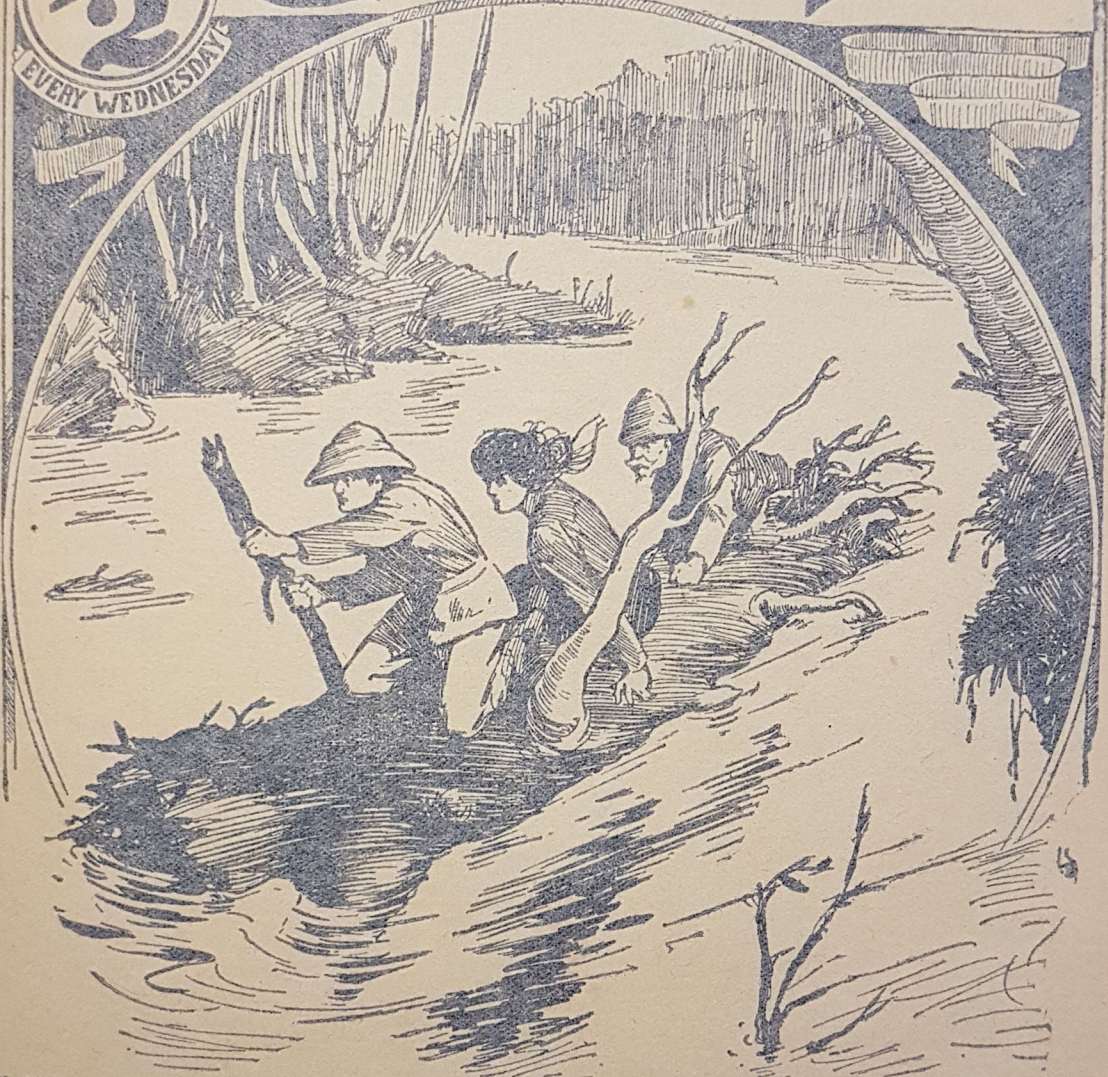


EVERY BOY SHOULD READ 'THE ROAD TO FAME' Starting Within.

1^D/₂
EVERY WEDNESDAY

CIRCLED BY FOES



SLOWLY, SLOWLY DOWN THE BLACK RIVER THE HUGE LOG DRIFTED WITH ITS HUMAN FREIGHT. A MINUTE PASSED—FIVE MINUTES—TEN! NO SOUND OF ALARM OR PURSUIT. "SAFE!" CRIED SIDNEY.
(See the Grand Complete Tale inside.)

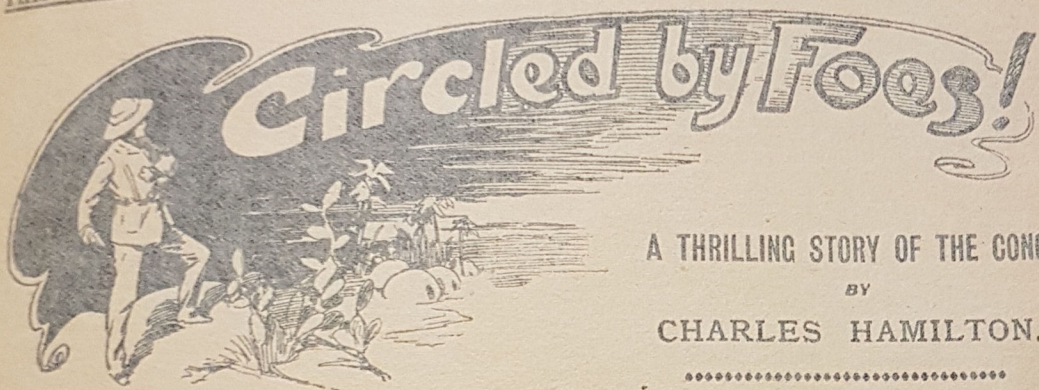
THE MARVEL LIBRARY

No. 527. STARTED TO SUPPRESS BAD BOOKS FOR BOYS.

Look out for the Splendid Sea Tale, entitled

Next "ONLY A CABIN-BOY," Next
Week. A STORY OF A BOY'S HEROISM. Week.

THIS SPLENDID NOVEL IS COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.



A THRILLING STORY OF THE CONGO.

BY

CHARLES HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I

In the Wilds of the Congo—A Friend in Need—The First Shot.

"THE Congo!"

The full round moon rode high in the sky. Like a flood of silver the Congo rolled on its course, between banks covered with thick tropical forest. A man, emerging from the trees, stopped abruptly, and looked at the wide river with eyes full of dismay.

"The Congo! We are lost!"

He flung down his rifle, and reeled against a baobab, the picture of despair.

A girl stepped from the trees—a tall, graceful girl, with a face calm and sweet, though worn by fatigue.

"What is it, uncle?"

"Don't you see? We are lost!" he muttered, without looking up.

"But—"

"That's the Congo. It bars our path. Not a step farther for us, Marie; and the cannibals are close upon our track."

A wave of pallor swept over Marie Louvois's fair face.

She cast a swift glance back at the shadowy forest, and then looked at the broad river glimmering in the moonlight.

"My heaven! And is there no escape?"

"None," Jacques Louvois made a gesture of utter despair. "I tell you we are lost!"

A sound came humming through the dark woods—the echo of a distant shout. It was repeated from different points.

Louvois trembled violently.

"Do you hear them? It will be only a few minutes now. Fool that I was to come to this accursed country! Yet how was I to know that he was still alive—that I should meet him on the banks of the Congo?"

The girl looked at her uncle in amazement. She had not understood the drift of his words.

Another shout—still nearer. Their foes were fast closing in upon them through the forest.

"Oh," cried the girl wildly, "is there no help, then? Must we perish here?"

"I will help you!"

It was a strong, clear English voice that uttered the words.

A young man, with a rifle in his hands, sprang from the trees.

Marie started, and fixed upon him a gaze, half amazed, half terrified. He swept off his hat as he met her glance.

"Did I startle you?" He smiled. "I am

sorry. But come! You have no time to lose. Whether I can save you I know not, but I will do my best!"

Jacques Louvois started forward.

"Save us, monsieur, only save us, and name your own reward!"

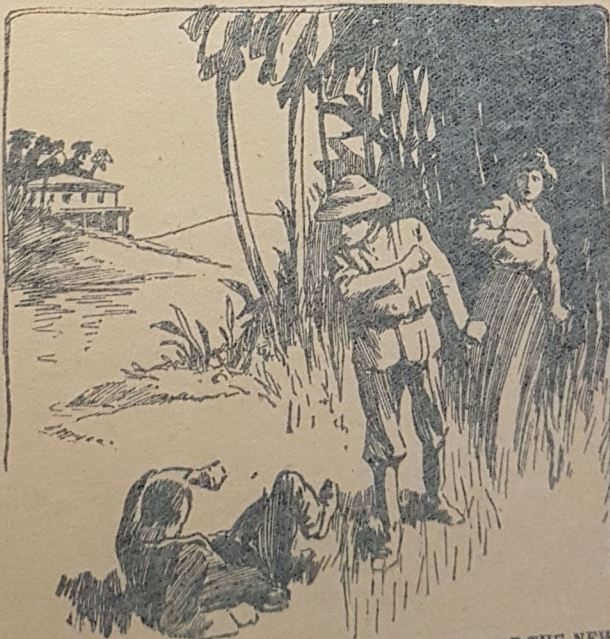
The Englishman looked at him, and gave a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"It is not reward I seek, sir. I will save you if I can."

"But—but whither can we fly? The cannibals are close behind us, and the river cuts us off from flight!"

"Follow me!"

"But—"



HELLENDORF CAUGHT A MOMENTARY GLIMPSE OF THE NEW-COMER ERE A STUNNING BLOW SENT HIM CRASHING TO THE EARTH. IT WAS SIDNEY LISLE! (See page 7.)

MARVEL, VOL. XXI. No. 527. | YOUR EDITOR WISHES YOU TO WRITE TO HIM. Turn to Page 16.

"Monsieur, there is no time to waste in words. Come, mademoiselle. You trust me?"

Marie gave one look at the sunburnt, resolute face, the frank blue eyes, and bowed her head.

"Entirely."
"Come, then."

And Sidney Lisle gave the girl his arm, and led the way rapidly along the rough, swampy bank of the Congo. Louvois picked up his rifle, and hurried after them.

"But, monsieur, whither are you leading us?" he ejaculated after a few minutes.

Sidney halted.
"Look!"

About a dozen yards from the bank an isle, covered with tropical vegetation, lay black against the moonlit river. A low, swampy neck of land, jutting out into the shining Congo, joined the isle to the shore.

Sidney pointed along the isthmus to the isle. There huge baobabs, mingled with the tamarinds and mangolias, were overgrown and festooned together by clinging vines.

"I do not think they will find us there. Or, if they do, what spot could be better fitted for defence?"

Jacques Louvois shivered.

"Defence! Against fifty of them!"

"So many?"

"Yes; and led by a merciless demon who has sworn my death!" almost groaned Louvois.

Sidney shrugged his shoulders.

"At all events, monsieur, it is safer there than here."

"Yes, yes; that is true. Let us hasten!"

Sidney, with Marie's hand in his, led the girl along the narrow isthmus.

In a few moments they reached the group of trees at the extremity of the "point" and entered the gloomy shades.

"You are fatigued, mademoiselle," Sidney said kindly.

"Rest here, while I watch for the enemy."

The girl sank wearily upon a mossy log.

"Thanks, monsieur. You are very good. It is true that I am terribly tired."

Jacques Louvois clutched Sidney's arm. His thin, meagre face was white with terror.

"Look, monsieur—look!"

Hidden from view by a screen of tamarinds, they looked anxiously towards the shore.

Three men had emerged from the forest, and were walking towards the isthmus. They were burly negroes, clad in the semi-military garb of the Congo Free State Native Army, and armed with rifles and bayonets. Their dull, brutal faces and savage looks showed that they had not left behind their native ferocity when they entered the Belgian service.

The two white men watched them silently. Were they going to pass on, or cross the isthmus and search the isle?

Sidney's finger felt for his trigger. If they came, he was ready for them.

The blacks stopped, and jabbered to each other for a few minutes, the fugitives listening in tense anxiety.

Suddenly one of the Congo soldiers stooped and fixed his eyes upon the ground. He rose, and jabbered excitedly, pointing towards the isle.

Louvois groaned.

"We are discovered!"

Sidney nodded.

"They have guessed that we are here. It will be a fight now."

The Congo soldiers were stepping upon the isthmus. Sidney stepped out of the tamarinds, and held up a warning hand. They stared at him in amazement.

"You are not wanted here," said Sidney coolly. "Advance at your peril!"

He sprang back amongst the trees, just in time to escape a whizzing bullet.

The Congo soldiers, with bayonets at the charge, advanced at a run along the isthmus.

Sidney flung up his rifle to a level. The muzzle, peeping from the tamarinds, bore full upon the leading soldier.

Crack!

Splash!

The soldier, shot through the chest, staggered blindly, and fell headlong into the water.

The other two stared for a moment at the widening circles in the river, and then, turning round, bolted like rabbits back into the forest.

CHAPTER 2.

A Captain of Cannibals—A Startling Recognition.

SIDNEY LISLE reloaded his rifle.
"First blood to us," he said lightly. "They will not find it easy to take this isle."
"It is all one," muttered Louvois. "What can we do when they advance in force?"

"Die like men, at the worst!" said Sidney sharply.
Louvois sank limply at the foot of a tree. His face was chalky white, and his hands were trembling.

A more pitiful picture of cowardice Sidney had never seen. He turned away with a shrug of contempt. The man's terror was all for himself, he could see that—not for the girl, whose danger was as great, or greater.

Sidney stepped across to where he had left Marie. She looked up, with eager inquiry.

"Safe, so far, mademoiselle. But how the affair will end I cannot say."

She was very pale, but perfectly calm. He wondered at her courage.

"Yes, yes; I understand. There is no hope. It is noble, generous of you to throw in your lot with ours at such a time."

"Don't speak of that. It is nothing. It is of you I would speak. Are you alone, then, in this wilderness of the Congo? Have you no friends at hand from whom aid might come?"

She shook her head.
"None nearer than Nkota Pool."

"Nkota Pool! That is two miles down the Congo!" He looked at her curiously. "But have you friends there, then?"

"At least, my uncle, M. Louvois, has. We were going there when we were attacked in the forest. Mr. Hellendorf is the resident Belgian commissioner at Nkota Pool. Do you know him?"

"I have heard of him," said Sidney evasively. He did not care to say that he knew Ludwig Hellendorf to be one of the greatest scoundrels in the Congo Free State.

What could be Louvois's motive in taking this girl to Nkota Pool? he wondered. Was there some black treachery afoot?

The Frenchman's looks had by no means impressed him favourably.

"But how comes it, then, that you are attacked by the Congo soldiers?" asked Sidney, looking puzzled. "I know they are lawless rascals, cannibals even, many of them, but—"

"I do not know. My uncle anticipated no danger when we set out from Boma. We were accompanied only by native servants. It was a complete surprise when the black soldiers attacked us in the forest. But it is not mere lawlessness on their part, for they were led by a white officer."

"You are sure?"

"I saw him. My uncle saw him, too, and—and—" She hesitated, and then went on. "From some words my uncle has dropped, it seems to me probable that this officer is some old enemy of his."

"It is possible," said Sidney thoughtfully. "These wild forests are fitting hiding-places for dark deeds."

He looked towards the shore. Nothing moved there yet in the moonlight. His brow was more gloomy than before. If the girl's surmise was correct, as seemed probable, the doom of the trio on the isle was sealed. For the Belgian captain would scarcely leave living witnesses of his crime.

"It's to the death, then?" Sidney gritted his teeth. "Be it so. It shall cost them dear."

A stirring at last in the trees! The enemy were at hand! Sidney watched intently through the openings of the foliage.

From different points of the forest men emerged upon the bank of the Congo, all gathering towards the isthmus.

"Ah! there's the leader!"

A white man, distinguished by his garb, his pith helmet, and his air of command, appeared amongst the Congo soldiers. Sidney could not see his features in the uncertain light. But he could see that the Belgian officer was a tall man with a fine, soldierly figure.

And across Sidney's mind flashed a vague kind of half-remembrance. Where had he seen that figure before?

The officer fixed his eyes upon the isle. Sidney could easily have shot him where he stood. But he waited for an attack.

"Are you there, then, Louvois, you dog?"

It was a deep voice, not unmusical, though vibrating with cynical mockery.

And Sidney started at the sound of it. Surely those tones were familiar to his ear!

He stepped from the tamarinds. He would not be outdone in courage by the Belgian.

"Jacques Louvois is here, and I also am here to defend him."

The moonlight fell full upon Sidney's face. The officer, looking at him, gave a violent start.

"In Heaven's name, who are you?" he cried abruptly.

"My name is Sidney Lisle."
"Good heavens!"

Sidney stared at him in amazement. The officer advanced along the isthmus. Sidney made a motion with his rifle.

"Don't fire! You have nothing to fear from me, Sidney, have you forgotten Bernard Burke?"
Sidney started forward.
"Bernard! My old chum! Have I found you, then?"
And then a sudden recollection smote him.
"Burke! You here! You—a captain of cannibals!"
And the hand he had stretched out dropped to his side.

CHAPTER 3

Bernard Burke's Demand—No Surrender!—A Night of Anxiety—Down the Congo.

CAPTAIN of cannibals!

A bitter smile crossed the face of Bernard Burke. He gave a shrug of the shoulders.
"Even so, Sidney."

"But—but—"

"But you are astonished to see me here?"

"Inexpressibly."

"And I, also—I am surprised to see you. In Heaven's name, what are you doing on the banks of the Congo—and in company with Jacques Louvois?"

And as the name passed his lips, a dark look came over Burke's clear-cut, handsome face.

"Louvois? I met him by chance not more than an hour ago."

"He is no friend of yours?"

"I never met him before."

"But how came you here, Sidney? What are you doing in Central Africa?"

"Lion-shooting. Also, I had an idea that I might run across you, although not—"

Burke laughed drily.

"Not at the head of a Congo cannibal regiment?"

"You are right."

Burke shrugged his shoulders again.

"Beggars can't be choosers, Sidney. I had to take what I could get."

"But—"

"And perhaps I am not so particular as I used to be. Let that pass. It was by chance you came upon Louvois?"

"Yes. I was following the spoor of a lion."

"He is nothing to you?"

"Nothing."

"Then you have no call to stand between him and me," said Burke, looking at him.

Sidney shook his head slowly.

"I cannot desert him, Burke, if that is what you mean."

The captain made an impatient gesture.

"I tell you, he is my prey. I have sworn his death in revenge for a bitter wrong. His eyes blazed with hate. 'The scoundrel! He ruined me! If I command a gang of cannibals now instead of an English regiment, I owe it to Jacques Louvois. I tell you, before the moon sets, my men shall tear him in pieces.'"

"What your wrongs may be, Burke, I do not know; but my word is passed to Mademoiselle Louvois and her uncle, and I stand by that."

"Mademoiselle Louvois!" The captain's brow darkened. "No harm is intended her. You must think me strangely changed if you believe me capable of harming a woman."

"I do not believe it. But Louvois, whatever he may have done, is her uncle, and—"

"In short, you stand by him."

"I must."

Burke's brows wrinkled in thought. He was clearly puzzled how to act. There was a long pause before he spoke again.

Meanwhile, the Congo soldiers lounged upon the bank, looking curiously towards the two white men.

From the foliage behind Sidney came no sound. But he knew that both Louvois and Marie could hear all that was said.

"I cannot spare him!" burst out Burke at last. "Have I not brooded for years upon my vengeance? The chance may never occur again. Sidney, I offer you a free passage with Mademoiselle Louvois. But that dastard must remain to me!"

Sidney shook his head.

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

Burke made a gesture of rage.

"So be it, then. Look out for yourself!"

And with that he swung round and strode back to his men. Sidney stepped back into the trees. He came face to face with Marie.

"It is to be war, then, monsieur?"

He nodded.

There was a troubled look upon her beautiful face. She seemed about to speak, but checked herself and turned away.

Sidney's look was very grim. Unexpectedly, in the depths

of the African forests, he had found his old friend. And that old friend he was about to face in deadly conflict—for whom—for what? For the sake of a shrinking, trembling poltroon, whom he more than half believed to be a treacherous scoundrel as well.

And yet there was no alternative. To desert the Frenchman, scoundrel as he was, was out of the question. He would have to see the matter through to the end. And the end was death. Certain death, unless Bernard Burke relented.

Needless to say, Sidney anxiously watched for the attack, hoping that it would not come, or that, at least, Burke would take no part in it.

He could see Burke standing amongst the black soldiers of the Congo, talking to them. Was he ordering an attack?

No! If such had been his intention, he had changed it. For the soldiers, when he ceased speaking, re-entered the forest in twos and threes, and disappeared. Burke stood looking towards the isle for a few minutes, silent, black as thunder. Then he, too, vanished amongst the trees.

Sidney drew a deep breath of relief. He felt a touch upon his arm. Marie was beside him, her pale face alight with joy.

"Oh, monsieur! They are gone, then?"

"So it appears, certainly."

"You have saved us! It is because of you that they do not attack."

"No doubt."

She looked into his face searchingly. She could see that he was by no means satisfied.

"Are we not safe, then, monsieur?"

"Safe from attack—yes."

"But then—"

"I know Bernard Burke of old. He is a man of iron determination. I cannot believe that he will abandon his object so easily."

She understood. The joy died out of her face.

"You think they are lurking in the wood, to seize us when we depart from this place?"

"I think it very probable."

"Heaven! What shall we do, then?"

"We are doomed," quavered out Jacques Louvois. He was still limply crouched at the foot of the tree, shaking with terror. "There is no hope. A thousand curses—"

"Silence!" said Sidney sternly. "This is no time for cursing."

The Frenchman was silent, only a quivering moan escaping him at intervals. Marie vainly strove to conceal her contempt as she looked at him.

Sidney's brows were knitted in thought. The girl saw that some idea was forming in his mind. She watched his face without speaking.

"There is one chance," the young man said at length, abruptly. Jacques Louvois looked up eagerly. Marie's gaze became inquiring.

"When the moon sets we shall have an interval of darkness before dawn. The shore is barred to us. But the river is open. In the dark we may escape their vigilance."

"But how?"

"Look!"

He lifted his hand and pointed upstream. The Congo, like all African rivers, bore upon its surface vast masses of driftwood, debris of the forest, lazily floating down with the current. A huge log, as Sidney spoke, was gliding towards the isle. It passed within a stone's throw.

"A log like that would bear us safely. I could easily secure one. And if the fellows yonder are not watching for such a device—and I think it is likely they are not—it may be done. At any rate, it is our only chance."

"Let us try it," the girl said calmly.

A gleam of hope lighted up the ashy face of Jacques Louvois.

"Yes, yes; let us try it," he said feverishly. "It is a chance, at least."

Sidney nodded.

"We must wait for darkness."

Darkness was long in coming. It was weary waiting. Louvois sat silent. Sidney, standing beside the girl under the trees, talked sometimes, while he watched the shore.

No sign of the Congo soldiers! Not a leaf stirring to show that the edge of the forest hid watchful foes. And yet Sidney was certain that keen eyes never left the isle.

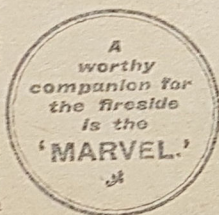
Dusk replaced the moonlight on the wide river. Then Sidney crossed the isle to the outer edge, and secured a floating log. It was the huge trunk of an uprooted tree, one of the giants of the Congo forest. A hundred men could have found footing upon it.

By one of the branches that remained to it Sidney caught it and anchored it to the isle. Then he rejoined Marie.

There was only a glimmer of moonlight now. Darkness at last!

Sidney gave his hand to the girl.

"BAIL UP!" is the title of the Grand Complete Story in "PLUCK." Now on sale.



"Come—and silence!"

The three crossed to the anchored log. The girl resigned herself to Sidney's care. He placed her securely between two forked boughs. Then, not so gently, he helped Louvois to embark.

Still no sound from the shore. Evidently the Congo soldiers had no suspicion of what was going forward.

Sidney, with a light heart, sprang upon the log and set it adrift.

Slowly, slowly down the black river the huge mass went with an easy, gliding motion. And still no sound came from the shore.

A minute passed—five minutes—ten! No sound of alarm or pursuit. It was clear that their flight had not been discovered.

"Safe!" said Sydeny.

And Marie Louvois gave a low sob of relief.

CHAPTER 4.

At Nkota Pool—Hellendorf the Belgian—Sidney's Farewell—A Sudden Attack.

HALF an hour had passed. Gently the huge log floated down the Congo's lazy current, bearing the three fugitives far from the ken of their foes.

Sidney was talking cheerily to Marie. In the East, over the tree-tops, a glimmering white showed itself in the sky. Dawn was at hand.

Even Jacques Louvois's fears had left him. He was cool again now—cool and calculating. The glances he cast at Sidney Lisle were by no means cordial. Sidney had saved the Frenchman's life, risking his own to do it. But that counted for little with a man like Jacques Louvois.

He rose, steadying himself by holding to a bough, and peered towards the southern bank in the breaking dawn.

"We must not pass Nkota Pool," he said, with a look at Sidney.

The Englishman nodded.

"I shall know the pool, monsieur. We are not far from it now."

"That is well," said Louvois, with an air of satisfaction. "I shall be glad to find myself within the walls of Hellendorf's bungalow. And then"—his little black eyes glittered spitefully—"then we'll see about dealing with Captain Burke."

"It would be wise of you to keep clear of him in the future," Sidney said drily.

Louvois clicked his teeth.

"Last night's work, my friend, shall cost him dear. Do you know that I bear credentials from the Government in Boma? Burke, as an officer in the Belgian service, has been guilty of treason in attacking me. I'll have him shot like a dog!"

Sidney did not reply. His heart was heavy. He could see that Louvois was in deadly earnest; and for the first time it struck him that in saving the Frenchman's worthless life, he had, perhaps, condemned his former friend to death.

"Ah, there is the bungalow!" Louvois exclaimed suddenly. It was full day now.

The Congo here widened into one of the lagoons so frequent in its course. This was Nkota Pool.

On the southern shore a white bungalow, circled by palms, could be seen in the brightening sunlight. From a high flag-staff waved the standard of King Leopold. Close by the bungalow was a group of native huts, and Sidney could see moving figures in white waist-cloth amongst the palms. As they drifted nearer he could make out a man, clad in white, on the verandah of the house.

Sidney, punting with a long branch, skilfully brought the log to land. It grounded in a bed of mud.

Louvois sprang ashore, to meet the man who came hastening down from the bungalow.

The latter was a Belgian of about thirty, with a sallow, crafty face and keen black eyes, in the depths of which was a gleam of cruelty. A broad hat was tilted back upon his head, and he had a big, strong-smelling cheroot between his teeth.

"Louvois! You!" He stared at the Frenchman in amazement. "What the dickens does this mean?"

"It's a long story. I've had a narrow scrape, Hellendorf. What I want now is food and rest."

"You can have both at once. Mademoiselle, your servant! But who is this?"

Sidney had taken Marie's hand, and deftly assisted her to land.

Hellendorf fixed a sharp, suspicious look upon the Englishman.

"Mr. Lisle has been good enough to help us," said Louvois.

He exchanged a quick glance with the Belgian, and then turned blandly to Sidney.

"Monsieur, I thank you, in my niece's name and my own. If I can at any time be of service to you, you have but to com-

mand me. In the meantime, I have the honour to bid you a very cordial farewell. Come, Marie!"

Sidney bit his lip.

He would not have cared to accept the hospitality of Ludwig Hellendorf, if that had been offered. But to be thus cynically dismissed when he was no longer of any use—that was not a pleasant experience.

Marie coloured with mortification. Her uncle's motive for not fathom. She hardly dared to look at Sidney.

"Farewell, monsieur," she faltered. "I cannot tell you how grateful I am, but I shall never forget your courage and your noble generosity!"

Sidney pressed the hand she gave him.

"Believe me, it was a pleasure to be of service to you." He paused a moment, and then continued: "And if you should again need the aid of a friend, mademoiselle, remember that Sidney Lisle is always at your disposal."

She looked at him quickly. Something in his tone warned her of a hidden meaning in his words.

Jacques Louvois broke in sharply.

"Come, Marie!"

Sidney raised his hat. He watched the girl up the path to the house until she disappeared within the bungalow.

Then he slowly turned away and entered the forest. The face of the girl was gone from his eyes, but her image was imprinted upon his heart.

And, thinking of Marie Louvois, he was less wary, less alert, than usual.

The first suspicion he had of danger was when a branch crackled in the underwood, and then, as he grasped his rifle, and turned, three or four figures sprang upon him from the thickets, and he was borne to the ground in the grip of sinewy hands.

One desperate effort he made to tear himself loose, and for a moment it seemed that he would succeed. For one fleeting moment the grip of his assailants was loosened.

But then it closed again, vice-like, and Sidney succumbed powerlessly under it. He lay panting, pinned to the ground, while a rope was wound about his limbs and knotted. Then, lifted upon brawny shoulders, he was carried rapidly away into the depths of the tropical forest.

CHAPTER 5.

A Pair of Scoundrels—An Old Quarrel.

YOU have had a narrow escape, my friend," Ludwig Hellendorf blew out a thick cloud of smoke, and removed the cheroot from between his yellow teeth. He looked curiously at the Frenchman.

"But what is it, then, this grudge which Captain Burke bears against you?"

It was the afternoon. They were smoking upon the verandah of the bungalow, and Louvois had told the story of the night's adventure in the forest.

"An old quarrel," said Louvois evasively. "We had a—contest once, in which he came off worst, and he has sworn revenge."

"You had better keep on your guard, then. I know this Burke—a gloom came into the Belgian's eyes. "He is a man of iron—one of those English bulldogs who never turn back."

Louvois looked at him.

"He has crossed your path, too?" he asked. "He is your enemy?"

The Belgian gritted his teeth.

"Probably he has forgotten my existence by this time. But I have not forgotten." He glared vindictively. "I was making an example of a nigger who presumed to make a fuss because his father had been shot for not bringing in the required quantity of rubber. I had fastened the rascal up on the edge of the Congo for the crocodiles. And then ill-luck brought Burke upon the scene. He interfered, in his disdainful English way, and set Mpoma loose; and when I reached for my pistol he flung me head first into the Congo. Peste take him! I had a narrow escape from the jaws of the crocodiles." He shivered at the recollection. "But it shall cost the hound dear before I have done with him."

He smoked in silence for a few minutes, reflecting deeply.

"We can do it," he said abruptly. "He has placed himself in our hands by this attack. We have only to accuse him before the authorities at Boma to have him arrested; and once he is under arrest I think we know how to take care that he does not get loose again."

Louvois's eyes gleamed. There was nothing he would stop short at to secure himself from the vengeance of the man he had wronged.

"But to business," said Hellendorf, changing the subject abruptly. "It is of mademoiselle that I would speak."

"Well, I have kept my word. She is here."

Hellendorf nodded.

MANY INTERESTING SUBJECTS
are discussed by Your Editor in his
WEEKLY CHAT.

Turn to Page 16.



SHARPLY RANG A BUGLE NOTE; FIERCELY THE SAVAGE YELLED; AND FORWARD IN A TORRENT CAME THE BLACK SOLDIERS OF THE CONGO. "FIRE! FIRE! STAND FAST FOR YOUR LIVES!" THE BELGIAN SHOUTED. (See page 12.)

"Have you told her?"

"No."

"She would not have come?"

"She would have flung herself into the sea first," said Louvois grimly.

The Belgian knitted his brows. An extremely unpleasant look came into his eyes.

"She must not carry her head too high here," he said; "we are not in Europe now. There she could dismiss a suitor with a word. On the banks of the Congo the case is altered."

A momentary expression of uneasiness flitted over the face of Louvois. Even in his hard, selfish heart all feeling was not dead.

"Don't be hasty, Hellendorf," he said. "There is plenty of time. Use fair words first."

"Of course. But, between ourselves, there is no need to mince words."

Louvois did not reply.

"And, to tell you the truth," continued Hellendorf, "I have little hope that Marie will listen to me. It is not that she is indifferent to me—it is that she dislikes me."

"I don't—"

"Haven't I seen it?" exclaimed Hellendorf. "But that does not disturb me. Her dislike will only give a zest to my success. Let her hate me if she will, but she shall be my wife, as I swore when she refused me a year ago. I shall speak to her to-morrow."

"Better not so soon."

"Bah! Delay will serve no purpose. Besides, in a few weeks I have to go into the interior." He rose and flung away the stump of his cheroot. "So that is settled!"

And it was for that that Marie had been brought to the bungalow on the Congo!

CHAPTER 6.

The Camp of the Cannibals—A Tale of Treachery—Sidney's Word of Honour.

BOUND with ropes, and borne upon brawny shoulders, Sidney Lisle was carried through the forest at a rapid pace.

He was brushed against low boughs and scratched on thorny bushes. Who his captors were he did not at first guess. But as soon as he was able to get a look at them, he recognised the garb of the Congo soldiers.

Burke's men? Doubtless. In that case, he thought, he had little to fear, and his mind became easier.

For several miles he was thus carried, the black soldiers occasionally jabbering to each other in a dialect he did not understand, but addressing no word to him.

At length this strange journey ended. The blacks halted in a glade of the forest, and dropped their prisoner at the foot of a baobab-tree.

Sidney with some difficulty struggled to a sitting posture against the tree-trunk, and took a survey of his surroundings.

There was a camp in the glade. Nearly thirty Congo soldiers sprawled or lounged about, and through openings in the wood here and there Sidney could see sentinels on guard.

"Sidney!" Bernard Burke stood before him. There was an indefinable expression upon the bronzed face of the Congo captain.

Sidney nodded to him calmly. "So I am your prisoner, Bernard?"

"It appears so."

"What are you going to do with me?" Burke made a sign to a tall corporal who stood beside him. "Cut him loose, Mpoma."

Sidney, freed from his bonds, rose and stretched his limbs, drawing a deep breath of relief.

"Thanks!" he said; "that's better. And now, Bernard, if breakfast is going, I sha'n't refuse to take a snack."

Burke smiled in spite of himself.

A THRILLING STORY OF
THE SEA.

"ONLY A CABIN-BOY."

THE "MARVEL"
NEXT WEDNESDAY.

"You are welcome to all my camp offers," he said. "But, Sidney, am I to regard you as a friend or a foe?"

Sidney held out his hand. Burke did not take it.

"Do you forget that I am a captain of cannibals?" he asked ironically.

"I don't forget it; I wish I could."

"Perhaps you would not blame me so much if you knew the facts."

"Perhaps. Let me hear them."

"You shall; and then, if you like, I will take your hand."

Breakfast was soon brought, and Sidney, sitting on a large, projecting root of the tree, began to eat.

Bernard Burke threw himself upon the turf, resting upon his elbow.

"Yes, it's a change," he said in a reflective way—"to a gang of Congo cannibals from a crack British regiment. But it was the only thing left open to me after I sent in my papers."

"You resigned; but why?"

Burke gave a hard laugh.

"I was allowed to resign, as a favour."

"Tell me the story."

"When you knew me last I had taken a command on the Niger. I had every prospect of a fine future. Jacques Louvois spoiled all that—Jacques Louvois, the man you saved from me last night."

"My quarters were at Fort Bergo, close to the French Niger frontier. Jacques Louvois was a trader at the fort. He knew the country well, and spoke several of the native dialects. I had no reason to doubt his honesty, and, looking upon him as a useful fellow, I frequently employed him on business amongst the natives."

"The chief of a certain Yoruba tribe, who was under British protection, fearing an attack from an aggressive tribe over the border, sent his treasures to the fort for safety. Jacques Louvois, as I learned afterwards, had advised him to do it. At that time he had already formed the plan he afterwards carried out."

"The treasure, the valuable part of which consisted of a number of fine diamonds, belonging to the chief's wives, was lodged in my house at the fort. I saw it securely placed, and thought little about it after that."

"The raid the chief had feared did not take place. I know now that from the beginning Louvois had alarmed him to serve his own ends. It was after a week or so that the chief came to the fort to reclaim his property."

"Then, to my amazement, it was discovered that the valuable part of it—the diamonds—was missing!"

"I questioned, I searched right and left. No one knew anything of the missing stones. But I found that, two days before, Jacques Louvois had left the fort without acquainting anyone with his destination. A glimmering of the truth broke upon me. I ordered instant pursuit, and sent off an express to Lagos."

"Meanwhile, the chief was raising a clamour about his loss. I saw that it would not be long before he would get the idea into his dull brain that it was I who was seeking to rob him. I made every effort to run down Louvois, especially to cut him off from the French territory, to which I guessed he would fly with his booty."

"In the latter I was successful. Finding escape impossible, he entered Lagos at last, and was arrested there, when just about to embark for Europe."

"When I received news of that, and that a packet of diamonds had been found upon him, I thought the affair was at an end. I was never more mistaken in my life."

"I was a little surprised at the curtness of the governor's note calling me to Lagos. When I arrived there I found that Jacques Louvois had yet one card to play."

"His chief motive, I suppose, was to save his skin, but also he wished to make me suffer for causing the failure of his coup. But for me he would have left Africa a rich man. Owing to me he was in danger of remaining there a convict. I could read in his little spiteful eyes the pleasure it gave him to swear away my honour."

"To be brief, he accused me of the theft. He declared that I had placed the packet in his hands to be taken to Europe—that he was ignorant of its contents. And with a devilish ingenuity he made out a kind of proof. It was known that I had often employed him—that he was to some extent in my confidence. Some note of mine to him, referring to some business he had done for me upon a former occasion, he now produced, making out that it referred to this matter; and I could not disprove it."

"The governor told me that I could demand a court-martial if I like; but that as a friend he advised me to resign and let the matter be hushed up. I had been either dishonest or careless, and in either case he saw no alternative for me but to leave the service."

"At first I was inclined to demand the court-martial. But upon reflection I decided that, if I was to leave the service, it would be better for my people if I left it without a scandal."

"So I sent in my papers. And then, Sidney, what was going left for me to do?"

"When my friends in England I would not. And, had a soldier, a life of idleness seemed to me impossible. I decided that if I was not allowed to follow my own flag, I would follow another."

"There is one War Department which will accept an offer, provided he knows his business, without asking questions about anything else. It is that of the Congo Free State. First you a hard life in a vile climate—and no questions asked."

"That was why I came to Boma and enlisted in the Belgian service, and became an officer of King Leopold. It is true that I now form a part of a system of tyranny which is crushing the very life out of Central Africa. It is true that the Belgians are robbers and brutes, and that their native forces are recruited from the most savage tribes, many of them cannibals. But, as I said to you before, beggars cannot be choosers. And I tell you, Sidney, through the comrade of petty tyrants and the captain of cannibals, I have done no deed unworthy of a man who has worn King Edward's uniform."

"I am sure of it, Bernard," said Sidney—"I am sure of it."

"On the other hand, many a time I have stepped between an oppressor and his victim, and my authority has always been used to restrain the ferocity of the native troops." He smiled faintly. "I want you to know the best as well as the worst, Sidney."

"Forgive me, Bernard!" Sidney held out his hand, and the captain grasped it warmly.

There was silence for a few minutes.

"Now you know all," resumed Burke, "do you wonder that I hate Jacques Louvois—that I have sworn to take upon him a revenge as terrible as the injury he did me?"

"No; I do not wonder."

"The chance came unexpectedly. It was Fate that brought him to the Congo. He has escaped me this time, but one swallow does not make a summer." Burke gritted his teeth. "My time will come."

Sidney was looking very thoughtful.

"And yet—" he said slowly, half to himself.

The captain looked at him quickly.

"What are you thinking of?"

Sidney coloured a little.

"I was thinking of Mademoiselle Louvois. Her uncle is a scoundrel; but she—I am sure of it!—she is as good and pure as she is beautiful."

Burke smiled grimly. He could see the drift of Sidney's thoughts.

"I do not doubt it, Sidney. I should not be surprised to learn that she is destined to be a new victim of some black treachery of his."

Sidney started.

"What do you suspect, Burke?"

"When I first learned that Louvois was setting out from Boma with his niece for Nkoto Pool, I guessed that there was some foul play afoot. The nature of it I cannot say."

"You are right, Bernard. The same thought crossed my mind. She cannot have known the kind of place she was going to. Hellendori is a scoundrel; and Louvois—he was so decided in getting rid of me as soon as we reached the ban galow, I knew there was something behind it. And yet, how to interfere between her and her uncle—and, I a perfect stranger?"

So ran Sidney's muttered reflections. But Burke was no longer listening. His mind was filled by his own bitter thoughts.

Sidney had finished his meal. He rose and lighted a cigarette.

"Well, Burke, am I a prisoner?"

The captain shook his head.

"No, Sidney. All I ask is your pledge not to interfere again between Jacques Louvois and me."

Sidney hesitated. He was thinking of Marie.

"And if I do not give it?"

"You will give it. You will not accept your freedom at my hands and remain my enemy."

"No, I could not do that. I give you my parole, then."

"I rely upon you."

There was a short silence.

"You are going to follow this trail, then, to the bitter end?"

Sidney asked reflectively.

"To the death!"

"Have you thought what the consequences are likely to be? The wrongs you have received at the hands of Louvois will count for nothing at Boma. I have learned from mademoiselle that he has come to this region to take an official post. By attacking him, and using Government troops for the purpose, you place yourself in a peculiar position. What will they say in Boma?"

Burke shrugged his shoulders.

"Let them say what they will. So long as I have my revenge I care little what follows. Besides, a bribe at Boma will offset almost anything if it be large enough."

Sidney smiled.
 "However, Louvois is pretty certain to remain in the shelter of the station at Nkota Pool."
 The captain made a disdainful gesture.
 "That will not save his skin."
 "You would not venture to attack a Belgian station under the flag of King Leopold?" ejaculated Sidney.
 Burke did not reply. But the look upon his face would have made Jacques Louvois shiver to his very soul if he could have seen it.

CHAPTER 7.

The Belgian Resorts to Drastic Measures—Sidney Appears.

HOW do you like my bungalow, mademoiselle?"
 It was morning, the day after Marie's coming to Nkota Pool.
 The girl had wandered down amongst the nodding palms towards the river, more for the sake of avoiding Hellenendorf than for anything else.
 Her face was thoughtful and almost gloomy. Her reflections, indeed, were painful enough.

Her uncle had not given her a faithful description of Nkota before she left Boma.

She knew that she was going to an up-country station, where things would be rough and ready; but she had not imagined that the bungalow of Ludwig Hellenendorf was to be her permanent residence.

She felt that her uncle had deceived her; she felt that it was impossible that she should remain at Nkota. But how to get away? That Louvois would refuse to return to Boma she felt sure. In her now distrust of him, she asked herself what motive he could have had for thus placing her in such a false position. Sidney's parting words recurred to her.

Was she threatened, then, by some peril, and had he foreseen it?

She wished—ah, how she wished—that he had not gone.

That, again, was her uncle's doing.

The voice of Hellenendorf broke unpleasantly upon her reverie. She turned to face him with a light almost of anger in her eyes.

Already she had seen that he meant to renew his old attentions. And she remembered that she was no longer in Europe. What if he would not take "No" for an answer?

"What do you think of Nkota?" he continued. "A pretty place, isn't it?"

Her eyes dwelt upon the shining river, the graceful palms, the dark, deep forest beyond.

"Very beautiful."
 "Do you think you could be happy here?"

"I am afraid not, monsieur."
 "Might I ask—why not?"

"A thousand reasons."
 "I am sorry. I had hoped that I should be able to make you happy here."

"Monsieur!"
 "It is true, mademoiselle. You are aware that I love you. I told you so before. I tell you so again."

Marie coloured deeply.

"You have no right to speak to me so. I gave you an answer once."
 "But you might change that."
 "Impossible."
 "You are cruel! I love you devotedly."
 "Monsieur, you displease me by saying so, and I beg of you not to mention the subject again."
 A gleam shot into the Belgian's eyes.
 "Ah! that is what I cannot promise."
 "Monsieur Hellenendorf!"
 "I repeat that I love you."
 "You insult me!"
 Marie turned haughtily away. An oath rose to the Belgian's lips. He sprang forward and caught her arms.
 "How dare you!"
 She tore herself free and faced him with flashing eyes and beating heart, and the colour coming and going in her cheeks. Never had she looked more beautiful, and the Belgian's eyes gleamed with bold admiration as he looked at her.
 "You must listen to me, mademoiselle."

A sense of her powerlessness rushed upon her as she caught his mocking smile. The colour faded from her cheeks, leaving her deadly pale.

"I love you, Marie, and I have sworn that you shall be my wife. I am not the kind of man to abandon a cherished project because of a woman's 'No.' I expected all this. You say you have given me my answer. Well, I say to you that that answer must be changed."
 She did not reply. It seemed to her as if her heart were ceasing to beat.

The Belgian came a step nearer. She shrank back, her eyes fixed on his, dilating.

"Here, I am master. If you will not listen to fair words, you shall listen to harsh ones. You disdained me before. I have not forgotten it. But now it is I who can dictate!"

"You— you coward!"
 He laughed boisterously.

"You will find it better, mademoiselle, to conciliate me than to defy me."
 "Conciliate you! You coward! I despise you!" she broke out—"I despise and detest you!"

The sallow face all of a sudden reddened with rage.
 "By Heaven—"
 "Let me pass!"

He had planted himself in her path to the house. His eyes, fixed upon hers, glittered with mockery. Her words had roused all the venom of his evil nature.

"A kiss, mademoiselle—a forfeit for your cruel words. I claim it," he laughed.

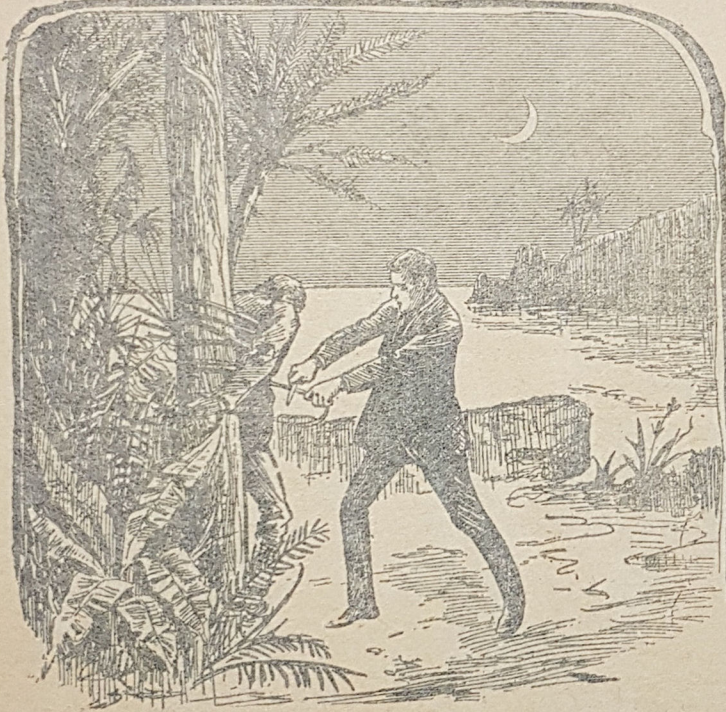
And, baffling her attempt to elude him, he caught her in his arms.

A startled scream broke from Marie, ringing far through the palm-trees.

Hellenendorf laughed again.
 "Help, help!" screamed Marie, as a footstep sounded amongst the trees.

Hellenendorf, turning, with an oath upon his lips, caught a momentary glimpse of the new-comer ere a stunning blow sent him crashing to the earth.

It was Sidney Lisle!



WITH A GASP OF SURPRISE, BOB SPRANG FORWARD AND CUT THE OLD MAN'S BONDS WITH A SHEATH-KNIFE. (An exciting incident from next week's story, "ONLY A CABIN-BOY.")

"ONLY A CABIN-BOY."

NEXT WEDNESDAY. A Grand Complete Story of a Boy's Heroism.

"ONLY A CABIN-BOY."

CHAPTER 8.

Sidney and Marie—The Treachery of Hellendorf.

SIDNEY stood over the Belgian, his eyes ablaze, his fists clenched, ready to repeat the blow if Ludwig Hellendorf rose.

But he did not rise. He had fallen like a log, and he lay like one, his eyes closed, his breathing stertorous. He was stunned. Sidney had struck with all the force of his powerful arm, and a second blow was not needed.

He turned from the fallen ruffian to Marie. The girl's face was full of amazement.

"Monsieur Liese! Thanks—oh, thanks!"
Sidney drew a deep breath. He had seen her rin the arms of Hellendorf, and it had kindled in his heart a rage that astonished himself. He could have killed the Belgian.

"I heard you call, mademoiselle. I was yonder, by the river. Has he hurt you?"

"No; he—he frightened me."
She was recovering her composure now; but her heart was still beating violently. A short silence fell between them.

She wondered how he came to be at hand. She had been amazed to see him there.

And Sidney did not explain that he had been lingering about Nkota in the hope of seeing her—with no definite object in view save that of assuring himself that all was yet well with her.

What he had seen gave him sufficient assurance upon that point. All was not well—all was very far from well.

Marie spoke again, casting a disquieting glance at the stark, silent Belgian. There was no sound of anyone approaching the spot; the circling palm-trees concealed the scene from the view of the bungalow.

"He—he is not dead?"

"Dead! Oh, no!" Sidney reassured her, with a smile. "That would be no more than he deserves, though, the cowardly dog!"

"Oh, no, no!"

Sidney reflected. He had an opportunity now of speaking freely to Marie, but he did not know how long it would last. They might be interrupted at any moment. It did not take him long, then, to decide what to say.

"Mademoiselle, you believe that I am your friend, do you not?"

"Surely, I do!"

"I am a stranger to you, almost, and if I ask you to trust me—"

"I would do so with my life," she said, with unconscious earnestness.

Sidney's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"Thank you! Will you, then, allow me to give you counsel?"

"Gladly—gladly! I was never more in need of it than at this moment," she said, in a faltering voice. "What do I know not?"

"You are in danger here."

"Alas! I know it."

"And M. Louvois, your natural protector, is not worthy of your trust."

A deeply-troubled look came over her face. She felt that Sidney was right, and yet—Louvois was her dead father's brother, and she was loth to believe. She was silent.

"Believe me, mademoiselle, I speak only for your good. I counsel you to leave Nkota."

"Oh, would that I could!"

"I will aid you to do so."

She started.

"You, monsieur?"

"I! Say but the word, and I will take you back to Boma in spite of them all."

"You are very kind," she faltered. "I thank you from my heart. But—but—"

Sidney understood her hesitation—to leave her uncle, her guardian, to trust herself to a stranger. True, he had proved his faith, but—but—in fact, there were endless "buts."

"It is true, mademoiselle, that this flight would be a desperate step for you to take. I am aware of that. But it is the lesser of two evils. Can you remain in the society of that?"

He made a gesture towards the silent Belgian.

She shuddered.

"Oh, heavens!" she cried. "What can I do?"

Sidney was silent in his turn. It was not his place to urge her.

"Perhaps if I appealed to my uncle he will take me away,"

said Marie, with a gleam of hope.

Sidney looked doubtful.

"And if he does not?"

She did not reply for a full minute. She was thinking deeply, painfully; but at length her troubled face set in an expression of resolve.

"If he does not, monsieur, I shall accept your generous offer of aid. After what has passed, I cannot remain here."

"So be it. But we must not forget that Ludwig Hellendorf will oppose your going, and that he has force upon his side." Marie looked startled.

"I had not thought of that."

"It will be necessary to use caution. At midnight I will have a canoe on the Congo. I will await you at the landing-place. If you have decided to fly, you will meet me there. They do not watch you?"

"Oh, no."

"You think you will be able to come if you wish?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"You must take care, of course, that they do not suspect your intention. Speak to M. Louvois, but let nothing of this escape you."

"I will be careful. And oh, believe that I am very grateful."

"I would die for you, mademoiselle!"

She coloured a little as she gave him her hand. But the warmth of his tone woke a strange, pleasant thrill in her heart.

"Adieu, then, monsieur!"

"Or Au revoir!" he said, with a smile.

He watched her till the palms hid her. How beautiful she was—how sweet! How worthy of love and tenderness! And at that thought the colour deepened in his sunburnt cheek.

He remembered the Belgian, with a start, and turned to look at him.

Hellendorf still lay motionless, his eyes closed, his under-jaw dropped. There was a big blue bruise on his face. His breathing was thick and heavy, and came in jerks. He looked as if he would not recover for hours—as if he possibly would not recover at all.

Whether he recovered or not Sidney cared little. If he had been able to look a little into the future, he would have sent a bullet through the Belgian's black heart as he lay there. But the future was hid: Leaving Hellendorf where he lay, to fare as he might, Sidney strode away from the scene of the rencontre, and entered the shades of the forest.

His footsteps died away. Ludwig Hellendorf was alone.

And then a strange and startling change came over the Belgian.

He sat up, his eyes opened, and he rubbed with his hand the aching bruise his face bore. He cast a look of demoniac hatred in the direction in which the Britisher had gone.

"Curse him! curse him! He shall die like a dog for that blow," he hissed, his eyes gleaming like a savage animal's.

"Heaven! how my head aches! Curse him!"

And then, in the midst of his cursing, a grim chuckle broke from him at the thought of how he had deceived the Englishman.

The blow had stunned him; he had lain unconscious for many minutes. But when consciousness struggled back, and he found Sidney and Marie in talk, his native cunning and treachery suggested the course he followed. And he had played his part so well that Sidney, keen as he was, had no suspicion of the truth.

The Belgian had overheard only the last sentences of Sidney and Marie. But they were sufficient to place him in possession of their plans.

He picked himself up and walked unsteadily towards the bungalow. His brain was by no means clear yet; his head was aching terribly; one of his eyes was closed. He felt sick and dull; but all the same a sense of fierce satisfaction was strong within him. He held the man he hated in the hollow of his hand.

"He will take her to Boma, will he?" He gritted his teeth, and grinned derisively. "Well, we shall see."

CHAPTER 9.

A Vain Appeal—The Snare for Sidney—Marie a Prisoner—A Night Alarm.

"UNCLE! Uncle Jacques!"

Louvois removed his cigar and looked up un-easily. There was an expression upon his niece's face that he did not like.

"Well, Marie?"

"I want you to take me back to Boma."

"Back to Boma! Nonsense!"

"Uncle, I must go. It is impossible for me to remain here."

Louvois shifted nervously.

"What has happened?"

"I have been insulted by that—that man." Her cheeks burned at the remembrance, "Uncle, will you take me back to Boma?"

He did not answer the direct question.

"Surely you exaggerate, Marie. I am certain that Ludwig did not mean to offend you. He loves you."

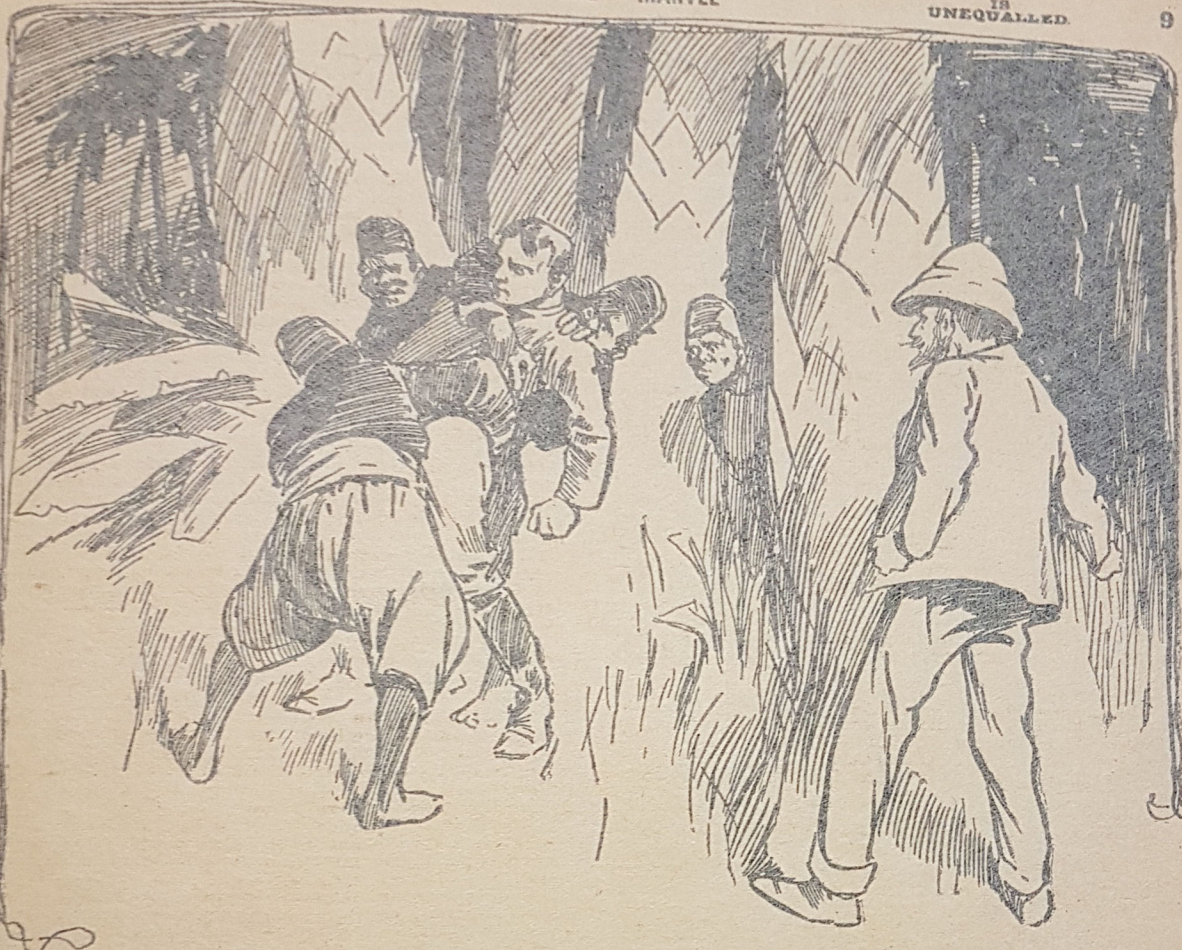
"Uncle!"

"He wishes to make you his wife. In my opinion you do wrong to disdain him."

"Monsieur!"

"It is time, Marie, that I made you an explanation. I am under deep obligations to M. Hellendorf."

"However—"



OUT FROM THE DARK SHADOWS SPRANG SEVERAL FIGURES WHO GRAPPLED FIERCELY WITH SIDNEY.
"SEIZE HIM!" CRIED HELLENDORF. (See page 10.)

"Do you know why I left Europe?"

She shook her head.

"It was because I was a ruined man. Ludwig Hellenдорf's help was to me like a plank to a drowning man. He has obtained for me a post on the Congo—security from my creditors, and a chance of getting rich. Can you guess why he has done it, Marie?"

She was silent.

"It is because he loves you

"And you—you accepted all that, thinking that I—I would—"

"Marry him. Yes."

"It was cruel—base."

"Marie!"

"Yes, I repeat it. But I will not submit. I would choose a reptile from the swamp rather than Ludwig Hellenдорf," she cried, with flashing eyes.

An extremely unpleasant look crept over the thin face of her uncle.

"Calm yourself, Marie," he said coldly. "It is necessary to remember that I am not master here; nor does it rest with you to give orders."

"Do you mean, monsieur, that we are at the mercy of the Belgian?"

"Can you not see that such is the case?"

"And you, my uncle, placed me in this position?" she exclaimed, with angry scorn.

"Reproaches are useless, Marie. You had better take a sensible view of the case."

She set her lips firmly. Her resolution was already taken.

"Monsieur, do you refuse to take me back to Boma?" she asked quietly.

"It is impossible!"

"How impossible?"

"For one reason, because Hellenдорf would not permit our departure—not yours, at all events."

"I am a prisoner, then?"

Jacques Louvois shrugged his shoulders.

"One word more," said the girl calmly, very quietly; "I consider, monsieur, that you have forfeited all claim to my obedience." And with that she left him.

Louvois gave another shrug. He was disturbed; but at the same time relieved. He had feared a scene of tears and reproaches. That Marie would give him serious trouble he did not anticipate. She would end by a surrender. What else could she do?

"The dickens! What's the matter, Hellenдорf?"

He looked up as the Belgian stood before him.

The aspect of Hellenдорf's face was certainly a little startling, and Louvois stared at him in amazement.

"Nothing—only the Englishman has been here," the Belgian replied grimly.

"Sidney Lisle?" ejaculated Louvois, with a start.

"Yes. What has mademoiselle been saying?"

"That she wished to leave Nkota."

"And you told her—"

"That it was impossible."

Hellenдорf chuckled.

"She has lost no time. That was the first part of the game."

Louvois looked bewildered.

"What are you talking about, Ludwig?"

The Belgian threw himself into a seat, and lighted a cheroot.

"Only this—that Sidney Lisle and Marie have agreed to fly together, if you should refuse to take her back to Boma."

"Is it possible?"

"As I say."

"But how—"

Hellenдорf laconically explained. The Frenchman listened in amazement and alarm.

"The dickens! It is lucky we know their intentions," he exclaimed. "It will not be difficult to checkmate that meddling Englishman. I had a feeling that Lisle suspected something."

NEXT WEEK!

"ONLY A CABIN-BOY."

NEXT WEEK!

Louvois continued, nodding his head sagely. "But I thought that after the way I dismissed him we had seen the last of him. I was mistaken. He will have to be reckoned with. Have you formed a plan?"

The Belgian nodded.

"What are you going to do?"

"Lisla will be allowed to come to the rendezvous. But he will not find Mademoiselle Louvois there. He will find me and half a dozen niggers ready to lay him by the heels."

"And Marie?"

"She shall be guarded in her room."

"But—but—" Louvois looked nervously at the Belgian.

"What will you do with Lisla when you have taken him?"

Hellendorf's face blazed with sudden ferocity.

"Do you see the mark upon my face, and then ask me that question?"

"You will kill him?"

"I will kill him like a dog."

"But—there is danger—"

Hellendorf's lip curled contemptuously.

"You are a coward, Louvois, and a fool as well. The danger would lie in sparing him, not in killing him. If we made him a prisoner he would get away sooner or later; and if the story were told in Boma, and the English consul took it up, it might be ruin to me, to say nothing of the revenge he would seek—a bullet for me and another for you, probably. Ah! I see that affects you," he said derisively, as Jacques Louvois gave a start and changed colour.

"Let him die, then. He deserves it for his meddling," Louvois said savagely.

"Oh, he shall die. His life is little enough to pay for the blow he gave me. And besides, it is not only an enemy, but a rival I am going to rid myself of."

"What do you mean?"

"Bah! What do you think he is meddling for? The days of Don Quixote are past. The fool has fallen in love with Marie. That's his motive."

"In that case it's doubly necessary to be rid of him," Louvois said, thoughtfully. "Only—let there be no bungling about it."

"Rely upon me," Hellendorf grinned. "After I have plunged my sword through his heart, he shall be flung to the crocodiles. Ah! I am thirsting for that moment!"

He was not the only one at the bungalow who longed for night. Marie watched with impatience the sun slowly sinking in the west, beyond the shining Congo.

She had quite decided. To remain in the house of Hellendorf was impossible. Her uncle, evidently in league with the Belgian, would not help her. There remained only Sidney Lisla. And upon him she gladly relied.

The room she was in had a door opening upon the verandah. There were two other doors, opening, the first upon the stairs, the second into her bedroom. By either of the latter it would be impossible to escape unseen. It was only by means of the verandah that she could attempt to quit the bungalow.

But at sunset she noticed with uneasiness that two or three negroes were lounging upon the verandah, and when darkness fell they were still there.

She waited. The night advanced, hour followed hour; but she could still hear the negroes upon the verandah. And a chill went to her heart as the thought occurred to her suddenly—Had they been placed there to keep watch?

Did the Belgian know or suspect her intention? The doubt was terrible. She resolved to ascertain. Anything was better than uncertainty.

She looked out of her door upon the stairs. It was dark there, but she could hear a chattering of negroes.

She closed the door silently.

For some minutes she stood still, her heart beating painfully. That she was guarded she could have little doubt now. A prisoner—divided from the one man who would have given her aid! But would they dare to use actual force?

She could only try. She opened the door upon the verandah and stepped out. A burly form loomed up before her.

"No come," grunted a voice.

"Stand aside!"

The figure did not move.

"Massa say, no come."

It was useless. With a heart like lead, Marie re-entered her room. She was a prisoner!

What would Sidney Lisla do? He would think that, as she did not come, her uncle had consented, after all, to take her back to Boma. That was the arrangement. What else could he think? And he would go.

Or—worse still—perhaps he would suspect what had really happened, and would take some desperate step, and they would kill him.

Hark! What was that?

Through the silence of the night there sounded, sharply, a sudden burst of firing. Marie clasped her hands in an agony of terror.

"Oh, my friend, my friend! They are murdering him!"

CHAPTER 10. Sidney Falls Into the Snare—Face to Face with Death— Cannibal Allies.

THERE were ridges of dark cloud across the sky, and the moon was hidden, only an occasional flicker of silver light dancing upon the wide, rolling Congo.

A light canoe rocked to the current, moored amongst the mangroves. Upon the landing-stage of levelled planks Sidney Lisla stepped lightly. He crossed it to the nearest clump of trees. It was, above all, necessary to remain unseen while he waited for Marie.

He waited and watched. How long he would have to wait he knew not. The lights were out in the bungalow. If Marie were coming, he thought it would be soon.

He had made all preparation for a flight to Boma. The canoe, purchased from Congo fishermen up the river, contained what of necessaries he had been able to obtain for the girl's comfort during the journey. Once afloat on the giant river, there would be little danger in pursuit. A thousand hiding-places would offer themselves to the fugitives, if required; and, better than these, he had his trusty rifle and his brave British heart. He waited, watching the path by which Marie must come from the house.

Of the Belgian's treachery he was, of course, ignorant. But he was keenly on the alert. He had never been more thoroughly alive to the signs of danger. The rustling of a branch, in the windless calm of the tropic night, was sufficient to place him on his guard.

He had turned his back to the group of palms while looking for Marie. At the slight sound of stirring he swung swiftly round. A low, startled exclamation broke from his lips; for, even as he turned, five or six dark figures sprang upon him out of the shadows.

"Seize him!"

It was Hellendorf's voice, hissing in the intensity of his spite and excitement.

In the grasp of many hands, Sidney staggered for a moment. But, brief as the warning had been, he had braced himself for the attack, and in a moment he had torn himself free, felling the foremost two of his assailants with crashing blows from his clenched fists.

Then he sprang back, his revolver in his hand, gleaming up to a level.

"You Belgian dog! Come on, then!"

He faced them with perfect fearlessness. There was an instant's pause for breath. Then knives and pistols glimmered. A second more, and they would have been upon him like blood-hounds.

But, at that critical moment, from the silent night came a crash of firearms, and the Englishman's opponents reeled to right and left, struck down by tearing bullets.

Only two of them remained upon their feet; and these two, without even looking round, took to their heels, racing away blindly towards the bungalow. One of them was Ludwig Hellendorf.

Sidney was as amazed as the Belgian probably was. One moment he was on the verge of a desperate struggle against odds, from which it was scarcely likely that he would emerge alive; the next, he saw his foes fallen or fled, himself secure and unassailed. It was a startling transition.

"Burke!"

A shaft of moonlight came through an opening in the clouds. It revealed to him the tall, soldierly figure and bronzed face of the Congo captain.

Burke held out his hand, with a smile.

"Lucky for you we are here, Sidney."

"Very. You have saved my life, probably. But—"

"You want to know what we are doing here?"

"That's it."

"I told you that King Leopold's flag would not shelter that dastard from my vengeance."

"You are going to attack the bungalow?"

"Yes."

Sidney glanced round. There were a large number of moving figures amongst the palm trees. The Congo cannibals were there in force.

"It's a strong place, Burke; and Hellendorf has his guards."

"I don't think his men will stand long against mine. I haven't been idle all this time. I have called up all my command."

"What is your force, then?"

"A hundred men."

Burke turned away for some minutes, to give quick, decisive orders. Meanwhile, Sidney thought over the situation. That Marie was now a prisoner in the bungalow was, of course, clear to him. To rescue her, or to die in the attempt—that was his instant resolve. And he said to himself that nothing could be more opportune than the arrival of Burke and the Congo soldiers. Alone and unaided, his prospects were dubious indeed. Doubtless it was unpleasant and humiliat-

ing to fight side by side with black cannibals. But for Marie's sake— He was in the midst of these hasty reflections when Bernard Burke rejoined him. There was a gleam of satisfaction in the captain's eyes. He appeared to regard success as assured.

"What are you going to do, Sidney? I need not remind you of your parole."

"I have no wish to interfere with you, Burke, even if my word did not bind me. I have done with that scoundrel."

Burke laughed grimly.

"So he has shown the cloven foot already?"

"He is leagued with Hellendorf. They are keeping Mademoiselle Louvois a prisoner yonder."

"I suspected as much. But tell me what has happened since you left me yesterday."

Sidney did so, in a few brief sentences. The captain listened attentively.

"It is clear that she is a prisoner. I should pity her if she remained in the power of Ludwig Hellendorf," Burke said grimly.

Sidney set his teeth.

"She shall not remain in his power while I live," he said resolutely.

The captain appeared to be reflecting.

"You will stand by me, Bernard?" asked Sidney. "Your vendetta does not extend to an innocent girl?"

"Heaven forbid! Yes, I'll help you. I had intended to demand Louvois at the hands of Hellendorf. The Belgian is a scoundrel, but I have no quarrel with him; and if he surrenders Louvois, he can live, for aught I care. But I will demand mademoiselle also."

"He will not give her up without a fight."

"I am sorry for him, then. If fighting begins, the time for surrender will be past. My men are tigers when they have tasted blood, and there is no stopping them. If the Belgian fires a shot, they will not leave a man living in the bungalow."

Sidney shuddered; but he did not falter. All personal considerations must yield to his concern for Marie. Her rescue came before everything.

"But we'll give him a chance," added the captain. "Come on! My men have encircled the bungalow. They are only waiting my word to attack."

The clouds had drifted before the silver moon again. Again deep darkness fell as they strode towards the bungalow.

CHAPTER 11.

The Attack on the Bungalow.

WHAT is it, Hellendorf? What has happened? You have not let him escape?"

A savage curse broke from the Belgian.

He thrust Louvois aside, and began to shout orders to the startled negroes.

The sound of firing had alarmed Louvois. He met Hellendorf in the hall as he rushed in, white and panting.

While Hellendorf was giving rapid orders for the defence of the bungalow, Louvois stood trembling. He understood that there was danger, though he did not know precisely what it was.

Hellendorf, more than half a poltroon as he was, had his wits about him. The bungalow was built for defence in case of necessity. It did not take long to prepare for an attack.

With doors and windows barred, the steps to the verandah taken in, and the verandah itself manned with black riflemen, the Belgian breathed more freely.

He knocked off the neck of a bottle, filled a glass, and drank deeply. Louvois ventured to question him again.

"What has happened, Ludwig?"

"What! Didn't you hear?"

"I heard firing."

"The Englishman was there. But he wasn't alone. Just when we were upon him we received a volley."

Louvois's pale face assumed a greyish hue. Only too well he knew who Sidney's friends were likely to be. He had not forgotten that he owed his escape once to Bernard Burke's regard for Sidney.

"A volley? From whom? Tell me!"

"I didn't stay to see," the Belgian answered grimly. "I only know that there were a crowd of them. But it's not difficult to guess."

"Good heavens! You think—"

"Didn't you tell me that Captain Burke was Lisle's old chum? That that was why he didn't attack you on the isle?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, then, it's Burke we have to deal with, to a certainty. But we shall soon see."

Louvois groaned.

"Hark! They are there!"

A bugle-call rang crisply through the night. Hellendorf stepped out upon the verandah. The moon was hidden; thick darkness lay around the building. He could not see his enemies; but he knew that they were there in force.

"Are you there, Ludwig Hellendorf?"

The Belgian knew the voice that rang through the gloom.

"I am here, Captain Burke."

"Do you want to make terms?"

"I have no terms to make with a rebel and a traitor. Da you, who wear King Leopold's colours, dare to attack a Government station?"

The Belgian's idea was to ride the high-horse; but that was the last thing to prove effective with Bernard Burke, the captain of cannibals.

"You will find that I dare, Ludwig Hellendorf. If you do not accede to my terms, I will burn your bungalow to the ground, and the vultures will pick your bones amongst the ashes."

"It would be death for you in Boma."

"That I need not discuss with you. Do you want to hear the conditions upon which I will spare you?"

"I am listening."

"In the first place, you must surrender Jacques Louvois to me."

"To what fate?"

"Death."

"What else do you want?"

"Mademoiselle Louvois must be given up."

"I refuse."

"Better consider."

"You can have Louvois if you like—"

There was a shriek from the wretched Frenchman. He grovelled before Hellendorf, clinging to his knees.

"Save me! Save me from him!"

The Belgian spurned him away with his foot.

"You can have Louvois, but mademoiselle I will not part with."

"Then I shall take her away from you by force."

"Curse you! We shall see. I have a strong position here, and men to hold it. We shall see."

"I warn you that if blood is once shed, it will be a fight to a finish—no quarter given or taken."

"Bah! you will not scare me with threats."

"You refuse finally?"

"I refuse to give up Mademoiselle Louvois."

"Then your blood be upon your own head!"

For five minutes silence reigned around the bungalow of Nkota. Burke was completing his arrangements for the attack.

Hellendorf and his men were on the alert, and watchful as cats. There were thirty armed negroes on the verandah which circled the house. If the enemy won it, it would not be done without heavy loss. And Hellendorf was inclined to believe that when Burke discovered what a difficult task he had undertaken, he would give it up. And, in fact, even now he could scarcely credit that the captain would dare to fire upon the flag of King Leopold.

Louvois had disappeared. He had dragged himself away to Marie's room. A last hope had come to him that in her presence he might find protection. The wretch was paying dearly for a wicked life. In his anguish of fear he tasted more than the bitterness of death.

A deep, eerie stillness hung over the house, the forest, the river. It was the calm before the storm.

It was abruptly broken.

From every side, with startling suddenness, burst out a crash of firing. Swift and swifter the red flashes flitted through the darkness.

"Fire!" yelled Hellendorf.

And volley answered volley, crash on crash.

Marie, in her room, listened to the terrible uproar, with wildly pulsing heart and her trembling hands clasped together. In a corner crouched Louvois, pale as death, shivering as if with the ague. She did not notice him. She was thinking of Sidney Lisle. He was yonder, facing death, fighting for her freedom.

CHAPTER 12.

A Desperate Struggle—Face to Face—Vengeance or Mercy—A Just Retribution.

CRACK! crack! crack! crack! From the black shadows round the bungalow came the red flash, the ringing shot—swifter, swifter, till the firing seemed incessant.

And Hellendorf realised, with a tremor, that the enemy was in unsuspected strength—that a hundred men, at least, were ringed round the bungalow.

A hot fire was kept up from the verandah, not so much in the hope of doing execution upon the unseen enemy, as to check a sudden rush. But the rush came, nevertheless. The heavy fire was only a prelude.

A more deafening volley than usual had crashed out, and in the instant's pause that succeeded rose wild and fierce the charging yell of the cannibals.

Sharply rang a bugle note; fiercely the savage yelled; and forward in a torrent came the black soldiers of the Congo, fire-eyed and furious.

"Fire! Fire! Stand fast for your lives!" the Belgian shouted.

A kind of shudder had run round the verandah at the sound of rushing feet. But a responsive yell answered Hellenendorf. The negroes were savage and brave—differing in nothing, in fact, from their opponents—only following a different leader. Their blood was up. The fight was to be a desperate one.

A heavy fire swept through the charging cannibals, and shrieks and groans mingled with the ferocious yells. But still they came on. Like cats they clambered upon the verandah, crashing blows resounded upon the doors below. But tearing shot and stabbing steel met them grimly. There was a brief but deadly struggle, furious on both sides, and then the Congo soldiers were flung back.

Back, back, with sinking yells dying away into mutterings. And Ludwig Hellenendorf breathed freely.

"They are beaten, then!" he muttered, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

Silence fell, broken only by an occasional groan. The Belgian listened with straining ears. Did this quietness precede a retreat or a renewed attack?

Very far from the former. The look of grim resolution was fiercer than ever on the face of Bernard Burke.

Sidney looked at him anxiously. There was the scratch of a bullet along Sidney's cheek, but he was not hurt. Burke gave him a reassuring nod.

"Mpoma!"
The black corporal came at the word. Burke talked to him in a low tone for a few minutes. Mpoma saluted and disappeared.

Again the volleys crashed out. From the bungalow a heavy fire answered.

"Hellenendorf is making a better fight than I expected," Burke remarked; "but I shall have him this time."

"What is Mpoma going to do?"

"Place a petard at the door."

Sidney glanced towards the bungalow. The thick darkness favoured such an attempt, and the heavy fire occupied the attention of the defenders.

"But if they see him, Bernard?"

Burke shrugged his shoulders.

They waited impatiently. The firing continued without cessation. The minutes dragged by.

"Ah, Mpoma! you have done it!"

The corporal stood before them. He nodded and grinned.

There was a minute more to wait. Then a deafening explosion rent the air, drowning the crackling of the rifles. A sheet of flame shot up, and for a single instant the bungalow, the circling forest, the wide river were visible in that weird illumination. Only for an instant; then blackness blotted out the vision—all was dark as before.

Two or three lesser crashes succeeded—the falling of beams and planks disjoined by the explosion, and a part of the verandah itself shivered down bodily.

A quavering cry rose from the house, only to be drowned by a yell of ferocious triumph from the Congo cannibals.

The bugle rang the charging note. Forward the Congo soldiers went tearing.

Burke smiled grimly.

"That will be the finish."

The petard had done its work well. A huge, ragged gap had been torn in the defences. The door was gone.

And before the Belgian had time to face the new danger the Congo cannibals were upon him.

Regardless of the fire—fainter than at first—which met them, the black soldiers rushed to the attack.

Sidney was in the midst of the wild charge thinking only of Marie—seeking her. Although Burke's orders to his men had been strict, he was not without fears of what might happen if some savage soldier, drunk with slaughter, should chance upon the girl.

Fortunately it was upon the verandah, to which the Congo soldiers could now penetrate from the interior, that the fiercest struggle was waged. Sidney, careless how the fight went, sought Marie, and almost unconsciously it was by that name he called her.

"Mademoiselle Louvois! Marie! Marie!"

He heard a cry of joy. A door was flung open.

"Monsieur, I am here!"

Sidney hurried towards her.

A flying figure rushed past him. It was Ludwig Hellenendorf, with three or four cannibals in hot pursuit. The Belgian recognised Sidney. He flung himself at the Englishman's feet, wild and jabbering with terror.

"Save me! save me!" he shrieked. "For Heaven's sake keep them off!"

Sidney's very soul was sick with horror.

But he had no time to act even if he had had the power. Before the words were fairly uttered, the Belgian, snatched up by the cannibals, was dragged away.

The Britishers hurried to his Marie. She was pale, quivering with fear, but the sight of him made glad her eyes.

"Oh, mademoiselle, thank Heaven I find you safe!" she clasped both her hands. "I must stay with you. I do not what will happen with those fiends here. Would that Burke were here."

At the same there was a gasp of terror from the darkness.

"Who is there?"

"My uncle," said Marie in a firm voice.

Sidney started.

"What does he here? This is no place for him. He is the cause of all this. Monsieur Louvois—"

"Save me, monsieur—or, at least, hide me!" the wretched man panted. "Do not let him know I am here, and—"

A grim laugh interrupted him. A light gleamed in the doorway. It was Bernard Burke, who stood there with a habitual lamp.

For a moment he stood in silence, looking at them. Then he set the lamp upon a stool and advanced into the room.

"So I've found you, Louvois, you dog!"

Louvois sank upon his knees. Burke bowed contemptuously to Marie.

"Lise, will you take mademoiselle away!"

The girl stopped beside her uncle. All his wickedness, his selfishness, his cruelty, counted for nothing now. She tremored only that he was her uncle, and in part of his life.

Her eyes, calm and clear, met Burke's.

"I will not leave my uncle, monsieur."

Something of admiration mingled with the impatience of the Congo captain's look.

"It will be better," he said.

"Monsieur, that my uncle has wronged you I can readily believe. He has wronged me also. But look at him! If you want revenge, is it not revenge enough to see him thus?"

And there was shame as well as pity in her face as she glanced at the grovelling coward.

Burke was silent.

"I do not ask you to forgive him, monsieur—"

"Mademoiselle," Burke said hoarsely, "you do not know how that dastard has wronged me."

She nodded.

"No, I do not know. But I know that it is unworthy of you to stain your hands with his blood. Have mercy!"

There was a terrible pause. Oppressive silence was in the room, while from without still sounded the savage cries of the cannibals.

"Mademoiselle, say no more," broke out Burke. "You do not know what you ask."

And he advanced a step.

Marie's eyes flashed. Her hand fell upon the shoulder of the shivering Louvois. She faced Burke fearlessly.

"But you shall not kill him, monsieur; or, if you do, you shall kill me first."

Burke dung his revolver crashing upon the floor.

"Have your way, then," he said bitterly. "Let him keep his dog's life. Live, Louvois! but if ever you cross my path again—"

Louvois moaned low, and fell forward; his head struck the floor. He lay twitching and quivering.

"My heavens!" cried Marie, "he is dying."

Sidney started forward. He raised the Frenchman, supporting his head upon his knee. Louvois's breath came in gasps, his face was ashy, his eyes closed.

Marie had spoken truly.

He was dying.

Whether the agony of terror had wrought so upon the over-worn heart; whether the sudden revulsion of feeling had done it; whether both, they did not know. But Noname had been relentless. It was fated that he should answer for his crimes—though not by the hand of the man he had wronged.

Sidney laid him gently down, and rose. A sob shook the breast of Marie. Burke stood silent, a curious expression upon his face, looking down at the silent form of the man who had so wronged him. It was Burke's voice that broke the silence.

"Heaven is just," he said.

A canoe glided on the beam of the falling Congo. Marie Louvois, pale, silent, sat wrapped in a cloak. Sidney looked shorewards.

From the bungalow savage cries were still heard—the quavering voices of the cannibals. Was some ghastly scene toward there? Sidney shuddered, and was glad of the darkness.

A tall figure stood on the shore. A hand was waved. Sidney waved his in return, and the canoe passed from the sight of Bernard Burke.

One scene more—it is in Boma.

"Must we part, then?" Sidney said. "You must know, mademoiselle, that I love you. Must we part?"

Marie, blushing, smiling transparently, placed her hand in his. In life they will part no more.

THE END.

You cannot do better than advise all your friends to start reading the Powerful Serial "THE ROAD TO FAME."

You will receive their thanks and at the same time you will do Your Editor a good turn.