

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark brown color, framing the central text.

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The tenderfoot, preparing for his first big-game shoot, has many misgivings in his mind to which, if he is man-size, he never gives voice. He wonders how he will face those three supreme tests of nerve: charging lion, buffalo, elephant. The old hand does not give a thought to the dangers from game. He knows that a man can walk through a hundred thunder-storms without being struck by lightning. What the old hand dreads is the "heart-breaking condition."

Almost every African big-game country that has not been reduced to a Cook's coupon basis has its heart-breaking condition. In Guijá, home of mighty beasts, it is pitiless reaches of waterless country; on the coast to the east it is grass—eternal grass, higher than a man's head; and to the north it is tsetse-fly, with its sudden death to cattle and its seven years' suspended sentence to the victim of sleeping-sickness.

The old hand is forever seeking some prolific game region where no heart-breaking condition exists. He often thinks he has found it. Catran and Annestley thought they had found it when they went up the Great River in flood, passed the upper shoals, and stumbled into the deep, narrow waters of an uncharted creek.

The creek itself, which they called the Nameless River, seemed too good to be true; for it was interminable in its twists and turns, and of a comfortable even depth, like a canal. Along its banks grew tremendous wide-spreading figus trees. For long reaches their branches interlaced overhead, and the motor-boat chugged along in shade—always a boon in Africa.

Where the trees were smaller there was jungle, dotted here and there by white-breasted monkeys, and occasionally bearing a snowy crown of ibises or making a calm background to startling things: sleeping crocodiles, iguanas, dandified cranes, spur-winged geese, and long-beaked, noisy ah-di-daahs.

There is always joy in killing a "croc," if it is only for the look of ineffable satisfaction that brightens the faces of your black servants, whose flesh and blood pay yearly an astonishing toll to saurian refection. Catran and Annestley, lolling in the stern of the boat, took turns in curling up one monster after another.

They ceased only when certain signs told them they were in choice game country. With their two blacks, who combined the offices of servants and trained gun-bearers, they struck inland, looking in general for what they could see and in particular for a site for a permanent camp. What they saw in the way of spoor and game made their blood plunge; what they did not see made their hearts sink—for three hours they sought in vain for signs of human habitation.

The blacks were sent out in opposite directions with orders to travel until they found natives. At sundown they came back to the boat and reported. Each had found two small kraals in possession of women. Nearly all the “boys” in that country were at the mines. The few that had come back had money and were purse-proud. They would not carry a load at any price. The women were overworked. It was the planting season.

Catran and Annestley refused to be depressed. Their pulses were still throbbing from the sights they had seen—polygamous impala bulls with troops of meek wives; a rare inyala, proudest of the horned creations of God; the spoor and sign, still fresh, of a mighty elephant.

They could scarcely sleep, and at break of day they began to move their kit inland and to make camp. All day long, with the help of the two blacks, they toiled on. They had found the heart-breaking condition. As they smoked after a scrappy dinner, Annestley broke a long silence.

“Transportation.” he said.

Catran nodded sadly. Where each thing you shoot is as big as an ox, and when you are carrying with you housing, bedding, and provisions for three weeks, transportation becomes an essential—an elemental thing, like water or fire or food.

“Next time—” began Catran.

“We’ll bring carriers with us,” finished Annestley.

“This “time—” said Catran, and stopped. It amused him to hear Annestley finish his sentences for him.

“This time,” said Annestley promptly, “no duplicates. Just a long look around and a couple of trophies apiece. Not common garden heads—trophies.”

Catran nodded. "Or —"

"Yes, of course," said Annestley. "Or elephant. Natives will swarm out of a desert to a dead elephant."

It is only after a hunter has shot through five seasons that he begins to learn the repression that makes sport an art. The killing instinct is natural—it has its great sensation; but it is a coarse thing measured by the charms that come to him who by skill draws near to the great beasts of forest and plain and holds his fire, content to await the overwhelming temptation of a noble trophy. Consequently Catran and Annestley would not have counted as lost those three weeks in a region equipped to glut the veriest pot-hunter, even if they had not bagged a splendid inyala and two fairly good tuskers.

Between the elephants, which fell within a few yards of each other, they made a temporary camp and waited for the natives to swarm. Contrary to all the rules of Africa, the natives did not swarm. A few old men, a few old women, and a host of children turned up and squatted in gluttonous circles around the two mountains of flesh.

The old men were willing, but weak and clumsy. It took all hands three days to hack out the four tusks, and two days more to strike camp and get back to the boat. Provisions were beginning to run short.

"We'd better do a bilk," said Annestley, as he emptied the remains of four chuck-boxes into one. Catran nodded.

That first day of the return journey was one of such absolute peace that it seemed ominous—as ominous as the dead stillness that precedes a hurricane. Catran sat very quiet, smoking one pipe after another. But Annestley was restless. He shot a croc at every sandbank, and talked in between.

Annestley was frankly talkative. He preferred doing anything else to talking; but when there was nothing else to do, he must talk. And Catran liked to hear him. He often provoked him to it with a word or two.

As they turned a corner, their eyes fell on a native calmly wading, waist-deep, across the croc-infested stream. They watched him, fascinated. They had felt disaster hovering in the still, hot air. This was it. The native would be taken before their eyes. But he was not taken. As he climbed up the slippery bank,

Catran said, "Fatalism or just laziness?"

"Neither," said Annestley promptly. "His sense of proportion has not been distorted by an overdose of civilization. His experience has bred the realization into what brain he's got that life is nature's cheapest commodity."

"Rot," said Catran.

"Civilization overrates life," continued Annestley calmly. "Try and think of a big man in history who wasn't a pioneer or a murderer."

"Rot," repeated Catran. "We don't overrate life; we overrate the individual."

Before Annestley could answer, the boat drove her bow on a hidden snag. The current swept her stern around. She canted, and one of Catran's bags and his beautiful rifle, for which he had paid a month's salary, shot into the river.

The water poured in over the gunwale. The blacks threw their weight to the other side and got out their oars. They could not reach bottom.

Catran unlaced his boots. Before Annestley realized what he was doing, he had plunged into the water. It seemed an age before he came up with his gun and bag. He handed them over the side, and, clutching the snag, braced his feet against the boat and pushed her off.

Annestley stood by with an oar and dragged him in.

"Fatalism or laziness, you damned fool?" he asked, with a grin.

"The bag that went overboard held all our quinine," said Catran, as he began to strip off his wet clothing.

That snag put a period to a long run of what had been, on the whole, good luck. The boat began to leak faster than the blacks could bail. At last, without saying a word, Catran headed her nose in to the bank.

The two white men as well as the two blacks became silent machines of toil. They landed all the gear. They dragged and winched the boat up by inches. She was sprung in six places. With nails and bits of board from a broken chuck-box, with grease from the engine-room and a piece of canvas from the discarded

awning, they patched and patched. By night-time the boat was tight.

When the blacks had set the tent, Annestley and Catran, too tired to eat, crawled in and went to sleep in their clothes. They arose at dawn to a breakfast of remnants.

Annestley went to the river-side to bathe his face. He came back almost at once.

“We’ve got to hurry,” he said. “Water’s falling.”

Catran was tugging at a great-coat. He did not bother to wash. He pulled on the big coat and sat down.

Annestley understood.

“Touch of fever, eh?” he said cheerfully; but his jaws set grimly as he turned to help the blacks load.

At last they were off. They had come up the Nameless River in two days; it took them four to go down. They stuck many times. Annestley with the boathook and the boys with the oars shoved the boat along the bottom by inches. When she would no longer move, and every channel had been tried, Catran would nod and the boys would go over the side and drag her through.

“They take a chance every time they do that,” said Annestley.

Catran nodded. . He headed the boat in to the bank.

“Get out all the gear,” he said. “Cache everything here under the awning. We’ll strip her down to nothing and make a dash for it.”

But when it came to lifting out the heavy tusks that lay like ballast in the bottom of the boat, Catran’s eyes met Annestley’s. They smiled.

“Sure,” said Catran; “leave them in.”

They shoved off. With her lightened draft the boat did better; but just when they thought they were going to make the mouth of the Nameless without a stop, she grounded again. Catran sprang up and threw off his big coat.

“Easy, old man!’ said Annestley.

Catran shrugged his shoulders.

“We’ve got to make the settlement on the Great River in two days. There’re times when you simply can’t have fever.”

“And that’s generally when you get it,” remarked Annestley dryly.

The four of them pushed the boat over the bank into deep water. After that they chugged along for an hour. The hum of the engine was the only sound, and it seemed to rebound on them from an infinite barrier of silence. Annestley dozed.

When a man is bathed, shaved, and in his right pajamas, he will choose the most comfortable position before he goes to sleep; but when he is dog-tired and grubby he’ll go to sleep with one foot behind his neck—if that is the way he happens to be sitting.

Annestley was dog-tired and grubby. His face was decorated with a smudge of engine oil and a scrub of patchy beard. His helmet was bashed in on one side. His shirt was stained with sweat; his trousers and puttees were caked with mud. He slept bolt upright, one dirty hand on each knee.

Catran let his eyes wander over him, and remembered the last time he had seen him in his rôle of joyous fop in Piccadilly. He laughed.

Annestley started and looked up. “What the devil?” he asked.

“Annie,” said Catran, grinning, “if you could only see yourself!”

“Me see myself!” growled Annestley. “Why, you blasted beach-comber, your dog wouldn’t let you into your own front yard. You’re a sewer—the mother and father of filth.”

Just then one of the blacks grunted. They had come at last to the end of the Nameless. As they shot out into the wide vista of the Great River, Annestley and Catran groaned. As far as the eye could reach, there were little islands and sandbanks and crocs. In the distance the wide waters seemed to lie in patches.

“Well, let her go,” said Annestley resignedly.

The Great River ran in a series of sweeping horseshoe curves. The deeper water was always on the concave side. They all knew that. The thing was to know when to cross. It seemed as if they were eternally crossing, and just as eternally grounding. Every time they stuck, they decided to cache the tusks; every time they got off they decided to hang on to them.

Day ended, but night did not fall. A full moon lit up the waters of the wide river. There was no camp to set, no food to cook. They munched biscuits, drank river water, and kept on. Toward dawn the boat grounded, the engine stalled, and no one moved to push off. Masters and blacks had fallen asleep, each at his post. The sun woke them.

There is something about the dawn of day that puts heart into whatever is left of a man. Once awake, the four looked at one another and smiled. With oars, boathook, and the awning-pole they fairly plowed the boat through the sandbank.

Catran had fallen asleep without putting on his big coat. He put it on now, and tried to smoke; but his chattering teeth could not hold his pipe.

“Fool,” said Annestley—and stopped, with a lighted match poised half way to his own pipe. A hail had come to them from the bank.

They looked and stared. At the edge of the water stood three plump men done up in the most approved book style for traveling in Africa: pipe-clayed helmets, spotless khaki coats and shirts and trousers, shining puttees and boots. With them was a half-breed. Behind them a big camp was set, and from behind that came the stench of rotting meat.

“Been slaughtering more than they can eat,” growled Annestley, and then yelled: “Well, what d’you want?”

“We’re stranded,” called back one of the three. “We are in distress. We want you to take us down the river.”

“This isn’t a yacht,” called back Annestley. “We’ve got all we can carry.”

“My man,” came back the voice, this time “with a quaver, “don’t go. We’ll make it worth your while. We’ll pay you well.”

“Pay us!” gasped Annestley. “What d’you think of that, Cat? The gentleman will pay us.”

Catran said nothing. He headed the boat in to the bank. As they neared it the three immaculates broke out into voluble explanations. They were rubber experts, sent out to report on a forest. They had been landed there. Their boat had gone away. Then they had found that they couldn’t get transportation—not for a single load. By an oversight they had left salt out of their provision list. With half a ton of food stacked around them, they had been living on biscuits and whisky. They were in desperate straits.

“Overlooked the salt!” murmured Annestley, with a sneer. “Such a trifle—salt!”

Catran pointed at the tusks in the bottom of the boat and waved his hand. The blacks lugged them out and up the bank. Annestley cursed.

The half-breed sprang into the boat, but the three white men hesitated.

“What about our kit?” stammered one of them.

“Kit!” gasped Annestley. “D’you see any kit in this boat? Where were you when we chucked out that two hundred pounds of ivory? Kit be damned!”

The three clambered solemnly into the boat, and sat down suddenly as the blacks pushed off.

“My man,” said one of them, glancing with distaste at the unkempt Annestley, “please remember we’re going to pay for your services and—”

“And what?” said Annestley, fixing his eyes on the spokesman.

“And b-be as civil as you can,” stuttered the passenger, uneasy under that wondering gaze.

It was a solemn and cheerless party that labored its way down the river. They stuck often. Annestley and the blacks got out oars and boathooks and pushed with all their might. The half-breed pushed half-heartedly. The passengers pushed not at all. Catran was at the helm.

“How much farther are the shoals, d’you think?” asked Annestley at last.

Catran shrugged his shoulders. “Five miles—ten. Not over ten.”

They toiled on. The sun blazed from the sky, from the water, and from the sandbanks. The blacks stripped; the white men took off their coats—all but Catran. He kept on his overcoat, and shivered while the rest sweated.

In the middle of the afternoon they grounded fast. There was no other channel. Poling availed nothing.

Annestley laid down his oar.

“Come on, now,” he said sharply. “You have to work your way. No time to lose. All into the water at once with a splash, and rush her over. Everybody! Stay by the helm, Cat.”

He made a sweeping motion at the blacks with his arm, and jumped into the water. The blacks were quicker than he, but the half-breed made only a feint at moving, and the passengers sat stock-still and stared.

Annestley and the boys gave one impotent heave at the heavily laden boat. She did not budge. Annestley leaned over and slapped the nearest passenger across the face. He roared and rose at the outrage; but while he was getting up his nerve to hit back, something happened. Annestley cried out and gripped the gunwale desperately with both hands. His face went suddenly white; his jaws clinched. Catran threw his arms around him and pulled. A boy plunged toward them through the shallow water and drove his steel-shod boathook dong the line of Annestley’s extended leg.

Annestley was suddenly released. They lifted him into the boat. His right foot was a ghastly sight—shreds of puttee, shreds of boot, shreds of flesh.

“If they’d gone all together—if they’d gone all together with a splash—” he sobbed, more for rage than for pain.

Catran had out his sharp hunting-knife. With quick slashes he cut away what was left of puttee, trouser, and boot. He held the mangled foot over the side and washed it roughly—thoroughly. Then he took from his pocket a soiled wooden tube. He drew the cork with his teeth.

From the tube he poured crystals of permanganate into his left palm. On the

crystals he poured water—just a little water. Then he rubbed the biting solution into the jagged wounds. He did it again and again.

At the first stinging touch Annestley writhed; then he clutched his own right knee with both hands and held his leg still. He cursed Catran—called him filthy, brutal names in a loving voice. The passengers stared open-mouthed, cold sweat on their brows.

Catran picked up one of their coats and cut it into strips. He made a permanganate solution in the bailing-tin and soaked the strips in it. Then, with one of the blacks helping, he bound Annestley's pulpy foot, from the toes up.

When he had finished, Annestley was very white. "Give me a drink," he said.

One of the passengers fumbled at his pocket and passed along a flask. Annestley threw back his head and let half the hot liquor run down his throat. He tossed the flask overboard.

"Now," he said, with a ghastly grin, "can't stay here forever. When I say 'go,' into the water you go, every damned one of you. Stand by the helm, Cat. Go!"

The blacks rose quickly, watching Catran's hand for a signal. Annestley was not looking at them. His eyes were fixed on the half-breed. His hand reached out slowly and felt for his rifle.

The half-breed saw and understood. "No, you don't, boss" he snarled. He crouched forward, snatched up Catran's gun, and rose. Annestley shot from his hip. The half-breed crumpled up and plunged forward—toward the shot.

"You bungler!" cried Catran, his eyes blazing with anger. "You've killed him!"

"Would we have saved any weight if I'd wounded him, you idiot?" snarled Annestley. "Chuck it overboard," he yelled at the blacks, sweeping his hand around.

They obeyed with set faces and staring eyes.

"My God—my God—my God!" sobbed the fattest of the passengers.

"Shut up!" roared Annestley. "Now," he said tensely, "into the water—every

damned one of you!”

He leaned forward and, with his finger on the trigger, poked the nearest passenger in the belly with the muzzle of his rifle.

With bulging eyes the man rose, plunged overboard, and started for the shore.

“Come back!” shouted Annestley, and fired. The man’s helmet flew into the air.

“I can shoot!” laughed Annestley. “Shot the button off his tile.”

Quivering and sobbing, the man came back. In numb fear, the two remaining passengers stumbled into the water. The blacks followed. They easily dragged the lightened boat across the bank. Trembling and dripping, they climbed in as she floated.

Annestley ostentatiously reloaded his rifle.

“Now, mates,” he said, his white face still fixed in a ghastly grin, “the object of this expedition is to get my foot to a doctor in two days. When I say pole, you pole. When I say jump, you jump. Only, when you’re in the water, be cheerful. Sing. Make a noise. If you can’t sing, cry. Make a noise.”

All through the blazing afternoon the boat forged her way downstream, and no man spoke. There were sounds, but they were part and parcel of labor: the rattle of oars and boathooks, the grunts and groans of the passengers, poling desperately lest they be ordered into the water.

Twice they could not escape it. The blacks struck up a chantey; the passengers tried to shout.

Toward evening they passed a long, low island. Catran nodded toward it.

“Last of the shoals, eh?” said Annestley, and laid aside his gun. He sank back, flat on his back.

Late that night they made the settlement. A port tug was anchored off the jetty. When Catran saw it his eyes blurred with tears of thanksgiving. He drew up alongside, climbed over, and woke the captain. They talked in low tones. The captain touched his cap. He roused out his crew and ordered steam. Then he

helped lift Annestley aboard.

By morning they were in the bay. Four hours later they reached the wharf. One of the blacks sped away to fetch a carriage. The passengers clambered feverishly up the steps on to the jetty. They hurried off, each intent on feeling land beneath his feet. It was as if they were strangers to one another.

Suddenly reassurance came to them and drew them together. They talked in whispers. Then they marched back slowly to where Catran stood, anxiously watching for the carriage.

It was the fattest of them who spoke.

“You needn’t think,” he said, “that we’re going to let this matter drop here. There is a doubt in our minds whether your companion shot our servant in self-defense. Perhaps you don’t mind telling us who you are?”

Catran’s eyes, fishy with fever, peered over the high collar of his coat and measured the three shrewdly.

“The first man you ask,” he said, “will tell you who I am. As to my companion—he’s Lord Annestley. That’s his yacht out yonder.”

“Lord Annestley!” breathed the fat man reverently.

His companions plucked at his sleeve, drawing him away.

Catran shrugged his shoulders and turned from them.

“Don’t trouble to leave cards,” he remarked into space.