, the great creatures rushed away in all directions through the brushwood, while our allies yelled in their savage delight, following swiftly after their flying enemies. All the feuds of countless generations, all the hatreds and cruelties of their narrow history, all the memories of ill usage and persecution, were to be purged that day. It was on the third day after our forming our camp near the Indian caves that a tragedy occurred. Challenger and Summerlee had gone off together that day to the lake, where some of the natives under their direction were engaged in harpooning specimens of the great lizard. Lord John and I had remained in our camp, while a number of the Indians were scattered about upon the grassy slope in front of the caves engaged in different ways. Suddenly there was a shrill cry of alarm, with the word "Stoa!" resounding from a hundred tongues. From every side men, women and children were rushing wildly for shelter, swarming up the staircases and into the caves in a mad stampede. Looking up, we could see them waving their arms from the rocks above and beckoning to us to join them in their refuge. We had both seized our magazine rifles and ran out to see what the danger could be. Suddenly from the rear belt of trees there broke forth a group of twelve or fifteen Indians, running for their lives, and at their very heels two of those frightful monsters which had disturbed our camp and pursued me upon my solitary journey. In shape they were like horrible lizards and moved in a succession of springs, but in size they were of an incredible bulk, larger than the largest elephant. We had never before seen them save at night, and indeed they are nocturnal animals save when disturbed in their lairs, as these had been. We now stood amazed at the sight, for their blotched and warted skins were of a curious, fishlike iridescence, and the sunlight struck them with an ever varying rainbow bloom as they moved. We had little time to watch them, however, for in an instant they had overtaken the fugitives and were making a dire slaughter among them. Their method was to fall forward with their full weight upon each in turn, leaving him, crushed and mangled, to bound on after the others. The wretched Indians screamed with terror, but were helpless, run as they would, before the relentless purpose and horrible activity of these monstrous creatures. One after another they were taken down, and there were not half a dozen surviving by the time my companion and I could come to their help. But our aid was of little avail and only involved us in the same peril. At the range of a couple of hundred yards we emptied our magazines, firing bullet after bullet into the beasts, but with no more effect than if we were pelting them with pellets of paper. Their slow reptilian natures cared nothing for wounds, and the springs of their lives, with no special brain center, but scattered throughout their spinal cords, could not be tapped by any modern weapons. The most that we could do was to check their progress by distracting their attention with the flash and roar of our guns and so to give both the natives and ourselves time to reach the steps which led to safety. But where the conical explosive bullets of the twentieth century were of no avail the poisoned arrows of the natives, dipped in the juice of atropian- curion, could succeed. Such arrows were of little avail to the hunter who attacked the beast, because their action in that torpid circulation was slow, and before its effects failed it could certainly overtake and slay its assailant. But now, as the two monsters hounded us to the very foot of the stairs, a drift of darts came whistling from every chink in the cliff above them. In a minute they were feathered with them, and yet, with no sign of pain, they clawed and slithered with impotent rage at the steps which would lead them to their victims, mounting clumsily up for a few yards and then sliding down again to the ground. But at last the poison worked. One of them gave a deep rumbling groan and dropped his huge squat head on to the earth. The other bounded around in an eccentric circle, with shrill, wailing cries, and then, lying down, waited in agony for some minutes before it also stiffened and lay still. With yells of triumph the Indians came flocking down from their caves and danced a frenzied dance of victory around the dead bodies, in mad joy that two more of the most dangerous of all their enemies had been slain. That night they cut up and removed the bodies, not to eat, for the poison was still active, but lest they should breed a pestilence. The great reptilian hearts, however, each as large as a cushion, still lay there, bending slowly and steadily, with a gentle rise and fall, in horrible independent life. It was only upon the third day that the ganglia ran down and the dreadful things were still. (Continued next Saturday)

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