

# AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR!

By  
— CHARLES HAMILTON —



*Lyn Strong and the Kikuyu disappeared by the forest path*

## CHAPTER I

“BOBO! What do you hear?”  
Bobolobo, the Kikuyu, did not answer.  
His tall head was bent to listen.

The Kikuyu had stopped, suddenly, on the forest path, under the shadowy branches of the vast muhugu trees. Why he had stopped, why he was listening so intently, Lyn Strong did not know. Lyn heard nothing but the faint murmur of the wind in the high branches, though his own ears were keen. But the Kikuyu's were as acute as those of Tui, the leopard, or Kala, the jackal. Bobolobo had heard some sound that had not reached the boy hunter of Masumpwe.

Lyn did not repeat his question. He waited for the Kikuyu to speak. But his rifle was ready, his finger on the trigger. In the dusky shades of the Kenya

forest lurked lion, and leopard, and hyena, and there was peril at every step on the jungle path.

The tall Kikuyu stood motionless, a massive figure in his garb of black-and-white monkey-skins. Lyn watched him and waited. But Bobolobo stirred at last. His large black eyes turned inquiringly on the white boy at his side.

"Do your ears hear nothing, Bwana?" he asked.

Lyn shook his head.

"Only the wind in the trees," he answered. "What is it that you hear, Bobo? Is it Simba or Tui or Kala?"

"It is none of these, Bwana," answered the Kikuyu. "It is a cry."

"A cry?" repeated Lyn.

"It is the voice of a Mzungu."

"A white man?" exclaimed Lyn.



Lyn stared round him. He could see nothing

"It is far away, but my ears have heard it," said Bobolobo. "In the forest there is a Mzungu who is hurt and cries for help."

Lyn stared round him. He could see nothing but the great trunks, the massive branches, the tangled underwoods: he could hear nothing but the faint sound of the wind. But he did not doubt the Kikuyu. Bobolobo's ears did not deceive him.

"Lead the way, Bobo," he said.

"Follow me, Bwana."

Leaving the path, the Kikuyu plunged into the forest. It was hard and heavy going, through the tangled, prickly bushes and sprawling vines under the muhugu trees. Here and there Bobo had to clear a way with the broad blade of his spear. But he tramped on without a pause, Lyn Strong following in his footsteps.

It was to hunt for the spoor of a lion that had preyed on the cattle in the shambas of Masumpwe that Lyn and the native tracker were in the forest. And Lyn was very keen to return successful to his father's house in Masumpwe. But he dismissed Simba from his mind now. If there was a white man lost in the forest, in need of help, that came before all else.

He listened intently as he followed the Kikuyu. Bobolobo did not pause: evidently the sound he had heard from afar was a sufficient guide for him, even in the trackless depths of the Kenya forest. And at length, faintly, the sound that Bobo had heard came to Lyn's ears also:

"Help!"

It came faintly, almost like a whisper, but he heard it now, as Bobo had heard it earlier. The distance was still great. But he heard it, and it went to his heart. It was an English voice, calling in English: someone, of his own race, was hurt and helpless in the tangled wilderness: calling for help where there was no hope of being heard or heeded: but still desperately calling. Only by fortunate chance were there ears to hear.

"Hasten Bobo!" breathed Lyn.

The Kikuyu pushed on steadily, parting bush and branch and cleaving great tree-ferns with his spear. They emerged at least on the bank of a swampy stream: a tributary of the Popolaki river, on which the town of Masumpwe stood, several miles distant.

Then the Kikuyu pointed with his spear.

"Kumbe!" he said. "Look, Bwana!"

Lyn looked, and hurried on. Lying on the earth, between the trees and the swampy edge of the stream, was a boyish figure. It was a lad of about sixteen, no older than Lyn himself, who lay there: evidently unable to get on his feet. He was still calling faintly: but he ceased, as the boy hunter and the Kikuyu



*Lyn dropped on one knee at his side*

appeared from the forest, and his colourless face brightened at the sight of them.

Lyn dropped on one knee at his side.

"You are hurt!" he exclaimed.

"My angle—twisted—I cannot walk—I have lain here for hours, calling and calling, though I could not hope that there was anyone to hear in the forest—help me, or I must die here—"

"Thank heaven my Kikuyu heard you calling," said Lyn. "We are here to help you—and if you cannot walk, Bobolobo is strong, and he will carry you on his back, to my father's nyumba at Masumpwe."

"I was on my way to Maro—to the Anstruther plantation at Maro—."

"Maro!" repeated Lyn. "Maro is very far from here. You must have wandered far from your way. But no matter now—Bobo, you are more skilled than I—see what you can do for his hurt."

"Naam, Bwana!"

Lyn stood looking on while the Kikuyu, his strong muscular hands as gentle as a woman's in their touch, bathed and bandaged the injured limb. He was glad from the bottom of his heart that Bobolobo's keen ears had picked up that faint cry from afar: for there was no doubt that, unaided, the boy must have perished alone in the lonely forest. But he was saved now—saved and safe: and Lyn knew that his father, Grant Strong, would make him welcome in the nyumba at Masumpwe, till he was able to go on his way to Maro. And he little dreamed of what was to come of this chance encounter in the depths of the wild forest of Kenya.

## CHAPTER II

"WHY does he not come?"

Ezra Hook, the planter of Maro, muttered the words, as he had muttered them over and over again during the long, hot, tropical day: and he followed the muttered question with a curse. He sat in the verandah of the bungalow on the Maro plantation, staring across the cultivated shambas towards the forest.

All was still and silent in the shambas, and in the bungalow, under the glare of the westering sun. Usually, Kikuyu field-workers were at labour in the shambas, and the bare feet of house-boys pattered in the bungalow. But now no one was to be seen or heard. The black-browed scowling man was alone on the plantation.

For hours and hours he had sat or lounged in the shady verandah, drinking, smoking, and staring towards the forest. His sunken gleaming eyes fixed continually on an opening in the forest, where there was a path under the branches. By that path he expected, every moment, to see a figure coming into sight. But moments, and minutes, lengthened into hours, and still no one came.

"Why does he not come? Why? The guide must have met him at Tati, to bring him here. He should have been here by noon. Yet he has not come. Why?"

He rose from the Madeira chair, and tramped restlessly about the verandah. But every moment his eyes turned on the distant forest path. His dark face grew blacker and blacker. He muttered and muttered.

"He can suspect nothing! Why should he? I had his letter from Nairobi—there was no doubt in that. He is but a boy—he has never even seen me, and knows nothing of me, except that I have managed his uncle's plantation since

the old man died. At Nairobi he can have heard nothing of what they say of me in this district. And even if he had, what difference would it make? He is coming to take possession, and give orders here—never doubting that I shall take orders from him, as from his uncle in the past. He could not even dream of danger here! But why does he not come?"

Ezra Hook came to a halt in his restless pacing, and leaning on the rail of the verandah, stared at the dim forest.

House-boys and field-hands had been surprised, that morning, when the planter had unexpectedly given them a day's holiday, ordering every one of them off to Maro for the day. Ezra was, as a rule, a hard master, a hard and driving man, feared and hated on the plantation. But for once, it seemed, he had relaxed. That he had some secret motive for desiring to be left alone that day, did not occur to the simple Kukes. But he had a motive, and a very strong one. What was scheduled to happen there that day was to be known only to Ezra himself. But—if the boy did not come, nothing could happen—and why did he not come? A boy, fresh from Nairobi, might very easily lose his way in the forests: but the guide from Tati would not lose his way. Why did not Cyril Anstruther come?

Why? That question hammered in Ezra's mind.

"He knows nothing," Ezra was muttering again. "He has never seen me—I have never seen him—we are strangers—all he knows of me is that I have managed this plantation for his uncle. The old man, if he had lived, might have found out that I managed it more for my own benefit than his—but the boy can know nothing. He would not have written as he did from Nairobi, if a doubt had crossed his mind. Yet—why is he not here?"

He resumed his restless pacing.

But as he tramped up and down the verandah, there was one spot that he carefully avoided in his tramping. It was a spot covered by a plaited rush mat. To all appearance, that spot was as firm and solid as the rest of the solid planking floor. But perhaps Ezra knew better, for he was very careful indeed not to step on the rush mat.

"He will come. He must come!" Ezra muttered again, "The Kukes will not be back from Maro till the morning—all is safe till then. He will come—he must come!"

Once more he stared towards the forest. Then a blaze came into his eyes, and he drew a deep, deep breath of relief.

"He is coming!"

From the shadowy forest a figure appeared at last: the figure for which Ezra had been waiting and watching through the long hot hours. Even at the distance he could make out a handsome boyish face under a shady hat. He

watched the lithe young figure, as the boy emerged from the shades of the forest, glanced about him, and then struck into the path leading to the bungalow.

"He must have lost his guide! He is coming alone!" muttered Ezra. "But he has found his way, guide or no guide, and he is coming—at last!"

And his dark evil face wrinkled in a grin, as he watched the boyish figure advancing up the path to the bungalow.

### CHAPTER III

"**B**UT who are you, and why are you alone here?" asked Lyn Strong, his eyes on the pale face of the boy so strangely found in the forest.

The boy was sitting up now, his back to the trunk of a tree. He was more at his ease: Bobolobo's ministrations had eased the pain in his swollen ankle. But his limb was useless, and he could not walk, or even rise to his feet. It was clear that if he left the spot where Lyn and the Kikuyu had found him, he would have to be carried on Bobo's brawny back. But the powerful Kikuyu was more than equal to the task of bearing his weight the two or three miles down the stream to Masumpwe.

"My name is Cyril Anstruther—I was on my way to the plantation at Maro," the boy answered. "It was my uncle's—it is mine now. Mr. Hook, the manager, is expecting me to-day—he must have expected me hours ago—I should have been there before noon, and he must be wondering what has become of me. He must be anxious." He gave Lyn an inquiring look, "You live in this district?"

"Yes! My father, Grant Strong, is a big-game hunter, and has a house at Masumpwe—where you are going to rest until you are able to go on your way," added Lyn, with a smile.

"Then perhaps you know Mr. Hook, at Maro?"

Lyn shook his head.

"Maro is a great distance from Masumpwe," he answered. "I have heard of Mr. Hook, but I have never seen him."

His face clouded a little as he spoke. He had never seen the manager of the Maro plantation: but he had, as he said, heard of him: and he had heard no good. The Maro manager had a reputation that did not make him popular among the settlers. But he could see that young Anstruther knew nothing of Ezra Hook's unsavoury reputation.

"I have never seen him, either," said the boy. "He managed the plantation during the last years of my uncle's life. We lived in Nairobi, where I was at

school. After I lost my uncle, I remained at school, and Mr. Hook continued to manage the plantation at Maro. Now I am going there, to take up a planter's life. It was a rich plantation once, and I hope it may be prosperous again some day."

"It is a rich plantation now, from what I have heard," said Lyn.

The boy shook his head.

"No! No! There have been bad times, since my uncle fell sick and had to go to Nairobi," he answered. "The estate has produced less and less for years."

"And you are going there to take over?" asked Lyn. "Well, you will not get to Maro to-day, or to-morrow either. How came you alone here in the forest?"

"I left Tati early in the morning, with the guide Mr. Hook had sent to take me to the plantation," explained Cyril Anstruther, "I should have been there before noon but for the leopard—"

"The leopard!" repeated Lyn.

The boy shivered.

"The brute suddenly leaped at us from a tree. My guide fled at the sight of him, and I was left alone, and I—I ran for my life. I escaped the leopard, but I did not see my guide again, and the forest was trackless—how far I wandered, and where, I do not know—and then I caught my foot in a trailing vine, and fell—here! My ankle was hurt—I could not walk again—and if you had not heard my cries for help—" He shivered again, and was silent.

"It was Bobo who heard," said Lyn. "But you have wandered far, very far, from the way to Maro. It is to Masumpwe that you must go now, and Bobo will carry you on his back."

The boy's face clouded.

"But I am expected at Maro," he said. "Mr. Hook must be anxious already, and if I do not come, he will be alarmed. He expected me by noon." He paused, and gave Lyn an anxious look. "If your Kikuyu carries me to Masumpwe, could you—?" He broke off.

Lyn Strong paused for a moment. Then he nodded.

"Make your mind easy," he said. "It is a long way to Maro, but I am used to long treks. While Bobo takes you to my father's nyumba, I will go to Maro, and tell Mr. Hook what has happened, and that you are safe and sound at Masumpwe."

The boy's face brightened.

"If you will do that—!" he said.

"That's settled," said Lyn. "We were out to hunt for a lion that has been giving trouble in the shambas, but Simba can wait! Bobo, you will bear our friend to my father's house at Masumpwe."

"Naam, Bwana."



"Then you will follow me to Maro. I shall rest there until you rejoin me, and then we will set out together again to hunt for Simba." Lyn smiled, "You are swifter of foot than I, Bobo, and you will not be long after me at Maro."

"Paa, the gazelle, is not swifter, in his flight when he hears the roar of Simba the lion, Bwana," said the Kikuyu. "Long before the sun has touched the summit of the Great Mountain, I shall be with my lord at Maro."

"So be it, Bobo," said Lyn.

And in a few minutes more, Cyril Anstruther, hoisted on the Kikuyu's brawny back, was borne away down the bank of the stream, and Lyn Strong



*On the Kikuyu's brawny shoulders*

was left alone in the forest. To young Anstruther's eyes it was trackless: but not to those of the boy hunter of Masumpwe. Having watched Bobo and his burden out of sight, Lyn Strong set out with a swinging stride on the long trek to Maro, never dreaming of what awaited him there.

## CHAPTER IV

LYN STRONG glanced round him in surprise, as he emerged from the forest path, and saw before him the planter's bungalow, and the cultivated shambas of the Maro plantation. The blazing sun was sinking towards the far Congo, but the sunset was still far off, and the shambas should have been busy with many workers. But not a man was to be seen in the fields, or among the out-buildings: the place seemed utterly deserted. Even at the bungalow itself there seemed no sign of life: till he caught sight of a dark face with watchful eyes that looked over the verandah rail. Not another face was to be seen: the whole plantation was silent and still.

It was a long path from the edge of the forest, to the planter's bungalow. Lyn tramped up it towards the building, conscious all the time that the keen watchful eyes were upon him. The man in the verandah, he had no doubt, was Ezra Hook, the manager: but why he was alone on the plantation was a mystery. He had never seen the man before: and now that he saw the dark face, seamed with excesses of late hours and heavy drinking, he had a feeling of repugnance. On his looks, Ezra Hook fully merited his evil reputation among the settlers.

However, that was no concern of Lyn's. All he had to do was to deliver Cyril Anstruther's message, and rest in the shady verandah till Bobolobo rejoined him there: and he was not likely to have to wait long, for the Kikuyu was almost as fleet of foot, as he had said, as Paa the gazelle. But it had been a long trek to Maro, and Lyn, strong and sturdy as he was, was a little fatigued, and he looked forward to a rest in the shade, out of the blaze of the African sun.

The man in the verandah did not stir, as he came nearer. He remained leaning on the rail, watching the boy with unwinking intentness. Not till Lyn reached the step, did he stir or speak. Then he moved, at last, and called over the rail:

"So you've come at last! You're late! You've had me guessing all day. Did you lose your guide and wander, or what?"

Lyn stared at him in surprise.

Then he smiled, as he realized the man's mistake.

Ezra Hook was watching and waiting for a boy to arrive at the bungalow: a boy he had never seen: and now that a boy had come, he had no doubt that it was the boy for whom he had watched and waited. Of what had happened in the distant forest, of Lyn Strong, he knew nothing. To his eyes, it was Cyril



*"So you've come at last—." Lyn stared at him in surprise*

Anstruther who had come, at last, after so much delay. It did not cross his mind to doubt.

Lyn was about to reply, when the planter stepped back from the rail, and disappeared from his sight. But his voice called again:

"Come in, come in, Anstruther!"

Lyn mounted the wooden step.

The verandah was deeply dusky, after the glare of the tropical sun. Lyn stepped into its shade.

Hook did not come forward to meet him. He was standing by the doorway that gave on the living-room of the bungalow. His eyes, under his bushy brows, glinted across at the boy.

He waved his hand towards the Madeira chair.

"You must be tired," he said. "Sit down, and then we can talk."

"Thank you, Mr. Hook," said Lyn. "I'd better explain—."

"Sit down, I tell you."

"Very well."

Lyn walked across to the chair. To reach it, he had to cross the wide rush mat that covered a section of the plank flooring. He stepped on the mat. ■

What happened the next moment seemed too startling to be real. Never had the boy hunter of Masumpwe been taken so utterly by surprise. Under his feet, the seemingly solid floor gave way, and he shot downward into darkness.



*What happened the next moment — under his feet he shot down*

Too utterly amazed even to utter a cry, he fell blindly into the dark. Splash!

He was plunging in water—deep water. The cold contact struck him like a blow. Instinctively, without thinking, for he was too amazed and dazed to think, he struck out and swam. His head came up over the water, and he floated, his brain in a whirl.

He was in a narrow circular pit, dug deep under the verandah. All was dark around him, but light glimmered above. As he swam, he stared up. He made out the trap-door in the verandah floor through which he had fallen. Over the edge of the opening, an evil face looked down, with sunken eyes that gleamed and glittered with triumph. Like one in a dream, he stared up, as the husky voice of the Maro planter came:

“You’d better have stayed at Nairobi, Cyril Anstruther! You’ve come here to Maro to take over, have you? Did you think it would be easy, after the plantation has been as good as mine for ten years? Fool! After I had your letter from Nairobi, I made all ready for you, and you have fallen into the trap as easily as an antelope into a game-pit. Fool! You seem to have lost your guide, but if he had come with you, I should have met you on the edge of the forest, and dismissed him there, and brought you here alone! You had it coming to you, Anstruther! You will not take over the Maro plantation—you will not learn what has become of the profits during the past years,—you will not charge your manager with fraud in the courts at Nairobi,—you will disappear, Cyril Anstruther, and no man in Kenya will ever know your fate!”

#### CHAPTER V

“YOU villain!” gasped Lyn.  
He understood now.

Swimming strongly, he kept afloat in the deep water of the pit. From that pit, as a single glance told him, there was no escape. The level of the water was six or seven feet below the verandah, and the sides gave no hold for climbing. Unless help came, he could only swim till he was exhausted, and then sink—sink to death in the depths. That was what the manager of the Maro plantation had planned for the boy who had inherited the estate, and who was coming to take possession.

But the matter was not as the evil-faced man above believed. He had no doubt that it was Cyril Anstruther whose upturned face looked at him from the pit. But that mischance in the Kenya forest had saved Cyril Anstruther from this deadly trap. Young Anstruther was at Masumpwe, in the nyumba of Grant Strong, and it was a stranger who had fallen into the trap. And what would have been certain doom for Anstruther, was by no means so sure for the boy in the pit—for Bobolobo was coming to Maro, and must already be near at hand.

“You villain!” repeated Lyn, breathlessly. “If you think that you can get away with this—.”

Ezra Hook chuckled.

"Why not? No one knows that you are here—there is not a soul on the plantation, and not a Kuke will come back from the village before morning. It seems that you can swim, my boy, but you will not swim so long as that. You should have stayed at Nairobi. Did you suspect that you were not receiving all that was your due from the plantation? Did you guess that your manager was feathering his own nest? It was rash to come here, and place yourself in my hands, if you did. Did you fancy I could be called to account for money that has gone on cards and drink? But you suspected nothing,—you, a silly schoolboy from Nairobi. You would soon have found out, here on the spot. You should have stayed at Nairobi, where you were safe."

"Fool as well as villain!" snapped back Lyn. "You had this trap ready for Cyril Anstruther, to rob him of his property, and if he had fallen into it, you could have carried on here as before: but let me tell you this—I am not Cyril Anstruther, as you fancy—."

The sunken eyes stared down at him blankly.

"You are not Cyril Anstruther!" repeated Ezra.

"I am not. I will tell you—."

He was interrupted by a harsh laugh.

"You need tell me no lies, boy!" jeered Ezra. "Do you think I am a child to be taken in so easily as that?"

"I tell you—!"

"That will do! A foolish lie like that will not save you, Anstruther. I am through with you."

He reached down to the trap door, to pull it up into place.

"Help!" shouted Lyn.

A jeering laugh came back.

"Shout as much, and as loudly, as you like," jeered Ezra. "There are no ears to hear. There is not a soul within three miles to hear you. Shout, if you choose."

"I tell you—."

"Pah!"

The trap-door closed with a snap. It left Lyn Strong in black darkness, and he heard the snap of a bolt that secured the trap. Ezra had fastened it from above.

"Help!" shouted Lyn.

His strong young voice came up sharp and clear. Any ear in the planter's bungalow must have heard. But there were no ears to hear—but Ezra's. And the evil man, sprawling in the Madeira chair, lighted a cigar, and poured a drink in a long glass, and shrugged his shoulders. All, as he believed at least,

was safe: and the trapped boy in the pit could shout, and shout, as he swam: till at length his strength was exhausted, and he sank down to his death: his fate never to be known, and Ezra Hook still master of the plantation.

“Help!”

Ezra smoked and drank. He knew that it could not last long. But he did not know that Bobolobo of the Kikuyu was drawing nearer and nearer with swift steps, seeking his young Bwana.



*Ezra smoked and drank*

## CHAPTER VI

“GET out!”

Ezra Hook snarled the words savagely.

Who the black man, in his garb of black-and-white monkey-skins, with a rhinoceros-hide shield on his left arm, three spears in his muscular hand, was, and why he had come to the Maro bungalow, Ezra did not know. But he knew that he did not want ears to hear, and eyes to see, on the spot where Cyril Anstruther, as he believed, was sinking to death in the flooded pit beneath the verandah.

Almost an hour had passed, since Lyn Strong had fallen through the trap. Again and again he had shouted, hoping against hope that Bobolobo might already be at hand. To Ezra, his shouting indicated merely desperation. It passed him by unregarded. But at length the shouts came only at intervals as the boy's strength began to fail. There was no sound from below the plank flooring, when the massive figure in black-and-white monkey-skins emerged from the forest, and came with swift strides up the ndia, the narrow path between the shambas, towards the bungalow.

Ezra had counted on solitude at the plantation, till the Kukes came back from the Maro village, in the morning. Strangers were few and far between in the district, and he did not expect to see one. He was surprised and enraged when a tall Kikuyu in fighting-kit with shield and spear, appeared at the step on the verandah. Drinking and smoking, and listening for a sound from below, he had not heard the feet of the Kikuyu on the ndia. He started up from his chair, his face black with anger. It was only a Kikuyu who came: but Ezra did not want even a native within hearing of a call from the trapped boy below.

“Get out!” he snarled.

Bobolobo gazed at him, in astonishment.

He had arrived at Maro to rejoin his master, and with him to resume the hunt for Simba. He expected to see Lyn in the verandah as he came. But he saw no one but this angry man, who waved him away savagely.

“O Bwana!” he began.

“Get out, I tell you,” snarled Ezra. “Your not wanted here! Go, before I take my whip to you.”

He had no doubt that the black man, at his order, would go, and he was feverishly anxious for him to go, lest another cry should come from the flooded pit below.

But the Kikuyu did not go.





*"Get out before I take my whip to you"*

He halted, staring at the angry evil face. He was astonished by his reception, and in other circumstances, would not have disputed a white man's order. But he had come to Maro for his young Bwana, and they were to go together.

"O Mzungu," said Bobolobo, mildly. "It is for my master that I have come, and he awaits me here."

Ezra glared at him.

"No one awaits you here," he snarled. "You are dreaming! Go, or I will drive you off my land with this kikoto." He caught up a heavy whip, and lifted it with a threatening glare at the Kikuyu.

Bobolobo's eyes gleamed.

"It would not be wise to strike Bobolobo of the Kikuyu with your kikoto, O Mzungu," he said, "for it would mean death under my spear." And from the three spears in his left hand, Bobolobo picked one, and his eyes glittered over it at the angry planter.

"Go!" hissed Ezra. He was in momentary dread of a calling voice beneath the verandah planks.

"I have come for my master—."

"Your master is not here! I order you to go."

"My orders are from my Bwana, and your words are to my ears no more than the wind in the branches," retorted Bobolobo. "Where is my Bwana?"

"I tell you that he is not here—no one here. Who is your master?" snarled Ezra, as puzzled as angry at the Kikuyu's persistence.

"The young Bwana Lyn, son of the Bwana m-kubwa Strong, the great hunter of Masumpwe!" answered Bobolobo.

"I have not seen him! I have never seen him! He is not here! Go and look for him elsewhere!" snarled Ezra.

"But he came with a message—."

"He did not come! No one has come! Go!"

The Kikuyu stood puzzled. Lyn had left him, to trek to Maro with the message from young Anstruther. He must have reached Maro long before Bobolobo came, after carrying Anstruther to the nyumba at Masumpwe. Yet he was not to be seen, and this angry white man, declared that he had not come. But even as the Kikuyu stood wondering whether some mischance on the way had kept Lyn away from Maro, there came a sudden shout in a voice that he knew.

Bobolobo gave a sudden bound as he heard it.

"The Bwana!" he panted.

"Help!"

It was Lyn's voice, every tone of which the faithful Kikuyu knew. His master was there, crying for help. Bobolobo's black eyes burned like fire.

"Dog of a Mzungu!" he roared. "Where is my master? What is it that you have done to my young lord? O Bwana, Bwana-wangu, Bobolobo is here, and he hears your voice."

"Help! Bobo! Bobo, help and save me, or I perish here at the hands of that villain! I am sinking, Bobo—I shall drown if you do not save me." It was a wild and desperate cry, coming the Kikuyu knew not whence, only that it came from the bungalow.

"Bwana! Bwana-wangu! I come!" shouted back the Kikuyu.

He leaped up the step of the verandah. Ezra, his evil face aflame with rage and fear, barred his way. Savagely, he struck with the kikoto, as Bobolobo came, but the Kikuyu's spear caught the whip and cut it from his hand. In desperation Ezra thrust his hand into his hip-pocket, and it came out with a revolver in it. Another moment, and he would have shot down the Kikuyu at his feet.

But that moment was more than enough for the swift Kikuyu. Even as the revolver came up, he thrust with his spear, and the keen blade, keen as a razor's edge, drove through the planter's arm.

The revolver clattered down on the planks from a nerveless hand, and Ezra, shrieking with pain, clasped his right arm with his left hand, staggering.

Then the Kikuyu's grasp was on him.

In that mighty grasp he crumpled like a leaf. Bobolobo's eyes blazed at him as he gripped.

"Where is my master? Where is the young Bwana? Speak, before I cut your head from your shoulders with my spear-blade."

"Bobo! Help! I am here—under the floor, in a flooded pit—I drown if you do not save me. There is a trap-door under a mat—save me, Bobo."



*With a swing of his powerful arms, the Kikuyu hurled Ezra Hook headlong*

With a swing of his powerful arm, the Kikuyu hurled Ezra Hook headlong from the verandah. He crashed on the earth, and lay groaning with the pain of his disabled arm. A moment more, and Bobo had dragged the rush mat away and revealed the hidden trap: another moment, and the trap was wrenched open, and he was looking down at a white face that looked up from dark water.

"Bobo!" panted Lyn.

He was almost at the end of his tether. His strength was almost gone, and it was only by desperate efforts that he still kept afloat in the flooded pit. The Kikuyu had come only in time.

But he had come in time. At the eleventh hour, Bobolobo had come.

"O Bwana! Bwana-wangu!" panted Bobolobo. "Hold to my spear, and with my strong arm I will drag you up."

Leaning over the opening, he lowered the spear-shaft, and Lyn grasped it with both hands. Slowly, for it was a strain even upon his strong and powerful arm, the Kikuyu dragged him up: and he caught at the edge of the trap, and Bobo's hand helped him out.

"O Bobo!" panted Lyn. "My brave and faithful Bobo, you have saved me from drowning like a rat in a trap." He clasped the great black hand, and pressed it in both his own, "O Bobo, but for you my father would never see me again in the nyumba at Masumpwe."

He leaned, exhausted on the verandah rail, in a pool of water. His eyes fell on the groaning man who lay on the earth where Bobolobo had flung him. Ezra could not harm him now. Only his sunken savage eyes gleamed up at the boy whom he had so nearly done to death.

"O Bwana," said the Kikuyu. "It was not written that you should die at the hands of that wicked Mzungu: but it is written that he shall go to the land of the ghosts under a Kikuyu warrior's spear." And Bobolobo grasped his weapon.

"No! No!" said Lyn. "Hold your hand, Bobo. There is a law that will deal with him, and the prison at Nairobi waits for him. The askaris will come for him when we return to Masumpwe. Let him lie!"

"As the Bwana commands!" said Bobolobo, reluctantly.

"You will bind up his wound, Bobo, that he may live till the askaris come to take him," added Lyn.

In silence, the Kikuyu obeyed. And when Lyn Strong and the Kikuyu disappeared by the forest path, the evil man was left, to lie till the askaris came for him.

THE END