



“**B** WANA, MY EARS do not hear you.”
Bobolobo of the Kikuyu stood quite still.

The black man, tall, muscular, brawny, magnificent in his fighting-garb of black-and-white monkey-skins, looked a giant beside Lyn Strong, though Lyn was sturdy. With his rhinoceros hide shield on his left arm, his three spears in his right hand, Bobolobo was equipped for war. Lyn was armed with the white man's weapon: a rifle under his arm.

They stood in a narrow forest path, where interlacing branches overhead shut out the blaze of the African sun, though not its heat. It was a path trodden through forest and jungle by the feet of countless animals going down to the banks of the Popolaki river to drink. Generations of wild creatures, antelopes, gorillas, hyenas, lions, and many others, had trodden that path, and the treading of many years had marked it plainly.

Where Lyn Strong and the Kikuyu had halted, another path branched off, leading away through the tropical forest at right angles, in the direction of the distant low foot-hills. In that direction, though far away. Mount Kenya

soared to the sky, where, as Bobolobo did not doubt, the great god N'gai dwelt on the snowy summit amid the clouds.

Lyn, about to take the second path, looked back, as the Kikuyu spoke, and his boyish brow wrinkled in a frown. Lyn, the son of Grant Strong the hunter of Masumpwe, was accustomed to give orders: Bobolobo, the native tracker, to obey them.

"Have I not spoken plainly, Bobolobo?" demanded Lyn. "Here we must separate. You will take the path to the river, I the path to the hills. It is two days since we left Masumpwe, to look for sign of the Mau Mau men who have been driving cattle and burning the crops in the shambas. We have found nothing: and we must go two ways to look for the Mau Mau."

Still the Kikuyu did not stir.

"Do not your ears hear me, Bobolobo?" exclaimed Lyn, sharply.

"Bwana, my ears do not hear," answered the Kikuyu. "When we left Masumpwe, the Bwana M'kubwa bade me care for his son in the forest: and it is not written that the young Bwana shall go alone, for the Mau Mau are fierce and terrible men, and the young Bwana is but a boy."

Lyn Laughed.

"I have my rifle, and I do not fear the Mau Mau, Bobolobo," he said. "We must find sign of them before we return to Masumpwe, for I cannot tell my father that we have failed. Go you by the path to the river, while I take the other path. Your ears must hear, for it is a command."

Lyn's hand rose to point.

For a moment longer, the Kikuyu did not stir. Then he bowed his tall head, and without another word, strode away by the path of the river. In a few moments the thick bush encroaching on the narrow jungle-path hid him from Lyn's sight.

Lyn, with a smile, turned to take the other path. Bobolobo of the Kikuyu was loyal and devoted, and anxious for his safety: but the hunter's son was well accustomed to taking care of himself: and in point of fact, he relied more on his own rifle than on Bobolobo's spears. With his eyes and ears on the alert, watchful and wary for enemies lurking in the thick forest, Lyn Strong tramped along the tangled path towards the distant hills, nothing doubting that the Kikuyu had obeyed his instructions, and was heading for the river.

But for once, if for once only, Bobolobo was deaf to the young Bwana's commands: or as he expressed it in his own picturesque way, his ears did not hear. Hardly a dozen paces had the Kikuyu taken along the path to the river, when he halted, and bent his tall head to listen. Faintly to his ears came sounds which told that the young Bwana was going: and in a few moments, those sounds died away in the silence of the forest.

Then Bobolobo, turning, retraced his steps to the parting of the ways. There he stood, looking the way Lyn had gone. To follow, against orders, was to incur his young master's anger. But to leave him to go his way alone in the

shadowy depths of the forest, where Mau Mau raiders lurked with murder in their hearts, was not in the thoughts of the loyal Kikuyu. He stood in doubt, with a clouded brow, while long minutes passed, and he was still in doubt. And then suddenly from afar, ringing and echoing through the giant trees of the Kenya forest, came the crack of a rifle.

CHAPTER II

“N’KAZI!” breathed Lyn Strong.

He came to a sudden halt, and his rifle flew to his shoulder. The man who barred his path was scarcely three yards in front of him: he had stepped as silently as a ghost from the bush. N’kazi was tall and muscular, almost as big a man as Bobolobo, and he carried a long spear in his hand. Lyn knew the fierce, savage black face: N’kazi, the leader of the Mau Mau gang in the Popolaki valley, was a known man: long sought by the askaris and the white soldiers from Nairobi.

Lyn had been hunting for sign of the Mau Mau: and unexpectedly, he had come on their leader. N’kazi, from his great height, looked down on the boy hunter, with a savage grin and a flash of white teeth. The levelled rifle that looked him full in the face did not seem to daunt him. That rifle was steady as a rock in Lyn’s hands, and his finger was on the trigger.

“Drop that spear, N’Kazi!” rapped Lyn.

“The Small One speaks with a big voice,” said N’Kazi, derisively. “Did he come into the forest to seek for me?”

“I came to hunt for sign of you and your gang,” answered Lyn, “and I have found you, and shall take you a prisoner back to Masumpwe, or leave you dead for the hyenas to pick. Drop that spear, or I pull the trigger.”

“The Bwana M’kubwa will wait long to see his son again!” jeered N’kazi, and even as he spoke the words, there was a sudden rustle in the bushes behind Lyn, and unseen hands grasped him.

In a flash he realized how he had been trapped. He had passed hidden enemies on the forest path and the cunning N’kazi had held his attention while they closed in behind him.

As the hands behind him dragged him over, he pulled the trigger. The bullet grazed N’kazi’s cheek, cutting a strip of skin, and spattering a bare black shoulder with blood. The next moment the rifle was wrenched away, and Lyn was struggling desperately in two pairs of brawny hands. Two brawny blacks had grasped him, and either of them was more than a match for the boy hunter. They flung him to the earth, and a knee was planted on him, pinning him there, two fierce black faces grinning down at him.

N'kazi, dabbing blood from his cheek with the back of his hand, looked down at him, with smouldering eyes.

"O Small One," he said. "You came to seek me, and you have found me. But it is not N'kazi whose bones will be left for the hyenas."

Lyn lay silent, in a grasp that was too strong for his resistance, expecting instant death. And for the moment, it seemed that N'kazi would thrust with his long spear. Its broad blade flashed before Lyn's eyes: but he did not close them: he had courage to face death. But N'kazi did not thrust with the spear. He muttered to his followers in the native dialect, and Lyn was dragged to his feet. With a grasp of iron on either arm, they forced him away into the forest, following N'kazi, who lead the way.

Lyn stumbled along between his captors, wondering what it was that they intended. Not for a moment did he expect to escape alive from the hands of the Mau Mau. Death to the whites was their slogan: even if he had not wounded N'kazi, they would not have spared him. But the gash on his cheek, the blood that trickled over his bare shoulder, had roused all the savage ferocity in N'kazi, and it was not the thrust of a spear that was in his thoughts. Several times he looked back at Lyn, and his black eyes smouldered, as the boy hunter was led away into the forest. Lyn could only wonder, with a heavy heart, what savage vengeance was in his mind. He thought of Bobolobo, the brave Kikuyu, whom he had commanded to leave him: but it was useless to think of him: he was far, far away by this time. And he wished that he had heeded Bobolobo when he said that his ears did not hear. But it was too late now.

At a little distance from the forest path, the Mau Mau gang came to a halt in an open glade, circled by giant trees and thorny bush. At a muttered word from N'kazi, Lyn was slammed against the trunk of a tree, with his back to it, and a leather cord bound him there, with such cruel tightness that he could not stir a limb.

N'kazi, still dabbing blood from his cheek, stood looking at him, his dark face wrinkled in a savage grin. With his long spear, he pointed to a little earthen mound at a short distance from the tree.

"Do your eyes see, O Small One with the big voice?" he asked, mockingly.

Lyn stared across at the mound.

"My eyes see, N'kazi," he answered. "It is an anthill—the home of the red ants that I see."

"Naam! And soon you shall see the red ants also!" said N'kazi. "It is not the hyenas that will pick your bones."

"Oh!" breathed Lyn. And the colour wavered in his cheeks. He knew now the terrible intention of the Mau Mau leader, whose savage face had been gashed by his bullet. It was not death by the thrust of a spear that he had to look for: it was a torture known to the savages of Central Africa: and in spite of his courage his heart almost failed him.

One of the blacks had taken a gourd of honey. He spilled it over Lyn's mosquito-boots, and then receded towards the mound, dripping a trail of honey as he went. Lyn watched him in dumb despair. From the prisoner tied to the tree, to the anthill in the glade, lay the trail of honey: and a sudden thrust of a spear into the mound, brought a swarm of its tiny inhabitants pouring forth.

Lyn's eyes were upon them. They had found the trail of honey. Soon they would be following it: and, soon or late, they would reach the prisoner bound to the tree, and swarm over him, biting with tiny but pitiless bites. Only too well Lyn Strong knew what the fierce red ants were like: he had seen the bones of an elephant, picked clean in a single night by the tiny savage creatures, in their countless swarms. And the colour drained from his face as he watched, and knew what was coming to him. Minutes—perhaps half-an-hour—before the red ants reached him, but then—

A shudder ran through him from head to foot.

"O Bobolobo!" he muttered. The brave Kikuyu would have died to save him: and his own order had sent Bobolobo far from him in his hour of desperate need. If but Bobolobo could have known—

Something stirred in the bush on the edge of the glade. Lyn's eyes widened, and N'kazi stared round amazed, as one of the blacks uttered a sudden hoarse cry, and fell headlong. He lay still where he fell, and the haft of a throwing-spear was sticking up from the black body. And even as the Mau Mau realized that an enemy lurked in cover on the edge of the glade, another throwing-spear came whizzing, swift and accurate as a bullet in its flight, and a second black went down, transfixed.

N'kazi uttered a yell of fierce wrath and alarm, grasping his long spear, and staring round him with blazing eyes. Both his men lay speared in the glade: and as he stared, a tall figure in black-and-white monkey-skins came leaping from the bush, and Lyn's eyes danced as he shouted:

"Bobolobo!"

And the next moment Bobolobo of the Kikuyu, and N'kazi the chief of the Mau Mau, were fighting desperately, spear to spear.

CHAPTER III

LYN WATCHED, his heart beating in great thumps.

Only a few yards from him, under the mighty branches of the tree to which he was bound, the two black men were fighting a desperate duel to the death. On the outcome was staked Lyn's life as well as Bobolobo's. He strained at the cords that bound him to the tree, but in vain: he could give no aid to the brave Kikuyu. But his faith in Bobolobo was strong.

The red ants were crawling, myriads of them, along the trail of honey. One tiny creature, in advance of the rest, reached Lyn, and he felt a sudden sharp pang in his leg. But it would be minutes—long minutes—before they swarmed on him, and if Bobolobo was victorious, he was saved. With his heart in his eyes he watched the Kikuyu. Bobo, he knew, must have disregarded his order: his ears, after all, did not hear! From the bottom of his heart Lyn was glad of it. If there was yet a chance that he might see his father again, in the shady streets of Masumpwe, it depended on the faithful Kikuyu who had followed him his ears deaf for once to his young master's orders.

There had been three of the Mau Mau, but the Kikuyu was cunning. He had tracked them with the silent tread of a leopard, and from cover his two throwing-spears had each claimed a victim. Now his fighting-spear was in his sinewy grasp as he rushed on N'kazi.



Bobolobo was attacking . . . N'kazi was driven back.

But N'kazi was strong and muscular and powerful, and looked a match even for the giant Kikuyu. His face, streaked with blood from the gash of Lyn's bullet, was like that of a hyena in its savage fury. Spear to spear, the two powerful black men fought: trampling, springing, winding, watching each other with burning eyes, thrusting and warding and thrusting again.

"O Bobo!" breathed Lyn, in anguish, as a fierce rush of the Mau Mau outcast drove the Kikuyu back, and back, and Bobolobo's foot caught in a trailing vine, and he staggered.

N'kazi, with a fierce yell of triumph, bounded on him, thrusting. But Bobo caught the thrust on his rhinoceros-hide shield, and turned it aside: and then, with a spring as active as a leopard's, recovered himself. And Lyn breathed again.

And now Bobolobo was attacking, and it was N'kazi who was driven back. The spears flashed like lightning, in the sunlight that filtered through the branches overhead. Suddenly there was red on the broad blade of N'kazi's spear: it had grazed the Kikuyu's shoulder and drawn blood.

The Mau Mau chief made a spring like a lion. His reddened spearblade flashed under Bobolobo's eyes. Lyn felt his heart sick within him as he watched. But again the rhinoceros-hide shield caught the spear and turned it aside, and Bobolobo thrust in his turn.

With one terrible cry, the chief of the Mau Mau fell.

Bobolobo stood over him as he crashed, his spear ready for another thrust. But another thrust was not needed. N'kazi of the Mau Mau lay like a log, and did not stir again.

Bobolobo lowered his fighting-spear. The fierce excitement died out of his face: and his voice was low and grave as he spoke, his eyes on the slain enemy stretched at his feet.

"Speak well of me, O N'kazi, in the land of the shadows!" said Bobolobo. And he turned to his master, bound to the tree.

"O Bobo!" panted Lyn.

The cutting edge of the Kikuyu's spear slashed through the cord. Lyn Strong staggered from the tree, and stood panting, almost dizzy with the relief. The red ants that crawled and crawled along the trail of honey had no terrors for him now.

"O Bobo, I sent you away from me, and you have saved me," panted Lyn.

"My ears did not hear the words of the Bwana!" said Bobolobo. "But my ears heard the shot of the Bwana's rifle, and I came. And the Bwana M'kubwa will know that Bobolobo was faithful to his trust. And we have found the enemies we sought, O Bwana, and behold they lie slain by my spears, and we may return to Masumpwe, and tell them that the cattle will be safe, and that N'kazi of the Mau Mau will no longer burn the crops in the shambas. And they will know that I, Bobolobo of the Kikuyu, am a great warrior."

Bobolobo swelled out his broad chest

“Am I not a great warrior, Bwana? There were three of the Mau Mau, and I was but one, and they lie slain by my spears, to feed the hyenas and the jackals. In all the lands that N’gai sees with his eyes from the height of the Great Mountain, even among the tribes of the Masai, who are terrible in war, there is no greater warrior than Bobolobo of the Kikuyu!”

And Lyn nodded, and was careful not to smile.

THE END