

Tahara Among African Tribes

Harold M. Sherman

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TAHARA

Among African Tribes

By

HAROLD M. SHERMAN

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Tahara—Among African Tribes

CHAPTER I

THE EYES OF DREAD

"What's the matter, Raal? You seem to be worried about something." Dick Oakwood, blue eyed and smiling and resembling a blond savage in his garb of soft zebra skin, glanced down at his chief warrior who prostrated himself at the feet of the boy king.

"Tahara, hal! Come quickly, O Master!" replied Raal, his whole body expressing fear.

"What is it, Raal? What new danger threatens us now?" asked Dick, dropping the work he was doing and facing the stocky figure of the warrior.

"Tahara is great! I do not fear," replied Raal still bowing low before the boy, but his trembling shoulders and terror-stricken eyes told Dick that something unusual had happened.

Dick Oakwood cast a glance about the royal enclosure, a spring surrounded by date palms, then strained his eyes toward the vast expanse of the Sahara. Everything was quiet. It was mid-afternoon and the savages went about their work in drowsy fashion still only half awakened from their siesta, the resting time while the blazing sun was at its height. The women were in their caves, busy with the weaving and spinning. The tribesmen of the kingdom of Tahara were in the fields, cultivating the ground while others were chipping flint arrowheads and making bows and spears. There was no sign of trouble anywhere.

Dick turned to Raal. "Speak, Raal, what bothers you?"

"O Master," gasped the chief warrior, nervously gripping his stone hatchet.

"Near the spot where the great bird-demon rested a few suns ago, a strange object with terrible staring eyes, is lying in the sand. It is an evil spirit, I am sure."

"Bring it here, Raal. I would see what it is."

Raal started violently as if struck, his tanned face turned pale. "I dare not, O Tahara! It is perhaps black magic! It may work evil. I beg of you, Tahara, take your bow and drive an arrow through this demon's heart before it slays us."

"Come with me, Raal!" commanded Dick. "Show me this strange creature! How big is it? As big as a leopard?"

"No master it is very small, but terrible, and its skin is black and shiny. In truth it is a wicked demon."

"Fear not, Raal, for I, Tahara have chased away all evil spirits."

"But the strange creature, O Master, is not good to look at. It watches you with great shining eyes that stare and never blink."

Dick looked amused and puzzled. As the pair walked together over the sandy waste, Dick's tall, slender body stood out in striking contrast to that of his thick-set companion. Raal was heavily muscled and his blond hair hung about his shoulders while his face was covered with a light beard. Though he was an African, Raal was a white savage of the Stone-Age, for the Taharans were a survival of ancient times.

Dick's blue eyes were glowing with interest as he neared the spot where the strange creature was said to be hiding. What could it be? What new menace was he about to face?

Suddenly Raal slowed his steps, gripping his stone hatchet in readiness to strike. "Not so fast, O Master. The demon may be asleep and we can slip up on him unawares," cautioned the warrior.

But Dick had caught sight of the object half hidden in the sand, and with an exclamation of joy he sprang forward and picked it up.

"Ah-woe, Tahara!" moaned Raal. "Have a care, Master."

But Dick did not hear him. "Good!" he exclaimed. "Just what I need. Binoculars! I bet Rex Carter will be mad when he finds that he left his field glasses behind. It's my lucky day!"

Raal looked on in fear as Dick put the glasses to his eyes and gazed out over the desert.

"Good!" said Dick smiling at Raal. "These are binoculars."

"Binoculars!" muttered Raal. "What a terrible word. It must be a fierce creature to have such a name." He watched Dick holding the glasses to his eyes and added with admiration, "How brave is Tahara! My Master has great courage to handle such a terrifying demon without fear!"

Dick offered the glasses to his warrior but Raal backed away hastily.

"The evil eye! Ah-woe, Tahara!"

Dick laughed. "Take a look, Raal. They are, in truth, magic glasses. But you can see that they do not harm me."

Raal shook his head vigorously. Tahara was all-powerful, that he knew. Tahara could cast out evil. But he, Raal, was not a god and could not afford to take chances.

Dick Oakwood looked at his chief warrior with a tolerant smile. Here was a man, brave in battle, a great fighter, a courageous hunter, taking chances with his life a thousand times in combat with his enemies or a hand-to-hand struggle with wild animals, yet the sight of the binoculars with their glass lenses that looked to his savage mind as great unwinking eyes, had sent him into a panic.—And Raal was one of the bravest of his subjects. The others were far less intelligent.

Dick looked forward to the time when he could teach this tribe the folly of superstition. These strange fancies of demons and witchcraft, learned from Cimbula, the wily medicine-man, had more than once stood him in good stead, for Dick had used their fears to bend their wills to his, but now that he had brought peace to his kingdom, he wanted to break down these superstitious ideas that kept the tribe from advancing in the arts of peace.

Dick Oakwood had joined an expedition to Africa undertaken by his father,

Professor Hector Oakwood, a famous scientist, who had come to the desert to find and study a tribe of white savages living in an obscure mountain fastness and said to be of a Stone-Age race. Professor Mason and Dr. Jarvis had their own projects, the study of the jungle plants and reptiles, while Rex Carter, the millionaire, who financed the expedition, was interested in the eclipse of the sun which he wanted to study from a temporary observatory put up on an oasis in the desert. His other interest was in seeing that his son and daughter, Dan and Ray Carter, had a good time on the trip. Dan's carefree disposition, his ability to find fun under all circumstances, kept the party from taking the dangers and inconveniences too seriously. Dan always brought a laugh with him.

All went well until Jess Slythe, an unscrupulous adventurer, managed to attach himself to the expedition, foreseeing an opportunity to get a large sum of money from the wealthy Rex Carter. After helping to establish the camp at the Pomegranate Oasis, Jess Slythe found that Dick Oakwood was watching his movements with suspicion. The boy was alert to everything that went on in the camp.

The treacherous Slythe, aided by Suli, his Arab servant, persuaded Dick to take them in his plane, the *Meteorite*, on a trip of exploration into a mountainous country said to be rich in gold. Dick was pleased at this plan, the desert seemed to call to him with a promise of thrilling adventures. But when they were far away from the Pomegranate Oasis, Slythe started a fight with Dick, who was forced to take a parachute jump in order to save his life. He landed in a mountainous district among a white tribe of savages, known as the Taharans. By a clever trick the boy made these savages believe that he was Tahara, their god of the sun.

Only Cimbula, the witch-doctor, refused to accept him as a god, and continued to stir up suspicion against him, urging his followers to kill the boy. It took courage, quick thinking and prompt action to save Dick from the dangers in which he found himself, for the tribe would worship him one moment and in the next would be preparing a ceremony of execution in which Dick was to be the chief sacrifice.

He won the respect of the Taharans by helping them conquer their enemies, the Gorols, a black, hairy tribe of savages not much above the apes. In ancient times the two tribes, the Gorols and Taharans had been under one ruler, but that was long ago, before the golden crown of the king had been stolen. Since then,

frequent attacks and raids from both sides kept the district in a constant state of war.

Dick Oakwood showed the Stone-Age men how to make and use bows and arrows and once in a battle with the Gorols when defeat and death for his warriors seemed certain, the boy arranged a catapult to shoot rocks to the top of a cliff. Then his warriors hailed him as "Tahara, hal!" only to turn against him when Jess Slythe took a hand in the battle by throwing hand grenades from the *Meteorite* among the Taharan warriors. The Stone-Age men had scattered quickly to find any refuge from this deadly fire from the sky, and Dick was taken prisoner by Cimbula and kept in his cave until such time as he decided to kill him. Dick managed to escape and rescued Ray and Dan whom Slythe had left with the Gorols. Dan was about to be sacrificed by the jealous Cimbula when Dick came upon the scene and saved his friend.

Dick found himself in many tight places and in the end it appeared to the boy that there was no way out. He and his friends, Dan and Ray, were to be executed by the Taharans whom Cimbula had set against them. But Dick did not give up hope and his alert mind found a way out of the difficulty. He found the golden crown, which he wore, uniting once more the two savage tribes.

When Rex Carter arrived in his plane to find his family, Dick had been crowned King of the Taharans. After hearing the whole story from Ray and Dan, he refused to believe that the young people were safe among this strange race.

"Get ready and let's be off!" he said to Dick as he looked anxiously around at the suspicious warriors, who gazed in horror at the great airplane that rested on the sands before the oasis.

"Nothing doing, I'm staying here," replied Dick. "I wouldn't miss this for anything!"

"You're fooling, Dick! You wouldn't want to stay here! Let's go!" urged Rex Carter.

"I'm not fooling, Mr. Carter. This will be my one and only chance to be a real king. I've earned this job and I'm not going to give it up. Tell Dad I've found that Stone-Age tribe!"

Rex Carter looked at Dan and Ray, with a question in his eyes.

Ray took her father's hand and snuggled up to him as if for protection, but Dan turned to his friend.

"Say Dick are you positive that there'll always be plenty of eats?" he asked.

"I promise," replied Dick with a smile.

"Then I'm staying as chief adviser to the king!" Dan said with a smile as he turned to his father.

Rex Carter looked troubled, but Dick's confident manner assured him that he could trust his son to him.

"It's all right, Mr. Carter," said Dick seriously. "We couldn't leave these people without a king and an adviser. They are depending on us! We have to stay!"

Thus had Dick Oakwood become Tahara, the Boy King of the Desert.

His ambition was to develop the Stone-Age tribesmen in the ways of peace and progress, without allowing them to be robbed or reduced to slavery by greedy fortune-seekers from the outside world.

But in planning this happy future of his people, the Boy King did not foresee that he would have to fight off raiders and bandits who wanted to enslave them.

Dick Oakwood's exciting adventures had only just begun and before they ended he was to go through many fierce battles and hair-breadth escapes.

CHAPTER II

KING OF TWO TRIBES

"Let's go, Dan! Here's where we give our royal domain a visit of inspection."

"Okay, Dick. But first let me finish my breakfast. One more slice of wild pig

please!"

"Get a move on, Dan! The sun's up. We're all ready but you!"

Dick's first interest was to explore his new kingdom, and he set out early on this expedition with his two chief lieutenants, Raal, who was the best fighter among the Taharans, carried a treasure, wrapped in a zebra skin. Kulki, the young leader of the Gorol tribe, which lived in the mountains in huts built in the trees, carried Dick's long flint knife as an emblem of royal power.

Kulki was the son of Wabiti, an old chief who could not lead his tribe in battle, but was still respected for his wisdom.

These two warriors led the way, and for his bodyguard, the Boy King took two Taharan tribesmen armed with bows and arrows and flint knives. Kurt and Kurul were devoted to him, and had proved their courage in more than one stiff fight.

Dan Carter, his chum, went with the expedition as right hand man and counselor, though as a matter of fact, Dan was so easy-going and light-hearted that he was more useful for his company than for his advice. As a sign of high rank he was allowed to carry the binoculars.

The party set out from the fertile hills that rose from the Sahara and climbed by winding trails up the cliffs to Gorol Land.

Here the country was rugged and covered with a growth of trees and where the forest was thick and hard to penetrate lurked many wild animals. Leopards, panthers and other fierce creatures were in those shadowy recesses, together with poisonous snakes and other reptiles. Great apes and chattering little monkeys clambered boldly among the trees while gaily colored tropical birds screeched and scolded the intruders.

"Jiminy crickets!" cried Dan excitedly. "This beats any zoo I've seen yet! Animals in cages don't seem as interesting as the ones that go climbing about in the forest."

"You're right at that," Dick answered. "And as for the Gorols, they are more like the side-show 'wild man of Borneo' than anything I've ever heard of."

"Listen. That sounds like war drums along the trail."

Dan put his hand on his bow, but Dick held him back.

"Don't be foolish!" he said. "Those are drums of welcome."

He spoke a few words to Kulki in the Gorol language, which he was beginning to learn, and the savage answered grinning:

"They are the drums of Chief Wabiti, my father. We are near his camp now."

"Here they come!" exclaimed Dan. "Say, this beats a circus parade!"

Ahead of them on the forest trail the boys caught sight of dark figures moving among the trees and spots of gay color. As they reached a small clearing, Kulki led the party to a fallen log at one side, where Dick sat with his followers standing around him.

Then Chief Wabiti and his people entered to greet their new ruler, the Boy King, with drums beating and voices raised in a shrill song of welcome.

"Quick, Raal, where is the crown?" Dick asked and his savage henchman hastily unwrapped the heavy diadem from a covering of zebra skin and handed it to his master, bowing low as he did so.

Dick placed the crudely fashioned crown of soft gold and uncut gems upon his head, while Dan inspected him with a grin, remarking, "It sets a little sideways, Dick. Say, you need me along to keep your royal crown from slipping over your eye."

"Lay off, Dan! Don't get funny!"

Dick turned to Kulki. "Where's my sword of state?"

Down on his knees went the hairy, dark-skinned Kulki, and presented the flint knife on both open palms.

"Good! Now Dan, you stand close to me and hold out the field glasses where they will impress the natives."

Dick with his zebra skin garments, his crown, flint knife and respectful attendants looked enough like a tribal king to impress Wabiti, who entered the clearing at that moment, following his bodyguard and a procession of young girls ornamented with garlands of flowers. Behind him came his sons, princes of the Gorol tribe, but all of lesser rank than Kulki.

At the sight of Tahara, the new king, who was now ruler of both the tribes, Wabiti fell flat on his face and crawled forward to embrace the young monarch's ankles.

His followers prostrated themselves at the same moment, all but the drummers, who stood to one side beating furiously upon the instruments with their flat hands.

"Tahara, hal!"

The words came from the aged Wabiti in a submissive growling voice from the pit of his stomach. His gray head was almost between Dick Oakwood's feet.

Kulki echoed the words in a ringing shout.

"Tahara, hal! Tahara!"

All the Gorol tribe followed, chanting at the top of their lungs, while the women and girls repeated the words of submission in shrill, piercing voices.

The uproar terrified the brightly plumaged birds in the treetops and sent the curious little monkeys scuttling to safety.

Dick was about to raise Wabiti to his feet, when Dan remarked, "Let him stay where he is a while longer. I remember that old scoundrel did not lift a hand to save me, the night of the witch hunt. Let him stay there till his joints get stiff!"

"Don't blame him for that," said Dick. "Wabiti couldn't help himself."

"That's right. He was scared of old Cimbula. By the way, where do you suppose that rascally witch-doctor is hiding out?"

"Can't say, Dan! But don't worry! The tribes are through with him and his so-called magic."

While Dick and his chum were talking, the tribe of Gorols showed some degree of uneasiness. Dick was not aware of it, but his delay in giving the signal for Wabiti to rise was taken as a sign of anger.

The Gorols remembered how Dan had been chosen for sacrifice in the Boiling Black Spring that night of the terrible witch hunt, and when they saw him talking earnestly with Dick, they thought he was urging the new king to punish them.

The women and girls of the tribe began swaying and weaving their arms over their heads in a dance of terror. Their high pitched voices broke into a wailing plea for mercy:

"Ah-woe, ah-woe, Tahara!"

Even the drummers joined in begging for a pardon, for the drums rolled in a melancholy rhythm.

Kulki bowed to the ground and cried, "May I speak, Master?"

"Speak, Kulki!"

"Is my lord angry?"

"Angry at what, Kulki?"

"We did wrong! Be merciful, O King. Touch my father with the flat of your knife as a sign of pardon."

"Pardon?"

"Yes, O mighty Tahara. If one of us must be slain, strike me. But do not kill my father before the tribe that loves him."

Dick was astonished at the earnestness of the young savage, and also at the spirit of sacrifice.

He smiled and spoke to Dan.

"Pretty sporting, eh?"

"I'll say so! Kulki shows the right spirit."

As the tribe saw Dan and Dick smiling, their fears were turned to rejoicing, and a great shout went up as Dick stooped and patted the old chief on his grey head.

"We are friends," he said.

"I am your slave, O Tahara," exclaimed Wabiti.

"And I!" Kulki cried while Wabiti's other sons all shouted in their own language, "Long live Tahara, King of the two tribes!"

After this ceremony, Wabiti led the way to the clearing under his airy village in the trees.

In a great pit, filled with glowing coals, were the carcasses of mountain goats, antelopes and wild boars. Small birds were roasting on skewers held by women of the tribe, while girls came forward with woven trays heaped high with tropical fruits such as Dick had eaten among the Taharans.

There were melons, dates, pomegranates and many others that he did not know by name, also gourds full of a delicious drink made from honey and wild grapes.

"Oh boy! This is the life!" exclaimed Dan. "Hey sister, bring over that basket of figs! Look at this, Dick! Ripe figs, purple and white figs! They're sweet as sugar."

Dick smiled and tasted the fruit but Dan insisted on keeping a basket beside him while the guests and Wabiti sat on the grass and the feast began.

Dan Carter, who enjoyed his meals and never passed up anything, was the hero of the hour. The savages believed in doing everything thoroughly: if they fought, they fought to kill and when they ate, they stuffed to bursting.

Dick Oakwood, with his habit of moderate eating, would have made a poor impression but for the exploits of Dan, who upheld the honor of both by his attacks upon the food.

As Dan picked a bone, he threw it behind him, over his shoulder and instantly a child of the tribe would snatch it as a prize.

The Gorols were in high spirits. They foresaw happy days ahead, days of hunting and feasting with no more fear of war with the Taharans to disturb their sleep.

"We are all friends and brothers!" said Wabiti, rising with a gourd full of the honey drink.

"Friends and brothers," echoed Dick.

Wabiti chuckled sleepily, sat down abruptly and the next moment his head fell forward and he began snoring like a buzz saw.

Dick was not displeased. He looked forward to many happy years, studying these simple people, left over from the Old Stone Age, and watching them develop as he taught them the arts of peace.

After the Gorols had eaten all their skins could hold, they began to drop off to sleep and Dick called Raal to him.

"Now is a good time for us to explore the country undisturbed," he said. "You and I will look over the Black Boiling Spring that I saw one terrible night. And I would enter the cave of the Great Gorol, where we stole the sacred black image."

"I hear. I obey!"

Raal ordered one of the Gorols to bring a bundle of torches and told Kurt and Kurul to stay where they were and look after Dan, who was stretched out in a happy doze.

But as Dick rose to go, Dan started after him. "I wasn't sleeping," he cried. "I just closed my eyes to think! I'm going along."

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I'd just feel better to go with you."

"You're not afraid, are you?" laughed Dick. "The Gorols are all friendly."

"Of course not. But I was just thinking, suppose that old witch-doctor, Cimbula, happened to smell the cooking and crash the party. He might persuade those fellows to throw me into the Boiling Spring after all."

"Well, come along, if you're able to walk," answered Dick.

They followed the winding trail to the hot sulphur spring that still sent its suffocating fumes from the black pit and bubbled menacingly as the boys looked down.

"Jiminy crickets! I'll never forget how they wanted to chuck me in there," exclaimed Dan. "Walk a little faster!"

"Come along. There's the cave mouth just ahead."

The chums paused to stare at the tall posts that marked the entrance, each crowned with a polished human skull, then Raal got the torches flaring and passed them out to light their way.

Dick followed close beside Raal, with Dan at his heels, as they plunged into the darkness of the cave. The narrow walls rose straight beside them as they proceeded slowly, and soon Dick reached the place where the passage turned at right angles.

Here the walls were flat surfaces, smoothed and cut artificially. It was no longer a rugged cave but a tunnel.

"Look!" exclaimed Dan. "The walls are all covered with drawings."

Dick held up his torch to the rocky surface and saw that it was painted with pictures of hunting scenes, men pursuing boars and antelope. The drawings were done in outline and rubbed with some brownish color to make them show clearly.

"These are real Stone-Age pictures," said Dick as they went deeper and deeper into the cave. "They are like the ones that Umba is painting now in his cave, but they show animals that have died out long ago. See, here are drawings of extinct animals. There is the sabre-tooth tiger. And look, that is a mastodon with long, curved tusks."

"Jiminy, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could find one or two left over?" said Dan.

"A mastodon? Not likely! The climate has changed since the time that picture was made and those giants died out long ago," Dick replied.

"Well, anyhow, some day we will go hunting in the high mountains. Maybe we can find one or two animals that are extinct everywhere else."

"We'll certainly do that little thing," said Dick. He held his torch closer to the wall to examine a large crack in the surface. It was of rotten, crumbling stone in the fissure and as Dick pried at it with his flint knife, a handful of fragments dropped out.

Dan stooped to look at them. He rose to his feet with his eyes bright with excitement.

"Do you know what this is?" he exclaimed. "Quartz! Rotten quartz! And it's heavy with gold."

Dick stared at the glittering bits of ore and echoed: "Gold!"

"We have stumbled on the place where all that metal comes from," said Dan. "This is a mine. See how the passage goes on at a right angle. It was dug to follow the ledge of gold."

"I wonder. These people don't value gold. They use it the way we use any common metal."

"It's the only metal they know," said Dan. "And it's common here as old iron is with us."

Raal showed no interest in their find. Gold was nothing more to him than lead or tin. He picked up a yellow nugget from the floor and carelessly threw it away again.

"I don't think the tribe hollowed this tunnel for gold," said Dick. "I believe they cut it for use as a temple. And from the rock that was dumped outside they collected the gold that happened to be mixed with the crushed stone."

"What a find!" Dan repeated over and over. "Why, Dick, this would lead to a gold rush if the news ever got out. Just like the California and Yukon stampedes."

"I hope nobody lets the word get out!"

"If Jess Slythe knew about it, he'd be here with an army of ruffians," said Dan.

"And kill off all the tribesmen. It would be a tragedy."

By this time the boys had reached the square dark chamber, with the stone block on which the idol of the ape-god had once been worshipped. Here the seams of ore were richer and thicker than in the tunnel and the floor of the room was heavy with glinting particles of yellow.

"Jiminy crickets!" gasped Dan Carter. "Gold dust! Think of it, Dick, the place is carpeted with gold dust! We're rich! Millionaires!"

But Dick was not happy. He had not come there to make money but to discover an ancient tribe. The secret of the gold would mean the slaughter of those people, if the word spread.

When he left the cave he had resolved to swear Dan to secrecy, and as for the cave, he would order the natives to wall up its mouth for fear of evil magic.

Following his visit to Wabiti's tribe, Dick returned to the Taharan village, where he began teaching the natives the simple arts that they could practice.

The women were shown how the wool of wild sheep and the hair of goats could be spun into yarn, and he had primitive looms set up in caves, where cloth was woven.

Veena, the pretty little handmaiden of the old queen, was quick to learn and as she was fond of Dick and anxious to please him, she was among the first to produce a fine piece of cloth.

Veena blushed with pleasure when he praised it and looked at him shyly, then

cast down her blue eyes much like one of the girls at home. With her fair skin and blond hair, Veena might have been his own sister.

The sharp-faced Queen Vanga, was given an occupation to keep her quiet. Now that she no longer ruled the tribe, Vanga was set to overseeing the women who spun and wove. She did it with relish.

"Work faster, you lazy creatures!" she cried. "Don't stop to gossip! Don't go to sleep over your work!" and if any of them talked back, she did not hesitate to box their ears. Old Vanga was still a queen.

Dan was especially useful in teaching the men of the tribe something about farming and horse-breaking. Both Dan and Dick had been in Arizona long enough to see how the cowboys did things and soon the Taharans had learned to make lariats out of their palm fibre ropes. Dick and Dan took turns in showing them how to lasso and throw the little wild horses, which the tribe owned but had never learned to use.

"Can you beat it!" exclaimed Dan. "These fellows think a pony is good for just one thing. They raise them for food."

"They are rather small to ride," said Dick, "but I'll tell you what, we'll break a few to the saddle anyhow."

"First we'll have to make a saddle."

"And then we'll show these Taharans what a horse-breaker their king can be."

But that plan had to be delayed for before the horse-breaking could begin a reign of terror swept like a hurricane over the peaceful kingdom of Tahara.

CHAPTER III

ARAB RAIDERS

Dan came running to Dick Oakwood and cried, "Say it looks to me like a sandstorm over there. Maybe we had all better get under cover!"

Across the desert, far away, Dick saw a cloud of dust rising into the hot blue sky and called Raal.

"Is that a sandstorm?" he asked.

Raal studied the horizon carefully with narrowed eyes. "No, Master. When the sandstorm comes from the desert, it is not like that. Overhead the color changes and threatens danger. It may be a herd of wild horses that raises the dust."

"Do wild horses run about on the desert?" asked Dan.

"Never before have I seen them, but of late I have seen many strange things. I have seen birds that carry men and I have seen the sun darkened."

Dick took his binoculars and studied the morning cloud, but it was too far for him to make out what was kicking up the dust. Dan looked without success, and Dick turned to the natives.

"You try what you can see," he said to Raal, handing over the binoculars.

The Taharan took the "magic glasses" with awe. Never could he outgrow the superstitious terror that they aroused.

"They won't hurt you," laughed Dan. "Take a chance! You saw me use them."

"Yet they are strong magic. I fear them because I do not understand."

"It's all right. They are harmless to you. Look!" And as Dick helped him to focus the binoculars, Raal cried out in amazement.

"Ah-woe, ah-woe! I see warriors!—Or demons, mounted on horses! The magic brings them close! Ah-woe!"

Dick took the glasses and thought he could make out what the sharp-eyed savage had seen.

"Arabs!" he gasped. "A wild tribe of nomads!"

"Arabs, Master?"

Raal did not know what he was talking about. Never had raiding Arabs found this spot so far from the caravan trails. In the history of the tribe, no strangers had ever visited the land until the airplanes had brought Dick and those others from the sky. Yet with the instinct of the savage, Raal was quick to grasp the idea of a raid by enemies.

"Arabs! If they be men, we will fight them!"

"Lucky for you we are here to protect you!" said Dan.

"Quick, Raal!" cried Dick. "Assemble the warriors with all their weapons. Spears, bows and arrows, stone hatchets and knives! Order the war drums to be sounded!"

"I hear, O Master!"

Raal hurried to obey. Shaggy blond tribesmen sprang to the hollow logs, with tightly stretched hides and soon the roll of the drums brought Taharan warriors hurrying from the fields. The alarm throbbed until the air was vibrating with a feeling of menace. The call to battle carried over the cliffs and beyond to the Gorol tree dwellings, and soon the ape-men were seen, scrambling down the steep rocks, with their war chief, Kulki, among them.

Their thin figures, covered with a fine growth of dark hair, made them resemble something more than beast and less than man. Like goats they found a footing on the steep sides. Their bodies were stringy and tough-muscled; light in weight, they were far stronger than the average civilized man, and more agile even than the Taharans.

As warriors they were formidable, and Kulki, their leader, was fearless and a tricky fighter.

Raal, too, was brave in battle and the Taharans were superb warriors. With their throwing sticks they could hurl a lance with such force that it would go right through a man's body, and as archers they could bring down a bird in flight with their flint-tipped arrows.

"There's trouble coming, sure!" exclaimed Dan Carter. "Jiminy, I'd hate to be an Arab and get crowned with Raal's flint hatchet."

But the Arabs were not fighting with such Stone-Age weapons. They carried long-barreled guns, that could pick off a bowman far beyond arrow range, and their swift horses and camels could keep them safe from attack.

"Dan, you keep close to me!" exclaimed Dick. "I'll need you to act as my lieutenant. This is going to be a real scrap!"

Dick saw at a glance that the battle would have to be carried on from the cliffs. There the Taharans and Gorols would have the advantage of cover and the Arab horses would be useless in fighting.

Yet he knew that a sharp resistance would weaken the Arab force and lessen their confidence. The first line of battle he entrusted to Raal and a force of picked Taharan archers.

"Post your men between the desert sands and the Sacred Spring," Dick ordered. "Let each man find shelter behind a rock and see to it that he can retreat to the cliffs at top speed. Then as soon as the enemy comes within bow-shot let drive at him with arrows and retreat, still shooting. Post a second line closer to the spring. And a third beside the water."

"I hear, O Master. I obey!"

Without losing a moment Raal ordered his archers to find an ambush shutting off the invaders from the spring. Dick knew well that the cool water would be the first thing these raiders would want after the long trip across the blistering hot sands. No matter how full their water bags had been at the start, they would be empty now.

The spring would be the first point of attack.

Dan studied the Arabs through the binoculars. "There are hundreds of them," he cried, "on horses and camels! They are a fierce looking gang of bandits."

"Raal will tame them when they get within bowshot," said Dick.

Meanwhile Kulki in command of the Gorols, took up a position on the cliff

edge, while all the small children and old people of the cave dwellers, hurried to find shelter in the mountains.

The older children and the women brought big stones to the edge of the cliff to roll down upon the invaders.

All these preparations had gone forward with breathless haste, for the Arab raiders were closing in fast.

Leaving Dan behind, Dick advanced to meet them, carrying a white flag; one of the first fabrics woven on his looms. He did not want to begin hostilities until he was quite certain that the Arabs were bent on war, and waved the flag as a signal.

But Dick was not long left in doubt as to their hostile purpose.

The Arabs began shooting at the flag of truce long before they were within rifle range. Bullets threw up puffs of dust in the desert and Dick retreated to the first line, where archers were crouching behind scattered boulders, and took refuge.

The thunder of hoof beats was loud in his ears, the tossing heads and flying foam of the horses showed clearly, before Dick shouted:

"Let them have it!"

Raal echoed his command. "Let them have it! Tahara, hal!"

Instantly the band of horsemen was stung by a cloud of arrows. Horses and riders were pierced by the flint-tipped arrows and a dozen saddles showed empty as the horses galloped on.

There was a shout of rage and surprise. The raiders had expected no such fierce resistance and some shrieked to Allah and Mohammed, his prophet, while others vented screams of pain.

"Slay them! The dogs of unbelievers!" shouted Abdul, their leader.

A crackling volley of rifle shots rang out, bullets whined through the air and flattened themselves upon the boulders and the troop swerved sharply to one

side.

"Another!" cried Dick. "Give it to them!"

Again arrows stung them like hornets and the Bedouins, firing wildly, were thrown into confusion.

Then as the charge broke and the riflemen galloped away to reload their weapons, Dick gave the signal to retreat to the second line of defense.

The Taharans fell back, keeping close to the ground and taking shelter at every bush and boulder.

So far the battle had been in their favor. The black-bearded ruffians had been repulsed with dead and wounded, while the Taharans had escaped without loss of a man.

Of course, luck could not favor them always. The raiders had withdrawn to take counsel with Abdul and that ferocious chieftain swore by the beard of the Prophet that he would show no mercy to the "infidel dogs" who had dared to resist him. His hawk eyes stared furiously at the cliffs, then at the boulders, behind each of which lurked a bowman.

"We will not make another charge!" he ordered. "This time each horseman will ride warily, rifle ready for action. Make a detour! Ride to one side of the rocks and try to pick off the archers one by one."

Suli, who rode beside Abdul, searched the horizon with black, angry eyes.

"Where is Slythe?" he muttered. "The winged warrior has failed us!"

Abdul heard him and vented a hearty curse upon the missing airman.

"He has led us into a trap! May he perish and the dogs devour him!"

"He did not warn us that the savages of this tribe would fight like demons!" put in a wounded Arab, knotting a strip of linen about his bleeding arm.

"If we had known that they could fight like tigers, we would have raided them by night when they slept," growled Abdul. "Now it is too late for a surprise

or a parley. We must fight it through."

"And first of all we must have water for ourselves and our horses!" grumbled Suli.

"Yes, by the Prophet! First we shall capture the spring. But not by storm! Ride warily and pick off the dogs one at a time!"

Carefully the troop approached and this time Dick used another strategy. As an Arab rider would approach a rock, a Taharan would break and run back to another shelter. But when the Arab chased him, firing his rifle, a second tribesman still hiding behind the rock would take a shot at the Arab at close range.

So keen and clever were the Taharan archers, that few arrows missed. But the tribesmen were not so fortunate as to go unscathed through the second attack. More than one was dropped by an Arab bullet, some to rise no more.

Dick Oakwood directed the running fight, giving orders to Raal, who shouted them to his men in a voice that rang out like the bellowing of a bull. Though he might be frightened at evil magic and things that he did not understand, Raal was brave as a lion when it came to battle.

Dan Carter had stayed in the rear according to Dick's orders until the thrill of watching the fight got his nerves on edge with excitement. Then, armed with a bow and a quiver of arrows, he ran from one shelter to another until he was among the fighting men. At the last rock where he took refuge, a Taharan archer was already hidden, driving his arrows to the mark every time an Arab rider came within range.

Dan saw it was Kurt, one of Dick's most trusted henchmen, and with a word of encouragement, the boy took up his position on the other side of the big rock.

"Let 'em have it!" said Dan.

"Let 'em have it!" Kurt repeated and both marksmen let fly at a Bedouin, mounted on a splendid gray horse that came charging toward the rock.

The arrows whizzed through the air, but the rider was on guard and dropped from his saddle, hanging to the side of his horse and protected by its body.

Then before the archers could shoot again he was right beside the rock and slashing out with his curving sword, struck at Kurt with a blow that laid open the tribesman's shoulder.

Dan was ready with his second arrow by that time and let drive a dart that caught the Arab in the throat and dropped him to the ground. The horse galloped on, while Kurt and Dan ran back toward the cliffs, for now other Arabs were close by and their position was too hot to keep.

"*Allah il allah!*" shouted the raiders, galloping to head off the fugitives.

"Slay the dogs of unbelievers!"

Their howls of fury rose shrill and high amid the rattling of rifle shots, the whinnying of horses and the war cry of the tribesmen, "Tahara, hal! Tahara!"

Dan was racing for life, when he saw that Kurt was lagging. Loss of blood from the gash on his shoulder had weakened the Taharan warrior and it seemed as if he might fall from exhaustion, so Dan forgot his own danger to help Kurt escape.

The Arab pursuers saw that the two enemies were having a hard time to get away and let out yells of triumph.

"Allah! Down with the unbelievers!"

A couple of horsemen sped toward the fugitives and their rifles sent the echoes flying back from the cliffs, though the bullets missed their mark and sent puffs of dust from the ground to either side.

"Run, Kurt! Run for your life!" gasped Dan Carter.

"Leave me! I grow weak, but I can die like a man," answered Kurt, brave to the last.

"You're not going to die!" said Dan. "Here, put your weight on my shoulder. I'll help you!"

Their situation was desperate. Behind them came the two Arabs, tugging at their scimiters to release them from the scabbards and eager to cut the fugitives

to bits.

Before them raced the riderless horse, zig-zagging to avoid the tribesmen who yelled and waved their arms at it. The animal was trying to reach the spring, for it was eager for water after the long trip.

In desperation Dan dragged his wounded comrade back of a small boulder and took up his position beside him. His bow was already sending a swift arrow at the foremost rider when a yell behind him caused him to look over his shoulder.

Dick Oakwood had seen the danger that his friends were in and acted promptly. He had snatched a coiled rope, carried by one of the tribesmen, and now ran toward the riderless horse, loosening the loop as he ran. Then as the animal swerved and passed, not far away, Dick whirled the lariat, sent it flying and braced himself for the shock.

It was a good throw.

The loop settled around the animal's neck and as Dick put his weight against it the noose tightened and the horse came down, half choked and terrified.

Before the animal could scramble to its feet, Dick was in the saddle, loosening the lariat and seizing the reins. A moment later with a new rider on its back, the Arab horse was heading back to where Dan and Kurt were standing off the Bedouin attackers.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE RAGES

"Hold 'em, Dan, I'm with you!"

Dan heard the cry, and at the same moment saw one of his attackers drop with an arrow through the chest.

Dick Oakwood was at home in the saddle and now he drove furiously at the remaining Arab, who was almost on top of Dan with scimiter upraised ready to deliver a fatal blow.

Dan reached for an arrow. But his quiver was empty!

The boy's only weapon was a flint knife, and that was almost useless in fighting a foe armed with a razor-edged sword.

Dan gave a despairing shout for help as he saw Dick Oakwood galloping toward him, and dodged the blow of the scimiter, missing it by such a close margin that the steel whizzed past his ear with a swishing sound.

"Attaboy, Dan!"

At Dick's cry of encouragement, Dan saw the Arab suddenly reel back in the saddle, fling up both arms and slump to the ground in a heap. Dick had no weapon but the rope, but he had learned to use the lariat as well as any cowboy.

The loop had dropped over the Bedouin's body, and as Dick wheeled his horse the Arab was dragged from the saddle and pulled across the desert until he was stunned and helpless.

At this, Dan let out a great shout of relief.

"Hooray, Dick! Fine work!" and he started hot-foot for safety, helping the wounded Kurt as best he could.

They were far from safe, however, for though the two Arabs were disposed of, there were others who had seen what was going on and were heading that way.

Dick rode up to his friends and bending low in the saddle, he seized Kurt under the arms.

"Help me give him a lift, Dan," he cried, and the next moment Kurt was lifted bodily upon the horse ahead of Dick, while the latter directed his friend:

"Grab the stirrup, Dan! Now run like blazes! There they come!"

Dan snatched at the stirrup and as Dick urged his horse to flight he seemed to be flying through the air. Every time he raised his foot for a forward step, he was pulled ahead by the rush of the horse and his flight was a series of leaps that carried him forward like a kangaroo.

"Gee whizz!" he gasped. "This is grand if I can keep it up! I feel like a giant grasshopper!"

Over his head whizzed the bullets of the galloping Arabs, who were joining in the chase, and the cliffs ahead seemed very far away.

Dick encouraged his friend to keep up.

"Watch your step, Dan. Keep going for a minute longer and you're safe!"

The dust rose about them in a cloud. Dan's mouth was parched and dry. His lips seemed to be cracking and his eyes full of grit, but he hung to the stirrup for all he was worth, struggling desperately to keep from falling.

It was like the end of a Marathon run, with every ounce of his strength put forth by sheer will power to keep from giving up the race. But the difference was that if he should lose the race, he would lose his life as well.

Half dazed and almost blinded by the dust, Dan suddenly felt the horse stop and he plunged forward in a heap. "This is my finish," he thought. "I'm a goner, sure!"

He lay there panting, expecting in the next moment to feel a bullet crash into his body, but instead, he was picked up by friendly hands and revived with splashes of cool water over his face and head.

"Quick! Give him a drink!" he heard Dick command and the next instant a gourd of water was put to his lips and Dan gulped it eagerly.

"Where are we?" he asked, wiping his eyes and looking around in a half daze.

"At the Big Spring," said Dick. "We're safe here, but only for a few minutes. The Taharans are standing off the Arabs with their bows and arrows at the last line of defense."

While he spoke Dick was busily engaged in washing the dirt from Kurt's bleeding shoulder.

"Quick, a piece of cloth!" he said. "This needs a bandage."

A strip was put into his hands and as Dick finished tying up the wound he was surprised to see the girl, Veena, standing beside him with more of the cloth which she had woven.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I am trying to help, O Master."

"But I gave orders for all the old folks, children and women to take refuge up there back of the cliffs."

"Forgive me, O Master! I saw the fighting on the plain, and I could not stay up there in safety. I had to come down to do my share."

"Your share?"

"Yes." Veena touched meaningly the bow and quiver of arrows, that hung over her shoulder. "I can send an arrow straight as any man in the tribe."

"But women are not supposed to go into battle."

"Why not? If the enemy feels an arrow in his body, does he stop to ask whether a man shot it or a woman?"

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" cried Dan Carter, who had caught the drift of this reply. "Talk about your modern girl! Why this Stone-Age maiden belongs to the Twentieth Century!"

Veena blushed. She knew nothing about either "Stone-Age" or "Twentieth Century" but she guessed that Dan was praising her and the color mounted to the fair skin of her cheeks, while her blue eyes smiled with pleasure.

"Please let me stay, O Master," she begged.

But Dick was not so easily led. "Nothing doing! Go back up the cliff. And get

a move on! You're supposed to be with Queen Vanga. This is no place for girls!"

Veena might have argued with anybody else, but Tahara, the king and god of the tribe, was not to be contradicted. Hastily she turned away and ran like a deer to the trail that led up the cliffs.

"We've got to clear out of here right away," said Dick.

"The archers are not able to hold back the Arabs any longer," Dan agreed.

"That's right. By this time they must have shot away all their arrows."

From the second line of defense, the Taharans were seen retreating, singly or in pairs, while the Arabs, grown more cautious now, hesitated to rush them, fearing another surprise.

"We can't hold the spring any longer," said Dick, and he gave the order for a general retreat. In a few minutes, the trails were covered with tribesmen, running nimbly to the rocky slopes.

They mounted them lightly as goats, and Dan Carter, though he was a good climber, had to do his best to keep up with the slowest.

As for Dick, he remained among the last. The horse he had captured was at the spring with its muzzle deep in the cool water.

Dick hurried to pull it away before it could injure itself by drinking too much, and swinging into the saddle he brought up the rear of his retreating forces.

Among all the footpaths that led to the top of the cliffs, there was only one that a horseman could ascend, and even that required a sure-footed horse and a steady and fearless rider.

Dick stopped at the foot of the cliffs and turned in his saddle to shake his fist at the pursuing Arabs, then dug his heels in the horse's flanks and sent it up the steep incline. As he reached the top, the grade was almost as steep as the roof of a house and the stones underfoot went rattling down the cliff side.

A few bullets sang through the air and flattened on the rocks beside him, but there was no volley of rifle shots, for at that moment the majority of the Arabs

and their mounts were trying to quench their thirst at the spring.

As Dick reached the top of the cliffs and put his horse to a trot on the level stretch, he was greeted with wild shouts of joy by his followers. They had not seen a man on horseback until the Arabs raided them and it seemed like a superhuman feat to bestride a four legged beast and drive it up a cliff side.

"Tahara, hal! Tahara!" they shouted.

Raal ran toward his hero and cried, "Tell us what to do, O Master! Never have we seen such demons, with sticks that speak like thunder and dart out fire. But we do not fear them! You are our king and our leader and with you we shall conquer."

"They're rooting for you, Dick!" cried Dan Carter.

"Yes, and I've *got* to save them now."

Dick rode to the edge of the cliff and looked over. The Arabs had taken possession of the spring and quenched their thirst. The horses and camels were all watered and refreshed and the invaders lolled about, stuffing themselves with dates, figs and the other fruits they found there.

If they were planning to attack the stronghold of the tribe on the cliffs it was clear that they expected to wait until they were thoroughly rested. Perhaps the next morning would be the time for the assault.

As Dick watched them, sitting on his horse, a bullet suddenly sang close to his ear and a second later the report of a rifle rang out. Some sniper had taken careful aim, hoping to bring down the leader of the Taharans, and Dick realized how careless he had been in exposing himself.

He wheeled his horse away from the edge and Dan hurried to him.

"Hurt, Dick?"

"Not a scratch, Dan!"

"That's lucky. Lucky for you and all of us. We would be lost without you."

"We may be, anyhow. Dan, how can we fight off those raiders? They are armed with guns, old style single-shot, Arab guns, to be sure, but at that, they are more than a match for stone hatchets and spears."

"Or even bows and arrows," agreed Dan. "Looks as though we were up against it."

"Well, there's one thing we can do. Defend the cliffs and keep them from coming any farther."

"Yes, we can roll rocks down on them if they start to climb, and if any get to the top, we can fight them off before they get a foothold."

Raal and Kulki approached followed by the old chief of the Gorols, Wabiti. Evidently they wanted a council and Dick asked them to say what was on their minds.

"Advise me, O mighty warriors!" he said.

Raal spoke first. "I say, do not wait. We are many and we are brave. Let us sweep down upon them from the cliff and destroy them."

"Yes, but you forget the sticks that speak like thunder and carry death," said Wabiti.

Kulki spoke out: "No matter, some of us must perish, but the rest will fight on. I say, wait until it is dark, then my Gorol braves will slip up on them and kill. We Gorols are dark-skinned and cannot be seen in the night like the pale Taharans."

"That is good advice," said Dick.

But the old Chief Wabiti spoke up, shaking his gray head dolefully:

"Our enemies use strong magic. Their thunder sticks hurl death and they ride on fire-breathing monsters that travel like the wind. We can do nothing against them without even stronger magic."

"That's all bunk," snorted Dan.

But Wabiti went on, "Nothing but magic will save us. If only the Great Gorol, the Ape-god had not been destroyed, he would save us."

"I like Kulki's advice better," said Dick. "And I like Raal's valiant words. We will gather the strong warriors among the Taharans and the Gorols and tonight when it is dark we will attack the Arab camp with arrows and spears. If we fight like men we can drive them off. No other magic is needed."

"Tahara, hal!" cried Kulki. "Tahara, good!"

"We fight and win," shouted Raal.

"Attaboy!" Dan cried.

Only Wabiti was not satisfied. He went away, shaking his head in gloomy thought and wandered in the forest, muttering invocations to the Ape-god of his fathers. Among the rocks he came upon a shelter which had been built of boughs for the old Queen Vanga by her maidens, and the two former rulers talked bitterly of the evils that had come to their tribes since they had ceased to reign.

While Dick Oakwood and Dan were busy with Raal and Kulki, organizing the forces of the two tribes for a night attack on the invaders, the two old leaders, shorn of their power, sat in the dark forest, plotting and grumbling.

"The old ways are the best," muttered Wabiti. "It brought nothing but misfortune when our Great Gorol was broken to bits."

"The old ways are the only right ways," said Vanga, her sharp features screwed into a grimace of hatred. "Once our tribe had a wise man, a one-eyed witch-doctor named Cimbula, who could always help us when the gods were angry. Now we have Tahara, but as for me, I like Cimbula better. His single eye glowed like fire and terrified all the tribe. But he treated me with respect and his magic was strong."

Vanga spoke sharply to her handmaidens, "Don't sit there doing nothing! You, Veena, bring a basket of fruit and a gourd of honey and crushed grapes for my friend the great Chief Wabiti."

"I hear, I obey," said the girl obediently and went to fetch them.

"As for you others," Vanga ordered, "scatter in the mountains. Call aloud for Cimbula and look in all the caves where he may be hiding. Perhaps he can save us yet."

So while the old chieftain and the ex-queen plotted, the women and girls searched among the wilds of the Gorol Land mountains calling in their plaintive, shrill voices, "Cimbula! Come out of hiding, O mighty magic worker!"

The witch-doctor heard the call, but was in no hurry to answer.

Since he had been driven out of the tribe when Dick Oakwood was crowned, the treacherous medicine man had lurked in the high hills, biding his time.

With only one disciple, a youth named Keltan to bring him food and act as spy among the tribesmen, Cimbula brooded over his loss of power and planned revenge.

"Go, Keltan," he directed his slave, "ask who wants Cimbula and why? But do not say that you know where I am to be found. Just learn what you can and bring me word in secret."

Through the forest rang the faint, high-pitched call, "Cimbula! Return to us, O Master of wizardry!"

Cimbula grinned and his single eye glowed in triumph.

The hour had come for him to be again a power in the land.

CHAPTER V

CIMBULA WEAVES A PLOT

"Dan, I am going to post you here at the edge of the cliff," said Dick Oakwood. "Stay hidden among the rocks, or some sniper will take a shot at you."

"Don't worry, Dick, I'll keep out of sight," said Dan.

"And if you see any sign of attack in the Arab camp, let out a yell of alarm."

"You're telling *me*? Nobody will have to ask me to do that little thing."

"The rest of us are going to be busy getting ready for the night attack," Dick explained. "We have to assemble the two tribes, select the best men for the battle and see to it that they have plenty of arrows and other weapons."

"Okay. You've given me a soft job," said Dan. "I can play sentinel all day. Now if I only had a big bunch of dates to eat and a good book to read—" he added laughing.

"Say, you'd make a great soldier," cried Dick. "You're the sort of soldier that goes to the guard house for the duration of the war."

"Go on. I was just kidding!"

"Well, big boy, this is serious. Here, I'll lend you the binoculars and you keep your eyes on the Arabs down there. If they start to climb the cliffs, we will roll big rocks on them and give them something to remember us by."

But the Arabs seemed satisfied to take things easy for a while.

Dan took the binoculars and after a brief survey of the Arab camp, began to search the horizon in all directions.

"I was just thinking," he explained, "that this would be a great time for my dad to make his appearance in the cabin plane."

"No such luck, Dan! Don't even think of it. I made your father promise to leave the tribes to me without interference."

"I'm hoping he may shorten the time or even forget that he made such a promise," said Dan. "Gee! Wouldn't it be great to see that big plane come sailing toward us?"

"With white men and guns to chase off those Arab slavers!" Dick added. "Yes, it would be fine, Dan. But don't expect it. Your father and mine are busy on the Pomegranate Oasis. They don't dream that we are in danger."

"That's right! Wouldn't it be wonderful if people could send word by their thoughts. A kind of human radio."

"There is something like that," said Dick Oakwood. "It is called telepathy, but not much is known about it. People who have the gift can send or receive messages sent by another person's mind."

"Aw go on. Quit kidding!"

"I'm not kidding. Lots of Hindu mystics in India have the gift."

"Well if I had it, I would send a hurry-up call to Ray," said Dan. "I'd say, 'Sister get busy and tell everybody on the Oasis that we're in danger. Load up the cabin plane with rifles and get here before we're all killed.'"

"Listen, Dan, you're not going to get killed, and I don't like to hear you talk that way. Snap out of it, boy! We're going to put up a fight that will make those Arabs wish they had never bothered us."

"You can count on me," said Dan.

The Boy King shook his friend's hand and clapped him on the shoulder, then turned away to organize his force of tribesmen. Dick summoned Raal and ordered, "Look over all the Taharans. Pick out the best men for tonight's attack and tell them what they are to do."

"I hear, I obey, O Tahara."

"Good. And let no man be idle. Even those who are wounded, but able to work, must keep busy. They can make arrows and spears, for we will need plenty of weapons."

"Yes, O Master."

Dick summoned Kulki.

"What about your Gorols? Are they all assembled?"

"Not all, Master. Some have strayed off to the woods. They are not trained to obey like the Taharans."

"Round up all you can find," said Dick, "and make sure that only the reliable men are chosen for the raid."

"Yes, Master."

"Send out others to collect pitchwood for torches and stones to roll down the cliff. Every man must do something useful."

"I hear, O Tahara."

"I would speak to Wabiti, your father."

"He is not here, Master," said Kulki. "Wabiti is old and his thoughts are not as ours. He has gone away into the woods."

"If Wabiti is up to mischief, it will go hard with him," said Dick. "Are your brothers faithful to me?"

"I think so, Master. If I knew that one was a traitor, I would slay him with my own hands."

There was no doubt of Kulki's loyalty. His primitive features and dark eyes expressed the eagerness to serve the Boy King of the two tribes.

"It is well," said Dick.

"Tonight the Arabs will be driven to defeat and shameful flight before the moon rises. Let every man be ready."

"All will be ready to die for you, O Tahara!"

Dick turned away to look after Kurt and the other wounded warriors and

found that they were being tended by old women of the tribes who were skilled in treating cuts with medicinal leaves.

Kurul had come through with only slight scratches and was in attendance as his body guard.

"I need no guard," said Dick. "You Kurul, take six of the fleetest warriors and hunt in the hills for game. Before sunset we will all eat and drink to build up our strength and as soon as it is dark we will strike a blow that will rid the land of our enemies."

With all these preparations for battle, the day passed swiftly. Dick's main worry was that Jess Slythe might appear in his stolen monoplane and drop bombs upon the tribesmen as he had done before. Of course his fears might be groundless. Dick was not sure whether the fellow was still alive or whether his plane had crashed in the desert, but until he was assured of the man's death, he would have reason to fear him. If Slythe should reappear and drop grenades on the tribesmen, that would give the Arabs a chance to storm the cliffs without resistance, and would lead to the destruction of the natives and his own death as well.

But the treacherous flyer was busy elsewhere, it seemed, for the *Meteorite* did not appear, and as the sun sank low, Dick breathed more freely and gave orders for the last meal before the battle.

Down in the Arab camp, Abdul and Suli were also watching anxiously for the plane and cursing Jess Slythe, who had disappointed them.

"By the beard of the Prophet!" cried the Arab chief, "that dog has betrayed us."

"What trickery can he be up to?" mused Suli, staring for the hundredth time at the heavens.

"Allah alone knows what the knave is doing! But it is for no profit but his own."

"How can he expect us to storm these cliffs without his help?" exclaimed Abdul.

"We would be crushed by stones and pierced by arrows," said Suli. "Nothing for it but to wait until tomorrow. Today, it is too late to even try."

"We will send out scouts to see whether there is an easier passage beyond the cliffs.—A way where we could go up on our horses and take the savages by surprise."

"They are stubborn, hard-fighting fellows," said Suli. "By the Prophet, Abdul, we will find it hard to make slaves of such men."

"You are right. They are not like the black fellows we have captured in the past. These men were not born to be conquered. We will have to fight for all the profit we make in this venture."

The two leaders of the Bedouin slave traders scowled at the cliffs that loomed so high above the spring where they had camped. From the grim black edges, arose a fringe of smoke; the fires where the Gorols and the Taharans were roasting game for the feast before the battle.

The sky had turned flaming red, the glory of the sunset was over the desert and a deliciously cool breeze followed the parching heat of the day.

At the same time the old Gorol Chief, Wabiti, was squatting cross-legged in the rude shelter where the ex-queen Vanga had taken refuge. Both of the former rulers had repeated their grievances and grumbled about the changes in the tribe until they were in a mood of revolt.

"If only I had my warriors again!" muttered Vanga.

"And if I could lead my brave Gorols, as I did when I was younger, things would be different!"

"Tahara brought us woe!"

"He destroyed the Great Gorol!"

"Now he sets me to spinning and weaving! Is that fit work for a queen?"

"And he has made Kulki leader in my place," growled Wabiti. "Only a few Gorols obey my orders, and they are the weaklings of the tribe."

"We have come upon evil days, O Wabiti."

"Evil days, O Vanga. I do not hold with these new weapons like bows and arrows."

"Nor I. When Cimbula was my chief adviser, all was happy in the land."

"Would that Cimbula were here," grunted Wabiti.

Suddenly as if he had been waiting to be called, the witch-doctor leaped from the shadowy forest and capered in a wild dance before them.

Cimbula was arrayed once more in the brightly-colored head-dress of feathers and tufts of fur on his elbows, knees and ankles. His lean old body was streaked and daubed with paint and around his eyes, one blind and one sound, were painted scarlet rings that gave him a horrible appearance.

In one hand he brandished a long stone knife, in the other he held the painted gourd filled with pebbles, which he rattled menacingly.

"Who calls Cimbula?" he shouted hoarsely. "Lo, as I was floating in the skies, I heard my name spoken and I come!"

Again he leaped high and the gourd sounded like a nest of angry rattlesnakes as he shook it.

Vanga and Wabiti shrank back in superstitious dread, while the old queen's maidens gave shrill and penetrating screeches of terror.

"Cimbula! Have mercy!" they screamed, and Wabiti's followers among the Gorols came running and stopped suddenly, held back by fear, crying hoarsely, "Cimbula! Cimbula, do not destroy us!" Vanga spoke her mind.

"We called the mighty Cimbula because strange enemies have driven us from our caves."

"Show me the enemies," bellowed Cimbula. "I will slay them all."

His one eye glared hatred and defiance and his flint blade swished through the air.

"Tahara could not save us," said Vanga. "Since he came here, our troubles have multiplied."

"Never before have raiders swarmed upon us from the desert," growled Wabiti.

"They have driven us from our caves," shrilled Vanga.

There were mutters of assent from the listeners, while Cimbula glared silently as if planning some deadly reprisal.

Then among the growling murmurs rose the clear protesting voice of the little maiden Veena.

"Why do you speak evil of Tahara? He fought the Arabs. He is a mighty warrior. Even now he gathers the tribes to drive off the enemy!"

Instantly there was an uproar.

Cimbula vented a bellow of rage. The Gorols with Wabiti howled in protest and Vanga cried sharply,

"Be still. Who asked *you* to speak?"

"I *must* speak. Tahara is good. He alone can save us."

"We shall see!" snarled the witch-doctor. "I, Cimbula, will drive away the foe."

"Cimbula, hal! Cimbula!" cried the rest.

"This very night I will show you that Cimbula is mighty in magic. See, already, the sun has set. Soon it will be dark. I will show you all that where Tahara fails, Cimbula wins."

The witch-doctor laid violent hands on the terrified Veena and wrenched her arms until she screamed with pain.

"You shall come with me!" he shouted. "The blood of a maiden is required to mix the strong magic I am brewing tonight."

Veena's screams were drowned by the chanting of Wabiti's Gorols and the shrill cries of Vanga's women.

"Take her, Cimbula! She is yours!"

"Cimbula, hal!" boomed the Gorols, and the ex-queen Vanga added: "Death to Tahara!"

CHAPTER VI

HOT WORK

"Come on, Dan, here's where the fun begins," cried Dick Oakwood.

By the light of pitch torches he reviewed his army, the Taharans under Raal; blond, stalwart fighters; and the Gorols, commanded by Kulki.

The Gorols were more numerous but though they were tough and wiry fellows, they were not equal to the Taharans in size or war-like powers. Dark-skinned and hairy, they resembled an army of giant apes as they slouched in the ranks, while the Taharans stood proudly upright and at their chief's signal, raised their stone weapons aloft and gave a mighty cheer.

Dick, with Dan beside him as his chief lieutenant, gave final instructions to his two troop leaders.

"You, Kulki, go first with your Gorols. Climb silently down the cliffs to the south of the Big Spring where the Arabs are camped. When you are all on the plain, light your torches, plant them in the ground among the brush and raise a great uproar of shouting the war cries. Do you understand?"

"I understand, O Tahara!"

"Then when the Arabs rush to attack you, meet them with a shower of arrows and quietly climb part way up the cliffs. Leave the torches in the ground to

deceive the Arabs and as they charge upon that spot, you can shoot at them from the cliffside with more arrows."

"I hear, Master, I obey!" said Kulki.

"Good! Make sure that every man knows what he is to do."

Dick turned to Raal and continued:

"You, Raal, take your brave Taharans down the cliff to the north of the Arab camp. Be quiet and give no alarm. Then when the Gorols raise the war cry and the Arabs rush to fight them off, follow with your Taharans and attack the enemy from the rear. Use bows and arrows first; then rush in with stone axes and flint knives. In a hand-to-hand fight, their long guns will be useless."

"I hear, Master. I rejoice in a hand-to-hand battle."

"Good! I will be in a position to oversee the battle, for Dan and I will climb down the cliff above the Big Spring, and when your Taharans charge, I will join you."

Dan reminded his friend, "Be sure to tell them about the signal for attack."

Dick replied. "You are right.—This is the signal. You, Kulki, when you reach your position, will give a long call like the hyena. Raal will answer with a wolf howl. When you hear the howl of the wolf, it is the signal to open the battle."

"I hear, O Tahara."

"We obey, O Master."

The two chiefs saluted and withdrew to their troops and the climb down the cliffs began, silently in the night.

Dick and Dan looked down over the edge of the cliffs and saw the camp fires of the Arabs below them, with shadowy figures moving about or squatting by the glowing coals.

Then the two boys began their slow difficult climb down the rocky face, using every care to move quietly. A single rock dislodged and bouncing down

the cliffside would put the Arabs on guard and this must be a surprise attack to be a successful one.

When Dick and Dan finally reached a ledge about a hundred feet above the camp, they were only too glad to sit there and rest. The descent of that steep slope in the dark was hard work; their hands were scratched and bleeding and their muscles felt the strain.

"We will just sit here and take it easy for a while," said Dick.

"It is like being in a circus waiting for the show to begin," replied Dan. "If only——"

"I know what you're going to say," Dick chuckled, "if only we had a couple of bags of peanuts and a bottle of pop, it would be perfect."

Dan admitted, laughingly, that refreshments would be welcome, but Dick grabbed his friend's arm.

"Look yonder, Dan."

"Where?"

"Up near the mouth of Cimbula's cave. What's going on there?"

"Men with torches. That's funny! It's the wrong direction for the torches to appear."

"And there has been no signal yet."

"This is something that is not on the program. Jumping Jiminy! I hope it's not going to spoil our party."

Things moved rapidly.

A procession with torches appeared from the wrong direction and at the head of a crowd of grotesquely painted figures, leaped and cavorted an unearthly apparition in feathered head-dress and fur tufts.

"Cimbula!" gasped Dick.

"What is that old fool up to?" Dan exclaimed.

"They are leading some prisoner among them," said Dick. "It looks like a girl, but her face is covered with her hair."

"It's a Taharan girl. Cimbula must be trying to buy off the Arabs with the gift of a slave."

"What a dog!"

"He is wrecking our whole plan of battle."

The boys looked on in suspense as the witch-doctor approached the Arab camp, capering and shaking his rattling gourd. The others who followed were imitating him, for Cimbula had decided that a magic dance of demons would terrify the raiders, and therefore he had dressed up a dozen of Wabiti's men in a garb like his own and painted their bodies with stripes and daubs of white.

Whirling and leaping the demon dancers approached the Arab camp, while one of the natives brandished a flint knife above the head of the bound victim.

"If the Arabs take fright at this hocus-pocus, they are bigger fools than I take them to be," growled Dick.

"More likely they are laughing at the medicine-man," Dan exclaimed. "Look, they are rushing the procession."

With shouts of derision the Arabs leaped to their horses and raced toward the intruders. No shots were fired. The Arabs did not want to kill the demon dancers, but shrieked with laughter as they charged them, bowled over Cimbula and scattered his followers.

"Look," said Dick. "It's not a fight. The Arabs are rounding up those fellows. They came here for slaves, and now they have got some."

"Serves Cimbula right! I hope they keep him at hard labor for life!"

"I'm sorry for the others though.—Listen. There goes the first signal!"

From the south came the call of a desert hyena, a long unearthly sound of

laughter.

Amid the hubbub of the Arab camp, the signal was not noticed by the enemy, but Raal was evidently on the alert, for soon a long wolf howl answered from the north.

"Good!" cried Dick Oakwood. "Cimbula's little show did not spoil the big circus, after all. Now Dan, you're going to see a fight."

To the south of the camp a torch flared among the brush. Another was lighted and another. Soon the place where the Gorols had assembled was a confusion of dancing lights, flaring and smoking.

A war cry arose among the flames, a shrill cry of "Tahara, Rax!"

"Give 'em the axe!" chuckled Dan. "Atta-boy, Kulki! Now the fun begins."

A few shots from the Arabs produced an immediate effect among the torches. They no longer moved, but held their places quietly.

"Get that?" muttered Dick. "Kulki's men stuck their torches in the ground. Now they must be climbing up the cliffs in the dark."

As the Arab horsemen charged the brush where the torches flamed they were met by a stinging shower of arrows coming from unseen foes. At once their cries of "Allah, il Allah," were changed to howls of anger and shrieks from the wounded. Yet they charged on, shooting at the torches and driving ahead with flashing scimiters.

But the Gorols were not near the torches and shot more and more arrows from places of safety.

"Give 'em the axe!" cried Dan. "Here come the Taharans!"

As he spoke, Raal's men raced in open formation upon the disorganized Arabs, only pausing long enough to discharge a flight of arrows at the enemy.

Now the Arabs, caught between two attacking troops, were at a loss which way to face.

Dick, with Dan at his heels, scrambled down from the ledge of the cliff side and joined the Taharans with the war cry:

"Tahara Rax!"

"Give 'em the axe!" echoed Dan.

"The axe!"

"The axe, the axe!"

The terrifying shouts of the Taharans, charging upon the Arabs, drowned out the battle cry of, "Allah il Allah."

Hand to hand the Stone-Age men struggled fiercely with the Bedouins, leaping at them like wild cats, pulling them from their mounts, swinging their keen-edged hatchets of flint and their short knives of stone with deadly effect.

All the advantage of gunpowder and horses was lost in that battle in the dark.

The Arabs fought madly with their swords and daggers, but such weapons were not much more effective than the stone knives and axes. Therefore the Arabs began to give away, for their raid had been upon supposedly weak tribesmen, and instead they were facing better fighters than themselves.

Yet stubbornly they fought on. There was nothing else to do—a case of kill or be killed.

"Give it to 'em!" cried Dick.

"Give 'em the axe," shouted Dan.

"Let out your bull-roaring voice," said Dick to Raal. "Call the Gorols to join in!"

Raal gave a war cry that summoned Kulki and his Gorols to clamber down from the rocks and take part in the battle.

From the ledges of the cliff came the shrill reply of Kulki's dark-skinned fighters, and instantly the Arabs were engaged in a life-and-death struggle with

new forces.

The Gorols plunged into the fray, carrying their lances, and whenever the burnous of an Arab showed pale in the darkness, a Gorol plunged his spearhead with telling effect.

"Go it, Gorols!" shouted Dan.

"Give 'em the axe!" Dick cried. "After them, boys! They're giving way."

The tide of battle had turned against the raiders. The Arabs on the fringe of the fray turned their horses toward the desert and galloped away. The Bedouins who were guarding the prisoners mounted them on the camels and fled in a body. Abdul and Suli swore by Allah and his prophet that they would return and take vengeance on the tribe, but they saw that the battle was lost.

Many of their men had been slain or badly wounded, and their horses were running wild in the melee; there was no chance to organize their force, for wherever they turned were the hatchets of the Taharans and the spears of the Gorols.

"Give it to 'em!" shouted Dick. "We've got 'em on the run."

"Back to home-sweet-home!" laughed Dan. "They want you back in dear old Araby."

Abdul shouted the signal to retreat. Those Arabs who could escape did so without a second command and the battle was over.

Dick and Dan both caught at the bridles of Arab horses and succeeded in capturing mounts, but there was no use in giving chase in the dark.

"Tell your men to get all the guns and weapons they can," Dick ordered the chiefs of the two tribes. "And catch all the horses you can."

"We hear, O Master!"

"Tahara has brought us victory. Praise to our king!"

The chiefs answered with shouts of triumph and the tribesmen joined in. No

longer was there any doubt in their minds, Tahara, Boy King of the Desert, was a mighty warrior and a bringer of victory.

The rising sun showed Taharans and Gorols in fantastic array beside the Big Spring. They were dressed in such parts of the Arab garb as they had captured, and carried what weapons had been found on the battlefield.

A dozen guns and horses were among the loot, also ammunition, daggers and swords. Even a camel had been taken, but it was lame from a shot, and was promptly butchered for a feast.

While they were all enjoying a hot meal that morning, Dick explained to the natives who had captured the guns, how to use them, but the old-fashioned firearms were not of much value except to the Arabs who were used to them.

After breakfast, he showed the most intelligent of the tribesmen how to ride the captured horses. They were fearless fellows and managed to stay on, somehow, and Kulki, who was one of the best men of the tribe, showed promise of becoming an expert horseman in short order.

"Wait until we round up the wild horses and break them!" said Dan. "Then you will see some fun."

Dick explained to Raal, who was keen to learn the new sport, the principles of taming and riding unbroken horses and the Taharan chief was eager to begin.

With a deep bow he begged Dick to accept an Arab gun he had captured and declared that when his tribe had learned to ride the wild horses, they would all set out to find the Arabs and raid them in turn.

Suddenly they were interrupted. Queen Vanga came to them, weeping and tearing her hair.

"Cimbula is gone!" she cried. "Where is Cimbula?"

Dan laughed.

"Your boy-friend was taken by the Arabs," he said. "You'll never see him

again."

"I hope not," said Dick.

"The Arabs will put him on the chain gang," chuckled Dan.

"Never!" cried the old queen when Dan's remark was explained to her. "Cimbula works strong magic. If he is taken by the Arabs, Cimbula will become their chief."

"There may be something in that," said Dan. "The witch-doctor is clever enough to get out of any kind of a scrape."

Vanga began weeping afresh.

"Why the water-works now?" asked Dan.

Raal questioned her and his face grew red with fury.

"Veena has been stolen," he cried. "The girl with Cimbula was the Princess Veena."

Dan felt his heart stand still. The pretty little maiden, a prisoner of the Arabs! She was fond of him and while he did not love her, he resolved that she must be rescued.

"Let me have a horse," cried Raal. "I will catch up with the Arabs and bring her back."

He was beside himself with fury. "Tahara, O Mighty King, use all your magic to save the girl I love."

Dick grasped his hand and promised: "I will help you!"

"Now, let us start now."

"We will all go!" cried Dan Carter.

"Yes! All, all!" echoed the warriors. Tahara and Gorols alike were excited by the news. The capture of Cimbula and his followers was not so bad, for everybody dreaded the witch-doctor and his disciples were hated.

But Veena was a favorite of all.

"We will take the captured horses!" urged Raal, "and overtake the raiders."

"Those are bold words," said Dick, "but they are not the words of wisdom. Stop and think. Ten men at the most against a hundred! What chance would you have?"

"We will risk it," Raal stormed.

"And lose all chance of rescuing Veena? No. We must prepare for a long journey first—and at the end a hard battle."

"How long must we wait?"

"Until our warriors have tamed wild horses and learned to ride them. Also we must carry food and water bags for a long trail across the desert."

Raal was in despair.

"And until then, we will know nothing of the maiden. I would rather set out alone than that."

At his words, all fell silent, thinking gloomy thoughts. Finally Dick said:

"Here is a way out. Kulki can ride better than any of the tribesmen, and has ventured farther on the desert than the rest."

"That is true!" cried Kulki. "Let me go out and rescue the maiden."

"Not so fast. Take three of your men who can stay on horseback. Carry water and food and follow the trail of the raiders. Can you try?"

"We will do that, O Master!"

"Do not try to fight the Arabs, that would only put them on their guard. But find out where they are taking the captives and bring us word. Will you?"

"Gladly, O Master."

"By the time you return," added Dick Oakwood, "I will have our warriors

trained to ride the wild horses and to shoot arrows while they ride, yes and to throw spears from the saddle."

"Tahara, hal!"

"Then we will set out and punish the raiders!"

"Tahara Rax! The axe! The axe!"

With shouts of vengeance, the tribesmen accepted Dick's plan. Even Raal, anxious as he was to set out at once, saw the wisdom of the plan.

"But *I* would go with Kulki. Now!" he begged.

"If you did, what would happen? You would try to fight the Arabs then and there. All would be lost."

Raal agreed.

"Let me work day and night getting ready for the rescue!" he exclaimed. "Then I will not grieve."

"We will begin now," Dick answered.

"You will be chief horse-breaker," Dan assured Raal. "In a week you'll be a regular Arizona bronco-buster."

Kulki and his chosen three began preparations for the trail at once. That same day they set out, mounted on Arab horses and carrying water and food. Kulki refused a gun. The "stick that spoke like thunder" was a magic he did not understand.

As for Raal and his Taharans, they wasted no time but set to work rounding up all the small wild horses that they could find among the hills, while Dan and Dick showed the others how to build a corral for the animals.

CHAPTER VII

THE WAR TRAIL

"Throw your rope over that wicked little beast!" exclaimed Dick Oakwood.

"Okay, Dick," answered Dan. His quivering lariat sailed through the air and the loop settled neatly about the neck of one of the small wild horses in the enclosure, bringing it to the ground.

Quick as a flash, Dick was on its back, much to the delight of the savage tribe who had never witnessed such feats of bravery.

"Tahara, hal!" they cried.

For days there had been great excitement in the land of the Taharans. After the raid of the Arabs and the possibility that the tribe might have to make a return attack to recover the princess, Veena, Dick and his chum, Dan Carter, had been breaking the wild horses and teaching the natives to handle them.

They were apt pupils and one after another were mastering the art of horseback riding.

Now as Dick after a fierce struggle brought the horse down to a gentle gallop, he dismounted and handed the reins to Raal. At that moment Kurt interrupted with a cry. He ran to Dick with terror in his face.

"O Master, look through your magic glasses and see who is coming. Is it a new danger that threatens us?" Then aside he murmured, "Tahara is great. He will protect us!"

Dick beckoned to Kurul to whom he had trusted his binoculars, and the warrior passed over the glasses as if he were glad to get rid of them. The savages were still not certain that these strange eyes were innocent of the spell of black magic.

Dick put them to his eyes and saw a strange figure approaching from the desert. It staggered and fell to the ground, then rose wearily and struggled on.

"It seems to be an old man, bent double with age," said Dick. "He is very

weary. Run Kurt, and help him! And you, Kurul, lend a hand. It is good to help the old and feeble."

But suddenly Dan who had taken the glasses, gave a cry. His face grew pale. Turning to Dick he said in a low voice.

"Kulki! It is Kulki!"

"Kulki!" repeated Dick. "It can't be. What has happened?"

The two boys hastened after Kurt and Kurul and had no difficulty in overtaking them, for the savages were afraid and went warily, invoking Tahara to protect them at every step.

Dick was the first to reach the Gorol warrior, who limped and staggered and when he realized that his friends had come to help him he sank to the sand at Dick's feet.

"Master forgive! I could not!" he moaned.

Dick raised the Gorol to his feet but he was trembling so violently that he had to be half carried back to the village where, a word at a time between his pleas for forgiveness, Dick got his story.

Kulki and his two Taharan companions had found the Arab camp. Suli was there and Abdul. And the wicked Cimbula!

"But Veena! Where is Veena?" demanded Raal, his heavy face white with anxiety, His large hands were clenched as he stood menacingly above the Gorol. "Where is Veena and where are the two warriors who went with you?"

"The warriors are dead," replied Kulki.

"But where is Veena?" asked Dick. His voice was stern as he tried to hide the emotion he felt.

"Forgive O Master, I could not bring her back. The Arabs have imprisoned her. They tortured me through long hours, hitting me with heavy thongs and burned me with hot embers, then they sent me home to tell you. I have travelled all day and all night to bring help." The Gorol youth looked at Raal imploringly,

then continued, "Veena, the little white princess will not be killed and we have still time to save her if we go at once. That is what Cimbula said to me and he understands the language and the ways of the Arabs."

"What do you mean, Kulki?" demanded Dick anxiously.

"Suli and Abdul protect her, for they are anxious to sell her for a big price."

Cries arose from the listeners, for most of the tribe had gathered to hear what Kulki had to tell. The women shrieked and moaned, rocking themselves back and forth, and tearing their hair.

Dick raised his hand for silence.

"Be quiet my friends," he said calmly. "Kulki says we still have time to save her." Then he turned to the Gorol, "Are you sure? Tell us all you know!"

"Cimbula tell me all they said," went on Kulki. "Suli and Abdul are waiting for the arrival of Chief Mobogoma who wants the white princess for his bride. He is willing to give in exchange a hundred of his best slaves."

"Ah-woe! Ah-woe!" moaned the tribesmen.

"Suli and Abdul agreed to this, but the man-demon who flies on the back of the bird-demon appeared and said that was not enough. He demanded much ivory as well."

"Slythe! That was Jess Slythe!" exclaimed Dick Oakwood with indignation. "I might have known that he was somewhere around and had a hand in my affairs."

"There will be delay while they quarrel with words," continued Kulki with a groan.

A slave appeared with food and drink for the returned warrior. He gulped it hungrily. Dick questioned him further about the Arabs.

A shiver passed over the body of the Gorol, his eyes looked wild. "They tortured me and sent me back to say that Veena would be returned for two hundred Taharan slaves."

"Tahara have mercy! O Master, save us!" moaned the tribesmen. "What are we to do?"

"Send us, O Master," came the cry from many throats. "Let us be sacrificed, but bring back the little princess Veena."

Dick looked at Dan in astonishment. He had not expected to find such a spirit of chivalry among this savage tribe.

"Say, they're pretty good sports, I'll tell the world!" cried Dan. "Who would have believed it? And we want to civilize them! That's a joke!"

Raal was standing impatiently frowning, waiting for Dick to give some word of command.

"What are we going to do, Master?" he asked.

Dick once more raised his hand. "What will we do? Get ready to march! At once! Food and drink must be carried! To work! We will go to that Arab camp, but not as slaves. We will go as warriors to bring back Princess Veena!"

"Tahara, hal! Tahara, hal!"

The cheer echoed through the hills. In a moment the village changed from a quiet, sleepy camp to one bustling with life and excitement. The women scuttled away toward the caves where the slaves were busy with the cooking. They were chattering like magpies among themselves but they were losing no time in carrying out the orders. Vanga's shrill voice carried above the noise.

"Move faster, slaves!" she shrieked. "Out of my way!" And with a resounding slap she boxed the ears of a small child who crossed her path. Food and water was ready to be packed on the back of the horses, when Dick had completed his plans for the march.

Kulki was left behind, he was too weak and tired for the second trip. And Dick could trust him to protect the cave-dwellers in his absence.

"Say Dick, I'm sure glad we got a few good horses out of that Arab raid. At least you and I and Raal will be looked after. What will the others do? Walk?"

"Of course not! What did I have you break in those small wild horses for if it wasn't for just such an occasion? Saddle your horses, men, and get ready!"

The warriors whooped with delight as they ran toward the enclosure where the horses were held. They were pleased at the chance to use their new saddles.

"Say Dick, what would a western cowboy say about these saddles? They make their silver trimmed affairs seem very plain. Look at Raal's saddle, it is covered with golden disks. Some class!"

The warriors shouted and screamed with laughter as they caught the wild horses and bridled them. It was a new game. They liked it.

"Those boys seem to think this is a big picnic they are going on," remarked Dan Carter. "Why don't you tell them it's a serious business?"

"What's the use?" replied Dick. "Let them get what fun they can out of the start. Besides I hope we can settle this without a fight."

"For a king who was going to have nothing but peace in his country, you have certainly managed to put up some pretty stiff scraps," teased Dan.

"Never mind that," replied Dick with a laugh. "I'll get around to that some day. Just now we've got to undo a great wrong."

"Oh, yes! You've got to fight for peace. I see! All right then, come along, I'm with you. But are you sure we'll be able to carry enough food?"

"You can take as much as you can carry on the back of your saddle. Besides it wouldn't hurt you to go hungry for a while," said Dick.

"Oh, is that so!" snapped Dan impatiently. The good-natured Dan was rarely cross and then only for a second. His face cleared suddenly and he said, "Tough luck! I suppose I'll have to stand it. Come on!"

It was a strange looking army that rode out of the land of the Taharans. Dick, Dan and Raal were riding ahead on their Arab horses and the rest of the tribesmen were mounted on the small wild horses that Dick and Dan had trained to the saddle. Although these animals were small they were almost as fleet as the large horses and could stand the heat of the desert much better.

The Boy King looked back with pride as he saw his warriors riding so well.

"There is no limit to what I may be able to do with these savages. All they need is a good leader," thought Dick as he glanced at Raal whose heavy figure sitting straight and proud, gave an impression of great strength.

For an hour they rode almost in silence, the horses eager and prancing. Then as the ferocious heat of the sun burned into them, the horses slackened their pace. Finally Dan drew close to Dick and whispered: "Isn't it about time for lunch? I'm starved!"

Dick motioned him away impatiently. "Nothing doing, boy! Take a small drink of water and pretend it's food. Our first halt is two hours from here unless we're lucky enough to find an oasis."

"But why take life so seriously?" responded Dan. "These savages spend a long time in bartering; we'll get there before they're through. Besides Slythe will wait to see if you will send the two hundred slaves to buy the princess."

"I'm not sure, Dan. We'd better push along as fast as we can. If Mobogoma offers enough, Slythe won't take any chances on a slip-up."

Before another hour had gone by, the riders were wilted with the heat and famished for food and drink. A green spot in the distance made them urge their horses on toward the grove of palm trees.

"Come on, let's hurry," cried Dan. "We can't get to that spring quick enough to suit me." The boy dug his heels into the horse's sides. The spirits of the men rose at the prospect of a spring of clear water and the shade of the palm trees beckoned them. Dan broke into a college song and the tribesmen took up the air and shouted it at the top of their lungs.

Suddenly Raal spoke in a voice trembling with excitement. "Look O Master, across the desert! Those are the Arab raiders!"

"Where?"

Raal pointed to the horizon, still wavering with heat, and Dick adjusted his binoculars.

At first he saw only a long straggling line of moving objects that resembled a giant centipede with countless legs and undulating back. Finally Dick made out a caravan of camels striding in single file and accompanied by Arab horsemen. They were so far away that Dick could not see them without the glasses, although Raal's sharp eyes had distinguished them.

Dick gasped. "Arabs! You're right, Raal. Maybe they are the ones we are after. Give orders for the warriors to have their weapons ready and be on the alert. Then let's go!"

To encourage the men, Dan once more burst into song. The tired horses caught the spirit and leaped ahead for a few minutes then began to lag. The heat was intense, the sand, catching the sun's rays dazzled the eyes and made them burn.

But no matter how fast they rode, the oasis seemed as far away as ever. The caravan was lost in the shimmering haze.

"Who would have believed that it was so far away?" grumbled Dan Carter. At that moment he caught sight of Dick's face. It was pale and troubled.

"What's the matter, old sport?" Dan asked anxiously. "Are you sick or something? Better take a sip of that precious water in the bag."

"No, I'm all right," answered Dick quietly, "but I'm wondering how I'm going to explain a mirage to these savages."

"A mirage!" exclaimed Dan with a catch in his voice. "So that's why we seemed to be getting farther away from that green spot all the time. But Dick, are you certain? I'd have sworn it was the real thing."

But even as they talked, Dan noticed the thinning haze ahead. It seemed to be rising and soon disappeared into the sky.

"Say, Dick, when did you catch on?" asked Dan.

"About five minutes ago. How am I going to explain it to them? They may never have seen one and may think that it is black magic. See, the caravan has vanished, too."

"Tell them it's Cimbula out there," said Dan with a laugh. "They'll believe that, all right."

While the boys were talking, the haze dissolved completely, leaving a far stretch of sandy waste.

"Ah-woe Tahara!" moaned Raal touching Dick's arm. "Look ahead. The spirit of evil has swallowed up the oasis. It is a warning, O Master. I have seen it many times before."

Dick gave a sigh of relief. At least the mirage was not unknown to the tribesmen.

"A warning, what do you mean, Raal?" asked Dick.

"Thus comes the oasis on the desert at times, leading men to destruction. Warriors depart to take possession of the new land and find themselves without food and drink. They ride around in circles in order to find the green oasis. Then at last the demons gobble them up. Did you not see the caravan disappear? It is a bad omen, so say my people."

Some of the tribesmen shielded their faces against the evil eye while others muttered anxiously. A few turned as if to flee back to their own land but at a sharp command from Dick they followed grumbling.

Dick halted his riders and they ate a hasty lunch while shielding themselves in the shadow of their horses.

Late that afternoon they came to the oasis in the desert. The men threw themselves flat on their stomachs by the spring, dipping up the water in their hands and drinking with loud sucking noises. It was hard for both man and beast to restrain the desire to overdo, for their parched throats seemed never to get enough.

As soon as the quickly prepared meal was over, the men stretched out on the green grass beneath the palms and slept.

Long before daylight the tribesmen were up, making ready for the second day's march toward the jungle. Dick and Dan were weary and sore from the journey but there were no complaints from either of them. They swung into their

saddles and taking the lead, raced their horses over the desert, making the most of the cool morning, knowing that as soon as the sun rose the heat would be almost unbearable.

It was late on the third day when they reached the lowlands which lay at the beginning of the jungle. Already the atmosphere had changed. It was oppressive and humid. Directly in front of them was a path leading to the wilderness of trees and overgrowing trailing plants. The stars were just appearing in the sky and Dick ordered his men to make camp, feeling safer to sleep in the open. He put Kurt and Kurul, his most trustworthy warriors, to stand guard. But Dick could not sleep. The sound of jungle life came to him, the sharp cries of night birds, the yelping of wild animals. The Boy King felt the menace of the jungle.

But after hours of listening the sounds seemed to grow fainter as if the wild life were going far, far away. His eyes closed. But just as he might have dropped off to sleep, he was awakened by Dan's hand on his face.

"I don't want to frighten you, Dick, but do you see those two greenish lights at the edge of the trees? Look!"

"They are probably stars," replied Dick sleepily. Dick rubbed his tired eyes and sat up. Dan pointed out the glowing sparks. The boys did not move, for they saw that Kurt and Kurul were aware of the intruder. They stood motionless near a jungle tree.

"It's a leopard, Dick, I'm sure of it," said Dan. "Where's your Arab gun?"

"It's here," replied his chum. "But wait! Kurt and Kurul are on guard. They have a plan. I will not interfere with them."

Slowly the lights grew larger. Two more appeared, and soon two others, and one could see the dim shapes of animals crouching low and wriggling from the tangle of vines and creepers, scarcely making a sound.

Kurt and Kurul stood tense and alert, their bows were drawn back ready at any second to send the flint pointed arrows into the vital spot of their enemy.

Dick watched and thought he understood why his bowmen waked so long. The leopards were making their way toward the wild horses and not toward the sleeping men. The warriors were waiting to get them out in the open where they

could see better to shoot. In the light of the stars Dick could see the beasts crawling along the ground. Suddenly the two first gave a spring, but before they could reach their prey, Kurt and Kurul had shot their arrows, catching the beasts between the eyes. Their bodies jumped high in the air, then dropped. The other animals turned and disappeared.

"Oh boy, what a shot!" exclaimed Dan, jumping to his feet and running toward the dead animals, but Kurul held him back.

"Beware, brother," said Kurul, "the leopard has a way of coming alive after he is dead! I've seen it!"

For Dick there was no more sleep that night. It was time to relieve Kurt and Kurul and he did not feel sure that the other men were to be trusted to watch. Dick knew that Rex Carter was depending on him to look after Dan and protect him from danger, and besides that the responsibility of his army weighed on the shoulders of the Boy King of the desert.

Dick sat up and watched toward the jungle. From time to time dark shapes slipped by as if eager to get far away from danger. The sharp call of night birds awakened monkeys that kept up a maddening chatter. The night seemed full of dangers that threatened him. But Dick Oakwood was not displeased.

"Who would have believed it!" he said to himself. "When I left America I had no idea that my experiences would be stranger even than those of Matt Binney, our old African trader. When I get back I'll tell him some thrillers that will make his hair stand on end, the way he used to make mine when I was a kid."

As usual on the march, dawn had not tinted the horizon before the warriors were up and busy preparing breakfast and as the first streaks of rose and purple made fantastic designs in the sky, Dick and Dan led the way into the jungle, following the trail that Kulki had told them would lead to the Arab camp.

In a few minutes steam rose from the horses' sides while perspiration flowed down the faces of the riders. Dan wiped his face with the back of his hand leaving a dusty streak across his cheek. He turned to look at his chum to see how he was standing the strain.

The Boy King looked tired. After a wakeful night, the heat irritated him. And the thought that Cimbula and Slythe had their heads together in a plan to

overthrow his rule, did not make him look forward with any assurance of success in the venture to rescue Veena.

Right now his brain was dulled by lack of sleep. The raid with his warriors seemed hopeless and a foolish undertaking. Dick slumped in his saddle for a moment and looked the picture of woe and discouragement.

"How's this for a steam bath!" exclaimed Dan. "Good for your health. Doctor's orders. Oh boy, what a treat!"

Dick smiled at his chum, whose happy-go-lucky nature always brought fun and a laugh into every situation, no matter how tight a jam it might be.

At last Dick sat erect with a jerk. Every moment he was coming nearer to the dreaded spot where his enemies were in wait for his arrival. This was not the time to weaken. Brushing his hand across his damp forehead, the boy took the lead bravely, his head held high. He knew that the odds were all against him, as they had been before, but in his heart he felt sure that he would win.

It was late that afternoon when Dick suddenly drew rein and gave a signal to halt. Some danger menaced them; he felt it without knowing what it was. The jungle trail was just the same as when they entered it that morning. Then why this nameless fear?

He listened intently, but there was only the scolding of monkeys and the answering screech of birds. No human sound was distinguishable.

Giving the order to proceed cautiously, every man ready with bow and arrow, Dick emerged without warning into a clearing. Suddenly his horse reared back with a frightened snort.

Blocking the path ahead of him was a score or more of black warriors, their faces painted in streaks of red and yellow, making them grotesque and frightful. Their bows were drawn and their fiendish grins sent terror to the hearts of the boys. With hideous yells, a band of the savages behind the bowmen started a war-dance.

"I see our finish!" exclaimed Dan. "Give them a taste of your gun, Dick!"

"That wouldn't help. Look at the black horde coming from every direction.

They are two against one! We'll try to show them that we are friendly."

"I guess you're right, Dick. But we are certainly in a tight jam this time."

"Keep quiet, Dan!" said Dick, really vexed at the boy.

The apparent lack of fear in Dick evidently gained the respect of the tribe. Their arrows did not fly, the warriors held them, waiting for a command.

Then a command came, loud and clear. It was a surprise to Dick, for it came from a point directly above his head and the voice was not that of an African savage. The hidden chief spoke in the language of the tribe. It was an order; the inflection of the voice told Dick that before the warriors dropped their bows and arrows and bowed low to Dick.

Then the voice again boomed out in broken English, "Advance white men! I will protect you! Mahatma Sikandar speaks!"

CHAPTER VIII

BLACK WARRIORS

"Can you beat it!" exclaimed Dan Carter in astonishment, on hearing the English words spoken among a savage tribe in the jungle.

A chuckle was heard from the tangle of foliage above the heads of the two boys as they drew rein where the jungle path entered a clearing.

"Advance, Dick Sahib! Mahatma Sikandar speaks!"

"Don't go!" whispered Dan. "There's something spooky about this. How does he know your name? Maybe it's a trap. If we go out there in the open they will use us for targets."

"Keep quiet, Dan, I want to speak to the man. Besides they can shoot us here

if they have a mind to do it. If there is a trap we're in it right now," Dick answered impatiently.

But Dan could not keep quiet. Before Dick could stop him the boy called out:

"Say, Mister, I bet you don't know what my name is."

A hearty laugh issued from the hiding place of the Mahatma. "Dan Sahib is young. After many lives, he will gain wisdom—perhaps!"

Dan stared above his head in speechless amazement. Here they were miles away from any one they knew, yet this man had called them both by their names and in their own tongue.

"Who is he, anyway?" whispered Dan.

"He must be a Hindu with that name, and I judge also by the sing-song English he uses. But what is he doing here? That's what I want to know."

"Advance friends," once more the Mahatma spoke. "The men of the Kungoras are brave warriors, they will not harm you for I have given them promise that you are my friends."

"Let's go!" said Dick, touching his horse's sides with his heels, sending the animal trotting into the clearing where the savages had ranged themselves in a huge semicircle.

A file of the Taharan and Gorol warriors followed Dick and Dan into the clearing.

There was a tense pause.

It seemed as though a battle might follow at any moment, for the Taharans and Gorols looked upon all strangers as foes and the blacks were dangerous looking fellows. The Kungora tribe was warlike and powerful, which accounted for the slave raiders leaving them alone.

Tall, well formed and athletic, each man was like an ebony statue, armed with a long bow or else with a slender lance tipped with a leaf-shaped iron point and a broad shield of buffalo hide. The shields were painted with fantastic designs and

light as they were could turn a spear thrust or withstand an arrow.

The black warriors were scantily clad with strips of hide and adorned with copper bracelets and neckbands. Their round heads were covered with little pointed caps, under which their rolling eyes and shiny negro features looked fiercely hostile, as they glared at the strange blond savages and the ape-like Gorols.

As Dick reached the center of the cleared space, he wheeled his horse suddenly and looked up at the lowest branches of the trees above the jungle path he had just left, but a dense tangle of vines and moss hung from limb to limb. There was no sign of the man who had spoken to them.

"Raal and his people would say this was black magic," exclaimed Dick, "and I'm half inclined to think it is. Who ever heard of such a strange coincidence? It doesn't happen."

But Dick Oakwood bowed toward the tree. "We thank you, Mahatma Sikandar for your protection."

But before Dick could speak further, Sikandar went on in his clipped English.

"The young Sahib has come far. The journey was full of frightful dangers, and Dick Sahib has done this for the sake of a girl he does not love. That much I see."

"And that is true, Mahatma Sikandar. But how did you know it?" asked Dick.

"He must be a mind reader. Or maybe it is black magic!" said Dan in an undertone.

As they talked, the warriors of the Taharans and Gorols glared suspiciously at the black men; their hands were on their weapons ready to fight. Raal tried to quiet them, feeling that the Boy King could be trusted. He watched Dick's face but it showed no sign of fear or uneasiness. Therefore, he, as Dick's chief warrior, need not be afraid. He dismounted and drew near to Dick.

But the Boy King had his eyes on the screen of vines above the path. At first he could see nothing but the mass of green, but finally through the foliage he saw two shining eyes staring at him. Then the leaves parted and Mahatma

Sikandar's whole head appeared. It was a broad good-natured face with a luxuriant grey beard. His dark eyes were smiling.

"Why he looks exactly like Santa Claus," exclaimed Dan, "Merry Christmas, old scout!"

The old man ignored this remark from Dan. His head suddenly disappeared and a few minutes later the Hindu had dropped from the tree and was walking toward them.

"Now perhaps Dan Sahib will believe that I am human," he said extending his hand, English fashion.

His body was short and fat and naked except for a loin cloth of saffron colored cotton. His complexion was darker than that of most white men and his eyes were smiling and friendly yet there was a shadow of a sneer in them, a look of craftiness that made Dick and Dan determine to be on their guard.

The boys shook the Hindu's hand, after which the Mahatma turned to the chief of the Kungoras and ordered him to bring fresh water and fruit for the visitors and to prepare a feast. The black savages hurried away with grinning faces, well pleased to show Mahatma's friends the hospitality of their village.

Sikandar drew Dick and Dan aside and squatting cross-legged on the ground, invited the guests to do the same. In his hand he carried something that was wrapped in a black cloth.

During a pause in the conversation Dan suddenly blurted out: "Say, I'd like to know how you can tell about our trek across the desert, and our names and all that. Who told you?"

The Mahatma smiled mysteriously. "There are many things revealed to wise men that are kept from others," he said very slowly. "Long before you arrived in the jungle I saw you."

The Mahatma closed his eyes for a second then opened them and stared at Dan. He seemed to be looking straight through him. Then he continued in a hollow-sounding voice: "I saw riders, many of them on strange small horses, the like of which I have never seen until today. And the riders urged their horses forward for they saw ahead of them an oasis where they were to rest and drink."

Suddenly the Mahatma turned to Dick. "Is that true, Dick Sahib?" he asked.

"Yes, it is true." Dick replied simply.

"Then suddenly the riders all slumped in their saddles and looked tired and ill, for the oasis had disappeared leaving only sandy waste in all directions. Is that true, Dan Sahib?"

"Jiminy crickets, you've got it straight all right, but *how* did you see all that?"

"And where you are going and what you will do, I also know. There is a young girl, a princess, bound and imprisoned. This I see and much besides." He looked meaningfully at the boys.

"Boloney!" said Dan in a low tone that Mahatma missed, but he saw the look of disbelief on the boy's face.

"Dan Sahib does not believe that I speak true. I will show him!"

Dan was about to make a flippant retort but Dick gave him a threatening look.

Dick's face was alight with interest. He had heard of the Hindu Yogi who spend many years among the wise men of Tibet, who are supposed to hold all the wisdom of the world in their keeping. Was Mahatma Sikandar one of these? Dick hoped so, for he had always wanted to study occultism and hoped to learn something of it first hand. He was watching the Hindu earnestly and at the first chance he said:

"Can you really see what has not yet happened? It is true that we are on our way to rescue a princess of the Taharans. But tell us, Mahatma Sikandar, will we arrive in time to save her?"

"Veena is safe at present," replied the Hindu.

"But how do you know that?" interrupted Dan impatiently. "You may have been able by mind reading to guess our names, but you can't tell me that there is anything in this fortune telling."

The Mahatma's eyes flashed fire for a second, then he became calm once

more and turned to Dick, ignoring Dan's outburst.

"I have heard of occultism," said Dick. "But I want to learn more. I would like to have you instruct me."

"It is a long hard way, Dick Sahib. Many lives are needed to gain wisdom. I will show you."

Sikandar unwrapped the black cloth and displayed a ball that looked like transparent glass.

"He's a crystal gazer!" exclaimed Dan. "Read your fortune for seventy-five cents. It's all the bunk!"

The other two ignored these remarks and Dick spoke quickly. "Look into the crystal and tell us what you see. Is Veena being treated badly? Where is she?"

"She is well treated even though she is kept prisoner, for a white man is bargaining for her sale."

"What's *his* name?" asked Dan, giving Dick a poke in the ribs and with an elaborate wink whispered, "I bet the old fakir can't answer a direct question."

"The name of the white scoundrel is Slythe, Jess Slythe. He is a bad man and will in his next life be less than the worms. Thus it is written."

Dan Carter thrust out his hand which the Mahatma grasped without understanding why.

"Attaboy, Old Whiskers!" said Dan. "Now you're talking! I don't wish Jess Slythe any bad luck but I'm hoping everything you say comes true."

Dick turned at this moment and saw Raal. He was sitting with his head between his knees, a picture of distress. Dick called him. "Come here, Raal!" And as the warrior obeyed, Dick talked to him kindly. "Don't worry, Raal. This man, Mahatma Sikandar, is a very great witch-doctor. He can see things hidden from men and gods. By his magic, looking through that sacred ball which he holds so tightly in his hand, he can see everything that goes on in the world. He says that he can see into the village of the Muta-gungas." Dick paused for a moment to let his words sink in.

"Speak O Master! What does he see?"

"He sees Veena, who is kept a prisoner. She is not dead, as you feared, but is being held for a big bargain with Chief Mobogoma, just as Kulki told us. Jess Slythe is asking a big price for the white princess."

"How far away is she, O Tahara?" asked Raal anxiously.

Dick translated the question for the Mahatma who answered, stroking his beard:

"The village is a day's march from here."

"Then let us go at once, O Master. The bargain may be made quickly and after she is once in the hands of Mobogoma, she will be lost to us. Hurry, O Tahara!" Raal threw himself at Dick's feet.

"Yes, Raal, we will go soon," answered Dick. "And perhaps Mahatma Sikandar will ask one of his tribesmen to guide us in the shortest way!"

The Mahatma nodded his head. "I will take counsel with my chief and it will be decided," he said slowly.

Dick rose and looked about as if he intended to order the men to get ready. But Dan put up a detaining hand, "Not so fast, Dick! There is plenty of time." Dan rubbed his stomach, "Don't you smell the eats? That fruit and water we got a little while ago was just an appetizer. I'm hungry as a bear!"

"Not thus does a man gain wisdom," muttered the Mahatma. "It is by fasting and meditation."

Raal was scowling angrily at Dan but Dick quieted him.

"The men are tired and hungry, Raal. Some of them are weak from the long journey. Mahatma Sikandar, the wise man, has ordered a feast to be set before us. After that we will go and the men will be better able to stand the march when their stomachs are full. Is that not true, Raal?"

"Yes, O Master, I know you speak the truth but my heart is heavy for fear that harm will come to Veena."

Suddenly Sikandar, who had been gazing into the crystal ball, said quietly:

"Tell Raal, the great warrior, that the little princess is safe. Before two days are gone she will be under the protection of her own people. Do not fear."

Raal smiled but looked eagerly toward his horse as if anxious to be gone.

"Rest, my friends, and eat for the journey is hard and beset with many dangers."

"What do you see, Master?" asked Dick again seating himself beside the Hindu. "Shall we have to fight?"

"Yes, Dick Sahib, before two days are gone you will have to fight for someone you love dearly." The Hindu gazed into the crystal and did not speak for a long time. Then he straightened up and drew his hand across his eyes.

"I do not see clearly. A fog shuts out the sight. It is not meant that you should know. I cannot see!"

"Say Dick, don't put any stock in all that talk. I never thought you'd fall for a lot of bunk like that. How can he tell, by looking into a glass ball, what is going to happen?"

"Dan Sahib has still to learn what sorrow is. He will learn that lesson soon. That much I see."

"What does he mean, Dick?" asked Dan nervously.

But the Mahatma had put away the crystal, wrapping it carefully in the black cloth.

"There you've done it," scolded Dick. "We might have learned something that would help us. Instead of that, you insult him, and it's all off!"

At that moment the chief of the Kungora tribe approached and with much bowing announced that food was to be brought. The Mahatma retired to a sheltered spot to eat alone and in meditation. Dan and Dick sat down with the warriors.

"This is what I call service!" said Dan as a black boy spread large leaves in front of him and deposited there a large roasted spurfowl. There were large steaks of gazelle meat, wild apricots and a kind of bread which the Mahatma had taught the natives to make, as he did not eat flesh but lived on grains and fruit.

Hungrily the warriors set to on the meal, pulling the birds apart with their fingers and devouring the bits in large mouthfuls.

"You would have made a good savage, Dan!" said Dick with a laugh, as he watched his chum.

"I wouldn't mind belonging to this tribe," Dan retorted. "If they can cook like this, I'm strong for them!"

But finally even Dan had to cry enough, for one course after another was being served and it seemed as if the feasting might go on for days. The Kungoras still sat in a semicircle about the visitors and later Dick learned from the Mahatma that this was a sign of friendship.

"These blacks are a very peaceful tribe, I see," said Dick to the Hindu.

The Mahatma smiled tolerantly at his warriors. "My ways are ways of peace," he said quietly. "But these savage souls are just emerging. They will learn through suffering. But just now they are known to be the most warlike tribe in the jungles of Africa. Offer any one of them their choice between a feast and a big battle and they'd take the battle every time. And make no mistake about it,

Dick Sahib, if I had not been here to protect you, this present life would be over for you and your young friend."

"I have no doubt of that, Mahatma Sikandar. And now as my men are refreshed I think we should go on to the rescue of our little friend."

"That will only be the beginning of your jungle journey. Another search will carry you far, far into its depths."

"Have you seen more?" asked Dick. "Tell me all, Mahatma Sikandar."

"It is not well for you to know all, Dick Sahib. For that reason a cloud comes between me and your search. But this much I can tell you. Through suffering and dangers you will finally win. Make ready, my friend. The time is short."

"Your tribesmen are great warriors. Could you not send them with us to help us in our search?"

"My ways are ways of peace, my son. I cannot send my men into battle. But this I will do. Mutaba, one of the best trackers of game, who knows the jungle as you do your house, he will guide you to the village of the Muta-Gungas."

"We thank you, Mahatma Sikandar. The jungle is a new country to me and my tribes of Taharans and Gorols. It will save us many weary steps."

The Mahatma suddenly raised himself. "Here, Mutaba! Make ready my litter. I accompany Dick Sahib into the jungle."

"Say," whispered Dan to his chum, "I'm not sure I want Old Whiskers along. He's something of a frost. I don't like him."

But Dick was giving orders to Raal, who joyously set his men to saddling their horses.

"Let's get ready," he said. "We've got a big job ahead of us, if Mahatma Sikandar knows what he's talking about."

"Okay!" answered Dan Carter. "I'm ready and waiting! Come on!"

CHAPTER IX

THE BAD NEWS BREAKS

"Let's go!" said Dick.

"We're on our way," Dan replied with a smile on his round face. "Oh boy!" he added, "what a relief to have a good square meal under my belt again. Honest, Dick, that trek across the desert was terrible! When I tightened my belt, my stomach was so empty that I could feel my belt buckle digging into my backbone."

Dick smiled. He knew that Dan was a good sport and chock full of courage in spite of his constant interest in food.

"I'd hate to go through a famine with you," he said.

"You'll never have a chance to," chuckled Dan. "I can face a jungle full of black savages and never turn a hair, but don't expect me to do any fighting on an empty stomach."

"We will have plenty of fighting from here on, Buddy."

Dick turned to Raal and called, "Are the men all set to go?"

"Yes Master. But Mutaba, our black guide, is putting up another plan."

"What is it?"

"He can tell you. I can't make out what it's all about."

"Mutaba, come here," said Dick.

"Yes Bwana Dick." And as the big black fellow began talking fast, rolling his eyes and shaking both fists excitedly in the air, Dick saw that he was trying hard to explain something important.

With the little that Dick had learned of native languages, he could tell that Mutaba was very much opposed to the expedition setting out through the forest, but that was all he understood.

"What else is there to do?" he asked Raal.

"Push on! That is my advice, O Master. Many dangers are ahead of us, that is clear, but if we push on bravely we will win through."

Dan spoke up.

"Let's get the Mahatma to translate. Maybe there is something to what the black boy is proposing."

Dick led Mutaba to where the Hindu was preparing for the journey. The wise man had no idea of traveling on foot, like the negroes, or on horseback, like Dick's warriors.

Instead he had ordered his devoted followers to construct an elaborate litter like a Pullman berth. It was covered with woven vines and leaves, to make a private compartment where he could lie back or sit cross-legged and meditate. The litter was hung on two long poles, extra stout to support his weight, and no less than eight bearers, all matched for size, carried it easily along the narrow trail.

The Mahatma poked his head out of the curtain of leaves, as Dick hailed him.

"Who comes to disturb my meditations?" he demanded. "Ah, Dick Sahib, it is you. Whereof would you ask advice of the Master?"

"It is about this guide," Dick explained. "He has something on his mind."

"Speak, son!" said the Mahatma inclining his head sideways.

Mutaba burst into a torrent of language, at the same time throwing himself on all fours in front of the holy man.

The Hindu listened to him earnestly, stroking his long grey beard and occasionally rolling up his eyes in surprise.

Once in a while he gave vent to a word or two of question, and at that Mutaba spoke louder and faster than ever.

"That boy would be grand to have in a calm at sea," laughed Dan. "He is windy enough to keep the sails full."

"Or to run a windmill," Dick smiled. "But what's on the fellow's mind?"

"Looks as if we were going to stay here all day!"

Dan glanced at Raal, who was becoming more and more impatient at the long talk. Ever since the warrior had learned the whereabouts of the Princess Veena, he had been in a state of suppressed excitement. Now that they were so near to the camp where she was held captive, he could hardly restrain himself.

But the Mahatma showed not the slightest concern. In the life that he led, time meant nothing. The years could go by until they mounted up into centuries and it was all one to a man who believed as he did.

The Hindu's carriers were more like other humans, however. They shifted uneasily under the burden and once in a while a bearer would reach out to slap a stinging fly that had lighted on his leg.

Dick and Dan looked on, mopping the perspiration from their foreheads and finally Dick ventured to interrupt.

"What is the word? Do we start?"

"We're in a rush," said Dan. "Particularly Raal, here, is minding it."

"Patience, patience!" observed Sikandar, stroking his beard calmly. "In patience is wisdom and in wisdom we attain perfection."

"We're losing time," said Dick impatiently.

"On the contrary, we are gaining time."

"By standing here and talking?" Dan blurted out.

"Wise talk is better than rash deeds," said the Mahatma. "Behold any fool is

strong, but a wise man tells the fool how to use his strength."

"Now what is all this getting at?" exclaimed Dan. "I bet that Old Whiskers has made a mistake and is trying to cover up."

Sikandar's dark eyes flashed in anger at this muttered remark, then he spoke in measured tones:

"My knowledge is vast, yet even a wise man may forget. This black guide reminds me that the trail to the land of the Iron-heads is through swamps. The land is treacherous. It hardly bears a man's weight and the horses would sink in it and be lost."

"Bad luck!" cried Dick.

"We have to *walk* it," groaned Dan. "And carry our eats on our backs!"

Raal growled and touched his axe handle. "I am ready to go afoot, now!" he asserted.

The Mahatma put up one fat, soft hand.

"Nay, now! Listen to the words of wisdom. I, Mahatma Sikandar, am not the one to be discouraged by difficulties. I have a better plan."

"Out with it, old-timer!" said Dan.

"Patience! Patience! We must all go back instead of forward."

"Never!" interrupted Raal.

"And some miles back from here we are close to a river where my tribesmen have many canoes."

"They will have to be big ones to carry our horses," said Dan.

"The horses will be put in a corral by the river," went on the Hindu. "My men will build a corral quickly. Meanwhile we can start out in comfort, paddling down the smooth river to a point within a mile of the enemy camp!"

"Now you're talking," said Dick.

He explained to Raal how that would save time; for a canoe could be paddled more than twice as fast as it would take to travel through a swamp.

Raal smiled joyfully at this news and muttered, "Good! Longbeard, good!"

"Hooray for Old Whiskers! He has thought up a good idea at last," said Dan. "But say," he whispered to Dick, "Sikandar didn't think of that. It was the black guide. The wise old boy is just stealing the credit for it."

Mahatma Sikandar scowled at Dan and said, "A fool and his folly cannot be parted! As I told you, we saved time by talking and taking counsel."

"Okay, let's go!" said Dick. "We travel by canoe to within a mile of the camp, you say? How is the trail from there?"

Sikandar asked the guide a question. The latter burst out in noisy explanation.

"Bad. Very bad!" said the Hindu.

"From the river, there is hardly any trail but just a dense growth of trees, vines and creepers. It is full of wild beasts and huge snakes. We must cut a path. But the distance is not great."

"Let's be on our way," said Dick. "I can see that Raal is keen to start."

"Patience, patience!" said the Mahatma, but already Dick had shouted an order, the horsemen mounted and Mutaba led the way to the river.

When the party reached the bank of the stream, a broad, sluggish river, almost entirely overhung with the great trees alive with parrots and chattering monkeys, they found that swift-footed natives had already reached it by taking short cuts. No time had been wasted. Vines, tough creepers and branches had been woven between growing trees to form a large enclosure where the horses could be held in safety.

A fleet of canoes was riding on the river and the Taharans and Gorols were now to learn the art of paddling a vessel down stream.

Mutaba went in the first canoe with Dick and Dan.

Raal followed in the second, while Kurt and Kurul commanded the third and fourth.

Following a command from the Mahatma, a number of men came forward. They were paddlers who were to accompany the expedition and instruct the desert dwellers how to handle the boats.

Soon the river was crowded with light craft, manned by warriors at the paddles.

"Where is the Wise Old Bird?" asked Dan.

"Hope he didn't give us the slip," said Dick. "We may need his help before the day is over."

"The Master of Wisdom is in the biggest canoe," said Mutaba, pointing out an exceptionally broad craft with a small cabin of boughs built at the widest part.

True to form, the Mahatma had insisted upon his privacy even in a canoe, and his followers had built a bower-like shelter of saplings, vines and flowering plants, in which the sage could sit cross-legged and meditate.

"That beats all!" Dan marvelled. "Old Brains can certainly make the strong-arm boys wait on him! When he says 'jump,' they all step lively."

The Mahatma's canoe was followed by a second, on which his litter was carried. Evidently the sage had no intention of doing any part of the journey afoot.

His vessel kept in the middle of the string of canoes that slid quietly down the stream, for he had figured out that the safest place was where he would be protected from attacks from either direction.

As the fleet moved under the strokes of strong-muscled paddlers, a low-pitched chant arose from the blacks. It floated over the water and the Taharans and the Gorols listened and soon joined in with the melody, though the words meant nothing to them.

But it was clearly a song of battle and raiding, for the eyes of the black men gleamed excitedly and the whites showed as they rolled them while they plied

their paddles with energy. The boats sped faster and faster.

By that time the Taharans and the Gorols, unused to the ways of rivers, had learned the simple art of driving the canoes forward with strokes in time to the chant.

The blond warriors bent to it with zest, their great muscles swelling, while the lighter built Gorols tried to outstrip them in clever use of the paddle.

Soon it was developing into a race, and Raal, who was burning with impatience, felt satisfied at last. He could see progress being made. That very day he might be able to rescue Veena from the scoundrels who had captured her.

Then a voice came to the leaders across the water and sounded a warning: "Patience, patience, my people! Too much haste now, means delay in the end."

"There goes Old Whiskers again," exclaimed Dan. "Maybe we are disturbing his meditations by going fast."

The Hindu's voice sounded as distinctly in their ears as though he were alongside.

"Not so fast Dick Sahib. Let your men rest on their paddles. I have much to say to you."

"Oh shucks!" Dan growled. "We were winning the race. Now the old gazabo wants us to fall to the rear."

But Mutaba had heard his master's command and the order was given. Soon the Hindu's canoe was side by side with the one carrying Dan and Dick.

Mahatma Sikandar spoke through his screen of leaves.

"Bad news, Dick Sahib and for you, too, Dan Sahib, the crystal ball brings evil tidings."

"What's up now?" blurted Dan.

"Were you really crystal gazing in the canoe? And did you see something that concerns us?" demanded Dick.

"I saw clearly what I saw only dimly before," answered the Hindu gravely. "The captives held in the same camp with Veena; one is a man, gray bearded and full of years. That is your father, Dick Sahib."

"Dick's father? Why how did Professor Oakwood get down here in the jungle?" Dan was incredulous.

"He was lured from the oasis by a trick. And he was not taken alone. A young girl is also kept for ransom."

"A girl? Who can it be?" cried Dan as the truth began to dawn upon him.

"Already you guess who it is, Dan Sahib, and your suspicions are correct. The girl who is captured is young and beautiful with dark eyes and curly black hair. She is brave, although her case is desperate, and she calls upon you for help. She is your sister, Dan Sahib!"

CHAPTER X

WAR CANOES

Ray Carter a captive!

This terrible news stunned the two boys for an instant, then spurred them to furious action. Their canoe drove forward. Soon the Mahatma's boat was left far behind.

Now they felt that not a moment must be lost. To think of Dan's lovely sister in the grip of those savage and brutal men, made them wild with the resolve to fight for her freedom.

It was bad enough to know that Dick's father was held for ransom, but Ray was in ten times as much danger. She was so sweet and pretty in her gay, jaunty way, that the mere thought of her coming to harm aroused them to madness.

They urged the boatmen to greater speed.

"Faster! Faster!" shouted Dan. "I've got to get my sister out of there!"

Gone was all his jolly manner. His round face was no longer ruddy but looked pale and strained, and his eyes showed the light of desperate resolve.

"Faster! Faster!" commanded Dick Oakwood, and his jaw set in a hard, fighting line as he stared straight ahead down the tropical river.

Raal echoed the cry for speed and more speed and the paddlers drove deeper into the sluggish water, while foam curled before the canoes.

Mutaba caught the excitement and his men were stirred to fighting rage. Their war chant rang out as they bent to the paddles and the alarming sounds startled the parrots and monkeys in the overhanging trees.

"This will never do," said Dick. "We don't know how far the sounds may carry."

"That's right. We don't want to warn those cut-throats that we are on our way," Dan urged.

As if his thoughts had been read, a voice of command travelled over the surface of the water and penetrated the uproar with its calm accent.

"Quiet, my children! Make speed, but no more noise."

"The Mahatma," gasped Dan.

"Did you hear him?" Dick questioned. "Did you hear English words?"

"Of course. At least I seemed to hear them."

"But the black Kungoras obeyed. And so did the Taharans. And the Gorols, too! Yet none of those people understood English."

"That's a fact. How do you account for that?"

"The Mahatma sent an order that each man understood in his own language. It was not in words, however. He just sent his thoughts to us all. We *imagined* we

heard the words, but what happened was that we got the idea by some sixth sense."

"That's magic! The real thing!" Dan exclaimed.

"Not magic. It's what I told you about; a kind of mental radio."

"Well, if the Mahatma can send his thoughts like that, he must be a wise old bird, after all!" Dan exclaimed. "Say, I was wrong to kid him so much and call him Old Whiskers."

"That's what I think."

"I hope he isn't sore at me."

"Not likely. He probably does not consider it worth while to be insulted by a fresh youngster like you."

"Jiminy, I hope you're right, Dick. We certainly need the Mahatma's help if we are going to get Ray out of there."

"We do that. It will take all his scheming and all our fighting speed to set her free."

Dan's face was very grave. He was so excited and nervous about his sister that he almost broke down.

"Do you think I'd better go back to his boat and apologize?" he asked humbly. "Say, I'd feel like a dog if anything happened to Ray."

"You can apologize later," counselled Dick. "What we have to do now is paddle for dear life and as soon as we reach the camp to put up the best fight there is in us."

Both Dick and Dan seized a paddle and added their efforts to those of the boatmen.

It was hot work.

The humid air of the jungle weighed upon them like a blanket of steam. Their

bodies were dripping and it was hard to breathe.

Most of the time they were in the shade of the huge trees, but once in a while the canoe darted into a patch of sunshine and then the rays of the afternoon sun beat down upon them fiercely.

The Taharans minded the humidity and so did the Gorols, while Dick and Dan were terribly fagged, but the black men did not seem to notice it. Their ebony-like bodies were wet with perspiration, but they seemed cheerful and eager. Only the command of the Mahatma kept them from breaking into song.

The boys looked into the jungle on both sides and saw that it was densely tangled with hanging vines. Here and there a clump of bamboo made a barrier that only a hatchet could cut through; elsewhere the forest was overgrown with small trees forcing their way to the sunlight, and among them could be seen the stealthy shapes of wild beasts.

"Hope we don't run into leopards or lions," said Dan. "It's going to be tough to fight the tribesmen, and we don't want to be clawed by wild animals before the scrap begins."

"That's a chance we have to take."

"You said it! Hey!——Look at that! Duck for your life!"

From a near-by branch, a long sinuous object like a giant creeper, suddenly swung toward them. It showed a murderous head, with wide open jaws and a tongue that darted angrily.

"Great snakes!" shouted Dan, striking at it with his paddle.

But the canoe had darted past the danger before the scaly monster could attack and Dan breathed more easily.

"Look there in the shadows," said Dick. "Elephants, as I'm alive!"

"And whoppers!" cried Dan. "Say, I never saw them that big before. Not even in a circus!"

"They are dangerous to fool with," Dick remarked. "I would hate to be in

front of that old bull if he started to charge."

The biggest elephant in the herd seemed the size of a freight car as he calmly reached into the tree tops and pulled down the tender foliage. His trunk stretched high above his head as he felt for the tender shoots.

"A regular boarding house reach!" laughed Dan, forgetting his suspense for a moment. "Say that bozo would never have to say, 'Please pass the butter.' He could grab it from the other end of the table."

One of the Taharans gave a cry of astonishment at seeing the huge creature so near by, and at the noise the elephant faced about, waving his enormous ears and looking at the intruders with an expression of anger in his little, intelligent eyes.

"I feel safer out here!" Dan observed. "What use would a bow and arrow be against that tough hide?"

"You're right. Even my old fashioned Arab gun would hardly send a bullet through it."

"How do you suppose the Stone-Age men ever hunted mastodons?" asked Dan. "Those woolly mastodons with long curving tusks were lots bigger than the elephant."

"I guess it was the mastodon that did the hunting in those days," Dick answered. "The cave-men were not the hunters but the hunted, if you ask me."

"And that goes for the sabre-toothed tiger, too."

"I bet it was a toss-up whether the human race would conquer the animals or be eaten by them in the Stone-Age," said Dick. "Maybe that's why the people of today get scared and have panics so easily. It may be a hang-over from the fear that haunted our ancestors."

"I can't say I'm exactly scared——" Dan Carter began, but before he could finish his sentence a shout from a boatman startled him and he answered with a yell of terror.

The canoe was passing close to a shallow spot and suddenly a pair of jaws snapped open right alongside. They were so wide that it looked as though they

could crash through the canoe with one bite, and the vicious rows of teeth could easily slice through a man's body.

Dan thought he was facing a horrible death in that instant and in fact he had never had a narrower escape. As he yelled, he threw himself flat, but the black guide, Mutaba showed no sign of fear.

Mutaba had hunted crocodiles before and knew what to do. His black arm shot out like lightning with a heavy stick in his fist. It was sharpened at both ends and as Mutaba thrust it upright between the monster's rows of teeth and the jaws snapped to close, the upper and lower jaw were stuck on the points of the stake.

Mutaba grinned as he jerked away his hand and the canoe darted past, just in the nick of time, for the enraged monster thrashed about with his tail, churning the muddy water to foam.

The man-eater was trapped.

The harder he struggled, the more firmly he impaled his open jaws upon the sharp stick, and all his thrashing about was futile, for the following boats sped by close to the opposite bank.

"Those black fellows are smart!" gasped Dan. "Jehosephat, I thought I was a goner, sure!"

"The natives are pretty well pleased!" said Dick. "Listen to them laugh and jeer at the unlucky beast."

"Don't waste any pity on crocodiles! This one was ready to make a lunch out of me."

"I am not sorry for him. And it's no wonder the natives hate those man-eaters that lurk in the shallows to snap off an arm."

"I've read that they are particularly fond of black children," said Dan, "so there's one croc' at least that won't eat any babies."

"Hush! Listen!" said Dick.

Close to his ear came the even voice of the Mahatma as before:

"Quiet, my children. We are near the journey's end."

Dick and Dan stared at each other. It was uncanny. They were sure this time that they had not actually *heard* the Mahatma's voice, but that their minds had received the message in some occult way.

Shadows were slanting from the west. The river was wider now and the surface was sluggish with hardly a ripple.

From the depths of the forest echoed the weird call of a bird with a human note that sounded like lunatic laughter. Otherwise all was still and the shadows of the jungle seemed to grow blacker and more mysterious at every moment.

"It's spooky," whispered Dan. "Like passing a haunted house at midnight."

"Cheer up," said Dick. "It's going to be worse when we have to cut a path through it."

"Just the same, I'd go through worse than this to save your father and my sister."

"I don't suppose my Dad worries as much as we do. Being a scientist, he is seeing so many new plants, animals and birds, that he has no time to get scared. But Ray, poor girl, she must be terrified. If only we can get to her before it is too late!"

"The Mahatma said we would save her."

"But you didn't believe a word he said. You were always kidding him."

"I believe in him now," said Dan. "Boy, *how* I believe in him!"

"I would like him better if he would let us have some of his warriors," said Dick. "He's doing us a good turn by lending the canoes and showing us how to reach the Muta-Gunga camp but what worries me is that the Taharans and Gorols are not used to this country and won't know much about fighting in the jungle."

"That's so, they will be at a disadvantage in a battle with these jungle savages

who know every inch of the ground," said Dan thoughtfully. "They're brave enough but it would help if they had a few of the natives of the section to show them the way around."

"Never mind, we will take a chance," said Dick. "We're going to win out! And come through with flying colors!"

CHAPTER XI

KING SOLOMON'S CROWN

Suddenly Mutaba raised both arms above his head and opened and closed his hands rapidly.

It was a signal.

The paddlers in the following canoes slowed down and the leader in each little vessel relayed the silent order until the last boat had received it.

The keen-eyed jungle tracker had spied an opening in the wall of trees and vines that Dick and his friend could hardly see, even when the canoe was making straight for it.

Apparently the little vessel which was headed right across the stream was about to run its nose into the bank, but at a muttered warning from Mutaba the crew ducked low and the canoe glided under a leafy fringe and entered a creek that allowed free passage.

As the stream widened Dick could see it extending like a black trail deep into the forest. Here the shadows were so heavy that there was not enough light for plants that grow close to the ground, consequently the undergrowth was not so dense as it was near the river bank.

Dick and Dan could see farther into the shadowy depths after their eyes became accustomed to the twilight, and now and then they saw a fleeting shape,

so distant that it could not be recognized as man or beast.

"This is ghostly," whispered Dan. "A magic forest, if there ever was one!"

"Cheer up! We have strong magic on our side," smiled Dick. "The Mahatma is with us. We would be lost without him."

"Old Whiskers—I mean, Mahatma Sikandar, is right there with the goods!" Dan was enthusiastic. "Say, I hope he won't hold it against me that I was so fresh."

"Don't worry. His mind is full of important things. I'm sure he thinks of your wise-cracks as less than the dust."

"It's up to me to do something brave and prove to the Mahatma that I am more than a smart aleck."

"That's the right spirit! I have the feeling that a big scrap is about to break. You'll have plenty of chances to show what you can do."

"Watch me! If I can lay hands on Jess Slythe, I'll pay him out for what he did to my sister."

Dick interrupted him.

"Quiet. Mahatma Sikandar looks worried. Maybe there is danger near by."

The tracker spoke in Swahili, a dialect spoken by many tribes in different parts of Africa, of which Dick understood a few words.

"Bwana Dick," he said earnestly. "We are near the place where we leave the canoes. I have seen signs of enemies. So be quiet, Bwana Dick, and tell your talkative friend to be silent."

Dick translated in whispers and Dan followed the warning.

Cautiously the canoe entered a wide part of the stream where vines and bushes grew in a patch of sunlight.

Mutaba looked at the banks carefully for signs of footprints or broken

branches that would tell of intruders, then pointed to a certain spot where the earth had been trodden by animals who came to drink.

"This is the place, Bwana Dick," he said. "I go first."

As the canoe touched the shore, the powerful native leaped to the bank as lightly as a cat, crouched low as if smelling the ground and examined every inch of the soil near him.

Then he peered into the forest depths carefully and finally raised one hand as a signal.

His blacks, who had been holding their bows in readiness for an attack, now followed him, and canoe after canoe unloaded.

Mutaba led the way by a narrow trail to a clearing where the forces could assemble, and here the Taharans and the Gorols awaited orders from the Mahatma.

The wise man came last. Even in the dense jungle he refused to walk, so the litter was carried by his bearers, while hatchet-wielding natives cut and slashed at the vines and brush.

But when he reached the clearing, Mahatma Sikandar refused firmly to accompany the war party any further and ordered the litter set down under a tree.

"My ways are the ways of peace," he said. "I remain here and my spirit will direct you from afar."

"I wonder whether he's afraid," whispered Dan.

"Ssh," cautioned Dick. "There you go! Offending him again!"

For the Mahatma's dark eyes stared angrily in Dan's direction and he beckoned the boys to come closer.

"Listen," he said. "I came from my own country in search of peace. A voice led me for many weary miles over seas and strange lands, across burning deserts and at last I was directed by my unseen guide to this jungle tribe. The voice directed me to bring peace to the warlike tribe of the Kungoras."

"And the natives understood and bowed down to you?" questioned Dick.

"Yes, my son. Fierce as they are, they received me as a friend and master. From that day, they have had no war. I promised them peace and I brought them peace."

"I see that they are anxious to join us in this raid," said Dan. "They have been quiet too long."

"Can you lend us just a few warriors?" asked Dick. "They know the jungle warfare and can show my desert fighters what to do."

"I can lend you a guide, Mutaba," said the Mahatma. "But once I set the tribe free to warfare, my days here are ended."

"You mean that they would turn on you and kill you?"

"No, my son. I mean that the unseen guide who led me here to meditate, told me that when war came to my tribe, on that day my search would begin once more."

"Your search? For what?"

Dan's question brought an unexpected reply from the Hindu.

"My search is for an ancient crown of massive gold and gems," he said. "It is so old that no man knows when it was made or for whom. It is of great value to the possessor."

"If it's gold you want," said Dan, "we know where you can get a shipload. Don't we, Dick?"

"Peace, peace! Gold is nothing to me. It is the crown I seek. The crown that has been in the treasuries of great kings but now has vanished. King Solomon had it as a gift from the Queen of Sheba. It was lost for centuries, then found in the Court of an Abyssinian king. Then it disappeared. Where it is now, I know not."

"Why don't you look for it in your crystal?"

"I have tried. Many times. But the magic of the crown is stronger than my own. It refuses to show itself in my crystal sphere."

"Why do you want it so much?" asked Dan.

"Because upon that crown is engraved the secret of wisdom. It is a secret that is older than man. If I could look upon that symbol and fix it upon my memory, I would give all the riches in the world."

Dick was thinking hard. He turned impatiently, as Raal approached him and asked, "O mighty Tahara, when do we start?"

"Soon, Raal, very soon."

"My heart is heavy, Master, when I think of the princess held captive."

"And what about me?" exclaimed Dan. "Am I to wait around here talking, while my sister's life is in danger?"

"Peace, peace, children!" said the Mahatma. "All will be well if you have patience."

"We will never get to the camp today!" exclaimed Dan.

"Then we can fight by the light of the full moon," Dick retorted sharply. "Don't break in on the Mahatma when he is planning things. By this time you ought to know that you make better time by following his advice."

The Hindu raised both hands above his head and closed his eyes, murmuring, "The voice that led me here, tells me that I shall learn more about the ancient crown. My time here is nearly at an end."

"Let me tell you about the crown of the two tribes," said Dick. "It is old and very heavy and set with uncut gems. And it is covered with signs like picture writing," and Dick described it as well as he could remember.

"You have seen this crown?"

"I have had it on my head," replied the Boy King.

"Where is it now?"

"Not here, Mahatma. It is too heavy to wear for long, and too valuable to carry on a war expedition, so I placed it in the safest spot I know."

"Tell me! Tell me where it is hidden," cried the Hindu.

Never before had Dick seen him show excitement. Now his voice trembled with eagerness.

"Do you think the crown of the Taharans and Gorols is the lost diadem?" asked Dick. "The one that the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon?"

"I believe it is the same. I cannot rest until I have seen it. Tell me where it is."

Dick started to say that he had placed it in the cave of the Great Gorol, the Ape-god in the land of the Gorols. Then it occurred to him that if Mahatma were told, he would lose all interest in helping rescue the captives. It would be better to hold the secret until Ray and his father were saved and Veena restored to Raal.

"Patience, patience, O Mahatma Sikandar," said Dick softly.

"Patience! *You* preach patience to me?"

"Yes, O wise man. For until you have set free the captives I seek, you shall never learn where the crown is hidden."

"But you must tell me."

"Later. After the battle."

"But suppose you should be killed?"

"Then my secret perishes with me. You shall never see King Solomon's crown and you shall never read the words of highest wisdom."

"Attaboy!" exclaimed Dan. "You've got the Mahatma where you want him, Dick. Make him set Ray free, or tell him nothing."

The Mahatma tightened his lips to keep back an angry retort and then spoke gently:

"My life is all in vain if I fail to see the crown you have hidden."

"Look for it in your crystal!" cried Dan.

Sikandar ignored him and continued to Dick Oakwood, "With the symbol on that crown in my memory, I could travel through the air to my own land. I could go to the high-built lamasaries of Tibet. I could enter the presence of the holy Dalai Lama himself and find welcome in the circles of the wise men of the high places."

"You can do all those things, once you have set free the captives," said Dick firmly.

"Sure," said Dan. "We will help you. My father has a plane that will fly you to India."

"Your father will fly with me to Holy India?" The Mahatma looked at Dan for the first time with respectful interest. "The voice told me that it would be so," he replied. "An unlicked cub would first annoy me by his foolish teasing, then would cause me to be carried through the air to the land of the sacred Ganges."

"Any place you want to go!" said Dan.

"Help me first, and we'll show you the crown and fly with you to India," Dick promised.

"Only we can't waste any more time here," urged Dan.

"Raal and his warriors are impatient," said Dick. "And so am I."

"Enough!" The Mahatma was through preaching patience. He clapped his hands and the tracker Mutaba ran to him, falling on his knees and awaiting orders.

"The days of peace are ended," said Sikandar.

"Good, O Holy Man!"

"And my days with you are nearly at an end."

Mutaba uttered a wail of grief, but Sikandar spoke sharply:

"Lead the way with hatchets and cut a path through the jungle for the Taharans and the Gorols. And when you come to the camp of the Muta-Gungas, fight as you never fought before."

"Good, O Master. Good!"

"My litter will follow close behind army," said Mahatma Sikandar. "This is a holy war. Till it is ended, there shall be no more talk of peace."

"Or of patience!" cried Dan.

"We strike for the Princess Veena!" Raal exclaimed, signalling to his warriors.

"We fight for our Holy Man!" cried Mutaba, leading his hatchet-bearers into the jungle.

"We fight for the rescue of my sister—and your father!" Dan Carter exclaimed, clapping Dick on the shoulder. "This is bully. Now we are going to put up a swell fight!"

"We fight for the crown of wisdom," said Mahatma Sikandar. "Forward to battle!"

CHAPTER XII

STAMPEDE

The jungle closed in upon the warriors. They seemed like insects winding through a patch of grass, for the trees grew high and thick above them and the saplings crowded close to the trail.

The Kungoras used their hatchets and the Stone-Age men slashed with their

flint implements, cutting away the creepers and vines that blocked their passage. But it was slow going.

Dick Oakwood watched the progress with anxious eyes, for it was far past mid-day and he wanted to attack while it was still light. Otherwise in the darkness, he might lose the captives altogether.

The time was short for what they had to do.

"At this rate we will never make it," said Dan Carter, mopping the moisture from his face.

"Push on anyhow," said Dick. "There's nothing else to do."

He and Dan were in the lead, with Mutaba, who directed his axe-wielding blacks. The guide kept watching for any sign of hostilities, running ahead whenever there was a clear space on the trail and searching for tracks or broken twigs which might indicate that some enemy had passed that way.

Suddenly he stopped short, crouched low in the brush and raised one hand high as a warning. Dick watched him draw his bow and take careful aim at something in the tangle of vines far ahead, then as he let the arrow fly, a creature that might have been man or beast fled through the undergrowth in terror.

With a grunt of anger, Mutaba leaped forward and pursued it, while Dick and Dan did their best to keep up. But the black slid through the tangled growth like a snake, while the two boys were blocked constantly, so they were soon left behind.

Finally when they did overtake him, Mutaba was squatting on his haunches, examining everything on the ground and in the brush with the trained eyes of a tracker.

"It was a man," he said briefly. "My arrow missed, for there was no trace of blood on any branch or on the ground."

Mutaba moved a pace forward and pointed to some crushed vegetation, which to the boys was meaningless.

"It was a Muta-Kunga tribesman," said the tracker. "A young warrior, who

knows the way of the jungle."

"A regular Sherlock Holmes:" remarked Dan. "Next thing he will tell us that the fellow was exactly five feet, eight and a half inches tall, had a hair lip and wore grey spats and a lion skin."

Mutaba understood nothing of this, but as though in answer to Dan's sarcasm, he reached out with his thin black fingers and dislodged a bit of fluff from a bramble.

"It is from the Muta-Kunga warrior's neck feathers," he said.

"Neck feathers?"

"Yes, Bwana Dick, when the Muta-Kunga is at war or on the hunting trail, he wears a neck piece of feathers. See, this is a bit that was torn off in flight."

Dick translated for Dan's benefit, and the latter whistled in astonishment.

"Guess I pulled another boner," he said. "Sherlock Holmes was on to his job after all."

"That ends our surprise attack!" Dick exclaimed. "The Muta-Kunga warriors will know we are on our way. That fellow may be at the camp already, and warning the tribe."

"Tough luck!" said Dan.

"The worst is that they may rush the prisoners to some other hiding place in the jungle."

"Or they may ambush us at some spot and shoot us full of arrows without warning."

"It's a bad break for us, either way," admitted Dick. "But it's too late to turn back now. We'll just have to take a chance."

"Why couldn't the Mahatma have foreseen this in his crystal?" Dan growled.

"You expect too much. The Hindu can't see *everything*."

"Well, it's up to him to make good," Dan persisted. "He said we would rescue Ray and your father and Veena, and if he lets us down, I'll make him sweat for it!"

The war party proceeded more cautiously than before. Word had spread through the little army that a spy had been shot at but had escaped, so every man was on his guard for attackers.

For some time nothing unusual happened, though there was a constant feeling of dread. At any moment a shower of arrows and spears might bring death to the invaders. The forest seemed more terrifying than ever and even the Kungoras, who would rather fight than eat, showed the nervous strain.

Finally Mutaba stopped short in his tracks with a sharp "*Psst!*" and held up his hand.

"What is it now?" gasped Dan, fitting an arrow to his bow.

Dick brought his clumsy Arab gun level for a shot at the hidden enemy. But this time the foe was not human.

Through the tangle of vines and saplings a huge head loomed above the party. It was an enormous elephant that faced them with murderous rage in its little bright eyes.

Its trunk raised high, the creature trumpeted angrily, while its ears stood out like wings on both sides of its head.

"Jehosephat!" gasped Dan. "Now we are done for!"

In his excitement he let fly the arrow he was holding, but it bounced off the tough hide of the bull elephant as though it had struck a brick wall.

At this annoyance, the elephant trumpeted more furiously than before, and from behind him other huge forms crowded to dispute the path of the warriors.

"It's a whole herd of 'em," cried Dan. "We'll be trampled to pulp."

But though his voice trembled Dan Carter did not become panic-stricken. He looked to his friend Dick Oakwood for advice and saw that the Boy King was

facing the danger manfully.

Raising the heavy gun to his shoulder, Dick was taking a steady aim at the animal's eye. It was a desperate chance. Only one shot with a clumsy old-fashioned gun and if that missed, all was over.

To Dan it seemed like an hour, as Dick held the bead on the infuriated monster, but it was only a second. Then Dick squeezed the trigger, there followed a sharp click—and that was all. The gun had missed fire.

"Good night!" gasped Dan. "This is our finish. Now they'll charge us, and we'll be trampled into the mud."

But just as the herd swayed forward in a clumsy attack, the even voice of the Mahatma sounded among the tribesmen.

"Stand fast! Fear nothing!"

Once more the wise Hindu sent his thoughts straight to their minds by his mysterious power and at the same time he used his occult skill upon the furious brutes. Some nameless fear struck the leader of the herd as the Mahatma exerted his mystic forces.

The rage of the bull elephant changed instantly to wild terror. Trunk aloft, he trumpeted shrilly, and wheeled about in flight.

The herd caught the panic.

At once the great animals crashed blindly through the jungles, flattening the saplings and tearing loose the clinging vines as they fled.

They were stampeding in the direction of the Muta-Kunga camp and beating a trail for the warriors faster than the hatchet-men could have cleared it.

Dick Oakwood cocked his gun and pulled the trigger, aiming at the retreating herd. This time there was no miss-fire. The gun roared like a young cannon.

"Tahara hal!" went up a great shout from Raal, as he leaped forward. His tribesmen followed, brandishing their weapons and echoing the war cry: "*Tahara, hal!*"

To Raal and his men this was one more proof of the Boy King's superhuman power.

Mutaba and his Kungoras took up the chase, yelling fiercely and hurling insults at the fleeing elephants.

Now there was no further need of caution for the Muta-Kungas were warned of a coming battle. All that the invaders had to do was to race forward, and at their top speed it was not possible to catch up with the herd. Clumsy as they appeared, the elephants were capable of moving fast, and now urged by fear, they tore through the jungle like a freight train.

The trumpeting of the elephants, the terrified chatter of monkeys in the trees, and birds, startled by the confusion, raised a terrific din in the forest that was usually so quiet. Small game fled in terror before the onrush that shook the ground. Snakes slid swiftly out of the way of the charging herd. No creature large or small dared to stay in its path.

And this onslaught was most violent when it swept upon the camp of the Muta-Kungas. Warned by their scout who had been shot at by Mutaba, the tribesmen of Chief Mobogoma were prepared for battle. Armed with flat-pointed spears and bows and arrows, they were drawn up awaiting the word to meet their enemies and attack them from ambush. The Muta-Kungas were ferocious looking fellows with degraded faces and about their necks they wore huge ruffs of brightly colored feathers.

Abdul and his men were ready with their guns and scimiters, while Jess Slythe was guarding two of the prisoners, Professor Oakwood and Ray Carter, with the help of a couple of Arabs. Cimbula who had impressed the tribe by his craftiness, was guarding the Princess Veena in a hut reserved for prospective brides of Chief Mobogoma. The one-eyed witch-doctor was quite at home in the enemy camp and hoped to see the Taharans slain.

The Arab horses were in a large corral, for the forest was too dense to use them in fighting, and as for flight, nobody had even considered it, as the Muta-Kungas expected to kill off the invaders before they even reached the camp.

But the whirlwind attack threw them all into confusion. First came the small animals, running as though the forest were afire behind them, then crash, *crash*, CRASH, the old bull elephant charged right through the village, his herd at his

heels.

Down went the fences of the small garden patches and down went every hut that stood in the way. Even the chief's big house was not spared and Mobogoma himself had to duck out of the way as a raging elephant brought down the thatched roof. His wives and children fled screaming into the wilderness, scattering before the thundering terror.

Brave as they were, the Muta-Kungas did not even try to fight off the charging elephants, but sought shelter behind big trees, and as for the Arabs, they made a wild dash for their horses, which had broken loose from the wrecked corral.

Dick shouted to his Taharans and Gorols, "Let 'em have it!" as his forces swept into the wrecked village.

"Let 'em have it!" echoed Dan Carter. "Give 'em the axe!" Both boys were keenly alive to the danger that the captives were exposed to, and while their followers took on the Muta-Kungas in hand to hand combat, the boys looked for Ray and Dick's father among the ruined huts.

Raal was no less eager in the search for Veena and he was the first to find what he sought. From a partly wrecked hut he spied the girl trying to crawl from under the thatched roof, while the witch-doctor stood over her threatening her with death if she tried to escape.

In one leap Raal was upon him, battle axe upraised and the wretched Cimbula vented a howl of terror as he saw the weapon flash through the air.

It was the last sound he uttered, for the next moment Raal's axe found its mark and the crafty plotter sank in a heap among the débris of the ruined hut.

Raal dragged out Veena and held her in his arms, looking about fiercely to protect her from other foes, while the girl clung to him in mingled terror and gratitude.

Meanwhile Dick and Dan caught sight of Ray struggling with Abdul, who was mounted on his horse and was holding the girl before him on the saddle.

Ray struggled frantically and screamed for help. Jess Slythe who was tying

Professor Oakwood upon a horse, aided by two husky Arabs, snarled at her to keep quiet.

"I've got a good mind to cut your throat and the professor's too," he raged. "If I didn't expect a good big ransom from your father, I'd do it in a minute."

It was at that moment that Dick saw the girl and rushed toward her, shouting, "Dan, Dan, there she is!"

The two boys flung themselves at Abdul, striking at him with their primitive weapons. Dan had only a flint knife which he tried to use dagger-fashion, but as he strained upward Abdul raised his scimitar to slash at his head.

But Dick Oakwood was quick to defend his friend. With the long Arab gun, clutched in both hands, he swung at Abdul, delivering a blow that half stunned the Bedouin. Abdul reeled in his saddle, releasing his hold on Ray and like a flash she slipped to the ground, her dark hair tumbled, her cheeks reddened with anger and her black eyes flashing.

"Don't let him get away!" she cried. "I want to pay him back for what he made me suffer."

Dick held her in his arms to keep her from falling, but Dan, whose hands were free, hurled his flint knife at Abdul just as the Arab's horse galloped away.

The weapon caught the ruffian on the arm and a gush of blood reddened his burnous, but the next instant, clinging to his horse's neck, the fugitive plunged into the forest.

Dick saw to his horror that Jess Slythe had tied his father to a horse and was now in flight, mounted upon another animal.

Professor Oakwood, too proud to call for help, sent one despairing look backward, as Jess Slythe lashed the animal's flanks.

"After him!" shouted Dick Oakwood. "Get me a horse, somebody! We have *got* to rescue my father!"

But the Arab horses were plunging about beyond hope of capture, and Jess Slythe and his prisoner were already lost in the shadows of the jungle.

CHAPTER XIII

JUNGLE DANCERS

The victory was complete.

By the time Mahatma Sikandar came on the scene, borne upon his litter, the Muta-Kungas were in full flight, pursued by the Kungoras, Gorols and Taharans.

The Arabs, too, had vanished, but a few of their horses were loose, running about the village and the surrounding forest.

Dick spied his Taharan friends, Kurt and Kurul, returning from the pursuit of the enemies and cried:

"Round up the stray horses! Get all you can! We'll start out to rescue Dad."

"Yes, Master," they replied obediently, and called upon their fellows to help in the capture of the terrified animals.

The Mahatma spoke to them in his placid voice:

"Patience, my children! I see that the battle has gone as I foretold. Through my power over beasts, I caused the elephants to stampede. Now be quiet, and watch. You will see me bring the horses to you."

Fascinated, Dick and his followers watched the wise old Hindu raise both hands above his head with a convulsive gesture. His eyes closed. At the same time his lips moved as he appeared to be saying something under his breath. But no sound came to the ears of the men beside him. The message was not meant for them. It was directed at the runaway horses.

At a distance the beasts were racing madly, at first, then their pace slackened and a few of them began to graze quietly, while the others stared in the direction of the holy man.

Kurt and Kurul, ropes in hand, gave a grunt of admiration, "Mahatma Good!" and started to bring in the horses.

But Dick restrained them. "Leave it to the wise man," he said. "He does not need help."

Sure enough in a few minutes the horses began straying back to where the Mahatma was sitting, all their fear gone.

"Now you can capture them, Dick Sahib," said Sikandar. "Go to them quietly and take them by their bridles."

Dan cried enthusiastically, "You are certainly there with the goods, chief!" With one arm around his sister, he exclaimed, "There's the man you want to thank, Ray! Without his help we might never have rescued you!"

"That's right!" cried Dick. "You owe him everything!"

Ray bowed and expressed her thanks shyly. The strange old Hindu did not seem so wonderful to her, but if Dick and Dan said he was a miracle worker, there must be something to it.

And now Raal came forward, still holding Veena as though he could never let her go.

Prostrating himself before the Mahatma, Raal drew the girl down beside him and the pair addressed a chant of thanksgiving to him in their own language.

The old man beamed upon them and uttered a blessing, then turned to Dick.

"You are impatient, my son."

"Yes, holy man. It is about my father. Can you help me save him?"

"I know. I know what has happened," said the Hindu. "Today the spirits that control my crystal are active, and I have seen everything."

"And will you bring Dad back safely?"

"Tomorrow you shall clasp his hand. Have no fear."

But Dick was not so easily quieted.

"He is in the power of a murderous scoundrel, a man who tried to kill me."

"Fear not, my son."

"Let me take the horses and go out with a party tonight."

"That would spoil everything! You would be lost in the forests. See, already the shadows are heavy in the jungle and before you could overtake him, it would be dark as the souls of evil men. Also the jungle is full of fierce beasts. The leopards, the lions and the crocodiles would destroy you."

Reluctantly Dick decided to stay in the camp until daylight, and join in the feasting that celebrated the victory.

"It is well for you that I have taught the Kungoras to advance a little way in the path of good," said the Mahatma, "otherwise you would have witnessed a cannibal feast this night."

"Do you mean it?" cried Dan.

"I do mean it. When I came to the Kungoras, they were eaters of human flesh. They believed that eating the heart of an enemy gave them all his strength and courage."

"And they slaughtered their prisoners?"

"And feasted on them!"

"That's too many for me!" ejaculated Dan Carter. "I can't deny that I'm fond of eats, but if it came to making a lunch off one of those Muta-Kungas, I'd rather go hungry."

The smell of cooking floated over the camp, mingled with the smoke of wood fires. Plenty of food had been found in the mud huts thatched with straw, for the surprise attack had caused the natives to flee without taking anything.

The feast was served in the clearing before the ruins of Chief Mobogoma's house. There a big fire was kept burning and by its light the warriors gorged

themselves with roasted game, corn and other products of the garden patches and then finished off with quantities of bananas and other fruit.

Ray and Dick ate sparingly as was their habit, and the Mahatma contented himself with a little food and that of the plainest, but Dan Carter joined the warriors in disposing of huge quantities of roasted and broiled meat.

The savages showed their delight in his prowess.

"Dan good!" said Kural.

"Dan big chief!" replied Kurt, his mouth full, and reached into a stew pot with a forked stick.

As the boy smiled at them, waving a bone that he was gnawing, Dick sang out:

"Take care, Dan! I was tipped off that the Kungoras smuggled in part of a Muta-Kunga brave among the stew meat."

Dan pulled back hastily and stared at the big pot in which vegetables and chunks of meat were mingled.

"You take?" asked Kurul.

"Stew good!" suggested Kurt with a broad smile.

"No thanks," gasped Dan Carter, turning a little pale. "I don't—think I care—for any more."

He got up hastily and left the circle of heavy eaters.

"Lost your appetite?" laughed Dick.

"No, not exactly. I just—think I've had—enough! Guess I'll take a little walk!" And Dan disappeared on the trot.

Ray gave Dick a reproachful look. "Is that nice?" she asked. But she was unable to keep back a smile.

"Dan Sahib is bound to the wheel of fleshly enjoyment," remarked the

Mahatma. "He must learn to restrain his appetites."

"Especially his appetite for stew, when dining with jungle blacks!" laughed Dick.

The meal was prolonged far into the night and broken by exhibitions of tribal dances. First the Gorols pranced about the fire in single file. They bent low, shuffling along and uttering monkey-like cries, while to make the resemblance perfect they had tied long twigs to their belts, so that they waggled like tails during the dance.

With their dark skins, long thin arms and legs and primitive features, they looked more like ape-men than ever and Ray and Dick shouted with laughter.

Dan Carter returned to the circle, attracted by the noise.

"Get in line, Dan, you are all that's needed to complete the picture," his friend kidded him.

"I don't—think I feel—like dancing," replied Dan, still a little greenish about the gills. "I'm not feeling very well."

"Have some more stew!"

Ray slapped Dick's arm and cried, "Don't tease the poor boy!"

"All right," Dick extended his hand. "Come on, Dan! Shake on it! We'll change the subject."

The Taharans were the next to dance and with a great brandishing of flint knives and stone axes they went through an imaginary battle. Two warriors would break away from the line and face each other like duellists, while the rest danced about them, uttering war cries that made the forest ring.

"These mock battles look like the real thing!" said Dick. "Look at that! I thought sure that the tall fellow was going to split the other one with his axe."

"I don't like it," said Ray. "What if he got excited and landed a blow?"

"Then there would be one Taharan the less.—Watch out! Now the Kungoras

are going to it!"

With a howl like jungle beasts, the black men were on their feet and rushing to the firelight with spears and painted shields waving above their heads.

At the same time the boom-boom-boom of the hollowed log resounded, the huge drum that the Muta-Kungas used for sending alarms through the forest.

"Now it's getting good!" exclaimed Dan, forgetting his attack of indigestion. "I wondered whether the natives were going to forget the old tom-tom."

"Boom-boom-boom," went the big drum like a challenge, and at that the Kungora dancers lined up in two bands facing each other and howled defiance and threats back and forth.

"What's going to happen?" whispered Ray clinging to Dick's arm. "Are they really going to kill each other?"

"Can't say. Ask the Mahatma. He knows this tribe."

"If they do slay a few warriors, it will be an accident," said Mahatma Sikandar. "This is a dance of battle and they sometimes forget it is not the real thing."

"How terrible!" cried Ray.

"Can't you make them be reasonable?" asked Dick as the Hindu watched the apparently enraged savages.

"Reasonable? What human being is ever reasonable?" asked the wise man. "Are your own people reasonable when they slaughter each other with guns and poison gas? No, the savages are on a low plane, but the civilized men are also far from the path of wisdom."

"Go it, Mutaba!" shouted Dan, clapping his hands.

The guide and chief warrior of the Kungoras was dancing in front of his own band, shaking his spear in the face of the rival leader. The pair rushed together furiously, leaped back and returned to the attack, while their rolling eyes and thick snarling lips expressed murderous hatred.

Behind each leader swept the warrior ranks, brandishing their weapons, guarding with their shields and pretending to attack and retreat in wild convulsive rhythms.

Their bodies, dripping with sweat, gleamed in the firelight, the whites of their eyes flashed furiously and foam gathered in the corners of their mouths as they jerked and writhed in mimic warfare.

All the time the drum kept up its beating, ever faster and wilder, like the pulse of a fever patient. To this boom-boom-boom was added the yells and shrieks of the frenzied Kungoras, and above the din rose the excited chatter of monkeys in the tree tops and the shrill outcries of parrots and other birds. Even the beasts in the depths of the forest had caught the tense excitement from afar, and the black jungle echoed with the roar of lions and the trumpeting of elephants.

"What a night!" gasped Ray, tightening her grasp on Dick.

"It's a grand show!" exclaimed Dan. "Wouldn't miss it for a big league ball game!"

"Reminds me of the witch-hunt," said Dick in a low voice. "Remember the night Cimbula was picking out victims for sacrifice?"

"Gee, I thought I was a goner when that black fellow grabbed me," Dan ejaculated. "Say, let me tell you I have dreamed of that many a night and started up in a cold sweat."

"That was horrible!" Ray answered. "Every second I expected that witch-doctor to pounce on me."

"Well, Mahatma," said Dan, "you did a good job to tame those wild Kungoras. How did you ever teach them to be good? How did you make them obey you?"

"By the power of the mind," answered the Hindu. "The spirit of the wise is master of the wildest savage. Watch me, and you shall see."

Fascinated, the two boys and Ray looked on, while the Mahatma leaned back, closed his eyes and seemed to put the force of his mind upon the frenzied dancers.

At first there was no response. The dance was more furious than ever. Then, one at a time, the warriors seemed to come to their senses. Man after man lowered his weapons, dropped quietly out of the ranks and returned to squat before the fire, all pausing to make a hasty prostration in front of the wise man before they sat down.

The Mahatma did not open his eyes until the notes of the big drum had faded out into silence. By that time all the blacks were seated and once more eating quietly.

"It's a miracle," said Dick.

"It sure is," answered Dan. "Listen. Even the wild beasts in the jungle have

quieted down."

"There is more to this than I can understand," whispered Ray.

"Those Hindus know plenty of things that are beyond me," Dick answered.

"I thought it was all the bunk, at first," said Dan, "but now I think the old man is the real article."

"Wait until you go to India where the masters are," Dick continued. "Then you will see miracles that even our Mahatma can't understand."

"I'd love to go," said the girl. "Africa is thrilling enough, goodness knows, but India fascinates me."

Before the feast broke up, Dan, Ray and Dick slipped away, too tired to hold their eyes open.

CHAPTER XIV

TO THE RESCUE!

The next morning before dawn had penetrated the jungle, Dick awoke from a troubled sleep with a voice sounding in his ears.

"Arise my son! Now is the time to set forth."

Springing from his bed of leafy branches and soft skins, Dick saw his faithful Kurt pacing back and forth near by, while Kurul, stretched under a mango tree, was snoring heavily.

The two devoted tribesmen had guarded him, taking shifts through the night. Near his resting place Ray and Dan were still sound asleep, exhausted by the excitement of the night before.

Dick paused a moment to look at the sleeping girl, whose flushed cheeks and

dark tumbled hair made a pretty picture, but again the voice was in his ears, and he recognized it as the Mahatma's.

"Take the horses and set out to find your father. Now is the time."

Dick could not see the Hindu. A few drowsy natives were stirring about the camp, but the wise man had sought a hiding place in some hut. Yet the Boy King knew that his adviser was guiding him by sending his message as before, and he hurried to get his force together.

Snatching a hasty bite as he moved about, Dick made up a party of picked men. First he selected Kurt, Kurul and Raal, dependable fighters; then Mutaba, for his knowledge of the jungle, and then a number of first class warriors from the Gorols and Taharans, as many as there were horses to mount.

Mutaba seemed to require no explanation. It seemed as though the Mahatma had told him where to go and what to do.

In a few minutes the party set out, with Ray and Dan following in the rear, rubbing their eyes sleepily. Veena rode with them, looking very fresh and happy. Since Raal had won her heart by rescuing her, the little savage girl was no longer jealous of Ray and wanted to be her friend.

As for the Mahatma, he stayed in the camp, promising to guide them from his resting place.

The trail of the fleeing Arabs was not hard to follow, as there were plenty of hoof prints in the soft earth of the forest, and the undergrowth gave them no chance to stray from the narrow path.

Yet Dick saw how wise had been the Mahatma's advice to make no attempt to follow in the previous night's darkness. The way was crooked as a snake's trail and passed on narrow strips of hard ground between treacherous swamps, while sometimes a fallen tree was the only bridge across a sluggish stream.

The mist hung heavy over the forest, so that the depths were veiled in gray shadow and the sun could not penetrate the low-hanging fog, though it soon warmed it until it resembled the steam room of a Turkish bath.

"Glory be!" exclaimed Dan, yawning and mopping his wet brow. "This is a

terrible place to be lost. I'd rather be back on the desert. There you can see where you are going, at any rate!"

"Don't make a noise," cautioned Ray. "We don't know what enemies may be lurking about."

"That's a fact. Mobogoma and his blacks may be behind any of those trees, waiting to shoot us full of arrows and make us look like a pincushion."

"Yes. Or the Arabs may be close by. And that terrible Jess Slythe."

"I hope he is!" Dan exclaimed. "I'd like to get my hands on that fellow."

"Don't, Dan! It makes me shudder to think of it. He wouldn't think twice about killing you in cold blood."

"I'm not scared of him!" boasted Dan, who always liked to show off a little before his sister. "If I could meet him in a fair fight, I'd soon show you who is the better man."

He was interrupted by the sound of a distant drum. The noise came from some native camp, that might be miles away and the message it tapped out in code seemed to convey a lugubrious warning.

"Gosh, that's enough to make a fellow want to creep in and hide," muttered Dan. "Suppose it is a signal for some war party to attack us!"

"It does scare a person," Ray admitted. "Here in the jungle everything is so terrifying and the drums get on my nerves."

Dick was far in advance at the head of the party with Mutaba.

"What do you make of that drum?" he asked.

The guide shook his black head and grinned.

"Is it a war drum?"

"No, Bwana Dick."

"Is it a warning from Chief Mobogoma to some other tribe?"

"No, Bwana Dick. Pay no attention to that drum."

"Tell me. If we are in danger I've got to know about it."

"I tell you, Master," said Mutaba. "The black fellows have drums for war. They have drums for other things, too. This drum tells a man's wife, 'I am on Snake Island, hunting with my friends and we killed much meat.'"

"Is that all?"

"No. Listen, now it says more. It says, 'I ate so much last night that I am too heavy to walk. I won't come back until tomorrow night.'"

Dick laughed. "That's like a 'phone call from the office. What does the man's wife say?"

"Nothing." Mutaba grinned. "Wait until he get home. Then she say plenty!"

"I guess it's the same the whole world over," smiled Dick. "Say, this is fine! The fog is lifting. And look, we are getting out of the forest."

Mutaba cautioned for silence and, dismounting, ran ahead to see what was before them, while Dan halted the column.

He awaited anxiously until the guide returned and explained in awe-struck tones:

"Ahead of us is a wide clearing on high ground. A great bird is there with broken wings. It is terrible magic."

"Are the Arabs there? And did you see Jess Slythe?"

"Yes, Bwana Dick. Slythe is there, but the others are leaving. I think they are afraid of the giant bird with broken wings."

"Well, I'm not!" cried Dick. And he shouted back to his followers. "Forward men! Let's go!"

The warriors let out their horses and on approaching the cleared space they scattered among the open trees and charged in from different angles. Before

Dick's eyes was what he expected, from Mutaba's description: the *Meteorite* crashed and helpless.

Instantly he guessed what had happened.

Slythe had landed there with his prisoners whom he had taken to Mobogoma's camp. Then after being driven out he had tried to escape with Professor Oakwood, his remaining captive, and had crashed on the take-off.

As Dick neared the plane he could see Jess working about it, while his father, tied by the wrists, sat on the ground, looking very wretched and hopeless. No Arabs were in sight.

"Don't worry, Dad! Your troubles are over!" shouted Dick as he galloped forward, while behind him thundered the hoofs of his rescue party.

The professor gave a great shout of delight. Jess Slythe cursed and drew his revolver, firing wildly, but the range was too great. He emptied his gun without effect and before he could reload, the tribesmen were almost upon him, yelling and brandishing their weapons. Already arrows were whistling about his ears, as the riders shot from the saddle and Jess Slythe saw that his only chance for safety was in flight. Cursing like a madman he waved his empty gun at the riders, then dashed for his own horse and put spurs to it.

"After him, men!" shouted Dick, and he saw the riders hot in pursuit. But as for himself, he was not so keen to overtake Jess Slythe as to hold his father in his arms.

Out of the saddle he leaped and the next instant he was embracing the old man and laughing, almost crying in excitement.

"Oh, Dad, this is wonderful!"

"My boy! My boy!" the older man exclaimed, and after giving Dick a big hug he held him off at arm's length and surveyed him.

Dick made a splendid showing in his garb of a savage king, clad in the skin of a wild beast and carrying primitive weapons, and his father was proud of him as well as astonished.

"I always trusted you to come out all right!" he exclaimed. "Rex Carter said I did wrong to let you run loose in Africa, but I told him you were able to take care of yourself better than most men."

"But at that, you never expected to hear of me crowned with the ancient diadem of the Taharans and Gorols," laughed Dick. "Say Dad, what do you think! I found a Hindu wise man who says that crown was once owned by King Solomon himself."

Professor Oakwood did not try to laugh off this story. Instead he answered seriously, "There are more strange things in the wilds of Africa than I ever dreamed of. I must talk to your wise man."

The father and son had much to say to each other. The professor explained how Jess Slythe had tried to fly with him that morning but the plane had made a faulty take-off and crashed before it got far from the ground.

"And Jess had a stiff row with the Arab scoundrel, Abdul," said Professor Oakwood. "That's why the Arabs left in a huff, and Jess was trying to patch up the plane."

Dan and Ray had joined the party now, while most of the tribesmen gathered about, staring at the damaged *Meteorite*. One by one, the men who had been pursuing Jess Slythe returned. The clever scoundrel had given them all the slip, and as he was mounted on a fresh horse, there was little chance of catching up with him.

"Give it up as a bad job!" observed Dan. "Say, I'll meet that crook some day and, boy! How I'll make him suffer!"

"He will be punished sooner or later," said Professor Oakwood. "No villain escapes in the long run. Sometimes the penalty is delayed, but somehow, sometime, the evil-doers pay for their wickedness."

"Is that why you never get excited, Dad?"

"Yes, Dick, I am philosophic about life. Believing as I do, I can take things as they come."

"You and the Mahatma would have a lot to talk about," said Dan eagerly.

"Say, that wise old bird has everything all figured out. He's wonderful!"

Ray laughed.

"Dan is funny," she said. "First he disbelieves everything, but once he is convinced, he swallows all he is told."

"Oh, come now, Ray," exclaimed her brother. "You should be the first to admit that Old Santa Claus—I mean the Mahatma—is the real thing. Why, without him we would have been killed by the savages and you would not have been rescued."

Dan went on to explain the Hindu's power to send his thoughts through space and to control animals by his mysterious gift.

"Seeing is believing!" laughed Ray. "When I actually *see* all that, I'll believe it."

But Professor Oakwood was inclined to take the Mahatma seriously. "I am anxious to talk to this wise man from the East," he said. "There is nothing I should like better than to learn more about his occult power."

"You will have the chance today," said Dick. "He is waiting for us at the camp."

"That's where you're wrong," said Dan. "Some mysterious power tells me that he is on his way here."

He gravely closed his eyes, placed one hand on his forehead and raising the other one spread his fingers rapidly and closed them again. "Hocus-pocus! Abracadabra! Now-you-see-it. Now-you-don't! Here comes the Mahatma now!"

Ray saw a suspicious twitch at the corner of her brother's mouth and cried, "Dan Carter, you're spoofing us!"

Dick looked hastily in the direction of the jungle trail by which they had come and saw figures moving through the trees.

"Say, you foxy rascal!" he exclaimed. "It's easy to guess what 'mysterious power' told you that the Mahatma is on the way. It was just good eyesight!"

Sure enough, the litter bearers were now at the edge of the clearing and the Hindu could be seen plainly moving toward them.

"I told you so!" cried Ray. "All this crystal gazing and the other miracles can be explained just as easily. I bet the Mahatma has been laughing at you all the time."

Both Dick and Dan paid no attention to her outburst. Already they were running to meet the old man, whom they regarded as their benefactor, and soon they were leading him in triumph to the plane where Professor Oakwood was standing.

Dick introduced his father and the two elderly gentlemen shook hands. They were totally different in appearance, the professor so spare and erect with thin, alert features and the Mahatma, stout, even pudgy, with his flowing beard and dark intelligent eyes.

"I am grateful to you for helping us out of a great danger," said Professor Oakwood. "My son tells me that you have used your strange science to save our lives."

"I know but little," said the Mahatma gravely, "but what little knowledge I have is at your service."

"How can I ever repay you?"

"Your son has offered to repay me a thousand times over," replied the Mahatma. "When he shows me the ancient crown, engraved with symbols of knowledge, I shall be the happiest man in the world."

"That's right," Dick cried. "I'll take you back to the land of the Gorols. That's where the crown is guarded."

"It's going to be a long hard trek for a fat man," blurted Dan. Then he blushed and stammered, "Excuse me! You're not so *terribly* fat! What I mean is, it's a hot trip across the desert. I minded it myself."

The Mahatma smiled. "Don't apologize, my son! And have no fear about the long journey, for my crystal tells me that we shall fly there through the air."

"Oh, you mean in the plane. That's where we are all out of luck. Jess Slythe crashed it this morning."

"So my crystal told me," said the Hindu. "But we do not need that plane. Another one is on the way now. It is many times larger than this one and can carry us with ease."

"You mean my father's plane?" Dan was excited at the prediction.

"Did you not say that your father had an airplane that could fly with us—even to Holy India? Behold, it is flying toward us even now."

Dick, Dan and Ray all searched the sky for a glimpse of Rex Carter's cabin plane, but there was not a speck in the blue.

"False alarm!" laughed Ray. "Lucky we have horses!"

"You're going to admit that you're wrong," teased Dan.

Dick produced his binoculars from the case that hung over his shoulder and studied the heavens but there was no trace of a plane to be seen anywhere.

"Not yet, my son!" said the Mahatma. "We can go to the fringe of the forest and rest in the shade. It will be an hour before the plane appears from the west."

He signalled to his bearers and they carried his litter to the nearest clump of trees, while Professor Oakwood walked alongside, conversing earnestly with the wise man.

The others followed and soon all were comfortably seated in the shade, and happy to be out of the blistering African sunlight.

Ray, Dan and Dick had plenty to talk about for a while but presently Ray became drowsy in the heat and yawned.

"I need a good sleep," she declared. "I've had too much excitement."

"What I crave is a good lunch," said Dan. "Why didn't somebody bring a picnic basket?"

His head sank between his knees and he dozed off but suddenly Dick shook him by the shoulders and the distant roar of engines was the first thing he heard.

At first Dan thought he was dreaming, then he sprang to his sister and shouted in her ear, "Wake up! Wake up! Look, Ray! There comes the plane!"

Ray ran out into the clearing, shouting and waving her arms.

Dan and Dick followed her and yelled at the top of their voices.

"This is silly," said Dick, finally. "What's the use of shouting? We could never be heard above the noise of the engines."

"It's too far away to see us," groaned Dan.

"But they are sure to see the wrecked *Meteorite*" Dick assured him.

"That's so. If they keep straight on, they will pass right over it," said Ray, then her voice broke as she exclaimed, "Look, Dan. It's banking for a turn. The plane is starting the other way!"

CHAPTER XV

READY FOR NEW ADVENTURES

"Quick, Dan, let's get a fire going!"

Dick Oakwood was taking no chances. He shouted orders to Raal and the other tribesmen and they rushed about getting dead branches and brush from the forest. Soon a huge fire was sending up a column of smoke.

Evidently the pilot was searching for the lost party, for he flew the plane slowly. Dick Oakwood was in a position to sympathize with Rex Carter, the anxious father hunting over the jungle for some trace of his children. Dick had gone through so many hours of worry lately that he knew how terrible was the

suspense that the unhappy man was suffering.

While he felt sure that the wrecked monoplane would be seen, he made doubly certain of it by sending up a signal that would attract the pilot's attention from miles away.

With his eyes straining at the cabin plane, he suddenly gave a great shout:

"Hurrah! They have seen the fire. Look! Now they're banking again."

"Oh Dan!" cried Ray. "It's coming straight toward us. I'm so happy! I could almost believe in your old Mahatma now."

"He's a wise old bird," Dan asserted. "It's coming out just as he said it would."

The natives had sighted the cabin plane and expressed their feelings in different ways. The Kungoras took to the woods in terror. The Gorols, clutching their weapons, dodged behind rocks and bushes, ready to fight off the flying demons if they should prove hostile. Only the Taharans, reassured by Raal, stood their ground without fear, believing that the Boy King would protect them. But even they were a little uneasy as the giant plane flew above the clearing and its shadow swept over them like a great hawk's.

"Fear nothing!" cried Dick to encourage them. "They are my friends."

"Tahara hal!" shouted the warriors lustily.

Professor Oakwood, standing beside the Mahatma, shook the Hindu's hand. "You are a good prophet," he said. "It is just an hour since you said the plane would be here. And now it comes on the dot."

Sikandar smiled and sent his warning to the Taharans in the open space. "Scatter to the woods, make way for the friendly eagle."

As the tribesmen scampered to safety, the great plane banked and leveled for a landing, while the pilot searched for a safe spot. A minute later it was on the ground with its three powerful motors still. The door flew open and Rex Carter leaped out to catch his boy and girl in his arms.

The big, ruddy-faced business man was almost in tears, so great was his relief.

"I had given you up for lost!" he exclaimed in a choking voice. "I never expected to see you alive again!"

"How did you know where to look for us?" asked Ray, hugging and kissing her father.

"It was Hassam. The fellow knew about the tribes that Jess Slythe traded with and directed us here. But it was a hopeless search, or so it seemed. Why you might have been hidden in that jungle and we could have passed close overhead without seeing you."

"It must have been terrible for you," said Ray, clinging to him.

"And how you must have suffered!" exclaimed her father. "If ever I lay hands on that scoundrel who stole you away, I'll make him wish he had never been born."

"Same here!" Dan clenched his fists and glared about as though he expected to see the treacherous Slythe lurking near by.

Rex Carter clapped his son on the shoulder and looked at him affectionately. "You're a great boy!" he said. "These adventures have hardened your muscles and tanned your skin. I was wrong to let you out of my sight so long, but now that it's over, I feel that it has made a man of you."

Dan eagerly related all his experiences since he had parted from his father and soon Professor Oakwood and Dick came to shake hands and exchange congratulations.

Later Rex Carter was introduced to the Hindu seer, who received the wealthy business man with quiet dignity. Carter was impressed for though the Mahatma wore nothing but a saffron-colored loin cloth, he was as majestic as though he were clad in the robes of a king.

Dan explained how the wise man had come to Africa in search of an ancient crown, on which was the symbol of perfect wisdom.

At first Rex Carter was inclined to take it lightly, but when he learned that the diadem was probably the same one that Dick Oakwood had worn in the land of the Taharans, he could hardly restrain his impatience.

"I'll fly you there, today," he said. "By sundown we will all be in the realm of the Boy King."

"I accept your offer with thanks," said the Mahatma.

"And after that I'll take you to India. Any place you want to go!" continued Carter. "You have done more for my children than I can ever pay for. Pack up your belongings and we will take off for Tahara now."

"My belongings are here," said the Mahatma, displaying the square of black cloth which contained his crystal.

"Is that all you own?" The millionaire was startled.

"That is all. More would be a weight to drag me from the higher plane where my spirit dwells."

"That's all right for a Hindu sage, but it would be all wrong for an American business man," Rex Carter answered, thinking of his vast factory, his town house and country estate, his yacht and automobiles.

With only a bow for reply, the Mahatma went a little way off, where he summoned his faithful Kungoras and took leave of them.

Mutaba threw himself on the ground and howled with grief and the others wailed in unison. They had lived in peace and happiness under this wise man's rule, and though they had sometimes been impatient to go on the warpath, they now realized that they were losing their best friend and adviser. They begged him to change his mind and stay with them but the Mahatma assured them that the time had come to say goodbye and urged them to follow the ways of peace and kindness as he had taught them.

Meanwhile Dick was instructing Raal, as leader of the tribesmen, to return to the Kungora village, recover their ponies and begin the long trek home across the desert. The plane could carry only a limited number.

"I'll be glad to take the Princess Veena in the plane," said Rex Carter. "And of course, Ray, Dan and Dick, besides the Mahatma."

But Veena would not consent to parting from Raal, whom she regarded as her chosen mate, and Raal was equally certain that he would never trust the girl to the demon bird.

With great difficulty Kurt and Kurul were induced to go along in the plane. Until the last minute the Stone-Age men hung back, fearful of a strong magic that might destroy them, yet curious to experience the sensation of flying through the air.

"Plane good!" said Dick giving Kurt a push toward the cabin door.

"Sure! Big bird good!" Dan laughed. "Come on, Ray, show them you're not afraid to go in. Then they will be ashamed to be scared."

Finally with a grunt of desperation Kurt took one leap that landed him inside the cabin. Kurul followed, helped by a shove from Dick and a minute later the motors roared, the big plane taxied with many bumps over the clearing and finally took off.

"Tahara hal!" gasped Kurt.

"Tahara hal!" echoed Kurul feebly. And the two husky savages clung to each other like scared children as they saw the jungle far, far below.

That same evening the pilot of the cabin plane sighted the cliffs of Gorol Land and before sunset had made a safe landing near the Big Spring.

Queen Vanga and Chief Wabiti came out to receive the visitors but Kulki walked between them and showed that he was having difficulty in keeping the former rulers from flying at each others' throats.

Since the failure of their plot with Cimbula, each had blamed the other, and their friendship had turned sour.

Now they joined in greeting the Boy King with due reverence and ordered a feast that promised to tax even Dan Carter's powers. Dick assured them that Raal and the other warriors were on their way home and that the search for the

Princess Veena had been successful.

The following days were busy ones for the Boy King. Accompanied by his father and friends, he set out on a tour of inspection to see that all was in order in the land he ruled. Proudly he pointed out to his father the industries he had started going.

"Just think," he said, "these people lived like Stone-Age tribes. They did not know how to build houses or weave cloth or make tools out of metal. It is going to be interesting to watch them advance in civilization."

"I can send out motor trucks with machinery," said Rex Carter, "and start you off right. And I'll send a few guards with repeating rifles to keep the natives from starting trouble. I'll even send you a machine gun or two."

"No thanks, Mr. Carter! I don't want *that* brand of civilization. We have enough factory towns and machine guns elsewhere. I'd like to start something better here."

"In that case I advise you to blot out that big sign on the desert," said his father. "That word 'Gold' will attract some greedy adventurer, and before long your whole population will be wiped out."

"You're right, Dad! It's a word that spells trouble."

Dick gave orders to the Taharans and the Gorols to scatter the rocks that formed the letters and destroy every trace of the sign, and then led the party to the cave where Umba had painted the walls with pictures of animals.

"These are marvelous!" cried Professor Oakwood. "Just as fine as the paintings in the caves of Spain and France. I could spend a whole day here."

Leaving the rest of the party with Umba, the crippled painter, Dick Oakwood and Mahatma Sikandar proceeded to the cave of the Great Gorol, where he had left the ancient crown. The entrance to the cavern was guarded by tribesmen, stationed there for that purpose, and when Dick and the Mahatma approached, they bowed low and cried, "Tahar Tahara, hal! Welcome, O Master."

Taking a couple of pitch pine torches, Dick led the way through the passages of the prehistoric mine, pointing out the seams of gold-bearing quartz.

But the Hindu paid no attention to the rich ore.

"Make haste, Dick Sahib," he said. "I would feast my eyes upon the ancient diadem and its magic inscriptions."

"Patience, O Mahatma! Patience!" laughed Dick. "One more turn and the passage ends in the temple of the Ape-god."

Soon they reached the small, square room where, upon the block of stone, reposed the crown of the two tribes.

Mahatma Sikandar prostrated himself before it, murmuring a chant of thanksgiving, then held his torch close to the massive circlet of soft gold and gems. His keen, dark eyes were gleaming with excitement as he studied every detail of the relic engraved with symbols.

Dick Oakwood picked it up and held it so that the inner surface could be seen and the Mahatma gave an exclamation of delight.

"These are the magic signs!" he cried. "Behold the wisdom of the ages engraved by seers many thousand years ago!"

"Do you understand it, Mahatma?"

"I understand it? Not I! Only a glimpse of its profound wisdom has reached my soul."

"Then what good will it do you?"

"I have recorded every detail of the inscription *here*." The old man tapped his forehead. "The picture of that crown is in my brain like a photograph. Soon I shall go to Holy India and there in the remote caves and temples, I shall speak to the masters who are far wiser than I."

"And will those wise men tell you what it all means?"

"Little by little! Bit by bit!" replied the Mahatma. "Each of these holy men will be able to interpret a part of the meaning. I shall visit the cave hermits in the Himalayas and the devotees in the temples, who recline on beds of spikes. I shall even go to the fastness of Tibet, where the lamas spend their lives in the search

for truth."

"The temples of India! The Himalayas, with Everest the highest mountain in the world! The forbidden land of Tibet! What wonderful sights you will see!"

"Would you like to see Holy India, my son?"

"Would I? Say, I'd like nothing better than to be there with you!" exclaimed Dick. "It would be a real adventure to visit that land of mystery."

"The crystal has told me that you shall accompany me," said the Hindu. "And that before many moons."

"Do you mean it?"

"I have spoken."

"But what about my kingdom? How can I leave these people? They trust me. They need me."

"Raal is a strong warrior," said the Mahatma. "He can rule while you are gone, and Kulki, the clever Gorol can be his chief adviser."

"I hate to go away and leave them to the mercy of Arab slave raiders," said Dick. "After all, being a king, means responsibility. Suppose Jess Slythe should start another raid while I am gone. He could wipe out the whole population."

"That evil man will not trouble your land. Certainly not for a long time. Perhaps never. So you are free to fly in the great plane and see the wonders of Holy India."

"Great!" exclaimed Dick. "And what about Ray and Dan? Will they come too?"

"My crystal says they will be with us. Also your father and Rex Carter."

"I'd like to take Kurt and Kurul along," said Dick. "It would be interesting to have Stone-Age men in the party. I'd like to know what they would do in the great world beyond the desert and the jungle."

"What will be, will be," answered the Mahatma quietly. "And now, my son, this is my request to you: say no more to me about the ancient crown and the symbols engraved on it. The image is clear in my mind. By talking about it, the sharp outline will become dim and cloudy. Promise!"

"Yes, Mahatma, I promise. Until you speak of it, I remain silent."

"Come then. Let us go!"

With this future of travel and fresh adventure to occupy his mind, the Boy King could hardly wait until Raal and his warriors returned. Meanwhile preparations were made for the flight to India. Rex Carter had to return with Professor Oakwood to the Pomegranate Oasis to wind up the affairs of the solar eclipse expedition.

"I'm taking Ray and Dan along," he said. "I'll feel safer to have them in sight."

"But let's work fast, Dad," cried Ray. "I want to set out for India as soon as we can."

"Patience, kid sister! Patience!" laughed Dan.

"Don't talk like the Mahatma. It gives me the jitters," Ray exclaimed. "Something tells me that I'll be sorry I ever met that man. It's one thrill after another when he is in the picture. I like it—but it makes me nervous."

A few weeks later the big cabin plane returned to the land of the Boy King to find all in readiness for the take-off to India. Raal had been appointed viceroy, with Princess Veena sharing the honors as his wife. Professor Oakwood had been hard at work collecting material for a book and specimens for museums, and was reluctant to leave the Stone-Age tribes.

"Don't worry, Dad. We are all coming back some day," Dick promised him as the party took off on its search for adventure among the mystics of India.

Far below on the desert the whole population was gathered to wave goodbye to Tahara as the great wings bore their Boy King away. "Tahara hal!" came their

farewell shout, growing fainter and fainter in the distance as the plane headed eastward toward the home of mystery and romance.

THE END

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