FINEST HOUR

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Winston Churchill's African Adventure

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Finest Hour

SPECIAL ISSUE 2022 • NUMBER 201

Concluding a Remarkable Year
A Message from the Executive Director

What a time it has been, these last three years. The Covid pandemic forced many changes on the world to which we all had to adapt, the International Churchill Society (ICS) being no exception. Sadly, we lost friends and family members, but we also took our lead from the example of Sir Winston Churchill and persevered through stern times to emerge not only transformed but reinvigorated.

In 2020 we had to close down our offices at the National Churchill Leadership Center at the George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Since, however, ICS staff—like our members—are scattered all over the world, we were already accustomed to working through the internet to carry out our business. Consequently, we never missed a beat. We continued to publish both *Finest Hour* and the *Churchill Bulletin* right on schedule.

We also found new ways to provide members with additional programming, ways that we will continue to use in the future. When forced in 2020 to cancel plans for our annual conference to meet in person, we changed the format to an online conference broadcast live from Churchill College, Cambridge—the school created at the behest of Sir Winston to promote the study of new technology.

This year, with the easing of the safeguards brought on by the pandemic, we have had an unusually busy time. While we have now been able to return to our Washington offices, we are continuing the use of new technology to fulfill our mission. All of our programs are either broadcast live on the internet or recorded for future broadcast. This includes our annual conference. Consequently, we now reach more people than ever before. Already, you can view the presentations from this year's conference in Kansas City through our website and on our YouTube channel.

This past summer, we presented our Sir Winston Churchill Leadership Award to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. In another example of how we have adapted to technology, the ceremony took place through a video link between 10 Downing Street, where Prime Minister Boris Johnson presented the award, and Kyiv, where President Zelenskyy accepted it. We also commemorated the event with a special issue of *Finest Hour*. We immediately followed up this achievement with a second special issue celebrating the friendship between Churchill and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

ICS has always been an evolving institution, and this adaptability has enabled us to fulfill our mission for more than fifty years. We could not have done this without the continued generous support of you, our members. In an unprecedented move, we now present to you a third special issue for the year. Prior to 2022, we had published only two special issues since the launch of *Finest Hour* in 1968. Please accept this final issue of the year as an expression of our gratitude for your commitment to keeping "the memory green and the record accurate," as our late Patron Mary Soames liked to say.

Our editor, David Freeman, has written a story that we hope you will find an enjoyable addition to your holiday season. It bubbles with Churchillian fun and reminds us of our attraction for the Great Man. **Finally, may we ask you to make a year-end donation to ICS to help us continue our mission? Making this fully tax-deductible donation is easy. You can use the envelope attached inside, visit winstonchurchill.org/donate, or email me directly at jreash@winstonchurchill.org.** Come, "let us go forward together."

Justin Reash
Executive Director, International Churchill Society

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From the Editor

Winston Churchill's African Adventure

Late in 1907, Winston Churchill, thirty-three years old and already Under Secretary of State for the Colonies in the Liberal government of Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, made an extended tour of the British-controlled regions of East Africa. He wrote about his travels in a series of five articles published in *The Strand Magazine*, which he subsequently edited together as the short book *My African Journey*, published in 1908. This material, along with letters he wrote during his tour, forms the official version of events.

But is that all there was to it?

The following novella is a *jeu d'esprit*, a work of fiction that reimagines Churchill's travels as an adventure story that could not be fully told—until now. We begin with the conceit that everything that follows is a true accounting of events but, for reasons made apparent in the story, had to be suppressed due to high matters of state. While some of the episodes are inspired by passages from *My African Journey*, they bear no closer resemblance to the truth than that. None of Churchill's original text is quoted here, and even the letters to his mother "reproduced" in the text are fabrications.

The narrative follows Churchill's true itinerary up to a point before diverging into a covert operation purely of the imagination. Along with Churchill himself, some of the characters in the story are real, including his traveling companions Gordon Wilson, Edward Marsh, and George Scrivings. The Colonial Secretary, Lord Elgin, and the colonial governors of Kenya and Uganda, all met in this narrative, are also real, as are the royal personages who appear. The rest of the cast, however, spring from the realm of fantasy.

We present this story to you as a holiday bonus and in gratitude for your support. This is not the first time that we have published a short work of fiction. Longtime members will recall 1992's *The Boer Conspiracy: A Tale of Winston Churchill and Sherlock Holmes* by John C. Woods. We felt that, after thirty years, we were somewhat overdue in presenting readers with another stocking stuffer. Enjoy!

David Freeman, *December 2022*

Winston Churchill's African Adventure —1907—

A Novel by David Freeman
Introduction by the Rt. Hon. The Lord Dobbs

Winston Churchill and the Meaning of Christmas

The young Winston did not get much exposure to the spirit of the traditional family Christmas—his parents often absconded, leaving his mischievous boyhood talents to the care of others. Perhaps that was why as a parent himself he seemed determined to make up for lost times.

Christmases at Chartwell were noisy eruptions, as children's laughter mingled with the sound of Winston's own exuberant if uneven singing voice. The swimming pool was heated to steaming excess, charades were played, snowmen built, presents exchanged, and much of it captured in his sparkling paintings. My favourite is *Bottlescape*, a vast bottle of Christmas brandy surrounded by what he termed a "bodyguard" of lesser beings.

And, of course, moments by the roaring fire when he read, recharging his intellectual as well as his physical energies. He would have rejoiced in *Winston Churchill's African Adventure*, the tale that David Freeman has penned with such pace and wit, and which wonderfully captures young Winston's irrepressible, sometimes wayward nature. I hope you will enjoy reading it during this holiday season as much as I have done.

Yet at other times Winston was forced to spend Christmas apart from his loved ones, foraging for money in North America, or on wartime duty. Then, as now, there were so many wars.

If that first Christmas in Bethlehem was a moment of celestial magic, it was also a moment of threat. We glibly throw around promises of peace and goodwill, yet these were never gifts that Winston took for granted. It was on perhaps the most tumultuous Christmas of his lifetime, in 1941 when the United States had just entered the war and at last the free world could see a light glimmering in the dark, that he brought together both the enduring spirit of the season and the endless challenges of life.

On Christmas Eve he broadcast to the world from the White House, where he was visiting President Roosevelt. Winston bid us "make for the children an evening of happiness in a world of storm....Let the children have their night of fun and laughter, let the gifts of Father Christmas light their play."

Beautiful words. Yet, as always, Winston found the deeper purpose: "Let us grown-ups share to the full in their unstinted pleasures before we turn again to the stern task and the formidable years that lie before us, resolved that, by our sacrifice and daring, these same children shall not be robbed of their inheritance or denied their right to live in a free and decent world."

Winston and his words are as relevant today as they were then. That, of course, will come as no surprise to the readers of this magazine. The inspiration lives on.

Michael Dobbs, *December 2022*

Chapter One

London

The Colonial Office, Whitehall

September 1907

The chimes of Big Ben were striking 11 am when the vast double doors of the office of the Colonial Secretary opened and a private secretary emerged to say, "Lord Elgin will see you now, Mr. Churchill."

Winston Churchill was still just thirty-two, but had already been a Member of Parliament for six years and a junior minister for nearly two. His dark red hair was now fast receding, but his frock coat fitted over a frame still slim enough to remind people that he had been a soldier not so very long ago. To some he was the Coming Man. Less kind observers thought him a pushy upstart.

Churchill stepped into the wood-paneled and marbled splendor of the office of His Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies. An enormous globe dominated one corner of the room. At the far end behind a vast and highly polished walnut desk sat Lord Elgin, the personification of the British Empire, the nerve center of which he now controlled.

The 9th Earl of Elgin exuded the relaxed confidence of a man who knew his business. His manner, his grey shovel beard, and his own formal dress combined to project the strength of his position as the manager of colonies on every continent and in every ocean. Previously he had served as Viceroy of India when Churchill was stationed there as a mere subaltern of cavalry. If there were anything unusual about Elgin's current position it was that he was a decidedly "conservative" Liberal in a Liberal government. But Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was a fellow Scot. "And auld Scotland counts ferrr something yet," reflected Churchill, "especially when it came to solidarity among the haggis eaters of Westminster."

Churchill himself had been a Conservative as recently as three years before, when, as a backbench MP wholly committed to Free Trade, he took violent exception to the decision by the Tories to adopt a system of protective tariffs. Churchill's crossing of the floor in 1904 to join the Liberal opposition proved fortuitous. The following year, the government fell, the Liberals took office, and the new prime minister gave Churchill his first step up the ministerial ladder. There followed a smashing Liberal landslide in the General Election of 1906. Inevitably, tongues wagged to say that young Churchill was simply an opportunist on the make, just like his father! He was impulsive and impatient, a young man in a hurry—in a hurry to achieve a destiny that would lead to his becoming prime minister at the earliest possible age. Churchill, in truth, dreamed exactly that.

All this Elgin knew well. Nevertheless he had established a warm relationship with his under secretary. He also knew that Churchill had turned down Campbell-Bannerman's offer of a more prestigious office precisely because the Colonial Secretary was a peer. This meant that Churchill was the only spokesman for the Colonial Office in the House of Commons, the true cockpit of legislative power. Although Churchill was not yet a member of the Cabinet, he had effectively become a front-bench speaker at the age of thirty-one.

In fairness, Churchill had turned out to be no mere placeholder. He threw himself into the heavy business of managing the colonies and had just successfully negotiated agreements with the old Boer Republics of South Africa that transformed them into self-governing elements within the empire. Churchill himself had fought the Boers in 1899. He had even been taken prisoner by them, and it was his sensational escape that had finally catapulted him into Parliament. He had now proven that he could beat his sword into a ploughshare and make peace with old adversaries. That being achieved, Churchill was prepared to face fresh challenges.

"Good morning, Churchill. Please take a seat," said Lord Elgin.

"Good morning, your lordship," replied Churchill.

The private secretary withdrew, closing the door behind him while Churchill moved across the immense room to the chair positioned to the right of the Colonial Secretary's desk. On the other side of the desk, a small dog bed lay on the floor. Curled up in this and snoring loudly lay a pug, the name of which Churchill well knew, although he pretended

ignorance when in Elgin's presence.

"I wanted to speak with you before you begin your travels during the autumn adjournment," said Elgin. "You have given yourself a heavy schedule I see."

"Yes sir," Churchill responded, "the French army manoeuvres this month and then on to Italy, Malta and Cyprus."

"All of which is simply a prelude to your grand tour of East Africa," Elgin gently commented. The Colonial Secretary understood that part of his responsibility was to keep the overly eager young Churchill firmly in check. He was not altogether reluctant to have his busybody assistant out of the country for an extended period of time, but worried that the notoriously impulsive Churchill might do something to cause an incident that would embarrass the government. It was partly to caution Churchill about this that he had summoned him to his office.

"The Royal Navy has agreed to place at my disposal HMS *Venus*, one of the *Eclipse*-class cruisers," said Churchill. "I shall embark at Valletta and travel from there to Cyprus. From there...."

"Do nothing to encourage the Cypriot nationalists," interrupted Elgin. "Their desire for union with Greece cannot be viewed by His Majesty's Government as being consonant with our ability to maintain peace in the Levant."

"No, sir," Churchill dutifully agreed. "I propose to take the line that we will be more impressed by the sound of argument than by flag-waving."

"Sound, indeed," said Elgin.

Having disposed of that point, Churchill continued, "From Cyprus we shall travel through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea. I propose to visit Aden and Northern Somaliland before finally disembarking at Mombasa to begin the overland portion of the tour."

"And from there it is to be simply a holiday of big game hunting for you, is it?" Elgin asked in such a way to convey that this was more of a directive than a question. Already the Colonial Secretary was sensing that Churchill's tour was looking more and more like a Royal Progress, instead of the private venture originally proposed. And at this point, Churchill had yet to depart London.

"There will be the usual formalities at Nairobi, Entebbe, Khartoum, and Cairo, sir," Churchill allowed, "but beyond the business of inspecting a guard of honour upon arrival at each capital and attending a reception dinner afterwards, there is nothing official on our itinerary. I will be travelling with my late father's brother-in-law Lt. Col. Wilson of the Horse Guards. We are both anxious to engage in the sort of shooting offered nowhere else in the world but Africa."

"And yet your private secretary is going with you?" Elgin persisted."Merely to coordinate the formalities, sir," Churchill replied. The colonies seldom receive visits from officials at our level of government, and Edward Marsh knows the department better than anyone. He will handle only the professional matters. My man Scrivings will look after all of my personal needs. His wife will be keeping house for my brother while we are away."

All this Elgin accepted without comment. Churchill had committed himself. If anything irregular transpired during his undersecretary's "holiday," Churchill would have to do the explaining to the prime minister. Elgin had his own defence secured. Nevertheless, he now shifted slightly in his seat knowing that he was about to take the conversation into new and potentially treacherous waters.

"We have started to receive reports of some unusual activity in the region of the Ankole Kingdom of southern Uganda," said Elgin. Churchill raised his eyebrows, and Elgin continued, "Reports from Hesketh Bell, the governor in Entebbe, are sketchy and difficult to credit. It could be something; it could be nothing. One can never tell from a distance just what is happening deep in the interior of Africa."

"Just what has Entebbe reported, sir?" queried Churchill.

"That there are wild rumours about unusual activities near the point where the Alexandra Nile forms part of the border between our Uganda Protectorate and German East Africa." Elgin stood up and walked Churchill over to the globe to point out the locus in quo. "As you can see," Elgin continued, "the region is as remote as anything can possibly be. Goodness knows how the border was ever agreed upon. The river only makes up a small

stretch of it before it is relieved of the task by this parallel out to Lake Victoria."

While the Colonial Secretary had been droning on, Churchill wondered to himself yet again if the rumour he had heard back in India were true: that Elgin started each day with cold porridge and prayer. Churchill pulled himself up just in time to ask, "And does Entebbe have any theories about the cause of the rumours?"

"Disease is one," replied Elgin. "Sleeping sickness has decimated the coastal populations of the lake. The Tsetse fly requires water and abundant flora to flourish. The same conditions obviously exist along the river."

"But perhaps there are other," Churchill hesitated slightly, "more sensitive possibilities?"

"It has been less than ten years since the Fashoda Incident, as you well know, Churchill," Elgin stated as he walked his protégé back to the desk. When the Colonial Secretary sat back down, the pug made a loud snort and resumed snoring.

"I gave an entire chapter to the subject in my book *The River War*," Churchill said as he also sat, having waited for his alleged mentor to do so first.

"Precisely," said Elgin.

"Have you inquired about this with the Germans, sir?" asked Churchill, "If it is disease, their side of the river should be equally affected."

"Or not," said Elgin. "There seems to be little population at all on their side. I did have a quiet word with the German ambassador during the reception for their revolting Crown Prince at Buckingham Palace last week. After waiting a sufficient number of days, he sent me a private message to say that he had checked with Berlin, which claims to have heard no such rumours at all." A silence ensued.

"But...," said Churchill.

"But...," Elgin replied, "the Kaiser's government is not altogether to be trusted. Well, you have met the man." Churchill nodded. "It was only thirteen years ago that the Germans stole a march on the Belgians to secure control of the northwest corner of their portion of East Africa. That is just upriver from where these rumours originate."

"What would you like me to do, sir?" Churchill had been anticipating this moment but did not want to break in too soon. "Make inquiries while in Uganda?"

"Just so," replied Elgin, only slightly put out by his underling's taking control of the conversation. But the Colonial Secretary had become used to this by now: he had more than a year of half of experience with Churchill already. "Ask a lot of questions while you are in Entebbe. You're good at that; they will expect it. I want to know about the sources of information. How reliable are they? What has been done to investigate the claims? But be discreet. At all costs, we do not want to do anything to alarm the Germans. They may well be telling the truth, and we do not want to be seen provoking an international incident ourselves."

"Very good, sir," replied Churchill. He had his marching orders.

Rising now to indicate the conversation was over, Elgin said, "You can cable your findings to me when you reach Khartoum. That way Hesketh Bell does not sense I am not completely satisfied with his reports."

Churchill nodded, shook hands with Elgin, and took his departure. In doing so, he privately mused, "My idea of hell would be having to lead a Scottish regiment, representing a Scottish constituency, and being made to marry the daughter of a laird. Aye, perrrrish the thought."

After Churchill shut the door behind him, Elgin resumed his seat. The pug finally awoke and walked over to his master. "And is it snack time, my boy?" asked Elgin. He reached onto his desk and removed the lid of a small jar, from which he withdrew a biscuit. This he handed to the pug with the words, "There you go, Winston."

Chapter Two

A Letter Home

Aboard HMS Venus
At sea near Aden
19 October 1907

Dearest Mamma,

We shall reach Aden tonight and so I take the opportunity to write. Uncle Gordon and Eddie Marsh met us at Malta, where we boarded this magnificent ship. I have been given a cabin with two splendid rooms, the larger of which includes a balcony overlooking the waves.

Uncle Gordon is very much excited about the shooting prospects we shall soon be facing. He is determined to bag "his" lion and talks of little else. I sense he is not altogether saddened to be away from Aunt Sarah for such an extended period of time, but you will know Papa's sister better than I do.

I am so glad that you have now reconciled yourself to Eddie continuing with me. When you first asked me to dismiss him due to his circle of friends and their known propensities, I felt torn. He is quite the best man the Colonial Office have on staff, which is why I chose him. Certainly he has more than vindicated my decision, proving invaluable even when we spent fourteen hours preparing reports about Cyprus under the sultry sun of the Red Sea. I simply cannot do without him.

I trust that Mrs. Scrivings is looking after Jack's domestic arrangements as well as her husband is presently looking after mine. I have taught Scrivings bezique to pass the time on our voyage. He is learning rapidly and I fear will soon surpass my own playing, so the exercise could prove to have been a costly investment.

We should arrive in Mombasa by the end of the month. I will write from East Africa to tell you of our triumphs on the hunt.

Ever your loving son,

Winston

Chapter Three

Mombasa

Churchill stepped from the gangplank of HMS *Venus* onto the terra firma of British East Africa smartly dressed in a dark two-piece suit with a narrow bow tie, a pith helmet atop his head, and a walking stick in hand. Col. Wilson, also in pith helmet, and Edward Marsh, with a large valise in one hand and a smaller one in the other, followed behind. Churchill's valet, George Scrivings, came next, carrying some large baggage and directing a small army of porters bringing along the rest.

There was rather a lot of luggage, and most of it belonged to the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies. None of it came inexpensively. Since assuming his first government office two years previously, Churchill had finally been paid a salary, unlike backbench MPs. Extended a handsome line of credit by the finest shops in London, Churchill, like his parents before him, quickly exhausted it. He bought his steamer trunks from J. W. Allen and his portmanteaus —made of sumptuous leather and specially ordered for this excursion—from F. Best & Co.

Scrivings was in a way a family heirloom, having previously served Churchill's late father Lord Randolph. The family retainer now undertook the responsibility of transferring the younger Churchill's impedimenta into a waiting wagon, while Churchill himself went to greet the local dignitaries who had gathered to meet him.

There stood, in tropical white uniform, the District Commissioner, whose responsibility it was to advise the native officials of the city and, just as often, to remind them of the meaning of "advice." He greeted the newly arrived dignitary with, "Welcome to Mombasa, Mr. Churchill. I trust you had a pleasant voyage?" The commissioner behaved admirably throughout the under secretary's time in the city, but Churchill never did learn his name. Turning to the tall officer next to him in the uniform of the King's African Rifles, the commissioner said, "May I introduce Maj. Marley?"

"How do you do, Major?" said Churchill, whose turn it now was to make introductions. "This is my uncle, Lt. Col. Wilson of the Royal Horse Guards, and my private secretary, Mr. Marsh." Introductions made, the men organized themselves into a line. Churchill took up a position between the commissioner and the major, Col. Wilson on the other side of the major, and Marsh just slightly away and a shade behind his four superiors. They all stood to attention to face a colour guard, and a small military band played "God Save the King."

After the anthem, Maj. Marley said to Churchill, "We have only a small guard of honour for you to inspect, sir. The governor thought it best to hold off on a large ceremony until you reach Nairobi. He understands you may be tired after a long voyage."

"Never too tired to answer the call of duty, Major," said Churchill, who set great store in the observation of formalities. "Lead on." The major escorted Churchill to where a file of a dozen soldiers stood to attention. "Present H'ARMS!" bellowed the NCO standing at the end of the line. Churchill stepped forward

to pass down the file with Maj. Marley, sword in hand, discreetly following one pace behind. The dark black faces of the soldiers stood out against the sharpness of their uniforms. "Most impressive, Major," Churchill remarked after completing the review. The NCO bellowed, "Order H'ARMS!" and marched off his detail. The formalities having been completed, Churchill shook hands with the commissioner and major with the promise of looking forward to the reception dinner that evening. He then turned to search for the transportation Scrivings should have readied by then to take his party to their hotel.

Churchill, Wilson, and Marsh made for the place where Scrivings was standing next to a carriage to transport the men and a wagon, now loaded, with the baggage. As Churchill made for the carriage, a white man in civilian dress approached him and said, "Welcome to Africa, Mr. Churchill. Michael Bishop of the *East Africa Star*." Bishop had a noticeably Irish accent. "The arrival of the Colonial Under Secretary is big news."

"How do you do, Mr. Bishop?" Churchill replied courteously before, for the second time in ten minutes, introducing his uncle and secretary. Turning back to the reporter, Churchill said, "I take it you would like to ask me a few questions, Mr. Bishop?"

"If you would be so kind, sir." Bishop had an ingratiating way about him.

Churchill turned to Scrivings, "You go ahead to the hotel with the wagon and have my bath ready when I arrive." Scrivings signaled his understanding and mounted the wagon. Churchill then turned to Marsh and, in a lower voice, said, "You had best go with him, Eddie. I trust you have our legionnaires?" Marsh quietly tapped the smaller valise still in his left hand and then got into the wagon with Scrivings.

Churchill turned back to Bishop. "Now there is room for you to join us in this carriage. You may ask what questions you can during the time it takes for us to reach the hotel." Churchill, Wilson, and Bishop got into the carriage, the driver pulled off, and Bishop made his opening gambit with the inevitable question, "What is the main purpose of your visit, Mr. Churchill?"

"To get away from bloody Irish journalists," thought Churchill to himself before speaking the platitudinous answer that Bishop knew was coming. "Officially I am here to inspect our East African territories and recommend to the government the best means of fostering their further economic development." Churchill paused before continuing. "Privately, we are here to hunt game."

The carriage took a small bump as it continued bouncing along the heavily rutted roads of Mombasa. Although it was still early in the morning, the equatorial sun was rising fast. Accustomed to it all, Bishop continued with the standard line of questions, "And what will be your itinerary?"

"From here we shall take the railway to Nairobi," Churchill answered, believing he knew as well as Bishop how the conversation would go from beginning to end. "From there we shall go on to Kisumu and cross Lake Victoria to Uganda. After visiting that protectorate, we shall make our way by stages down the Nile through the Soudan and thence to Egypt."

"Revisiting the scenes of earlier triumphs?" Bishop was not a complete hack. He knew that Churchill had participated in the great Battle of Omdurman in 1898 and written a massive two-volume account of *How I Pacified the Dervishes*, as some wags called the magnum opus.

"I understand Khartoum has developed considerably since I was last there nine years ago," Churchill chose to respond.

With the carriage now pulling up in front of the Hotel Kenia, Bishop knew to signal the conclusion of the interview, "Certainly it will be a more pleasant journey than what you experienced on your previous visit."

"The only danger is expected to come from your wildlife, particularly the insects," Churchill said while exiting the carriage. "In any event, I feel we will be quite safe."

Bishop turned a sly grin on Churchill and, in his heaviest Irish, asked his final question. "As safe as a walk in the Phoenix Park, Mr. Churchill?"

Churchill looked sharply at Bishop before simply saying in a jovial tone, "Pray it is a good deal more safe than that." The Under Secretary for the Colonies then turned to enter the hotel relieved to be free from the Irish journalist, whose name he

never forgot, unlike that of the District Commissioner.

* * *

Shortly thereafter, in his suite at the Hotel Kenia, Churchill lay luxuriating in a hot bath. Nearby, Marsh sat on a chair holding a page of notes and briefing his master. "We have received the following from Governor Sadler: 'The Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill & party are granted a complimentary license to shoot such game as is allowed by the schedules of the game Regulations, during their tour through East Africa.'"

"Splendid," Churchill purred before sinking down under the soapy water and popping back up again like a stately whale.

Marsh continued, "And the governor is making his personal train available to you for the journey to Nairobi. There is both a sleeping car and a dining car. Major Marley, whom we met this morning, is to accompany us. The engineer has instructions to halt where so ever you command. Evidently there is to be a specially arranged shooting platform on the train, but it is not clear to me from the description what that will be like."



Chapter Four

A Second Letter Home

Simba, East Africa
3 November 1907

Dearest Mamma,

After two days of speeches, functions, and inspections in Mombasa, I have traded my homburg for a pith helmet. We boarded the Uganda Railway two days ago and began our journey upward and inward into the interior of the Dark Continent. Never have I travelled in such unusual style.

The governor has provided us with use of his train, and it has all the normal amenities. When we first arrived at the station, however, we were taken to the front of the locomotive and shown our "shooting platform." Set just above the cowcatcher was an ordinary bench such as you might find in Hyde Park. To this had been added a footrest. There is room enough for four. And so I, Eddie, Uncle Gordon and Maj. Marley of the King's African Rifles—who is accompanying us to Nairobi—climbed aboard this most splendid conveyance for a journey through a wonderland of prehistoric beasts.

We have seen zebras, giraffes, rhinoceros, and ostriches. Whenever I saw anything at which I desired to shoot, I merely had to wave my hand to bring the engine to a halt. We had our first go at some antelope, of which there are here many different kinds. Whether we hit any animals or no, however, we could not tell. Certainly they scattered in all directions. We decided, therefore, that our perch on the locomotive was more ideal for the vistas it revealed than for the sport that it provided. And so we halted at this village on the savannah to make excursions inland. One feels that this is also more sporting for the animals: better that they should be preyed upon by the dismounted rather than from an iron horse. Uncle Gordon has had the best of it so far. His bag today included two hartebeeste, one gazelle, one bustard, and a wart-hog.

In this last lies a tale. The hunting of these fierce and monstrous pigs must be undertaken using spears while riding a horse at full gallop, for such is the speed of the beasts that they will suffer an attack no other way. I undertook to carry out the chase in the prescribed method, but Uncle Gordon—still in search of his lion—decided that he would follow along slowly on horseback with his rifle. Should the much-hoped-for lion appear, he would dismount and shoot as the opportunity presented.

Our first pig led us a merry chase for three miles of open country. The danger is that the ground is so potted with holes that the rider is torn between giving his keen attention to the earth and the pig. Take your eyes off the ground, and you may spill. Take them from the pig, and you lose your prey. For the unfortunate cavalier who is unhorsed, circumstances become reversed. The hunter becomes the hunted should the pig turn about and bear down upon him with gleaming tusks. Despite the perils, I remained in the saddle and slew my gallant enemy when he suddenly turned about while I was still very much in the saddle and came upon me like a leopard. I struck with one mighty thrust and plunged the spear deep into his flank.

In my enthusiasm, I dismounted to inspect the prize. As I did so, I heard a rush in the bushes. Turning to see what new devilry might be afoot, I found charging upon me what I have since discovered to be the mate of the recently deceased. The enraged she-pig was if anything even more irate than her former paramour. And here was the dilemma: my spear was still solidly implanted in the husband! Desperately I tried to remove it, for I carried no sidearm with me as I had when charging at Omdurman. Was I to have been spared a Dervish sword only to be delivered into the jaws of this fierce daughter of Circe? No! The crack of a rifle, a squeal of rage, the death throes of agony. The rest is silence. From a distance of more than a hundred yards, Uncle Gordon had followed my tracks and felled my foe with his rifle and keen marksmanship. Still no lion, but we live to fight another day.

Ever your loving son,

Winston

Chapter Five

Nairobi

Following the safari at Simba, Churchill's party returned to their train and proceeded on towards Nairobi. During this transit, the heavens opened and poured down upon them. Lightning flashed, thunder roared, the winds blew and cracked their cheeks, while torrents of water draped the cars of the Uganda Railway.

Inside, however, all was dry and serene. Seated in the dining car, Eddie Marsh calmly turned over the pages of Homer, which he read in the original Greek and, *inter alia*, probably made him the exclusive source of all his master's classical allusions, for this Churchill had in common with Shakespeare: they both had little Latin and less Greek. Col. Wilson passed the time cleaning his rifle, which had saved his nephew but still thirsted for lion. Churchill himself was smoking a cigar and playing cards with Scrivings when he emitted from his vast repository of English literature:

> Like water shot from some high crag,
>
> The lightning fell with never a jag,
>
> A river steep and wide.
>
> The loud wind never reached the ship,
>
> Yet now the ship moved on!

To this, Scrivings replied, "Bezique, double bezique."

Ruefully Churchill recorded the score on a pad of paper and opined, "Teaching you this game has become the albatross about my neck, Scrivings. My travelling expenses multiply with each hand. Fortunately

The Strand Magazine have now commissioned me to write five articles about our journey at the handsome price of £150 each. I shall then rework these into a book and clear another £500. I may yet emerge from this journey financially solvent."

* * *

The train finally arrived at Nairobi after the storm had passed, leaving a cooler atmosphere for the governor's official welcoming ceremony. The form was much the same as what had taken place in Mombasa, but on a much grander scale. The governor stood "plumed with estridges" in the full dress uniform of his office. A large military band prepared to play the anthem, and an even larger guard of honour awaited inspection. The red carpet was rolled out to the precise point that the VIP would disembark from the train, the arrival of which was timed to the minute. All was set.

Churchill once again went through the familiar ritual of ceremonial welcome, but this time he also had to listen to the governor deliver some overly-long remarks about the significance of the visit and what it meant for the future of the colony, etc., etc. Churchill then had to respond with remarks of his own. There would be another pair of speeches by the two men at the reception that evening. Churchill had dictated both of his speeches to Marsh while on the train. Marsh prepared the texts by setting them down on note cards, using only the key phrases. From these notes, Churchill would make his speech by filling in the connecting words to the key phrases as his rhetoric carried him along. Rather than continue to lose at bezique, he had excused himself from the dining car while still en route to Nairobi and retired to his compartment in the sleeping car, where he spent some time memorizing and rehearsing both speeches right down to the gestures and pauses. In this way, Churchill would be able to create the illusion of spontaneity during his delivery. A large portion of Churchill's life would be given over to preparing his spontaneous remarks.

The dinner at Government House that evening was the best Churchill had been served so far during his visit to Africa, and would remain so until the end of his journey in Cairo. As the guest of honour, he sat at the right hand of the governor. Sir James Sadler KCMG CB FRGS had only recently been knighted. He had been in his present office for two years after having previously served in the Persian Gulf, Northern Somaliland, and Uganda. He moved from Entebbe to Nairobi in 1905 to become the first Governor of the East Africa Protectorate, his predecessors having held only the lesser title of commissioner. He knew Africa, and Africa knew him. He also knew what powerful men who visited this region of the continent most desired.

"How has the hunting been going for you, Mr. Churchill?" the governor inquired. "Have you got your lion yet?"

"Col. Wilson saw some only yesterday, but we have had no luck so far in shooting one," replied the honoured guest.

"We will have to send you out to Thika tomorrow." Sir James responded with the follow up he always gave when this had been the answer to his query. "You are sure to bag one there. Maj. Marley is an excellent guide for such an expedition." Maj. Marley, in fact, had standing orders to use the natives at Thika for "discovering" lions upon request, a task easier said than done but accomplished more often than not. The governor winked at the major, who smiled back, all but sealing the doom for another specimen of the king of beasts.

Neither the governor nor the major, however, had ever before had to deal with a guest quite like Winston Churchill. To begin with, the next day Churchill slept in late. When he finally awoke, he remained in bed and dictated several telegrams to Marsh to be sent back to London. He then had a long hot bath and was dressed by Scrivings before settling down to an enormous breakfast that he loudly announced needed to be "sufficient to fuel the stamina of the determined hunter." By the time the under secretary's party did set off for Thika, the heat of the day had been gathering for hours, and the primarily nocturnal lions had sought out their dens.

When they finally arrived in Thika, Maj. Marley had little hope of the locals discovering any lions for his guests and had resigned himself to the standard backup plan of settling for zebra. Hunters who could not find lions usually hoped for rhinoceros instead, but the chances of that happening were impossibly

remote. So zebra it probably had to be.

From base camp, Churchill's party divided into three. Maj. Marley would escort Churchill to the "lions." A native scout would escort Col. Wilson, whom Marley already had reason to believe might be more successful than his personal charge in finding the real thing, and Eddie Marsh went off on his own with a pair of field glasses and a copy of L. S. Geller's *Guide to the Birds of East Africa*. Scrivings remained at camp to prepare the celebratory supper to be served when the hunters returned home from the hills.

As they set out, Marley looked at Churchill's handsome, and obviously still new rifle. "That is a fine weapon you have there, Mr. Churchill."

".450 double-barrel, had it specially made for me by Woodward." Churchill held up the massive gun so that the major could see the plate on the stock showing the name of the owner and manufacturer. The rifle had been much more expensive than the luggage. Apart from the makers of firearms and travel equipment, Churchill owed money to his bookseller, his vintner, his tailors, his hatter, and his tobacconist. He had yet to make a payment to Thomas Brigg for either his umbrella or walking stick. To his credit, he intended to settle up with all of them—some day.

Maj. Marley knew how to put on a good show. He took Churchill on a circuitous route through the bush that created the impression they had at least tried stalking lions and even managed to follow some "promising leads" that did not, regrettably, pan out. How would Churchill know the difference between lion droppings and those left by a zebra? After an hour or so at this game, and knowing that they had in fact been looking at zebra droppings, Marley brought Churchill to the point where a herd of zebra was clearly in view. "We may not have found your lion, Mr. Churchill," consoled Marley, "but a zebra hide makes a fine trophy." There were also some wildebeest nearby on the other side of a thicket, but their dull brown hides did not look so smart on the wall of a gentleman's home in London.

Churchill grunted his approval. At Marley's suggestion, he began to make his way to a good spot downwind from which to shoot. This position lay in a declivity just below the thicket opposite to the side where the wildebeest stood placidly chewing their cud. Thinking it prudent to stand back but not too far—Churchill could be absentminded when it came to which way he turned with a gun—Marley called, "I will remain here and cover you in the event of any danger." Churchill grunted again and continued moving to his intended firing position when, fully focused on the zebra, he tripped over a stone and fell. "Bloody thing!" Churchill expostulated as he stood up. In his anger, he threw the stone over the thicket and unknowingly struck a wildebeest directly in the face. It was the most accurate shot he got off that day.

Turning once again to the zebra, Churchill became completely absorbed in making his final preparations—so absorbed that he had no notion that he had unwittingly driven the dazed wildebeest into a confused trot that had the effect of startling the other members of the herd. This movement quickly gathered into a stampede. As fortune would have it, the group of wildebeest circled the thicket and started down into the wash, where Churchill was now pointlessly checking and re-checking the sites on his precious rifle before taking final aim at his zebra. He remained completely oblivious of the oncoming danger behind him.

"MISTER CHURCHILL!!" screamed Marley to no avail. Not wanting to return to Nairobi to inform the governor that he had just guided the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies into being trampled to death by a herd of wildebeest, Maj. David Marley of the King's African Rifles sprang into action. He sprinted across the wash directly in front of the oncoming herd, collapsed on Churchill, and rolled him into the thicket out of harm's way.

"Maj. Marley," said Churchill when the dust had settled, "you have caused me to miss my shot."

Churchill and Marley had now to return to base camp *sans* lion, *sans* zebra, *sans* wildebeest, *sans* everything. As they did so, the major felt that as an officer and a gentleman, he had best come clean with Churchill about all that had transpired. "Hmmm," mused Churchill. "You will not object, perhaps, if I write this experience up somewhat differently for *The Strand Magazine*?"

Marley, like Churchill, was a graduate of the Royal Military

College at Sandhurst and felt an affinity for his brother officer. And so the major tactfully replied, "Who am I to gainsay the word of a Right Honourable and Gallant Gentleman?"

Back in camp, Churchill and Marley sat down to the meal Scrivings had prepared. Col. Wilson soon returned to say that his group had in fact spotted a pride of lions but too distant for closing the attack. "At least I had another look at them in the wild," Wilson exclaimed, "Magnificent buggers. Magnificent!"

After Churchill had finished his meal and started on a post-prandial cigar, Marsh wandered in, still marking up in pencil his copy of Geller's *Guide* with notes he was making about which birds he had spotted. "How did the bird watching go, Eddie?" asked Churchill.

"Oh, splendid, sir, splendid!" Marsh exclaimed in his airy voice. "I spotted *Pternistis leucoscepus*, *Pternistis afer*, AND the lesser spotted *Pternistis atrifons*! There was the most beautiful stand of *Phoenicopterus roseus* on that large shallow pool just over there," he indicated with pencil in hand towards a far point on the savannah, "which took to flight like a great pink cloud. Of course, we have already seen a good deal of species of the *Otididae* order, but I am quite certain that I have just seen an *Ardeotis kori*, which we had not so far encountered. And you can see for yourself those *Balearica regulorum* across the way."

All this Churchill took in while quietly puffing his cigar. At the end of Marsh's avian catalogue, the under secretary simply grunted what he hoped would be taken for a sound of affirmation and approval. He had understood nothing of what he had just been told. The only bird present with which Churchill was familiar was the goose that had supplied the tin of *pâté de foie gras d'oie* he had just been served by Scrivings.

Chapter Six

The Growth of the Empire

"My first experience with a hostile enemy came on my twenty-first birthday in Cuba." Churchill had started telling the story of his baptism of fire to Maj. Marley as the hunting party began to make its way back to Nairobi. Col. Wilson, Marsh, and Scrivings had heard it all before—more than once—but Churchill could not resist telling the tale to his fellow soldier. The major courteously listened intently to the under secretary's account while the other three Englishmen moved on far ahead.

"I had gone out with my brother subaltern Reggie Barnes," continued Churchill. "I had just graduated from Sandhurst and was anxious to see some real action, if only as an observer. Reggie was a bit senior to me but of the same mind. So we went to see how the Spanish were dealing with the insurrection in one of their last surviving colonies. We were attached to a column of 5,000 men under the command of Gen. Valdez and marched for several days through the heart of the island without encountering any sign of the *guerrillas*. On the morning of the last day of November, my birthday"—Churchill omitted the fact that it was also the feast day of the patron saint of Scotland—"we were having breakfast when a ragged volley of fire came from the forest. A bullet struck the horse directly behind me, and it fell mortally wounded." Marley made himself look suitably impressed. "The poor horse, a beautiful chestnut, was the only casualty, but the bullet that it took could not have passed more than a foot from my head."

As Churchill finished his highly inaccurate account, a sound somewhere between a growl and a loud whine broke the air. "What was that?" asked Churchill.

"I don't know," said Marley, "but it sounds like some animal in pain. We had better be prepared. It could well be that a lion has just attacked some prey." With that he placed his rifle at the ready and moved cautiously forward. Churchill followed, delighted by the possibility that they might have stumbled onto a lion after all. He clutched his own rifle and prepared it for a leonine baptism of fire.

The rest of the party had already disappeared over a small ridge and could not be seen until Churchill and Marley crossed over themselves. As they reached the top, they saw at the bottom of the other side a solitary giraffe facing directly at them. No lion or any other predator stood in view. Wilson, Marsh, and Scrivings had frozen together studying the enormous animal and apparently uncertain about what to do. As the five men continued looking on, the staff that had been



following behind carrying their camp supplies also came to the top of the ridge and halted.

The giraffe made another whining grunt and turned around. And then Marley saw the cause. "She's giving birth, or trying to," he said. "Do you see? The hooves of the forelegs have just started to emerge." Suspended from the vulva hung two dark protrusions with perhaps a hint of the legs behind them. Marsh held up his field glasses and confirmed the major's observation.

"Would you like to see for yourself, Mr. Churchill?" Marsh passed over the binoculars to his boss, who took them and tried studying the scene. Not being familiar with the hindquarters of a giraffe, Churchill had some difficulty determining what was what. In addition to trying to push out a calf, the giraffe was defecating balls of feces and dripping amniotic fluid.

The Under Secretary of State for the Colonies was not accustomed to close viewing of the miracle of birth and at first wondered where these hooves could be that the major had so recently claimed to have seen. "There appears to be rather a lot going on back there, Eddie," Churchill said by way of covering his confusion.

"Indeed sir," said Marsh. "I believe that the baby's nose may be just starting to appear."

Churchill felt even more miffed that Marsh could make this out without the glasses, but he put them up to his eyes once more. "Yes, I see," he now said casually, having finally brought the unfolding action into focus, helpfully guided by a large nose sticking out of the mother's vagina. "Definitely a nose just to the right of the two hooves."

Unfortunately for the poor mother, she did not appear to make much progress in the delivery from there. "That's an older cow," said Marley. "She's obviously having a difficult time of it. No wonder she's groaning." The party continued to study the giraffe attentively. Eventually, a few more heaves by the mother brought the head of the calf fully into the open, along with one or two feet of leg behind each hoof. And there it all seemed to freeze.

"I fear she may not be up to it," said Marley, who had observed the births of many wild animals on the savannah. "The calf may suffocate, and the old girl may expire along with it if she cannot be relieved of the delivery

soon." He said this in a matter of fact way, like a staff officer stoically reporting casualty figures to a general.

"Can nothing be done to assist?" asked Churchill. Despite his enjoyment of the hunt, he could not bear to see an animal in pain and sank into deep gloom whenever one of his own domestic pets met its end.

"This isn't a lambing in Yorkshire, Mr. Churchill," said Marley "or even a calving in Jersey. If we go up there and try to pull on the legs of that calf, we risk serious injury from a good kick of the mother's hind legs. She's already in pain as it is." The giraffe gave out another loud moan to punctuate the major's observation.

"This I will not stand," said Churchill. "Nor will I allow the animal to suffer." Col. Wilson thought his nephew was going to shoot the giraffe and put it out of its misery. Instead Churchill went back to where the safari crew stood carrying the camp equipment, passed his rifle to one of the team, and demanded a rope. When handed a line that had been used to put up the tent at base camp in Thika, Churchill tied a slipknot in the end and, before anyone could try to stop him, darted down the slope.

As Churchill reached the giraffe's backside, he used his momentum to jump up just enough to slip the knot around one of the baby's hooves. He landed hard and immediately began tugging at the end of the line. Churchill had no idea if he was far enough back to avoid a kick from the mother. Nor did he think about it. Fear had no opportunity to enter his heart, because his heart felt only for the giraffe and her child.

Observing this, Maj. Marley could not at first believe his eyes and wondered how he would explain to the governor that, after saving their distinguished visitor from being trampled to death by wildebeest, he had allowed the under secretary's head to be bashed in by a giraffe. "Serve to Lead!" Marley found himself saying out loud. He turned back and got a second rope from the crewmen, tied a knot, and ran down to join Churchill, who was struggling mightily at the end of his line but with little success.

Marley tried approaching the back of the giraffe with more care than Churchill had shown. After shifting about somewhat and finally stalling, however, he realized that he should abandon caution like the under secretary and trust to fate. Finally, the major jumped up and got his rope around the second foreleg of the calf. "So kind of you to join me, major," said Churchill as they started tugging together.

With the two Sandhurst men pulling in tandem from the rear and the mother continuing her efforts at pushing from the front, more of the calf started to emerge. The turning point came suddenly. With about half of the baby's body extending out, gravity took control. Down came the entire infant giraffe with a thump. Churchill and Marley backed away as the mother turned about to begin licking off her newborn.

Marley ventured to move back in close enough to make a post-natal inspection. "It's a boy, Mr. Churchill." Having set out from Nairobi to beard a lion, Churchill had not killed so much as a guineafowl. But he had just assisted in the growth of the population of the empire by a total of one.

"Splendid! A strapping young lad for His Majesty's newest subject," said Churchill. After taking in the bonding between mother and child for a moment, he added, "The longish face on that little fellow looks familiar to me. Yes, I believe we shall call him V.B." Marley looked puzzled. "Victor Bruce," explained Churchill, but he could see that Marley still did not understand. "Otherwise known as the 9th Earl of Elgin," Churchill elaborated, "our Secretary of State for the Colonies."

Marley grinned. He had never met the Colonial Secretary, but he now knew the Colonial Under Secretary to be a fearless man of action.

Chapter Seven

A Third Letter Home

Aboard SS Clement Hill
Kisumu, East Africa
17 November 1907

Dearest Mamma,

We have now reached the western terminus of the somewhat misnamed Uganda Railway. Although one must take the line right the whole way across East Africa in order to reach Uganda, the tracks presently go no further than Kavirondo Bay, where stands Kisimu, the chief port of the Victoria Nyanza. This mighty lake, larger

than all of Scotland, rests some 4,000 feet above sea level and is nurtured by tributaries from even higher elevations. Here this sturdy volume of fresh water pauses to gather strength before journeying 3,600 miles through jungle and across desert to the land of the pharaohs and pyramids. We stand at the head of the Nile.

To reach Uganda proper, we have embarked on this lavishly appointed steamer. Smartly turned out British officers command an equally smart-looking native crew. We will make a good fifteen knots as we follow the line of the equator across the lake to Entebbe. We shall not want for comfort. There are baths and electric light, a handsome library, and a good table with excellent wine. I shall have a go at winning back some of my money from Scrivings at the card table. Another round of ceremonies awaits.

Ever your loving son,

Winston

Chapter Eight

Entebbe

The arrival of the *Clement Hill* at the pier of Entebbe entailed an even more elaborate ceremony than that which had recently taken place in Nairobi. And everything else was now different: the scenery, as intensely green as Ireland; the climate, hot and steamy instead of the breezy highlands of East Africa; and as for the plants, they had entered the jungle. Even the people were different in Uganda. Hundreds of them were present for the arrival of the Colonial Under Secretary. They wore long white tunics and red caps and breathed an air of urbanity. This was no primitive land, but a proud and ancient Kingdom—one now heavily permeated by Christianity.

Waiting to greet the distinguished visitor stood Henry Hesketh Bell, who had taken over as governor in the Uganda Protectorate when James Sadler moved to Nairobi. Hesketh Bell was unmarried, but there were rumours that he had "gone native" with a local woman, a far from unique distinction among the ranks of Britain's imperial administrators. Whether he had a wife and child hidden away, Churchill never learned. Such gossip did not interest him. The under secretary knew upon what matter he would most keenly be questioning the governor, and it did not involve miscegenation.

Along the pier, a temporary pavilion had been erected. Here Hesketh Bell escorted Churchill following the anthem and inspection of the honour guard. The shelter provided against any squalls that might suddenly materialize. All that greenery did not stem from a dry climate. Deputations were presented to His Majesty's Man from London, including representatives from the European (small), Goanese (larger), and Indian merchant (largest) communities. Greatest in number were the representatives from the Kingdom of Uganda itself, and the various lesser kingdoms and chiefdoms within the protectorate. Churchill dutifully conveyed to each the good wishes of King Edward VII to his fellow sovereigns.

The ceremonies over at last, the official party prepared to travel to Government House. Churchill rode with Hesketh Bell in a tonga drawn by two mules. Behind them Wilson and Marsh rode in a rickshaw. Scrivings followed in a wagon with the luggage. During the drive Churchill remarked to Hesketh Bell about the large number of people (black, brown, and white) riding about them on bicycles. "Really the most effective form of transportation we have, even out in the jungle," the governor informed him. "The bicycle is well suited to the narrow beaten path. It has now got to the point where some of the native chiefs are starting to use them."

The tonga arrived at Government House, and Churchill's party were taken to a suite on the first floor with a sitting room, two bedrooms, and a bathroom. From the sitting room, they could walk onto a wide verandah, heavily covered with mosquito netting, and take in the scenery of vibrant coloured flowers and butterflies dancing against the dark green canopy of the jungle. Yet the business of the day was nowhere near complete. With the assistance of Scrivings, Churchill bathed and put on his evening dress. The reception dinner summoned him to further duties.

After dinner—which was good but not quite so good as he had had in Nairobi, there being as yet no direct rail service linking Uganda to the outside world—the governor and his guests broke up into groups to play bridge. Naturally, Churchill joined the governor's foursome, but, in the absence of any Mrs. Hesketh

Bell (at least officially), the two men were joined by Mrs. Ayres, the wife of a local planter. "The Scots are more than kilt-deep in the British Empire," reflected Churchill when introduced to this dour matron, "and small wonder, considering how many natives were killed by Scottish soldiers to build it. But must they continue with their incessant complaining about how they are 'a poorrr wee people put upon by the English' when a third of our colonial staff and merchants are Scots 'lairding' it over hundreds of millions of the darker races? Bell himself was only half Scottish, however; the other half was French. *Mon dieu.*"

"And this is Dr. Hughes, our Chief Medical Officer, who will make up the fourth member of our bridge party," said Hesketh Bell as he introduced Churchill to a short, stern-looking man with wire-rimmed spectacles resting over a full beard and mustache. "Pleased to meet you, Doctor," said Churchill. To which Hughes replied in a thick Welsh accent, "*Sut mae.*"

"You must be from the north, Doctor," said Churchill.

"And how would you know that, Mr. Churchill?" asked the slightly surprised doctor. "Does the remit of the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies now include even Wales?"

"You said 'sit my' and not 'shoe my,'" replied Churchill. "My colleague, the President of the Board of Trade, is from County Gwynedd. We have developed a warm relationship."

"Ours may be a little five-foot nation, Mr. Churchill," said Hughes, "but we are also known for our giants, look you, and Mr. Lloyd George will be one soon."

"That I do believe," said Churchill, and the party sat down to play cards.

At the next table, Marsh sat down with Hesketh Bell's own private secretary, a young man with bright red hair and blue eyes named McLain. The clerical team partnered against Col. Wilson and Mr. Ayres. The two private secretaries quickly discovered that they were both Old Westminsters. "Didn't I read in the alumni newsletter that you move in literary circles, Mr. Marsh? Poetry, yes?" inquired McLain.

"Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold," responded Marsh, "And many goodly states and kingdoms seen."

"Splendid," responded McLain. "I too am a disciple of Erato. Just now I feel 'like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken.'"

"Bid clubs!" interrupted Wilson. Mr. Ayres harrumphed in agreement.

"I wonder what else we may have in common?" smiled McLain. Marsh smiled back.

As the evening continued, Churchill played poorly, much to the dismay of the Welshman who partnered him. The trouble stemmed from the fact that when Churchill concentrated on something, it monopolized his attention to the neglect of all else. This may have been a splendid trait for mastering the minutiae of government, but not for winning at cards, for he was more concerned with delivering a colourful monologue about his travels in Africa than taking tricks. The court cards he held in his hand abdicated play as Mrs. Ayres skillfully deployed her own knaves.

After being vanquished in the field in yet another rubber, Dr. Hughes gently lamented, "I fear, Mr. Churchill, that we are not the partners of dame fortune this evening."

"But we are fortunate, Doctor, to be in the company of a beautiful dame," Churchill replied smoothly as he smiled at Mrs. Ayres. The Monarch of the Glen faintly smiled back, grateful that she had focused on her cards rather than on the under secretary's epic account of hunting wart-hog and being reminded of the time he charged with the 21st Lancers in '98 or his escape from the Boers a year later or the time he fought on the Northwest Frontier, which for some reason led to an account of the Battle of Assaye, at which the future Duke of Wellington first distinguished himself as a commander in the field. "I confess, Dr. Hughes, that contract bridge is not my best game," said Churchill as he relit the cigar that had gone out at some point during the exploits of Major General Wellesley. "Now give me two decks of cards and one worthy adversary, and I shall demonstrate my mastery of bezique!"

"I do so agree, Mr. Churchill," said Hughes, "but there are few here I have found that know the game. We must have a go ourselves before you leave." Hughes strongly suspected this might be a successful way to regain some of the money he had

lost that evening, even though they had played only for shilling stakes.

"I fear that may not be possible, Doctor," Churchill said as the party rose for the evening. "My official schedule here in Entebbe is quite crowded."

Chapter Nine

Monsters and Dragons

The next morning, Churchill went through his usual routine, got off his telegrams to London, and then met Hesketh Bell in the governor's office at 11 am. The large rectangular room stretched across the ground floor of Government House. Centered in the back wall, double doors of glass opened onto a terrace—protected by the ubiquitous mosquito netting—that provided a fine view of the gardens. At one end of the room stood the governor's desk. At the opposite end, a large map of the entire Uganda Protectorate dominated the wall. Hesketh Bell greeted Churchill, and the two officials sat down to business at a round conference table in the center of the room, where McLain prepared to take notes. "My secretary shares your love of poetry, Mr. Churchill," said the governor as he introduced the two men. "He even writes a bit of it."

"Probably fancies he's Rrrobbie the Burrrrns himself," thought Churchill.

After briefing his guest about the itinerary for visiting Kampala—the seat of Uganda's king—the next day, Hesketh Bell proceeded to give his official visitor a *tour d'horizon* of the present situation in the protectorate, with a focus on future economic development. The rich soil yielded abundant harvests of many commercial crops. The difficulty was transportation for export. Bell stressed the need for establishing a railway link with East Africa and outlined a personal scheme for providing port services closer to Kampala. Churchill apprehended the need for the railway and asked many detailed questions about what would be required. Having dispensed with the "hard" business at hand, Churchill moved on to the more delicate subject. "Now, Bell, about these rumours coming from the south which you have reported to Lord Elgin, do they continue? What have you learned?"

"All we know for certain is the vague second-hand information reported by missionaries in Prince Albertville," said Hesketh Bell, "which is a settlement in the Ankole Kingdom and the closest place with which we are connected by telegraph to the alleged trouble spot." Hesketh Bell stood and took Churchill to the map. "The rumours are coming in from natives who normally live further to the south along the border stretch of the Alexandra Nile. They started moving north three months ago, claiming to have experienced attacks by strange beasts and even reporting sightings of a flying monster. There are also stories of entire villages being cursed and their populations all dropping dead. If it were just that, I would say it must be disease. That is all too common here. But we do not usually get these lurid fairy tales together with a simple outbreak of sleeping sickness. The people of Uganda are not so backward as those in England choose to believe. Well, you can see my dilemma: I could hardly cable Lord Elgin based on mere hearsay that mythical animals are stalking the banks of the Alexandra Nile, but I could not fail to pass along any information when we must also be sensitive to...," Hesketh Bell paused, "political considerations. That is why I had to be as ambiguous as I dared in my report."

They began walking back to the conference table when Churchill asked a leading question: "And undertake an investigation in the meantime?"

"Discreetly, yes," said the governor. "We sent a small patrol to investigate in early September. That was two months ago, and we have heard nothing since. They should have been able to cable a report from Prince Albertville by mid-October at the latest. How overdue are they now, McLain?"

"Five weeks sir," replied the secretary. "I fear they may be lost."

Would Hesketh Bell now affirm this by saying "Aye" or "*Oui*?" Churchill wondered. Instead the governor simply looked at him, raised his eyebrows to present an open-faced expression, and threw his hands apart as though to say, "draw what conclusions you may." "A man with good diplomatic sensibilities," Churchill thought to himself before saying out loud, "Now what do you propose to do?"

"We have been considering two very different plans for following up," Hesketh Bell began. "One is to send the 4th or 5th Battalion of the African Rifles. This would be the most certain way of investigating the situation, but even if we reduced this to sending just a company of troops, such an action could be neither hidden nor discreet. It would almost certainly trigger stories that they have gone to challenge a secret expedition undertaken by a rival power. Even if there turned out to be nothing in that, the rumour would still reach the Germans and Belgians who might suspect...."

"An attempt to encroach on their territory," finished Churchill. "And even though the French have no claims in this region, they will also hear the rumour and decide that with all the distraction going on here over what may simply be much ado about nothing, this would be a good opportunity to send a column of their own to a location they still covet."

"And yet I cannot discount the possibility that the situation *might* be driven by a treaty violation of some kind whether coming from the Belgian Congo or German East Africa," continued Hesketh Bell.

"Therefore any authorization for sending troops should come directly from London if there is risk of an international incident," concluded Churchill, "and that you can hardly request because you have heard people say that someone told them that monsters and dragons are rampaging through central Africa." Hesketh Bell nodded in agreement. "And what is your second plan?" asked Churchill.

"The second plan is much riskier and could well end in failure," answered the governor, "but it has the advantage of being discreet and providing us with a method of plausible deniability should it result in any political trouble with our colonial neighbours. McLain, you came up with this," Hesketh Bell said turning to his secretary, "You explain it to Mr. Churchill."

McLain knew that Hesketh Bell did not want it to appear to the under secretary that it was the governor himself who had devised any sort of wild proposal. Hesketh Bell stood with the safe and sound. If Churchill scoffed at McLain's suggestion, the private secretary would be consigning his own career, and not Hesketh Bell's, to oblivion. McLain, therefore, tried to hedge as much as possible. "It's only an idea, sir," he started, "I don't expect you will think much of it."

"Young man," Churchill intoned, "I make it a practice to propose several new ideas to Lord Elgin each day. Only rarely does he accept one, but, when he does, he has the kindness to admit that it is sound."

"Very well, sir," said McLain still feeling hesitant. He paused for a moment before drawing breath and saying, "Alexander MacCallum Stewart...." At which point McLain paused again as if struggling to remember the rest.

"Oh, bagpipes and Bonnie Prince Charley!" thought Churchill. "Is this Stewart some Bard of the Manse of whom I have until now remained blissfully ignorant? And is this scone fancier before me struggling to remember some dreary lines that this Stewart once wrote in bad verse about the heatherrr in the hills?"

Finally McLain gathered his strength and poured forth, "Alexander MacCallum Stewart is a local man raised in Prince Albertville by a Scottish missionary family. He knows the culture there and speaks the Bantu-based languages of the region." McLain now had Churchill's interest. "Stewart operates a small steam launch that provides delivery services to the Sese Island populations of Lake Victoria. He also acts informally to supply us with news from around the lake especially at the German end, where he probably engages in a bit of smuggling. We don't ask since the information he supplies us from that area usually turns out to be reliable."

"And what are your plans for this Drake of the Equator?" asked Churchill.

Hesketh Bell took them back to the map. He pointed to the west coast of Lake Victoria and began tracing his finger along a thin blue line moving inland while saying, "The Alexandra Nile, the natives call it the *Kagera*, is the largest tributary supplying Lake Victoria, and thus the ultimate source of the full Nile. It rises here," Bell moved his finger over to the northwestern area of German East Africa, "and flows north for 200 miles gathering strength before turning east to form part of our southern boarder until it reaches this line of latitude." Here Hesketh Bell indicated the

same line that Elgin had pointed out to Churchill two months before in London. "From there the river turns southeast into German territory until meeting a tributary at the bottom of the shallow u-pattern that it traces out on the German side. It then flows northeast across the border into Uganda, where the delta is located." Hesketh Bell's finger had returned to its starting position.

McLain now picked up the story, "We propose to engage Stewart to steam his vessel up the Alexandra Nile from the mouth of the river on our side, through the German territory, and on to the border region. Stewart would be posing as a private trader. If the Germans should apprehend him, they will probably think he is simply a smuggler. What could be more plausible than the truth? We would then request Stewart's release, suggesting to the Germans that we have our own score to settle with this 'troublemaker.' If that doesn't work, we would create a pretext for arresting a German citizen either along the border or on Lake Victoria and exchange him for Stewart. Both governments would then pledge a mutual desire for peace in the region and express regret for an unfortunate chain of events." McLain looked at the under secretary very pleased with himself. Churchill, however, felt the conversation had drifted and that the private secretary was taking the long way around the bog.

"If, however, Stewart could avoid capture and make it to the alleged trouble spot," McLain resumed, "he could start to investigate the rumours. After gathering what information he might, Stewart would leave his vessel laid up on the north shore of the river, where it could be of future use, and make his way over land to Prince Albertville to cable his report and wait for further instruction. Obviously our agent will be entering German territory without permission, but the region is so remote and sparsely populated that the hazards of the river are likely to be the greatest dangers that Stewart would face."

Churchill suddenly became deeply interested. Here was daring. Here was intrigue. Here was adventure. What secrets lay hidden up the Alexandra Nile? How can we investigate them without detection? A brave Scotsman and his crew knowingly steaming into potentially treacherous waters for the sake of King and country and hazarding whatever chances man or nature could present! It made Churchill proud of the fact that he had always admired the Scots.

Trying not to reveal his enthusiasm, however, the under secretary simply said, "I should like to meet this Capt. Stewart and question him myself before any decision is made." Hesketh Bell said that Stewart would be at Government House that afternoon and that he would send him to Churchill's rooms when he arrived.

Chapter Ten

Alexander MacCallum Stewart

"Scrivings," said Churchill, "my brother writes to say that I am to take care not to lose you on this journey, for you are the most faithful slave I shall ever have and I shall not be able to replace you."

"I have always found Mr. Jack to be a very wise young man, sir," replied Scrivings.

A mailbag from London had arrived on the morning steamer from Kisimu. After luncheon, Col. Wilson and Marsh left Government House, guided by McLain, to indulge a mutual passion for lepidoptera. Churchill shared their enthusiasm, but he preferred to await the arrival of Capt. Stewart and meet with the Rob Roy of Africa in private. Meanwhile, he read through his post, after first having given close study to the missionary reports about strange goings-on in the south, with which Hesketh Bell had supplied him at the end of their meeting.

Scrivings had also received a letter from home and stood reading it in the sitting room while Churchill worked from an escritoire in his bedroom. "And what news from Mrs. Scrivings?" called out Churchill.

"The children are sad that I will not be home for Christmas," answered the valet, "but my wife has reassured them that I will be returning with rare and splendid presents for each."

"With the money you have won from me playing cards thus far," said Churchill, "the four little Scrivings and Mrs. S. can expect the most precious gifts from the East since the Magi attended upon our Lord."

There came a knock in the outer room at the entrance to the suite. Churchill heard Scrivings answer the door, followed by an exchange of words that included

a telltale Scottish accent. Very soon he heard Scrivings standing at his bedroom door announcing, "Capt. Stewart, sir."

Churchill looked up from his letters to see an enormous black man in dark trousers held up by braces expanding over an immense chest covered in an open neck khaki shirt, the sleeves of which were rolled up to his massive biceps. He was shod in heavy boots and held in his right hand a weather-beaten peaked cap that may have once been white. Churchill took the towering figure to be Stewart's "man" and said, "You can hand your master's hat to my valet." The man stood silent, and did not move. Churchill looked around and said, "Where is your master? I distinctly heard Scrivings announce him."

At this point the black mountain began to speak, in broad Scots, "Misterrr Churrrchill, I dinnae believe you ken the situation. *Ayeeee* am Capt. Stewarrrt."

Churchill, more than taken aback, uttered, "I beg your pardon."

"Dinnae the governor explain to you that I was rrraised by missionaries?" Stewart drawled.

"Yes, that was told to me," Churchill replied, now starting to regain his composure, "but I was not told that you were a native man." Churchill was now thinking that the Kirk had a lot to answer for: teaching the locals Christianity was all very well and good, but teaching them to speak like William Wallace? It was enough to make a man sympathize with the epitaph on the tomb of King Edward I in Westminster Abbey, and one of the few Latin phrases Churchill could remember: *Scottorum Malleus hic est*—"Hammer of the Scots."

Breaking into Churchill's thoughts, Stewart said, "And I suppose a sawed-off Sassenach like yerrrrself thinks he can just make a wee jourrrney up a jungle rrriver about which he kens n'errr a thing?"

"Now, see here, Stewart," injected Churchill attempting to take control of the conversation from this native man whose voice splashed upon his ears like a not-so-wee dram of whisky, "I simply want to ask you a few questions about this expedition that the governor is proposing. How well do you know this river? How well is it monitored by the Germans? Are you confident that you can safely reach the area where these strange rumours have originated?"

"It'll be a clearrr day atop Ben Nevis before those cabbage-eating bastards we are pleased to call the Germans will ever catch me out on the *Bonnie Dundee*!" spat Stewart.

"Dundee? Ben Nevis? Has this fellow in fact been to Scotland?" wondered Churchill. "He certainly has the manners of a Celt. Still, 'a man's a man for a' that.'" Aloud he said simply, "I am afraid I don't follow you, Captain. *Bonnie Dundee*? Do you propose to play the pipes on your journey?"

"Och! Dinnae be daft, man! The *Bonnie Dundee* is the name of me boat," said Stewart, who was by now thinking that Churchill was just the sort of fool the English usually sent out to manage "their" empire, an empire Stewart well knew to have been built and managed by kilts on the ground from Canada to Calcutta.

"Mmm," Churchill simply said, "but if you would be so kind as to give me some details about the river?"

"It's navigable enough for a shallow drrraft vessel like the *Dundee*," said Stewart.

"And you know this because...," led Churchill.

"I may have strrrayed up it a wee bit accidentally on purpose once or twice on business of me own," replied Stewart clearly wary of telling the bloody fool before him about the nature of all of his activities. "There's only one settlement between the mouth of the rrriverrr and the point where we're headed. The Germans call it Wilhelmina. Wilhelmina me kilt!" Churchill doubted Capt. Stewart ever wore a kilt. "And has it not been called Bunazi since the Germans were still swinging by their tails from the trees of the Black Forrest? Well, never mind that. It ain't n'errr so big, whatever you want to call that village, that I cannot slip by it in the dark."

"Capt. Stewart," asked Churchill, "you are certain that you can get through German East Africa undetected?"

"By the mess," Stewart replied, "ere these eyes of mine take themselves to slumber, ay'll de gude service, or I'll ligh i' th' grund for it; aye or go to death; and I'll pay't as valorously as I may; that shall I surely do; that is the breff and the long."

"Capt. Stewart? Capt. Jamy?" mused Churchill, "here was a man that you would follow into the breach." Stewart may have been the most unusual-looking Scot Churchill had ever met, but Churchill could see that the captain clearly possessed the same determined spirit of Bannockburn that had carried the day on the Plains of Abraham. And had not the 78th Highlanders taken the greatest number of casualties of any British unit that day and *still* run the French to ground?

"Captain," said Churchill, "I want you to begin all necessary preparations for carrying out this mission. I shall tell the governor myself that you will be departing tomorrow night. Please report back to me after dinner, and I will give you your final orders."

Stewart nodded and said, "Aye." He had never expected the conversation to end any other way. He put on his hat and departed the room, leaving Churchill to begin making his own plans. For this much he had also decided: he too would be going on Capt. Stewart's expedition up the Alexandra Nile.

Chapter Eleven

Conspiracy

"Impossible!" retorted Col. Wilson when told by his famously impulsive nephew of what he now intended to do.

"But I always take chances!" protested Churchill, "That is precisely how I escaped from the Boers and gained sufficient notoriety to get elected to Parliament."

"But don't you see, Winston?" Wilson replied, "the governor will telegraph your intention to London, and Lord Elgin will waste no time in responding with strict orders that under no circumstances are you to be allowed to go on this madcap journey. The government can deny any connection with Stewart if he is intercepted by the Germans. It cannot deny a connection with one of its own under secretaries of state! If you are taken, there will be an international incident, and your political career will be finished."

Churchill absorbed this unanswerable logic as well as a small child who had just been denied the visit to the zoo that he so desperately had been craving. "Which is why," he now said, "I have not told the governor about my plans."

"What?!" gasped Wilson.

"I take full responsibility for my actions," said Churchill. "No fault shall attach to Hesketh Bell should anything go awry. I have already written out a document sealed in this envelope," Churchill gestured with the same, "a statement completely absolving him of any prior knowledge of my activities."

"And what have you told the governor?" inquired Wilson skeptically.

"That I have on my own authority authorized Stewart's mission, which is to begin tomorrow night. All of which is quite true," concluded Churchill.

"But not the whole truth," said Wilson.

"As the government minister on the scene, I have the power to determine what mere civil servants under my authority need to know and what they do not need to know," Churchill said somewhat officiously.

"And why are you telling me all of this?" asked Wilson. "You have no power over me. Don't think I am going to cover up for you in this foolish business!"

"I am telling you, Uncle, for the simple reason that you are going with me," Churchill calmly announced. Wilson blanched, but Churchill responded by calling in Marsh and Scrivings from where they had been asked to wait in the hallway. "I am afraid that my uncle and I are not feeling at all well," Churchill told the two men after they entered and closed the door behind them. "This could be very serious."

"Shall I fetch Dr. Hughes?" asked Scrivings.

"Don't be a fool, Scrivings," said Churchill. "Tomorrow while I am visiting Kampala, you are to pack my jungle kit in a small bag and do the same for Col. Wilson."

"I don't understand, sir," replied Scrivings. "If you are ill...."

"Which we most certainly will be by the day after tomorrow," interrupted Churchill, "probably near death, Scrivings. I expect it will take at least a week for us to recover if we are to survive at all."

"He's up to something," perceived Marsh.

"That he is, Marsh," Wilson said, finally having managed to retrieve his voice.

"It is very simple, Eddie," explained Churchill, "the colonel

and I are going away on a secret and dangerous mission. I did not tell you sooner because it was vital that neither you nor Scrivings knew about it until it was time to put the operation into effect. The highest level of state secrecy is involved. You and Scrivings are to remain here while we are gone and carry out the agreed-upon cover story that we are both ill."

Wilson started to wonder if any of this just might be true. "Surely not even Winston would dare such a thing without already having authorization from London?" he thought. "Had he in fact been given such authority by Elgin or the Prime Minister and concealed it until now? And why am I being dragooned into the expedition without so much as a by your leave?" In an effort to obtain at least one answer to these questions, Wilson ventured out loud, "Remind me why I am going with you, Winston?"

"For your marksmanship, Uncle. You are the only person skilled enough with a rifle to provide the support we may need and who also just happens to be a member of my family. What could look more innocent than that you should be accompanying me on safari during my tour through Africa?"

"And what might you need me to be shooting at?" asked Wilson.

"Oh, many things," Churchill said in his most blasé voice, "snakes, crocodiles, hippopotami, Germans."

"Germans!" exclaimed Marsh. "Just where are you going, sir?" Marsh already knew that there could only be one answer.

"Over the line, Eddie, over the line," Churchill said gesturing to the south in the direction of German East Africa. "But in silence dread our cautious way we shall feel."

"Sir," said Marsh, "perhaps you had better explain just what it is you are proposing to do."

"Col. Wilson and I will be travelling by steamer up the Alexandra Nile to investigate rumours of mysterious happenings in the south of the protectorate," said Churchill. "The river route is the surest way to get there undetected. It's all very secret because...."

"Because you are not requesting permission from the Germans to transit through their territory," finished Marsh.

"The Germans may be behind it all, Eddie, or possibly even the Belgians, who, let's face it, are Frogs in all but name," Churchill stated calmly, as if that closed the argument.

"But I always believed that you loved the French, sir?" It was Scrivings' turn to interject.

"As a married man, Scrivings," Churchill responded, "you surely understand that there is a difference between love and trust."

"And the government have authorized this?!" Marsh asked incredulously finding it difficult to believe that a Minister of the Crown would be dispatched as a secret agent into the middle of Africa.

"There are wheels within wheels, Eddie." Churchill sought refuge in cliché but went on to add, "I am not free to divulge all, even to you, my trusted friend."

If he had not yet convinced Marsh, Churchill had now succeeded in half-convincing his uncle. "It all *sounds* very official," Wilson thought, "a bit barmy perhaps, but every colonial power in Africa was always up to something dodgy and trying to keep it under wraps." "Very well, Winston," he said aloud, "when do we leave?"

"Tomorrow night," said Churchill. "Capt. Stewart will be here after dinner this evening to discuss final plans before our departure."

"But, blast it all, sir!" exclaimed Marsh, "you cannot go into the jungle like this and leave both me and Scrivings behind. Someone will need to look after you, sir. You cannot do it yourself."

"I was on my own when I escaped from the Boers," said Churchill defensively.

"Out of necessity and for only part of the journey," shot back Marsh, who had heard the story several times. "Now I am scarcely older than you and, to be honest, sir, in somewhat better condition. I know what is required to support you in the field. We have not travelled all this way through Africa without my learning that. Sir, I must insist that I go with you. Scrivings can provide the cover story of illness for all three of us."

"That's the spirit, Eddie!" exclaimed Churchill, "and spoken like your great-grandfather. Remember he fought the slave trade, stood up to Napoleon and was not afraid to die in the line of duty—even if he did oppose hunting. No matter. From this moment, we shall count you

as one of the company." Marsh smiled and then immediately began to wonder what he had talked himself into. Even Napoleon finished his *annus horribilis* of 1812 in better condition than Spencer Percival, Marsh's great-grandfather—and the only British prime minister ever to have been assassinated. If Marsh's facial expression began to change, Churchill took no notice as he said, "I dare say you are not looking any healthier than is Uncle Gordon or myself. Scrivings will have his hands very full nursing the three of us."

"But, sir!" protested Scrivings. "How am I to establish and maintain this pretense of illness? And for how long?"

"Not to worry, Scrivings," Churchill said reassuringly, "I already have everything worked out. You will not need to say anything until the morning after we have left, by which time we shall have quietly slipped away."

Chapter Twelve

A Fourth Letter Home

Government House
Entebbe, Uganda
19 November 1907

Dearest Mamma,

Uganda is a beautiful fairy-tale country safeguarded by her insects. Mosquito netting protects us from the danger of malaria, but the dreaded Tsetse fly carries the sleeping sickness that has depopulated large regions of the country. After removing your boots for the night, you must be careful to turn them over and shake them out in the morning before putting them on again, lest you encounter a centipede.

The steamy heat in this region of Africa is much the same that I experienced twelve years ago in Cuba. To recall some of that earlier adventure, I have brought with me a box of Havanas from London and smoke them in the evening on our verandah while gazing out at the wondrous butterflies. They are immense! Five inches across at least. And what colours: azure blue, scarlet red, vivid orange, old gold and faded crimson. Uncle Gordon and Eddie found the insects so docile—and so intent in feeding greedily upon any putrescent filth lying on the ground—that they could reach down and gently catch them with their fingers and had no need for a net.

Our first day involved the usual formalities and the meeting of many official delegations. Today we have travelled to Kampala. Entebbe is the seat of British administration, but the native king, called the Kabaka, resides twenty-four miles to the north. The road thither is lined the whole length with a double avenue of rubber trees. Behind these grows American upland cotton of higher quality than that grown in the United States. The land here is so fertile that commercial crops thrive in abundance. Uganda is a garden from end to end. We travelled in rickshaws pulled by one man in the front and pushed by three behind. These teams were relieved every eight miles, so that it took us two changes of motive forces to reach our destination.

Although Kampala is home to sixty thousand persons, the city is largely hidden under a forest of banana trees. Rising above this are hills upon which are situated the important buildings including the Protestant Cathedral with thatched spires perched above other primitive materials. There is also a Catholic Mission and a White Fathers' Monastery. The French introduced their faith to this country, but the mission has now been taken over by good English Catholics, which has reduced tensions considerably. Uganda is blanketed in missions, missions of all faiths, and these undertake responsibility for virtually the entire systems of education and medical services that exist in the country.

We were received by the Kabaka at the Parliament House. He sat on his throne draped in a flowing black robe lined with gold. The King is a very polite eleven-year-old boy. He has an English tutor and knows the language well but appeared reticent to speak. The Prime Minister did most of the talking, which is as it should be. Sir Apolo Kagwar KCMG had chairs set out for the Governor and me. We were treated to a display of the swearing in of a chief. One of His Majesty's councillors, a fat little fellow in court dress, prostrated himself before the throne, swore every oath of loyalty known to Kabaka, King, Kaiser, Sultan, or Nawab and then ran from the room with much zeal intent on laying low all of the King's enemies. He returned in a more sedate state of mind only moments later, having successfully vanquished the foes.

Afterwards we were given tea by the Kabaka in his personal residence. Over the biscuits, I noticed Eddie becoming rather chummy with the governor's private secretary. The King, meanwhile, unwound and spoke more freely. He is an enthusiast of football and already claims greater triumphs

in his study of mathematics than I could ever boast. The house is a stately European affair, modest in scale. The walls of the sitting room display portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert on one side and King Edward and Queen Alexandra facing opposite. Under British protection, a dynastic feudal state is developing into what will come to be seen as the Pearl of Africa.

We returned to Entebbe in the afternoon. From here we set off on our journey down the Nile from source to finish. Travel along the early stretches of the river will be by steamer, where navigable. But there are cataracts, rapids, and swamps that preclude maritime traffic moving all the way through. We will circumvent these hazards by land, and so shall continue to alternate between fresh water and shank's mare until we reach Gondokoro, from where we shall travel on the Sirdar's personal steamer all the way to Khartoum. Opportunities for sending cables and post will be few, Darling Mother, until we reach well into the Soudan, so you may not hear from me again for at least a fortnight.

Ever your loving son,

Winston

Chapter Thirteen

Departure

On the evening before the day spent at Kampala, Churchill and his party met in their rooms with Capt. Stewart. The governor had been dutifully informed by Churchill that he, as under secretary, assumed all responsibility for authorizing the Stewart mission to proceed with all haste the following night. This Hesketh Bell accepted as an order as good as one received direct from London. He knew that Churchill had been sending telegrams to the Colonial Office that afternoon and receiving replies, the contents of which the under secretary kept to himself, as was his right. What Hesketh Bell did not know was that three of his guests were due to become seriously indisposed after visiting Kampala.

When Capt. Stewart. arrived to discuss plans, Churchill was fully prepared. "You will have completed all of your preparations by tomorrow evening?" he asked.

"Aye, we will," replied Stewart.

"We?" countered Churchill.

"Me first mate and meself," explained Stewart.

"Good," said Churchill, "but there has been an alteration to the plan. You will now be carrying three passengers."

"Passengers?!" exclaimed Stewart.

"Myself, Col. Wilson, Mr. Marsh, and the Legion of St. George," Churchill calmly replied.

"That's a great deal more than three!" expostulated Stewart for the second time. "I dinnae hae' room on me boat for an entire legion."

"Not to worry captain," Churchill smoothly reassured him. "You will only need room and provisions for three passengers. The legion will easily provide for all that will be required, and...," Churchill dropped his voice to a conspiratorial level, "of course your complete silence about this with respect to the governor. Marsh," Churchill said crisply, "show Capt. Stewart our legion." Marsh opened and displayed to Stewart the inside of the small valise he had been safeguarding for many weeks. It contained fifty gold sovereigns, each bearing the image of St. George slaying the dragon. "These my dear Captain," said Churchill, "are to be yours."

Stewart glanced into his new treasury and quietly said, "We'rrre bought and sold for English gold." Then for the first time that day, something close to a smile appeared on his face as he said in a louder voice, "Welcome aboard to the bonnie Legion of St. George!"

"Now, Captain," Churchill brought Stewart back from the dreams of avarice, "how shall we go about our departure?"

Stewart thought for a moment and then said that he would be in front of Government House the next night at 11 pm with two rickshaws to carry himself and his passengers to the *Bonnie Dundee*. It would be up to Churchill to get out of the building undetected. His first mate would have steam up and the boat ready to depart when they arrived at the pier. Churchill told Marsh to count out five sovereigns and hand them to Stewart. "You will receive twenty more when we get to the boat," Churchill explained, "and the balance shall be paid to you when we have completed our mission." Stewart agreed, took the first of his five legionnaires with him,

and went off to make the final arrangements.

* * *

Leaving Government House the next night undetected required further subterfuge. After putting together a kit bag that each of the three departing men would carry with him, Scrivings went for an evening stroll. He walked outside the front of the building and around to the back just before 11. There he started to shriek like a banshee. When people—including the governor—came running from the building to investigate, Scrivings told them that he had had just stepped on a enormous snake, or believed he had since he could not see very well in the dark, but surely it must have been a snake and not a tree root? Or could it have been a root after all? Scrivings continued blabbering on in this way for as long as seemed necessary for Churchill, Wilson, and Marsh to slip out the front of the building quietly while the commotion was taking place in the back.

All would have gone according to plan except that, having reached the front of the building where Stewart waited with the rickshaws, Churchill suddenly remembered that he must have left his pith helmet on his bed and insisted on returning to fetch it. He handed his kit bag to Marsh and his rifle to Wilson, promptly turned about, and proceeded on his mission of retrieval. Arriving back at the room, however, Churchill found that he was now without the key. He went back to the front of the building and asked, "Eddie, do you have the key to the room?" Marsh said that he did, handed the two kit bags he was holding to Churchill, and said that he would see to the matter himself. But when Marsh did finally get into the room, he could not find Churchill's pith helmet on the bed or anywhere else. And so Marsh traipsed back to the front of the building empty-handed, only to find Churchill wearing his pith helmet and saying, "Eddie, it was in my kit bag the whole time."

By then, however, the disturbance Scrivings had generated behind the building had come to an end. People were filtering back inside, including the governor, who quickly noticed the unexpected activity outside the front doors, where two rickshaws stood parked. Wilson and Marsh had already climbed into the rear conveyance with their kitbags. The colonel held both his rifle and Churchill's. The Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, meanwhile, having just handed his kitbag to the unmistakable figure of Capt. Stewart, was preparing to climb into the first rickshaw at 11 o'clock at night. Hesketh Bell's mind raced to conclusions. "A night on the town perhaps, Mr. Churchill?" he called in his most diplomatic manner.

"Certainly not, Bell," replied Churchill. "I have asked Capt. Stewart before he departs to give us a working demonstration of how he navigates his boat at night." This Hesketh Bell could only accept with a straight face. As the four men were pulled and pushed away in their rickshaws, however, the governor prayed that Stewart had at least enough sense to take the dignitaries to one of the city's cleaner brothels.

When the rickshaws arrived at the pier where the *Bonnie Dundee* was moored, Stewart got out and called to the boat: "Ahoy onboard." What sounded to Churchill like a female voice answered something back, and Stewart turned to the passengers to say, "Gentlemen, if you would please step aboard?" Churchill crossed the gangplank first. After stepping into the small boat, he was greeted by a beautiful young Indian woman. Stewart, following close behind Churchill, said to him, "Meet the first mate of the *Bonnie Dundee*, Mr. Churchill: Mrs. Victoria Stewart."

"*Bonne soirée, Monsieur Churchill*," said Mrs. Stewart.

"Me wee lass was educated by French nuns at the RC mission school in Kampala," explained Captain Stewart. "Her father is originally from Goa but works here trading with the chiefdoms in the south. She is still learning English, but she speaks Bantu as well as I do meself."

"Pray that it is not with a Scots accent," muttered Churchill as he moved forward into the boat.

Col. Wilson and Marsh were also startled to meet Mrs. Stewart, but the manners of the English gentlemen quickly overcame their surprise. When Mrs. Stewart greeted Marsh, he instinctively replied, "*Enchanté, Madame*," and kissed her hand. From there, the two rapidly bonded in French conversation.

As the boat pulled away from the pier, Churchill quietly reassured the captain that there was no cause to be jealous: "Mr. Marsh is not a squire of women."

Chapter Fourteen

The *Bonnie Dundee*

The next morning at Government House, Scrivings opened the door of Churchill's suite to Dr. Hughes, who stepped in and crossed the sitting room towards the open door of the under secretary's bedroom while saying, "I regret to learn that you are feeling poorly, Mr. Churchill."

From what Hughes had just been told by the governor about the goings-on the night before, the doctor expected to find a case of nothing worse than extreme hangover. When Hughes looked into the bedroom, however, he saw an empty bed fully made up. He turned back into the sitting room in wonder and saw Scrivings standing next to a card table covered in green baize. Upon this were set out two decks of cards, a pad of paper, and two pencils. Standing next to these were a bottle of whisky, a siphon, and two glasses. "I understand, doctor," said Scrivings, "that you are fond of bezique."

* * *

While Dr. Hughes and Scrivings sat down to play cards, the *Bonnie Dundee*, with its crew of five, crossed Lake Victoria. They had left under cover of darkness so as to avoid notice, but navigating the archipelago that lay between Entebbe and the mouth of the Alexandra had to wait until daylight. They passed the night quietly at an anchorage Stewart knew not far out from Entebbe, but far enough away to prevent their recall should their cover plan have failed and Hesketh Bell been forced to cable London with the truth. Such a development would certainly have resulted in a swift response from Lord Elgin so heated as to burn up the telegraph lines from England to Uganda.

Following a cold breakfast eaten out of tins, Stewart got up steam and started to make his way through the Sese Islands that he knew better than anyone else on the Victoria Nyanza. After "pumping ship," as he described it, into the vast body of freshwater the British had been pleased to name for their late Queen-Empress, Churchill sat down on a tarpaulin covering some crates, took out a cigar and began the necessary preparations for lighting it.

"There is NO smoking onboard this vessel, Mr. Churchill!" bellowed Capt. Stewart, "Not unless you want to blast us all to Kingdom Come." Startled, Churchill gazed at the commanding officer of the little vessel with a puzzled expression. Stewart simply indicated with a gesture that Churchill should look under the tarp. When Churchill lifted the covering, he discovered two crates labeled "Dynamite." He looked back at Stewart quizzically, but the captain gave only the laconic reply, "I believe I ken me business, Mr. Churchill."

The *Bonnie Dundee* extended thirty feet from stem to stern with a beam of less than a third that size. Vertical poles fixed to the inside of the hull formed the supports of a framework overhead across which a canopy could be rolled out or pulled back as needed to provide cover for the forward end of the vessel. The aft portion was permanently shielded with thin planking, over which was draped an oilcloth for weatherproofing. An aperture in the planking accommodated the funnel of the boat's squat, black steam engine, which rested in the centre, just aft amidships. The deck around the engine was crowded and piled with crates, which had to serve as both seating and bunk space for the passengers and crew.

Captain Stewart helmed his vessel from a bench just inside the stern, where he sat with one hand on the tiller and a stack of firewood in front of him. Marsh had been pressed into the job of fireman, feeding wood into the furnace as Stewart commanded. Carefully Marsh would open the door using a heavy cloth to cover his left hand, feed in the wood with his right, stoke the flames with a poker, and then resume his seat on the bench next to Stewart. Every so often, the captain gave the tiller to Marsh and told him to hold his course while Stewart inspected the engine gauges, applied oil from a can here or there to the machinery, gave his dirty hands a wipe with a rag, and then sat back down to the tiller.

Mrs. Stewart stood in the bow of the boat while Churchill sat on the port side and Wilson on the starboard. Thus the *Bonnie Dundee* had a set of eyes to look out in each direction. From her forward position, Mrs. Stewart provided hand signals that could be viewed by her husband in the back over the pilings of wood, engine, and crates. She knew these waters as well he did, and in this way the narrow passages between the islands could be navigated successfully.

Stewart gestured to Marsh with his free hand and said, "Moving cargo about these islands used to be me bread and butter. But the sleeping sickness has taken so many of the poor wee buggers who lived here that me business has become skint. We're safe enough, though, to pass through here since the breeze will keep the wee Tsetse from settling on any of us." In fact, for all the load she was carrying, the *Bonnie Dundee* was making a good eight knots as the engine burbled and popped, leaving a trail of dissipating black smoke in its wake.

After the boat cleared the islands and moved into open water, Churchill carefully worked his way around the crowded deck to check on his fellow passengers. Marsh looked preoccupied, observing the lake birds through his field glasses, but Col. Wilson appeared to be lost in thought. Churchill broke in to say, "Very beautiful, isn't it, Uncle?"

"Hmmm," Wilson agreed. "We didn't have all this water and greenery in South Africa." The colonel had been aide-de-camp to Col. Baden-Powell during the siege of Mafeking eight years before, at the same time his nephew was also fighting in the Boer War.

"We certainly saw a great deal of veldt," agreed Churchill, "but I was confined as a prisoner for only a month. You were besieged for more than 200 days."

"217, and most of them with your Aunt Sarah," Wilson stated for the record. "Do you remember, Winston, that Baden-Powell asked her to leave for her own safety, and we had the devil of a time persuading her to go?" Churchill nodded. "After we finally had her spirited out of the city with her maid, she ended up on a journey as madcap as this one of ours, until the Boers caught up with her and brought her back to Mafeking. We ended up trading her for one of their horse thieves we had caught red-handed." Churchill smiled at the familiar story, but then his uncle said something unexpected: "Sometimes, Winston... sometimes I wonder, who got the better end of that bargain?"

After this revelation, storm clouds gathered, as they often did on a lake that collected most of its moisture from the sky and not the land. Mrs. Stewart, with the aid of Churchill and Wilson, rolled out the canopy over the forward end of the boat. When the downpour came upon them, Churchill recited aloud:

> In the stormy east-wind straining,
>
> The pale yellow woods were waning,
>
> The broad stream in his banks complaining,
>
> Heavily the low sky raining
>
> Over towered Camelot....

It took most of the day for the *Bonnie Dundee* to reach the mouth of the Alexandra Nile. Rather than start the run upriver in the failing light, Stewart chose to anchor outside the delta. Mosquito netting was draped around the sides of the boat from the poles supporting the canopy, and they settled down for the night with Churchill muttering:

> Canst thou, O partial sleep, give then repose
>
> To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude?

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," thought Marsh.

Chapter Fifteen

Water Lilies

In the morning the *Bonnie Dundee* entered the mouth of the Alexandra Nile.

At frequent intervals and at every turn in the river, they came upon a half dozen or two hippopotami lurking among the water lilies that gently undulated on the surface while flowing downriver with the current or were driven towards the banks by the wake of the steamer. When in the water, although they live in a steamy climate, hippos are the icebergs of mammals. Their large buoyant mass remains almost entirely concealed below the surface, with only their eyes and ears breaking the plane to sense the surroundings. Occasionally their nostrils come up to breathe. This made the animals difficult to detect until the boat came close by.

"These great bastards are not much danger to us," Capt. Stewart reassured his passengers. "They will n'errr attack a steamer in motion. It's the poor wee fishermen in their canoes that are in the way of danger. They can be capsized and crushed as fast as fast you can say auld lang syne. You dinnae find the brutes in deep water. They cannae swim so gude, but in the shallows they can

sprrring up at anytime and finish you with one snap o' the jaws. They're kind o' like women." Churchill noticed that this last statement had been delivered in a softer voice, which Stewart presumably thought could not be heard by his wife at the other end of the boat.

After a time, the hippo sightings became fewer. When they had apparently seen the last of the creatures, Churchill smiled and said, "Sofari, so goody."

A short time later the *Bonnie Dundee* passed into a stretch of the river thick with reeds and lilies. Captain Stewart worried that the propeller would be fouled and he would have the unenviable task of diving beneath the boat to cut it free. As it happened, quite a different problem presented itself. The boat suddenly bottomed out and wedged into a submerged mud bank. Stewart put the engine into reverse, but even at full throttle, the boat would not come unstuck. "Ochh. It's no gude," spat Stewart, "We'll have to kedge."

The captain pulled the anchor hawser out from where he stowed it in a lazarette beneath the stern bench. He set the anchor down at his feet and measured out with his hands a brace of rods that he carefully coiled over the anchor. He then took the remainder of the hawser and wrapped it twice counter-clockwise around the capstan on the starboard corner of the stern, threaded the line carefully across the stern under the tiller, wrapped it twice in a clockwise direction around the port capstan and then told Marsh to walk out the remainder of the line up the port side of the boat, being careful to hold onto the bitter end.

Stewart then picked up the coils of line over the anchor with his left hand and the anchor at the end of the line with his right. "Mr. Churchill," he said, "I'll trrrouble you to take the anchor and carry it out as far to stern as the line I will feed you."

"Now see here Captain, you are much the strongest of us...," Churchill began to remonstrate before Stewart cut him off.

"And do you ken how to operate the engine?!" Stewart forcefully responded. "You dinnae expect me wee Victoria to walk out an anchor do ye? And we will need Col. Wilson to keep watch with his rifle."

Not yet put off and convinced that Mrs. Stewart had probably more than once walked out an anchor in a jungle river, Churchill began to say, "Pray remember, Captain, that you are under my employ...." As Churchill continued with his excuse, Stewart lifted him up and hurled him from the stern of the boat into the water with a great splash. Churchill floundered about until he found his legs and then stood up discovering the water to be only waist deep. Stewart passed down the anchor to the very much under Under Secretary for the Colonies, who proceeded to walk out the line, sinking deeper into the water as he did so. By the time he had gone as far as he could, Churchill was up to his neck.

"Well done, Mr. Churchill," smiled Stewart. "You've permission to come aboard."

Churchill began to swim back to the boat when a thought crossed his mind. "You could have taken the anchor out yourself!" he shouted at Stewart having realized that the kedging would not begin until Churchill was back in the boat and assisting Marsh with pulling the other end of the hawser.

"Aye, I could," laughed Stewart, "but I could nae resist the opportunity to 'Lay the proud usurper low.' 'Liberty's in every blow!' Mr. Churchill, 'Let us do, or die!'"

Precisely on cue a hippopotamus with jaws fully open sprang from the water close behind Churchill.

"JESUS CHRIST AND CHARLES DARWIN!!" screamed Churchill.

Everything happened at once. Churchill began desperately swimming back to the boat with arms and legs flailing. Eddie Marsh screamed, "Mr. Churchill!!" Col. Wilson tried aiming for where the hippo appeared, but his nephew was in the line of fire. Stewart dropped to his knees and reached overboard with both of his tremendous arms in an effort to haul in the under secretary, who, he had not forgotten, was pledged to pay him another twenty-five gold sovereigns upon his safe return to Entebbe. It struck Stewart just then that this probably also meant returning Churchill in one piece and still breathing. The hippo had gone down for a moment, but undoubtedly would quickly spring up again after pushing off the shallow bottom.

Churchill's hands had just reached Stewart's fingertips when the hippo came up for the second time. Two thunderous shots barked out, followed instantly by two explosive thuds. The hippo emitted a blaring scream, rolled over, and floated harmlessly away. "Then bleak and cold is the silent spot," spluttered Churchill, "Where the lilies used to spring!"

With a great heave, Stewart hauled Churchill into the boat and dropped him onto the deck, where he lay gasping for a few moments. When finally recovered, Churchill looked up to see Col. Wilson holding his rifle. "I am much obliged to you, Uncle," he said.

"Not my doing, Winston," replied Wilson. With a turn of his head, the colonel gestured towards Mrs. Stewart, who held in her hands two smoking barrels.

"*Merci beaucoup, Madame*!" Churchill enthusiastically exclaimed in his usual bad French.

"*De rien, Monsieur Churchill*," smiled Mrs. Stewart. "*Mon plaisir*."

"Aye, yerrr safe enough now, Mr. Churchill," affirmed Capt. Stewart, "but we still need to get the *Dundee* off this bastard of a mud bank. So I'll trouble you now to assist Mr. Marsh and the colonel with pulling on the hawser while I open the throttle and keep rudder amidship." The combined forces accomplished the task: the boat came loose. After hauling in the anchor, Stewart turned to Churchill and said, "Now you may wish to examine yerrr person for leeches, Mr. Churchill. They're sticky wee buggers."

"Leeches," exhaled Churchill and turned suitably green. As he began removing his clothes to make the necessary personal inspection, he became self-conscious about the nearby presence of Mrs. Stewart. "*Pardonnez-moi, Madame,*" he said.

"*Pas d' problème*, Monsieur Churchill," she responded, whereupon she came over and began to assist him out of his wet clothes.

Seeing his savior up close, Churchill realized how young she must be, and—finding a leech and pinching it off—struggled to remember how to ask her age in French before finally saying, "*Quel âge avez-vous*?"

"Twenty," came the answer in English, leaving Churchill startled for a moment.

"Me Victoria kens English better than she speaks it," said Capt. Stewart, "but she's learned her numbers already and can put together a few good sentences when she tries."

"How did the two of you meet?" asked Churchill, now addressing both husband and wife as he removed a second parasite from his torso.

"I do a lot of business with her father." The captain had decided to do the heavy lifting in the conversation. "He's chartered the *Dundee* a few times."

"And he is from Goa?"

"Yes, but Victoria was born here. Her father said, 'We are no longer Portuguese. Now we are English!' and so he named her after the Queen."

"*Très bien*!" exclaimed Churchill. "But do you know, Madame, that, had it not been for Col. Wilson here, you might have been named for someone else?"

"*Quoi*?" said Mrs. Stewart.

"Now, Winston...," began Wilson.

"It is true, Uncle," interrupted Churchill. "*C'est vrai*. Twenty-five years ago, before you were born, Madame, a deranged Scottish poet," here Churchill looked hard at the captain, "attempted to shoot the Queen as she got off the train at Windsor. A schoolboy from Eton used his umbrella to strike the would-be assassin's arm, thereby causing him to misfire. In this way was the life of our Sovereign saved. That boy stands before you now a grown man: Col. Gordon Wilson."

Mrs. Stewart gazed at the colonel with awe and uttered, "*Quel courage, Colonel*!"

"If it had not been me, it would have been someone else," said Wilson. "There were quite a few of us there from the college, and I was not the only one rushing to stop the man."

"But it was YOU," said Churchill, "which is why the Queen summoned you to the castle to express her gratitude personally, and the Mad Bard of the Borders lingers in Broadmoor at His Majesty's pleasure. You saved one Victoria, and her namesake has now saved me. I have reason to be grateful for the keen marksmanship that the pair of you," Churchill nodded first to his uncle and then Mrs. Stewart, "so clearly possess."

Victoria Stewart blushed only slightly. She enjoyed Churchill's fulsome praise, but she knew herself to be a good shot—better than any Scottish poet.

Chapter Sixteen

Firewood

The *Bonnie Dundee* continued up the Alexandra Nile until Capt. Stewart steered the boat towards what he found to be a suitable landing on the north bank of the river. There he dropped anchor. A fair amount of clearance extended back from the shore before the jungle took over, and dead trees lay about among termite mounds. "What is going on, Captain?" asked Churchill.

"Two things. Ferr one, there's good tinder here, and we need to collect more firewood ferr the furrrnace," answered Stewart, "that I'll trouble you and Mr. Marsh to do, Mr. Churchill. Me wee Victoria will stay with the boat, and I'll ask the colonel to take his rifle and go with you."

"And pray, what will you be doing during this time, Captain?" Churchill suspected that this might be the prelude to another link with the '45.

"I'll take care of the other business meself, Mr. Churchill," said Stewart. "Just you go and collect that firewood. Here's the axe." With that, Stewart handed off the tool, jumped down from the starboard bow of the boat that lay nudged up against the riverbank, and marched off into the bush.

"He could have just done that over the stern of the boat," thought Churchill, misunderstanding the situation. "Well, come along, Eddie, let us turn to." Armed with the axe, Churchill left his own rifle in the boat and set off to chop wood, followed by Marsh and Wilson.

"*Bon courage, Monsieur Churchill*!" called Mrs. Stewart, behind them. "*Bonne chance, Eddie! Bonne chasse, Colonel*!"

"She wishes *you* luck, Eddie," observed Churchill slightly put out, "and wishes me courage!"

"Perhaps, sir," answered Marsh, "she feels your courage requires replenishment after you were forced to expend so much of it on the hippopotamus."

"There will *never* come a time, when I shall require more courage than that with which I have been naturally fortified," insisted Churchill. "I am a man of destiny, Eddie. I know this, and you do too."

"Indeed, sir," Marsh simply said. He did, in fact, sense that this might well be true.

What Churchill required, if not courage or luck, was instruction in how to use an axe. He carried it with him like a man of authority and experience until the shore party reached the first dead tree. He made several clumsy and ineffectual swings at a branch stemming from the trunk before Wilson asked him, "Winston, have you ever used an axe before?"

"I have seen it done," Churchill said defensively. "The principle is simple enough." Marsh reached down with his bare hands and snapped off the dried branch that Churchill had been attempting to cut off without success. "You see," said Churchill, "I have successfully loosened one faggot already."

"Perhaps you had better give that to me," replied Wilson, handing Churchill his rifle and taking from him the axe. Wilson set to chopping wood while his nephew and Marsh carried the kindling back to the boat and passed their bundles over to Mrs. Stewart.

Churchill had his left arm slung through the shoulder band of the rifle so that the weapon rested on his back, keeping his hands free to carry wood. On his third trip back to the boat, however, he misjudged his step, tripped over a termite mound, fell to the ground with firewood flying in various directions, and found himself face to face with a freshly disturbed snake.

The viper raised its head, looking angry and venomous. Staring directly at Churchill, it opened its coffin-shaped mouth, spread out its thin neck flaps, and hissed. "This was not the destiny I had in mind," thought Churchill.

He heard steps approaching behind him. Remaining as still as possible, Churchill said in a low, steady voice, "Eddie, I seem to have found a new constituent, and I suspect he votes Tory."

"Mr. Churchill!" gasped Marsh. "Don't move." Marsh started to fret. "Why ever did I allow you to assist with carrying the wood when you should have stayed ready with the rifle?"

By this time, Col. Wilson had noticed that there appeared to be some trouble and set down

the axe. All the sounds of the river and jungle seemed to disappear. "Trouble, Winston?" called Wilson.

"Mr. Churchill has found a snake, Col. Wilson," Marsh said over his shoulder. "Rather a deadly one, and it appears poised to strike."

"Blast," thought Wilson, cursing himself now for giving the rifle to Churchill. "Madame Stewart!" he shouted towards the boat. "*Apportez votre fusil. Allez!*"

This drew Victoria's attention and she began to rush into action, but as she disembarked from the boat with her shotgun, Wilson thought it wise to express the need for extreme caution. "*Faîtes attention, beaucoup attention, Madame. C'est un serpent*!"

No stranger to snakes, Mrs. Stewart began to approach carefully the point where she could see Marsh standing. Churchill during this time found himself wondering about the identity of his nemesis. "Eddie," he said coolly, "do you know just what sort of snake this is?

Marsh had already been streaming with sweat from his labours before Churchill's mishap. He now provided a fair imitation of Murchison Falls. "I fear it is *Dendroaspis polylepis*, sir," he rasped, "a black mamba."

"Strange," thought Churchill, "this fellow looks rather olive green to me."

As Mrs. Stewart carefully approached closer and closer with her gun pointed towards the ground, the scene suddenly exploded with a deafening, eardrum-piercing squawk. Churchill began to see in his peripheral vision a pitch-black bird about three feet in height rapidly approaching on the ground. The bird had a yellow eye surrounded by scarlet red skin that extended down to form a large crop. Taking no notice of the three nearby humans, the determined avian rushed forth, crushed the neck of the snake in its large and powerful bill, and proceeded directly to make off with its meal.

"There. What did I tell you, Eddie?" said Churchill, springing up, "Destiny!"

Chapter Seventeen

Rapid Development

"*Bucorvus leadbeateri*, formerly *Bucorvus cafer*, is the largest species of ground hornbill in the world." With the loading of the firewood completed, the crew awaited the return of their captain while Marsh read out loud from Geller's *Guide to the Birds of East Africa*. "Although capable of flight, they mostly hunt on the ground. Exclusively carnivorous, their prey includes small mammals, frogs, insects, and reptiles."

"Thank bloody goodness for that!" huffed Churchill, when Capt. Stewart suddenly reemerged from the jungle. "Home is the sailor, home from sea!" Churchill hailed.

"You ken your Scottish verse, Mr. Churchill," said Stewart, "I'll gi' you that."

"May we inquire, Captain, where you have been for the last hour?" replied Churchill. "As you can see, all is quite well here, and we are fully stocked with fuel." Churchill thought the story of how he had been saved by a big black turkey could wait until he could remember it with advantages and tell it without being in the company of those who had been present.

"I've been visiting a friend," said Stewart, as though there could have been no other explanation in the middle of the rainforest.

"At this fashionable address, Captain?" responded Churchill. "You move in elevated circles, a minister of the Crown for a passenger and a friend who resides in the Eaton Square of Equatoria."

"And if yerrr bloody Grace wishes to get any further up this rrriver," Stewart bellowed with sarcasm more belligerent than anything Churchill could muster, "it would do you well to take kindly to the neighbours. We're due to meet one of them now. He'll be waiting for us a wee bit ahead." With that, the captain started the business of getting up steam. Soon the *Dundee* weighed anchor, and resumed its trespass upon the German stretch of the lower Alexandra Nile.

Before long the river began to narrow, and the current noticeably increased. On the north bank of the river, the passengers spotted a native man standing with a herd of three buffalo, two cows and a bull. Capt. Stewart put over the tiller and made for this position. He dropped anchor, told Marsh to keep the engine steaming, and began removing several heavy lines from the same lazarette

where he kept the anchor. "Mr. Churchill," said Stewart, handing him the ends of three lines, "I'll trouble you to take these over to the shore and wait by his lordship." Stewart indicated the drover.

While Churchill made his way onto land, Stewart began to make fast the other ends of the lines to the bow of the boat. He then pulled back the tarpaulin covering the crates of the *Dundee* and removed from one of these three long straps of leather. "Gentlemen," he said to Marsh and Wilson, "I'll thank you to join me on shore. Victoria can tend to the engine fer the moment."

Once all five men were gathered together, Stewart turned to the passengers and said, "This is Samuel. He and I do a bit of trading now and then. His farm lies overrr yonder." Stewart gestured vaguely to the northwest.

"Pray, how do you do, Mr. Samuel?" said Churchill politely, still holding three thick ropes and at a loss for understanding what was happening. Samuel made no answer to Churchill, but Stewart quickly began talking to him in a Bantu language. To this Samuel responded. The native did not appear to speak English or any other European language, and how he came to be named for an Old Testament prophet did not seem to be information that Stewart felt compelled to vouchsafe.

After speaking with Samuel, Stewart told Churchill to hold out one of the lines. Along this he stretched a strap of leather, which he secured to the rope with small bits of twine he removed from his pocket. This done, he said to Churchill, "Now gi' me that line." Churchill handed over the end of it to Stewart, who curled it back and proceeded to tie a bowline, making the knot at the point just above where the leather strap came to an end. Stewart then did the same with the other two lines. When finished, he had three makeshift harnesses.

"We're going to need these brutes to give us a wee bit of a tow up the river," Stewart finally began to explain. "It's a steep rise from here, and the engine of the *Dundee* cannae' make it on its own." With that he slipped a harness over the neck of each animal and slid the loops up to sit flush with their simple wooden yokes.

Observing this, Marsh announced in a puzzled voice, "But *Bubalus bubalis* is not native to this country." Stewart, Wilson, and Churchill looked at him quizzically. "The water buffalo is an Indian animal," Marsh explained. "You must know that, Mr. Churchill, surely?"

"Indeed," said Churchill, now that he understood what his multilingual secretary was getting at.

"They'rrrre from India alrrright," said Stewart. "African buffalo dinnae make good beasts of burrrden. The Indians and Goanese thought to bring these brutes over from theirrr own country and put them to the plough in Africa. We're renting them from Samuel to tow us up these herrre rrapids."

"And she called his name Samuel: 'because I have asked him of the LORD,'" thought Churchill, all having now been revealed by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Stewart exchanged a few more words with Samuel, who then mounted the bull and began encouraging it into the river with a swish. "Samuel will take that beast t' other side of the rrriver and drive it along the far bank," explained Stewart. "Mr. Churchill and Mr. Marsh, I'll thank you two gentlemen to remain on this side. You can each drive one of this pair. Colonel, you stand in the bow on point with yer rrrifle. Victoria will tend the engine while I take the helm. We'll have to open the engine to full thrrrottle and drrrive the buffalo for all they're worth to rrreach the head of the rrrapids. Just keep giving these animals a good slap on their hindquarters to maintain their pace. Arrrre we all understood?" Everyone made signs and sounds of agreement.

Samuel was proceeding swiftly across the river, apparently indifferent to the threat of hippos and crocodiles. Observing this, Churchill mused out loud, "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence." Then, after the Stewarts and Wilson had got into the boat, Churchill turned to Marsh and said, "Eddie, do you have any experience as a drover?"

"None whatsoever, sir."

"Hmmm," muttered Churchill. "We shall have to improvise." He stepped up to one of the buffalo and, wary of the animal's horns, began to address it: "The Duke of Wellington also came from India to triumph on the fields of a foreign land, my

sturdy fellow." Churchill had not observed that he was addressing a cow. "Today we shall do the same, you and I."

"Rrrready, Mr. Churchill?" bellowed Stewart from the boat, where he had now hauled anchor. Churchill waved back and saw across the river that Samuel had reached Mizpah and was prepared to vanquish the Philistines. "Then we shall begin," cried Stewart.

Stewart put the engine in reverse, while Wilson stood in the bow using a pole to push the boat clear of the shore. The *Bonnie Dundee* backed up slightly. Stewart then idled the engine, shifted it from reverse through neutral and into forward, and started only slowly upriver. Marsh and Churchill each gave his animal a mighty slap on the rear, which did indeed encourage the buffalo to move forward.

When the lines of all three buffalo had fully stretched out ahead of the boat, Stewart began gradually to open the throttle. At first, all the trouble through which they had been seemed unnecessary. As they continued, however, the land noticeably rose, and the current started to show signs of whitecaps. Soon enough, the lines extending from each animal were taut, and Stewart had the *Bonnie Dundee* at full power.

Churchill grew increasingly enthusiastic about the effort as the difficulty increased. "Imagine we are at the Derby, Wellington," he spoke to his buffalo as if he were its jockey, "and that is the King's horse coming hard upon you, my noble steed. We cannot settle for place or show in a three-horse race!"

"For his part, Marsh had named his animal Archimedes and kept trying to encourage it in Greek. "*'Εμπρός! 'Εμπρός!*" He shouted with the occasional slap of translation.

At the point where the towing came to maximum strain but the finish line began to appear in sight, Churchill became so excited that he started to lose control. The banks of the Alexandra Nile transformed for him into the gates of Harfleur, and he positively yelled:

> Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,
>
> Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit
>
> To his full height. On, on, you noblest English!!

With these last words Wellington released an explosive, lengthy, and malodorous fart. Churchill caught the full effect of the bovine blast and began to weaken at the knees. "I thought I was with Henry V or the Iron Duke at Waterloo," he gasped. "Instead I find I am at the second reading of the Home Rule bill for Ireland. Your name isn't Wellington," Churchill told his buffalo, "It's Gladstone."

Apart from flatulence, "Gladstone" shared other traits with her namesake: hardiness, persistence, and longevity. Unlike the Grand Old Man's Home Rule bills, however, this campaign ended in success.

Once the rapids had been cleared, Capt. Stewart again berthed the *Bonnie Dundee* on the north shore, so that Samuel and his troika could return to their farm. The prophet re-crossed the river on his bull just as safely as he had before. Wondering at this, Churchill asked Stewart, "Just how did you pay that man for his services?"

"He was recruited by the Legion of St. George, Mr. Churchill," answered the captain.

"Evidently this prophet has faith in both God and Mammon," thought Churchill. His mind moved on from St. George to other dragon slayers before asking himself, "I wonder if Siegfried had to put up with Fafner's farting? Or was it only Wagner's interminable measures he had to endure?"

Chapter Eighteen

New Hazards

At Government House in Entebbe, Dr. Hughes was speaking in his most authoritative Welsh voice to the Governor. "Mr. Churchill and his party must remain in strict quarantine, look you, until the danger has passed. Absolutely no one but myself can be allowed to enter their rooms. Meals should be left at the door, where Scrivings can take them in to the patients. You may cable London that there is yet hope that all three men shall make a full recovery, but I would not care to be in their position, look you. Meanwhile it is essential that we continue to supply them with tonic water containing quinine, or it will be the permanent *hwyl fawr*." With that, Hughes left the governor's office, went up a flight

of stairs, and proceeded down a hallway to a door on which hung a large sign reading: "Danger—Strict Quarantine—Do Not Enter." He knocked.

"Who is it?" Scrivings' voice came from the other side of the door.

"*Y Ddraig Goch ddyry gychwin*," Hughes replied. This was the agreed upon password. The duress signal, in the event that the doctor were accompanied by someone else, was for him to speak in English.

After letting Hughes into the room, Scrivings moved over to the drinks trolley, where he started to prepare two large gin-and-tonics. "How did it go?" He asked.

Sitting down to the card table, the doctor said sharply, "No one in Uganda challenges my knowledge of tropical diseases."

Scrivings brought the drinks over to the table while Hughes began lighting an enormous cigar. "It was thoughtful of Mr. Churchill to leave this box of Havanas with us," said Scrivings, "was it not, doctor?"

"Hmm," Hughes agreed, before adding, "my deal I think."

* * *

"At 4 pm Nelson ordered his ships to rig springs on their anchor cables so as to increase their manoeuvrability." Churchill's voice carried well up the river. "Nelson planned to advance against the enemy by passing down the seaward side of Brueys' vessels, which would give the British fleet a two-to-one advantage against each of the ships in the van and centre of the French line." As the *Bonnie Dundee* continued steaming up one end of the Nile, Churchill provided his fellow passengers with a detailed account of what had happened more than a hundred years before and 4,000 miles away at the other end of the river, in the erroneous belief that they would find the Battle of the Nile as thrilling a tale of British maritime glory as he did.

No one else aboard evinced any interest in the history lesson. Marsh raised and lowered his field glasses to study each bird that flew by, swam on the river, or stood perched in a tree or on a rock. Wilson continually removed his pith helmet, wiped his brow, replaced the head covering, and began the process all over. Mrs. Stewart, stood, as ever, in the bow, carefully studying the passage ahead, and her husband sat in the stern, with his massive left arm on the tiller and periodically drinking out of a canteen that he would pick up with his right. The fresh water supply needed to be topped up every so often with stops along the bank, since the boat had reached the point where the Alexandra Nile, like the Mississippi, could just as well have been called the Big Muddy.

"Capt. Foley of HMS *Goliath* had noticed a passage between the *Guerrier* and the shoals to port of the French ship. He saw fit to exploit this on his own initiative." Churchill had finally come to the opening shots of the battle after prefacing the story with a lengthy account of the Mediterranean naval campaign in 1798 and a detailed description of the geography of Aboukir Bay. Just as Churchill had Foley's Royal Marines drawing their muskets down upon the French crew, he noticed, coming into his own sight, a spit in the middle of the river upon which rested the largest crocodile he had ever seen.

White egrets hopped about the indifferent monster, but Marsh took little notice of them since he had seen scores already. As for the *Crocodylus niloticus*, Marsh had seen enough of them as well to know that the wisest policy would be one of *laissez faire*. Churchill, however, took an altogether different view. The target he found too tempting. The fat scaly beast stretched nearly twenty feet and must have weighed a quarter of a ton.

Freshly motivated by the example of the *Goliath's* marines, Churchill picked up his rifle, took aim, and said in a low steady voice, "Vile worm, thou art a knave, a rascal, and eater of broken meats, and I avow with what regrets may be necessary, an active hatred of your kind and desire to kill you all." With that, he fired.

The shot electrified the scene. The King of Crocodiles gave a leap of mortal agony or surprise and disappeared into the water. Churchill never did learn if he killed the beast or not. What happened next erased all other thoughts. The far bank of the river, which had appeared until now to be dull, dun coloured, and lifeless, suddenly divided itself into an entire hoard of crocodiles. There were big crocodiles, small crocodiles, green crocodiles, and brown crocodiles. Crocodiles of every shape and size, with broken teeth and twisted tails, thrashed

in the water, beating it into white foam.

Dozens of crocodiles swarmed about the *Bonnie Dundee*, for this was a royal court and Churchill had committed an act of *lèse-majesté* against their sovereign. Courtier crocodiles and those of the sultan's harem all sought revenge against the assassin. Churchill began firing madly into the mass of crocodiles, as did Col. Wilson. From the bow, Mrs. Stewart repelled boarders with the double barrels of her shotgun. While bullets and buckshot whizzed in all directions from the main deck, back in the Engineering Department Marsh thought it well to feed the furnace and stoke the flame, while Capt. Stewart opened the throttle to all ahead flank. And so the *Bonnie Dundee* came unscathed through the Battle of the Alexandra Nile.

Once they appeared to have cleared the danger, Capt. Stewart eased back on the throttle and bellowed to the under secretary, "I'll thank ye not to do that again, Misterrr Churchill."

"Pray the beasts have no more family upriver seeking revenge," Churchill, somewhat chastened, said more to himself than the others.

"Now that that's passed, there's one more wee bit a trouble ahead," said Stewart, "but it will not be any animals that we shall have to overcome. Still, I'll get us past it, Mr. Churchill. Dinnae you fear."

Rather than explain himself, Stewart as ever let events unfold on their own. The river narrowed, and the *Dundee* started to pass through rock formations on both sides. These seemed to swell in size and close in until the passengers felt as though they were in a canyon that walled them off from the jungle. As the boat squeezed through an especially narrow aperture, guarded on each side by what seemed like towering gates of stone, the crew could hear the sound of falling water ahead. Emerging into a pool surrounded on all sides by boulders of various sizes, they could see the source. Directly before them poured a cataract from a shelf only a few feet in height, but enough to make an insurmountable obstacle for the boat. They seemed to have come to the end of the line well short of their destination.

"You said this vessel could navigate the river all the way up to the Uganda border," Churchill said sharply to Capt. Stewart, whom he now grimly suspected of treason.

"Aye it can, Mr. Churchill," Stewart replied in an amiable tone. "We are only temporarily at full stop. The crocodiles down river should have warned you, though, of what we were approaching. You see, the beasts gather back there where the rock gives way to mud banks and wait for the carcasses of animals caught up river and carried over these falls to their deaths to come washing down to them. You disturbed the buggers in their banquet hall."

Stewart's explanation about the crocodiles did nothing to mitigate Churchill's feelings about the waterfall they now faced. "And are we now to dismantle the boat and carry it above the falls for reassembly?" Churchill asked only half sarcastically, since he would not put such a plan past Stewart.

"We will be doing some disassembly, Mr. Churchill," replied Stewart, "but not of the *Dundee*." By this time, the captain had moved the boat close to the falls before putting over the tiller and dropping anchor. He secured the engine and then went to where the tarpaulin covered the crates of dynamite that had been serving as Churchill's primary seat for the voyage. He lifted the covering and picked up the top crate. This he moved to the area of the boat closest to the lowest lying rocks on shore. Stewart then stripped to the waist, jumped into the pool, which came up to his chest, and said to Churchill, "Now just you and Mr. Marsh hand that wee crate over to meself." The two men did as instructed, and Stewart carried the crate above his head to the point where he could slide it onto a low-lying rock lining the shore.

After depositing this first load, Stewart waded back to the boat and said to his wife, "Victoria, will you please hand me my explosives kit?" Mrs. Stewart walked to a point on the starboard bow, reached under the tarp, felt around, and withdrew a burlap bag that she handed down to her husband. With this wrapped about his neck, Stewart returned to where he had set the dynamite and, grabbing onto a stone for leverage, hauled himself out of the water. He lifted the dynamite crate again, stood up, and climbed to a higher point. "I have a wee bit o' business to attend to gentlemen. Perhaps you would care to have a bite to eat while I'm away." With that

Stewart started making his way over various boulders back down river, where he soon disappeared from view.

Nobody chose to eat. Instead they waited, waited, and waited some more. Eventually, Stewart stood up on a boulder from where he could be seen once again by Churchill and the rest. "There's going to be a wee explosion in a moment, gentlemen. Mr. Marsh, the engine should be cool enough now. I'll trouble you to cover it over with the tarp to provide it with some protection." Marsh did as he was told. Stewart then said, "Now if you and the other gentlemen would kindly take shelter in the bow with Mrs. Stewart, you should be all right." Churchill, Marsh, and Wilson moved forward as instructed. When the captain saw that all were gathered in the bow, he said, "It were best if you was all to crouch down now and face upriver." With that, he disappeared again from view.

About thirty seconds later, fire, smoke and granite exploded in all directions behind the boat with a deafening boom. When the smoke cleared, the passengers of the *Dundee* made their way aft. An entire shelf of the stone gates through which they had entered the pool had collapsed into the water, sealing them off completely. They appeared to be in an even worse situation than they had been only a few minutes before.

Stewart appeared again from behind the rock with a pleased expression on his face. "That should do it well enough," he said surveying his handiwork. He turned about and tossed his explosive bag onto the boat before lowering himself back into the water. Stewart pulled himself into his vessel, and asked, "Now, what are we eating?" Disappointed to learn that no tins had been opened, he insisted that everyone should now eat together while they waited.

"Wait for what?" asked a highly skeptical Churchill.

"For the lock to rise, of course," said Stewart as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. And that is just what happened. While Stewart savoured a meal of tinned bully beef, the level of the now-sealed pool steadily rose, lifting the boat along with it. After putting down an empty tin, Stewart said, "We best get up steam, Mr. Marsh." They removed the tarpaulin covering the engine and lit off the boiler. By the time the boat was ready to answer all bells, the pool had risen to the point where the vessel could just clear the former crest of the cataract. The captain opened the throttle, and the *Dundee* was once again on its bonnie way.

Chapter Nineteen

Night Passage

"The first time I ever came up this way and saw the situation," Capt. Stewart explained for the benefit of his passengers, "I kenned how the obstacle could be overcome by using the very forces that created it. Trrrouble was, once I'd taken the boat up, I could ne'er get it back down again. Now there's no need. The government have bought the *Dundee* and want it left on station for patrolling the river border. With the price they paid me and me legionnaires, I'll have a new boat built."

"The *S.S. Scotland the Brave*," Churchill thought to himself. Out loud he said, "So we now steam in unchartered waters for you, Captain?"

"I ken what lies ahead," Stewart confidently replied. "The village of Bunazi, or bloody Wilhelmina." He pronounced it Will-HELL-Mina. "There'll be Germans there. Not many perrrhaps, but enough that we won't advertise our prrresence. We'll have to secure the engine and row past at night. No one there will be expecting a boat like this coming uprrriver from tha' cataract. We should get through undetected alrrright."

Stewart had the engine throttled down while speaking and kept turning his head from one side of the boat to another. Finally, Mrs. Stewart said, "*Allez, allez*," and gestured to port. Two canoes came into view. The occupants were clearly native fishermen, and Stewart began to hail them in what, to the passengers, seemed the same language that he had previously spoken to the prophet Samuel. The fishermen paddled over, and Stewart idled the engine to engage them in conversation. There was much gesturing among Stewart and the natives in the upriver direction, and Churchill guessed that the captain was gathering information about how much farther it must be to Wilhelmina. The gesturing appeared to give over to some bartering. In the end, Stewart told his wife to bring out a bag of

sugar from the stores—the first indication to Churchill that any was being carried—and pass it to the occupants of the canoes. The fishermen, in turn, handed over some of their catch, and, with signs of gratitude all around, the boats went their separate ways.

"We'll lay up the boat till evening a short way ahead," said Stewart. Our friends will join us after dark to guide us past Wilhel-bloody-mina." With that, he opened the throttle. About a mile further on, Stewart moored the *Bonnie Dundee* at a point marked on the riverbank by a cluster of small boulders. The party settled down to a dinner of fresh seafood prepared on a small portable grill that could be fixed to the stern so that it hung out over the river. "Eat up gentlemen," Stewart encouraged. We've a long hard night of rowing ahead of us." Churchill found himself enjoying it all, especially since he knew that darkness would bring a fresh adventure involving stealth and Germans. The little boy in him felt like it was the night before Christmas.

After twilight, Capt. Stewart set out a red lamp on the bow of the *Dundee* as a signal to the fisherman. He then got out the boat's oars, four in all, and began to wrap each in cloth. Muffled oars only further excited Churchill. He imagined he was going on a cutting-out operation against the French fleet up the mouth of the Loire River in the age of Napoleon. "Cry 'havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war!"

In time, the fishermen returned in their boats and hailed Captain Stewart. Whereas before there had been only one man in each canoe, now there were two. Stewart passed a towline to each boat, two of the same that had been used for the buffalo, and these were fastened to the sterns of the canoes. The other end of each line was tied, as before with the buffalo, to the bow of the *Dundee*. "Now, gentlemen," Stewart began to explain, "our friends will lead the way and provide half the power necessary, but we'll have to provide the rest. I'll row from the forward port position, and, Mr. Churchill, you will row from the aft. Col. Wilson, I'll thank you to take the forward position to starboard, and, Mr. Marsh, you will have the aft quarter there. Victoria will take the tiller. Is all that clearrr?"

"You'll take the high road, Captain, and I'll take the low road," said Churchill, "and I'll be in Uganda beforrre you." Stewart made no response to this. Instead, after all had taken their assigned positions, he signaled to the canoes, and the boats set off.

With eight men rowing, including the enormously strong captain, the work did not turn out to be quite as arduous as Churchill expected, but it was a long night. The sound of the *Bonnie Dundee's* engine would have been heard in Wilhelmina well before the boat approached the village. It had been necessary, therefore, to shift to manpower while still a good distance down river. For the same reason, they would have to get well past the settlement before they could cast off the canoes and start up the steam engine once more.

The tricky part lay in negotiating the river bends. For these, the natives fell back in their canoes and temporarily tied up on each side of the *Dundee* to create, in effect, a single compact vessel for manoeuvring. The canoes were fully drawn out to the lengths of their lines when they finally rowed past Wilhelmina. Only a handful of lights on the bank revealed any human presence at all. Churchill never did get any other view of the village and could not guess how many Germans might live there. "Probably no more than a missionary couple and one or two traders," he thought. He well knew how vastly outnumbered British settlers were in their own empire, and he also knew that the German colonies in Africa attracted even fewer Europeans. But they had only come half way, and a good deal of rowing lay ahead.

With Wilhelmina safely passed, and with it the threat of lurking Germans, Churchill began to consider the other hazards of the river. In his mind he could see another hippopotamus or perhaps a crocodile come leaping out of the water with jaws fully open and biting off both his oar and his arms. Jungle nights were by no means still. The sounds of birds, monkeys and God knows what other creatures punctuated the dark. In an effort to drive away dark thoughts, he quietly began singing to himself.

As I walk along the Bois de Boulogne

With an independent air

You can hear the girls declare

'He must be a Millionaire.'

You can hear them sigh and wish to die,

You can see them wink the other eye

At the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo.

"Mr. Churchill," interrupted Capt. Stewart, "I'll brrreak this oar over yerrr head if you dinnae be quiet."

After what seemed several hours of rowing, the passage finally came to an end. The boats eased over to the bank of the river. Capt. Stewart anchored the *Dundee*, the towropes were unfastened and hauled in, and the natives pulled their canoes back to the side of the steamer. Stewart handed over to them an additional supply of the boat's stores ("Were those bottles of whisky?" Churchill thought in the dark), and the oarsmen rowed off into the night. Churchill, Marsh, and Wilson now felt their arms and backs would never recover, but they had the satisfaction of achievement to soothe their aching. If they did not fall asleep quickly due to their discomfort, they did at least lie motionless with exhaustion.

Chapter Twenty

Curious Discoveries

The next day turned out to be the least eventful of the voyage. Churchill resisted all temptation to shoot any more wildlife, and no natural obstructions impeded the boat's progress. When they stopped to collect more firewood, Churchill failed to encounter anything more dangerous than insects, which—in truth—were the most dangerous form of wildlife in Africa. Fortune or destiny, however, continued to protect Churchill and the rest of the crew.

By dusk, Capt. Stewart reckoned they were approaching the stretch of the river that marked the southern border of the Uganda Protectorate. He found an ideal mooring for the night in what remained of an old bend of the river. This could only be seen as you came up river, for the bend branched off what had become the current channel and reached a dead end as the boat faced upstream. The anchorage lay shielded from the main body of the river by a small peninsula thick with foliage. As the crew put up the mosquito netting for the night, Churchill began to say,

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,

Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,

Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,

With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine....

Mrs. Stewart smiled at this although she understood little of the meaning. Churchill blushed, sensing that she did not comprehend what he said, but after she lay down he muttered to himself,

There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,

Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight....

With that, he bunked down himself and began drifting into the Forest of Athens. "We should be woo'd, and were not made to woo," he mumbled before finally falling asleep.

While the crew slumbered, a pair of hands began to lift the netting from the side of the boat. A pair of feet slipped under the net, followed by another pair and a third. The intruders began exploring the deck. The leader crawled over the tarp-covered crates piled in the centre of the boat, shifted a rifle, and saw on the other side, stretched on his back, the recumbent figure of the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies. While his companions gingerly explored beneath the tarp, the leader stretched out his arms and gently caressed the face of Winston Churchill.

Awakening only slightly to the sensation, Churchill, with his eyes still closed, reached a wrong conclusion. "Mrs. Stewart, you are a very beautiful woman," he said, "*vous êtes très jolie, beaucoup jolie, mais* go back to sleep." Churchill was a gentleman, after all, and had not set out on this journey for any amorous purpose. "*Retourner dormir*, Madame, *s'il vous plaît*." At this point, some drool fell from the lips of the mysterious visitor directly onto Churchill's face. He opened his eyes and saw a stranger staring down. The dark skin and grey hair alarmed him.

"WAAAAAHHHHHH!!!" blared Churchill.

"Ahh! AHH!! AAAHHH!!!" screeched the stranger in an ascending register. This had the effect of causing the other

intruders to blare in identical high-pitched voices.

"What the Devil Is Going On?!" yelled Col. Wilson as he sprang to his feet, while Capt. Stewart sat bolt upright, yelling, "Robert the Bruce and the Highlanders from Hell!!" as he reached for his rifle.

Marsh simply sounded confused when he said, "Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus." Amid the pandemonium, he secretly wondered if he were about to be manhandled by ruffians, and would he find it enjoyable?

For the moment, the chimpanzees had trapped themselves inside the boat, since the netting had fallen back into place. They leapt about on the crates, bounced off Mrs. Stewart—the only crew member not alarmed—threw upward every loose article on the deck, and started flinging at the humans whatever came to hand, including a tin of herrings that struck Churchill on the nose. As the chaos reigned, Mrs. Stewart calmly lifted high the mosquito netting closest to herself, and the intruders quickly took their leave, but not before the last of them seized Churchill's pith helmet and made off with it into the dark, never to be seen again.

"Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves!" exclaimed Churchill, "That monkey has made off with my helmet."

"Oh, not a monkey, Mr. Churchill," said Marsh, "*Pan troglodytes* are chimpanzees. Darwinists theorize that they are the species most closely related to human beings. Of course these must have been Eastern Chimpanzees or *Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii*."

"Sweinforty?" said Churchill, "*Mein Gott*, I've been attacked by German chimps. First Marx and now this. Is there no limit to Teutonic perfidy? I fear what malign influence the Germans may have on our young century." After offering this dubious missing link between chimpanzees and Germans, Churchill settled down to secure what sleep he could before the dawn.

* * *

Morning began with a cold breakfast. Since they were now near the area they had set out to investigate, Churchill thought it best to do nothing that might alert anyone nearby to their arrival. "Finding this sheltered bend has proven most fortuitous," he observed. "We might leave the boat here and make our first foray inland." With that, a steam whistle blew, and the unmistakable sound of machinery and churning water began to approach.

Captain Stewart and Churchill both went to investigate. They jumped from the boat over to the peninsula separating them from the river and carefully worked their way through the bushes until they could just see through without feeling completely exposed to whatever boat might be coming.

The paddle wheeler made its way downstream. Somewhat larger than the *Bonnie Dundee*, the boat had a raised pilothouse at the forward end. The engine space appeared to take up much of the centre and was the only portion of the boat that was covered. A tall smokestack passed through the roof. As the steamer passed with paddles chugging on both sides, Churchill could see that a small open area lay between the pilothouse and the engine. Another slightly larger space extended behind the engine to the stern. In both of these sections, some kind of cargo lay covered in tarpaulin.

"The Germans as industrious as ever," remarked Churchill. "They obviously had to haul the machinery of that vessel in parts overland and assemble it somewhere along the river. Perhaps they have also built a dockyard in Wilhelmina. It seems unlikely that they would have hauled the equipment any further upriver than necessary, although they must have some settlement up that way to support or they need not have gone through so much bother." There appeared to be five or six hands onboard, including one in the pilothouse. "It's much like what operates on the lower Nile in Egypt and the Soudan," Churchill continued. "A sensible move by the Germans, since most of this river lies in their territory. Obviously that boat gives them mastery of this region. No doubt that is why they have not seen fit to speak of it to us."

The steamer continued downriver. Nothing about the manner of its crew suggested to Churchill and Stewart that they had been spotted. "They haven't seen us, I don't think, Captain," half whispered Churchill.

"No, they wouldn't be expecting to find anyone here," agreed Stewart, "and they dinnae see the *Dundee* either. I dinnae

ken from where she comes, but she must be headed down to Wilhelmina, there's n'errr else about."

The two men returned to the *Dundee* to report what they had discovered. "Since we appear to remain effectively incognito," announced Churchill, "at least until that steamer returns, we may continue with our planned reconnaissance inland."

"You don't think the Germans may have another steamer on the river, Winston?" asked the colonel.

"That's possible, but it seems highly unlikely they would have more than one boat at least the size of that," said Churchill. "In any case, we are moored on our side of the river, if we are in fact now in the protectorate. If the Germans do spot us, how could they prove that we did not bring the boat in parts overland through our territory and assemble it here, just as they must have done? They could not seriously believe any other explanation with a known cataract downriver of Wilhelmina. No, if the Germans find the *Bonnie Dundee*, it will give them a good healthy shock. It will announce that we are on to their game, whatever that might be, and have taken measures to safeguard our territory in the same manner as they have. There will be nothing for them to protest."

Chapter Twenty-one

Shore Party

"Eddie," said Churchill, "you will remain here on the boat with Mrs. Stewart. You speak German as well as French, and you are an official of the Colonial Office. In the event that the German steamer does return and sees the *Dundee*, you will tell the Herr Kapitän [Churchill pronounced it 'Hair CAP-ee-tan'] in your most official voice that this is a vessel of the Uganda Marine that has now taken station and that you have been sent out by Entebbe to oversee the process. Leave it to the Germans to try to figure out how the boat got here."

"And if they ask about Mrs. Stewart?" Marsh queried.

"Simply tell them that she is the daughter of a Goanese trader, who frequently travels to these parts and has been employed to help familiarize the crew with the area," Churchill then employed an axiom he had recently learned, "There's no better cover story than the truth."

"And the crew is where, sir?"

"That's none of their damned German business!" barked Churchill, "but if pressed, you might indicate that they are bringing along the supplies necessary to transform this bay into permanent harbourage. That will give them some sauerkraut to chew on. Of course, the other reason we need the two of you to remain here is so that you can get up steam in a hurry in the event that you hear us yelling and we need to make a hasty departure upon our return."

The shore party now made preparations. Churchill and Col. Wilson brought their rifles. Capt. Stewart left his rifle with his wife and brought along instead the double-barrel shotgun that she had used to kill the hippopotamus. "We will reconnoiter for no more than three hours," Churchill said to Marsh. "If we are not back by midday, you should assume the worst and take action according as you think best." With that, the three explorers set off.

The densest concentration of flora lined only the riverbank. Once this had been cleared, the land opened up considerably. Overcast skies, however, threatened rain and created a gloomy atmosphere to go with the steamy heat that pervaded central Africa. Not far from the river, the three men found a creek that must have been one of the Alexandra Nile's numerous minor tributaries. This they followed for about half an hour until rather suddenly discovering that they had come upon a small village.

The stench hit them first. The silence they sensed next, the lack of human voices. Only the sounds of birds and distant thunder fell upon their ears. And yet the village was not empty. Men, women, and children lay about among the huts—all of them dead. Here and there also lay some guineafowl and a pye-dog equally dead. No obvious signs of injury or violence could be seen. It appeared as though everyone had simply lain down to sleep and been frozen in death. Flies swarmed over the decomposing bodies in the eerie, putrid quiet.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and the wee donkey," let out Stewart.

"What could have killed all these poor buggers?" wondered Wilson as he raised a handkerchief to cover his face.

Wilson and Churchill had both stood amidst the aftermath

of battlefields, but they had never encountered any tableau in which death appeared to have breathed across a scene so instantly and comprehensively without leaving even a trace of destruction.

"Not disease," said Churchill. "From what's left of these people, there's nothing that appears diseased or malnourished about them. They probably did quite well for themselves growing some grain in the fields and having ready access to good fishing and fresh game. Food poisoning? No, people don't all drop down dead at once." And then Churchill thought to himself, "Yet those are the very rumours that reached Entebbe." Out loud he said, "Let us clear away from this apocalypse."

As the men moved out of the village, Churchill said, "We have now confirmed that at least one of the claims made by the natives from this region is true."

"Aye, but they clearly were not killed by any bleeding monsters," said Stewart.

"There's a question I've been meaning to ask you, Captain," Churchill thought it prudent to change the subject from the dreary scene they had just left.

"Aye?"

"You were raised by missionaries."

"Aye, I was."

"Yet there are times when your language is, how shall I say, more that of the mariner than the missionary."

"Me father swore absolute temperance around me mother, and around her he kept his vow," Stewart began to explain. "When I was a lad, as I got older, me father would start to take me with him when he would go to Entebbe for collecting heavy stores. We would leave me mother at the settlement while we took our wagon up to the port. After we had collected everything at the pier and loaded the wagon, me father would leave me to guard things, and then he would take to drinking. He drank and drank until he finally passed out. I would have to pick him up and put him in the back of the wagon along with the rest of the bundles."

"Leave it to a drunken Scotsman to find a way to fall onto the wagon," thought Churchill.

"It was when he woke up again on the journey home that the swearing started," Stewart continued. "'Jesus Christ and John Knox, mah head is throbbing, Alex,' he would say, and that was just for openers. By the time we had reached home, he had taught me every blasphemy in the book and a few of his own invention. He was a very creative man with language was me old dad. The pits and bumps in the road did much to stimulate his imagination along the way. They also sobered him up by the time we returned home. Just before we'd arrive back, he would swear to me 'Never again, son,' but I always knew he would forsake the pledge. I dinnae ken it was ever his idea to become a missionary in Africa. He was n'errr the strong one of me parents. His troubles finally came to an end when he went hunting one day and blew out his brains."

Churchill remained silent for a few moments, uncertain whether to respond to this. Finally he ventured to ask, "And what became of your mother, then?"

"Oh, she did not act the least bit surprised. 'Alex, my son,' she said, 'it takes women to do the Lord's work proper. Men are better suited to the affairs of men. Mismanaging this world counts for nothing in the next.' That's why she never concerned herself with desiring the vote, me mother. 'Politics is mostly talking,' she would say, 'Christianity is doing.'"

Churchill had not yet been converted himself to the suffragist cause, but found the reasoning of Capt. Stewart's mother not at all reassuring to his position.

The men had not walked much further when a loud snorting sound of agony and rage broke the air. From out of the bush emerged three full tons of black rhinoceros standing five feet high at the shoulder. With the horns of the beast bearing down on him at a gallop that did credit to any stallion, Churchill did not try to estimate what the length of the rhino might be. Immediate danger does not allow for taxonomy.

Churchill did not panic. He had been charged before by an entire army in the Soudan and seen men sliced apart by Pathans on the Northwest Frontier. Calmly he raised his rifle, took aim, and fired. The rhino's neck extended upward from behind its head to the hump of its shoulder. From this location burst forth a ball of flesh, muscle, and blood.

The animal, stumbled, let out a sound even more hideous than before—and kept charging.

Col. Wilson joined the attack. His first shot struck the rhinoceros just above the right foreleg. Another large splotch of red opened in the animal's hide, and still the rhino kept coming. Churchill and Wilson calmly continued their fire, but it was the twin blasts from Capt. Stewart's shotgun that finally laid the threat low. With a piteous dying cry, the rhino fell onto its left side and collapsed.

"You dinnae see much of these great brutes in these regions," observed Stewart as the three hunters carefully approached the carcass. "And there is something very unnatural about it. A rrrhino does not charge from out of nowhere. It requires provocation."

"Those are not natural either," said Wilson indicating with the barrel of his rifle large blackish-red lesions all along the rhino's flank. "That animal must have been in excruciating pain, but what could have caused these monstrous sores?"

"Whatever the cause may be," said Churchill, "we now know that the stories about mad beasts are just as true as those about unexplained human deaths. Let us return to the boat."

Chapter Twenty-two

Welcoming Parties

A somber atmosphere hung over the *Bonnie Dundee* as it resumed the journey upriver. Churchill turned over in his mind all that he had seen after delivering a full report to Marsh. They might not have found a dragon—yet—but they had seen enough to confirm that some unknown evil bedeviled the region. It remained for them to discover what this might be.

There had been no return of the German steamer in the absence of the shore party. Nor had any other river traffic been sighted. "We are alone, alone, all, all alone, alone on a wide, wide sea," Churchill said in a deliberately melodramatic tone intended to lighten up the grim mood of the crew.

"Even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea, Mr. Churchill," piped in Marsh.

"But we are going upriver, Eddie," retorted Churchill, "and likely we will find more danger there than safety." And so the gloom returned.

With the charge of the mad rhino still fresh in his mind, Churchill did not immediately distinguish memory from the sound that now broke upon him. A screaming sort of noise came down the river. Instinctively, the men reached for their rifles and prepared to face whatever threat now lay ahead. The sounds began to separate. There had to be more than one animal. At least they were all safely in the boat with the engine running. Only something in the water could threaten them.

The animals were in the water. As the boat made it around yet another bend, there came into view two elephants almost fully immersed in the river. They were adult cows, both large enough to make the passengers thankful that neither one was a bull. The two bathing elephants splashed about, while two more cows and a smaller elephant stood at the bank with only their forefeet in the river. These three were drawing water into their trunks and spraying it onto their backs.

The danger lay in the possibility of the animals in the river shoving their vast bulk against the hull of the *Dundee*. If both did so at once, the risk of capsizing became real, or at least the spilling overboard of much that was not tied down. Capt. Stewart moved the tiller to give the elephants a wide berth. Not quite wide enough, however, for complete safety, as it turned out.

Preoccupied with their ablutions, the elephants took no notice of the *Bonnie Dundee*. Churchill, though, was delighted and absorbed by the encounter. He brought down his rifle and said, "I have only seen Indian elephants before!" At that moment, one of the cows in the river turned away from the *Dundee*, filled her trunk with a large draught of the Alexandra Nile, and blew it back over her head directly onto the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Col. Wilson laughed out loud and chuckled, "They must be suffragettes, Winston!"

Marsh smirked, Mrs. Stewart smiled, and Capt. Stewart could not contain his delight: "I think they must be Scottish elephants, Mr. Churchill."

Joining in the laughter directed at him, Churchill quickly recovered and, as he wiped his face, improvised a limerick on the spot:

A wonderful creature, the elephant!

Of its features, the trunk is most relevant.

It can move like an otter,

Fill up with water,

And spray Asperges like a celebrant.

With that, Capt. Stewart opened the throttle, the *Bonnie Dundee* sped ahead, and the elephants were left to enjoy their victory in the campaign for women's rights.

The next sound the party heard came from an altogether different animal. The low drone of an engine began to be heard. This one, though, did not accompany the sound of churning water. Everyone onboard looked both up and down the river, but saw no other vessels of any kind. As their own boat emerged from under a draping canopy of trees, however, something could be seen directly ahead—in the sky.

A long, grey, cigar-shaped object passed perpendicular to the bow of the *Dundee*. With one exception, everyone onboard was at a loss for words. "A Zeppelin!" exclaimed Churchill. "Another riddle solved. Flying monster indeed!"

"I have read about them," said Col. Wilson, "but never seen one before."

"Until now I didn't think anyone who hadn't travelled to Germany in recent years could have seen one," replied Churchill. "But I was a guest of the Kaiser only last year. Piston engines are used to drive that gasbag forward. The Germans like to call it an 'airship.' It's all very experimental. Interesting that they should be experimenting with the machinery out here."

"Experimenting with it over our protectorate, Mr. Churchill," spoke Marsh. "That—airship—is moving north across the river."

"A steamship moving east and west, and an airship moving north and south," observed Churchill." Turning to face his colleagues, he pronounced, "Gentlemen—and Madame," here Churchill bowed slightly to Mrs. Stewart, "by itself, the steamship is not remarkable. But the village, the diseased rhinoceros, *and* the airship? We have found a riddle, a mystery, and now an enigma. Three rumours verified in one morning. And if they are not related, I am not a grandson of the old Duke of Marlborough. The reports about all three of these puzzles began at the same time. We must now discover the root cause."

"What do you propose, Mr. Churchill?" asked Capt. Stewart, recognizing that the odd little man from London had taken over as leader of the expedition. Any man who could stand his ground and shoot a rhinoceros charging directly at him, calmly reload, and then shoot again when the beast kept coming for him earned the captain's respect.

"We should put in again," said Churchill, "and undertake a second reconnaissance. We will stay on our side of the river. That appears to be what interests our German friends. That Zeppelin is on patrol just as surely as the steamboat." Turning to Stewart, he continued, "Captain, I would like for you to find an anchorage from which the *Bonnie Dundee* cannot be spotted from the air."

The best that could be done to meet Churchill's request was to moor the boat on the north bank of the river beneath some overhanging trees. Should the German riverboat return, the *Dundee* would be easily spotted. Should the airship pass going south, it might be possible for someone aboard the Zeppelin to view the boat provided he was looking downwards and aft. That seemed less likely. In any case, the British crew were entirely within their rights.

As before, Churchill led Col. Wilson and Capt. Stewart ashore while Marsh and Mrs. Stewart remained with the vessel. This time, however, the three men stayed close to the river and moved westward in the direction in which they had seen the Zeppelin. The jungle was too dense near the river, however, to allow for much visibility. After half and hour, they came to a large Mutaba tree. "Captain," said Churchill, "do you think you can climb this tree a bit and reconnoiter the situation?"

Stewart reached into the perpendicular roots of the tree and climbed up several feet. After a look round, he said, "Mr. Churchill, I believe I see the top of a tower ahead rising over the trees. It's clearly manmade and not something the people around here would build.

"This day brings one mystery after another," said Churchill. "Very well, we shall investigate. If there is some commercial activity taking place in the Uganda Protectorate, then the Colonial Office should know about it."

By now, Churchill could not be stopped. He knew he was on to something and felt comfortable having his boyish curiosity clothed in the respectability of officialdom.

To reach the tower, if tower it were, the shore party had to pass through another thick stand of trees. Leading the way, and not being very quiet about it, Churchill—inevitably—tripped over a root and fell. "Bloody Hell!" he shouted when he grazed his forehead on still another root as he hit the ground. He rolled over, felt for further injuries and, finding none, looked up directly into the barrel of a rifle.

The rifle did not belong to his uncle. Nor, clearly, was it the double-barreled shotgun of the captain. "*Sie werden aufstehen*," said a voice at the other end of the rifle. To this, Churchill did not immediately respond. The man with the rifle poked the end of the barrel first into Churchill's chest and then under his armpit with an upward thrusting movement and the helpful one-word instruction, "*Schnell*!" Churchill interpreted this to mean that he should get up, fast.

After rising to his feet, his eyes adjusted enough to the scene for him to look about and see that he, Col. Wilson, and Capt. Stewart were surrounded by an armed patrol of white men. Wilson and Stewart were still holding their weapons, but Churchill had dropped his rifle when he fell. His new-found German friend had thoughtfully picked this up for him but did not appear inclined to return it. Recognizing that he had become a hostage, Churchill decided that, as the senior government minister present on what he knew to be British territory, he should seek a peaceful resolution to the crisis. "Gentlemen," he said to Wilson and Stewart, "I propose that you lay down your arms. I am confident that we can negotiate with these Germans in good faith. They are a great and industrious people, without whom we should never have prevailed against the French."

Wilson and Stewart pointed their weapons to the ground and held out their arms. As they did so, they were quickly relieved of rifle and shotgun. For the first, last, and only time in his life, Winston Churchill had surrendered to Germans.

Chapter Twenty-three

Close Quarters

It grated on Churchill that the surrender had taken place on British territory, or—more accurately—territory that Britain had undertaken to protect. He vowed never to allow that to happen again.

The Germans, five in number, were dressed in khaki, but nothing except their weapons suggested that they might be soldiers. Prodded along by encouraging rifles, the British prisoners entered a clearing, around which lay six bicycles watched over by still another armed white man. Four of the Germans mounted bicycles. The other two picked up their bikes and walked them with their left hands so as to keep their right hands free to keep their rifles aimed at Churchill, Wilson, and Stewart. The mounted bicyclists led the way, followed by the prisoners and then the two guards bringing up the rear.

The clumsy column moved through the jungle until they came to a large open area containing much at which to wonder. They had arrived at a well-established camp along the river. A small number of wooden cabins stood, mixed in with a larger number of tents. A steam plant connected to cables that stretched to a flywheel mounted on top of a wooden tower, clearly the same one that Stewart had seen a short time before. "We're a long way from the Ruhr," thought Churchill. "Whatever they're digging for here, it's not coal."

Shocked as the prisoners were to find a German mining camp operating on the British side of the river, the greatest surprise came when they turned a corner and saw a large clearing ahead, at which was moored the Zeppelin. The enormous grey balloon must have been more than 400 feet long and about a tenth as high. The nose linked up to another wooden tower. Three men, including one in a dark uniform and peaked cap, walked about the vessel, apparently inspecting the cables that tethered it to the ground.

Churchill, Wilson, and Stewart were marched to a small cabin near the river, where they could see a pier sufficient in size to accommodate the steamer they had seen that morning. The cabin door was opened, and the three prisoners were herded inside. After the door shut, they could hear the sound of a latch being dropped to lock them in from

the outside. Inside the stuffy space, there was little room to stand. Each side of the cabin had a small window near the top to allow some light and ventilation. Looking about, Churchill could see that small wooden casks occupied much of the space. Each bore the words "*Warnung! Hochexplosiv*." "They have locked us in the magazine," Churchill remarked.

"Aye, we are packed in a powder keg," said Stewart.

After a time, the prisoners heard the door being unlatched. When it opened, Marsh and Mrs. Stewart were pushed in. The door promptly shut again, the latch dropped, and the crew of the *Bonnie Dundee* stood reunited on dry land but even more crowded than when they had been on the boat.

"Mr. Churchill, I am so very relieved to see you again," said Marsh. "These Germans arrived at the boat with rifles pointing every which way. I told them that they had no business being on our side of the river and that we were aboard a government vessel. This did not have the desired effect. Rather curtly, they insisted that we come with them and left no room for argument."

"You did well, Eddie," reassured Churchill. "The Germans have committed a grave act of provocation. We may be at the sharp end of it, but this is not something that they can hope to conceal from Entebbe and London."

"How were you taken, sir?" asked Marsh.

"They surrounded us in the jungle," said Churchill. "I suspect the *Dundee* must have been spotted from the Zeppelin. No doubt the crew reported our presence after landing."

"Not a friendly reception for a British party in British territory," added Wilson.

"Just so, Uncle. This is rather more serious than Fashoda. The French at least behaved in a civil manner towards our people there."

The door to the cabin opened again, and this time the occupants were called out. In the open, Churchill, Wilson, and Marsh were separated by the guards from Capt. and Mrs. Stewart, who were both made to return to the cabin. The three white prisoners were marched off to another, slightly larger cabin. The door was opened, and the visitors invited to enter, followed by two guards.

Inside, the British men found an office with a simple wooden desk at the end furthest from the door. Behind this sat a middle-aged man with dark hair slicked back over his head. He wore ordinary khaki clothing like the rest of the Germans present, but he evinced an air of authority that suggested something more than a mere mine manager. Here was a camp commandant if ever Churchill saw one.

The man at the desk looked up briefly from the papers he had been studying and then returned to these with deliberate intensity. Finally he looked up to survey the three men before him with similar concentration. As his eyes passed over Churchill, they betrayed a brief gleam. He looked down again at the papers on his desk, shuffled through them, found what he wanted, read it over, put it back with a slight grunt of satisfaction, and at last stood up to greet his guests.

"*Guten tag, meine Herren. Mein Name ist Herr Doktor Professor Reinhard von Stüder*," here he paused, "but you will find that I speak English quite well, Mr. Churchill." Churchill looked suitably surprised. "Oh yes, I recognize such a distinguished visitor as the Under Secretary of State for the British Colonial Office."

"I must advise you, Herr von Shutter," Churchill had no intention of continuing to remain nonplussed, "you are in violation of British sovereignty. I insist that you release us and dismantle this camp at once, or there will be a grave international incident." Churchill knew he stood on solid legal ground and hoped that adopting a superior and official posture might serve as a good bluff, since the German rifles directed at him appeared to be the only immediate means for adjudicating the dispute.

"Von Stüder," calmly replied the commandant, who appeared less perturbed by Churchill's argument than he was by the Englishman's pronunciation of German. "I expect there will be such an incident, Mr. Churchill, when it is learned that you are alive and well and several hundred miles from Entebbe." Here he paused and picked up the paper he had just been studying. "According to this report I received yesterday, your own government claims that you are seriously indisposed and may die at any moment. This raises many questions does it not? And since

I am the only one in a position to make reports from here to the outside world, it does not seem likely that your version of events is the one that I shall be sending to Berlin."

"This is an official expedition, von Shutter, and one not unaccompanied by elements of His Majesty's armed forces." Churchill continued bluffing.

"Your King's African Rifles must be following at quite some distance, Mr. Churchill. The Zeppelin makes a most excellent observation platform. There is as yet the unexplained matter of your boat, but any British soldiers will still have a good distance to travel, I think, before they could intercede on your behalf."

"But they are already here!" Churchill insisted. "This is Lt. Col. Wilson of the Royal Horse Guards." Deciding that he should complete the introductions, Churchill added, "and this is Mr. Marsh, my private secretary."

"I see only my guards here, Mr. Churchill, and no horses." Von Stüder remained unfazed by Churchill's claims. "As for Mr. Marsh, I am told that he at least speaks good German."

"*Wie geht es Ihnen, Herr Doktor Professor*?" Marsh spoke in the civil tone of the British civil service.

"*Danke, Herr Marsh.*"

"Now look here, von Shutter." Churchill would not give up the attack but decided to try a new approach, "You see before you an official delegation that you must realize came here in great difficulty and secrecy to investigate activities for which you are obviously responsible. You cannot believe that this will be the end of it."

"Von Stüder," the commandant patiently repeated. He continued to remain urbane and unperturbed for the most part, but exhibited a slight wince each time Churchill mispronounced his name. "No, Mr. Churchill, I am sure that you are quite right. Since, however, we appear to have some time before the arrival of any of your British forces, perhaps your official delegation would care to have an official tour of our unofficial facility?"

Chapter Twenty-four

Demonstrations

Von Stüder led the way from his cabin, followed by his three guests and two guards. "Have you ever heard of radium, Mr. Churchill?"

"Radium, hmmm," responded Churchill.

"A newly identified element that has been assigned the atomic number 88," volunteered Marsh. Churchill wondered if his private secretary need always be so pedantic.

"Precisely, Mr. Marsh," von Stüder soothingly concurred, pleased that Churchill had been unable to answer the question. "Radium, our physicists believe, may have many important industrial applications."

"By 'industrial' I suppose you mean military," suggested Churchill.

"Your Mr. Watt developed the steam engine simply to pump water out of coal mines. Only much later did the machinery find applications on warships."

"Watt, another bloody Scot," thought Churchill.

Rather than take them to the mine workings that dominated the camp, von Stüder escorted them to an area behind a tent, where, for the first time since their arrival in Africa, the Englishmen saw a lion up close. The male lion lay on the ground of a rackety looking cage in a foul mood snorting and drooling, his flanks covered in lesions similar to those observed earlier on the rhinoceros.

"What have you done to this poor creature?" asked Wilson.

"Prolonged exposure to radium results in ulceration of the skin," answered von Stüder. "Radium-dermatitis is a most uncomfortable condition, eventually resulting in death."

"Treaty breaking, illegal mining, kidnapping, and vivisection," Churchill read out the charge sheet. "But why lions? This isn't quite their country. We saw a rhino earlier today that looked similar to this cat. Presumably it escaped your jungle laboratory?"

"Or was released," said Marsh softly.

"This must be why the best students at your ancient universities go into the civil service and not politics," said von Stüder. "British politicians clearly depend on men of real intellect to advise them. You did not attend university at all, did you, Mr. Churchill? I understand you went directly into politics." Churchill took this in silence.

"Yes, Mr. Marsh, 'released.' We have created a happy synthesis between our mining and our experimentation. This lion and the rhinoceros you observed were both brought here on our river steamer from the grasslands of our colony to the east. Here we may test the results of radium exposure on large animals to determine what hazards there may be to humans. We then release the creatures locally...."

"Where they terrorize the population and keep away unwanted visitors from your camp." Churchill finished the commandant's statement.

"Guided by your civil service, Mr. Churchill, even a minister of the British Crown may stumble upon a solution." Von Stüder was enjoying himself, and Churchill was getting the worst of it. The commandant began to lead his guests away from the lion cage. "There is a radium mine in Germany, but the ore here has properties that make chemical separation of the element much easier to accomplish. One of our geological expeditions discovered this site last year."

"Discovered in British territory," interjected Churchill.

"Borders in Africa are quite fluid, as you well know, Mr. Churchill. Have you not fought yourself in two wars already to extend Britain's frontiers on this continent? And then written about it to your great financial advantage?" By now Churchill had started to wonder how this blasted German knew so much about his own biography. "But all this," von Stüder gestured with a wave, "is now only incidental to the primary reason for our activity here."

The commandant took his visitors to another region of the camp for a second demonstration. At this location there were several smaller cages stacked in the open. Each contained in pathetic condition an olive-coloured baboon. Von Stüder walked up to the cages. From the top of one, he picked up a rope with a slipknot tied near the end. He loosened the loop slightly and then opened the cage. Quickly he placed the loop over the head of the baboon and severely tightened the knot around its neck. Von Stüder then shouted an order in German at a man seated nearby who may have been the caretaker of the animals. This man walked up to a large metal drum and from it withdrew a lid made of wire mesh. Von Stüder strode to the drum, deposited the baboon, rope and all, inside, and stood back while his accomplice replaced the lid.

"Now, gentlemen, we have our specimen," von Stüder stated calmly. Churchill sensed that what was about to happen would not sit well with the RSPCA. "Stand back, gentlemen, if you please." This was simply the commandant's way of telling the guards to push the Englishmen as far away as possible, but keep them in view of the drum. Von Stüder stepped into a tent and returned very soon, wearing a facemask and holding in front of him a long pair of tongs. Extending the end of the tongs over the top of the metal drum, he released some tiny object through the mesh.

As von Stüder stepped well away from the drum, the baboon hidden inside shrieked, started beating the wall, and then lapsed into silence. The commandant removed his mask and barked a new order to the keeper. The man lifted the lid, dropped it to the ground, and then, with both arms and a mighty heave, tilted the barrel onto its side, where it lay on the ground with the open end facing the Englishmen. Churchill could see the still body of the baboon lying inside.

"The gas is poisonous, as you see," explained von Stüder after removing his mask, "but it soon dissipates in the wind. Deployed on a battlefield, there will no longer be any need for messy gunshot wounds or destructive explosions. We have created the formula in our laboratories in Germany, but research and development requires practical field tests—tests that must necessarily be performed under conditions of the greatest secrecy."

"And how would you deploy such a monstrous weapon?" asked Churchill.

"The gas can be compressed into canisters that are fired from great distances by artillery. The canisters burst open when striking the ground. The gas is too heavy to rise high into the atmosphere. It remains close enough to the earth to asphyxiate anyone standing at ground level. But there is already another method of deployment."

"The Zeppelin."

"Precisely, Mr. Churchill. The canisters are light enough to be carried in large number

by an airship. Dropped from a high altitude, the canisters will fall onto the battlefield—or any desired target—while posing no threat to the aircrew."

"And this you know because you have tested the method on the local villages." Churchill had pieced the entire puzzle together.

"The world is no poorer for the loss of a few savages. Eugenics is already accepted as a constructive development among the civilized races, as I believe you well understand, Mr. Churchill."

"My first responsibility," asserted the under secretary of state, "is to protect the lives of British subjects, no matter who they are or where they may live in our empire."

"You will soon be relieved of all of your responsibilities, Mr. Churchill—both public and private." Von Stüder had an answer to everything.

"That being so," Churchill decided to change tactics, "perhaps you would be so kind as to give us a tour of your Zeppelin. I saw one in flight last year when I attended the German army manoeuvres in Breslau, but I have not yet had the opportunity of viewing the machinery up close."

"With pleasure, Mr. Churchill, but my own knowledge of the airship is limited. The Pilot Kapitän will best be able to explain to you the workings of his vessel."

Chapter Twenty-five

Up in the Air

"Gentlemen, may I introduce Herr Pilot Kapitän Friedrich Manger?" said von Stüder. The captain of the airship proved to be the man the Englishmen had seen earlier in dark uniform inspecting the Zeppelin's mooring lines. With his extremely erect posture topped by a peaked cap, he gave the impression of being taller than he was. Manger had ice-blue eyes, dark hair, a youthful face, a pleasing smile and was, in fact, impossibly handsome. He also proved to be genuinely convivial unlike von Stüder, whose phony politeness oozed disdain with every syllable.

"How do you do, gentlemen?" said Manger in good English but more heavily accented than von Stüder's.

"These gentlemen are from London," explained von Stüder, although Manger could not but notice the armed guards who stood behind them. "They are visiting with us for only a very short time, but expressed a desire to see your airship."

"With pleasure!" exclaimed Manger. His enthusiasm for the new science of aeronautics, in which the Fatherland led the way, radiated from his broad smile.

"This is Mr. Churchill, the leader of the delegation, Col. Wilson, and Mr. Marsh." Von Stüder made the introductions and stepped back to leave Manger to conduct the tour. As the German aviator led the three Englishman closer to his airship, a man arrived and handed a piece of paper to von Stüder, who began studying it with some interest.

"You have not seen a Zeppelin before, gentlemen?" Manger politely inquired.

"Never up close," said Churchill. "We did see your vessel in flight earlier today."

"Count von Zeppelin is a great visionary," enthused Manger. "He saw the limitations in the French experiments with controlled free flight and theorized a more practical vessel. This design has a rigid framework supporting an outer shell, inside of which a series of individual cells of hydrogen are aligned. In this way, we have greater protection than with a single cell exposed directly to the elements."

"I am especially curious to understand your method of controls and propulsion," said Churchill. "That must present the greatest complication."

"Much progress in design has already been made since the count's first airship flew over Lake Constance seven years ago. This is a sister ship of the *Luftschiff Zeppelin Drei* or LZ3, which had its maiden flight only last year. The parts for our LZ3A were manufactured in Germany, shipped to Dar es Salaam, and then transported overland to Mwanza for assembly. After the mooring space was cleared here, I flew our airship to its present location in stages. We had to send scouts in advance to identify sufficiently open areas along the route where we could land and have these supplied with temporary fuel dumps. All this took this some time

but was an important part of our research and development. Before the army will grant us a purchase contract, we must prove the durability of the airship in varied conditions and that it has a sufficiently practical range of operation."

"And if it can work in central Africa as well as central Europe, it can work anywhere," observed Churchill. "I must congratulate you, Herr Captain. This is a most impressive enterprise."

They had arrived at the forward gondola, the control center of the craft, and Manger invited his guests aboard. Churchill stepped in first, followed by Wilson. When Marsh approached, he came close to Manger for the first time and smiled in a manner more awkward than polite. Churchill immediately made for the controls at the front of the narrow space. Wilson and Marsh stayed to the rear so as to allow Manger to explain the array of mechanisms on display.

"We have two Daimler engines managed from here," Manger pointed out the controls to Churchill, "and these are for the horizontal stabilizers." Churchill wanted to know about attainable air speed, altitude, and flight duration. Manger answered as evasively as possible. Then Churchill asked about the purity of the hydrogen used for lifting and what safety precautions were taken against the danger of fire. Manger had never had such a persistently curious guest, and this delighted him. At the same time, he could not answer all of Churchill's questions with much specificity. He had to guard the new technology both for his employer and for the Fatherland.

Undeterred by Manger's ambiguity, Churchill began inquiring about the materials used in the airship's framework and their fracture strengths. The Pilot Kapitän decided his best refuge would be in engineering terminology and began speaking about loading stress and modulus of elasticity. Churchill started emitting hmmm-hmmm sounds, which Marsh recognized as the sure sign that the argot had become too technical for him. Manger had started to notice that, during his interrogation by the leader of the delegation, the secretary—for so he took Marsh to be—had been gazing at him with unconcealed intensity. Manger now returned the gaze with a smile. For a moment, the eyes of Marsh and Manger locked—and transmitted understanding.

"You must do me the honour of taking me up some time." Churchill brought the Pilot Kapitän back to earth.

"With pleasure, Mr. Churchill," although Manger sensed it would be unlikely to happen. He walked his guests back to where von Stüder had remained with the sentries.

As the commandant escorted his guests back to their cell, they walked past where the Germans stood their bicycles, and Churchill ventured to say, "I do not suppose, Herr von Shutter, that you have shown us all this because you intend to release us?"

"Regrettably, Mr. Churchill, it will soon be my duty to report to Berlin the astonishing story that a minister of the British Crown was killed, along with a group of saboteurs he evidently was personally leading into German East Africa." Von Stüder held up the document he had been studying while the three Englishmen had toured the Zeppelin. "Dynamite has been found on your boat, yes? There is bound to be great international outrage about this that can only cause the most acute embarrassment to your government."

"When that happens my government will undoubtedly send full battalions of the King's African Rifles to this region, and there would be the end of your operation."

"Presumably they would be a more reliable threat to our position here than the forces you have claimed are already on the way." Von Stüder had read Churchill's every bluff. Churchill glared back.

A deep rumbling sound interrupted the conversation, and the ground vibrated beneath Churchill's feet. Remembering the high explosive in the cabin, he guessed that there had been a detonation in the mine.

Von Stüder smiled and continued, "Happily, Mr. Churchill, we may now consider our experiments to be satisfactorily concluded. You have seen the results for yourself. By the time your soldiers finally do arrive, all traces of this camp will have been removed. Preparations are already underway. We began them soon after the arrival of the previous expedition sent by your government. We anticipated the possibility of a

second visitation—but not by so distinguished a visitor as your good self."

"And what became of the earlier expedition?"

"The jungle presents many hazards."

"Clearly, if you abandon the camp, you abandon the mine."

"Our geologists have now discovered a comparable source of radium that is comfortably within German territory."

Undeterred but growing tired of the smug scientist's frustrating combination of imperturbability and logic, Churchill pressed home with his own line of reasoning, "Even if you remove all signs of the camp, you cannot so easily conceal the workings of the mine."

"There will be no need for that, Mr. Churchill. Your government will no doubt be most pleased to discover that it now has its own proven source of radium—and one conveniently far removed from the public eye. The existence of such a valuable resource will, of course, have to be kept highly confidential."

Churchill felt that, for the moment at least, he had been wholly outmanoeuvred. He reentered the cabin cell through the door but determined to find a way out the window.

Chapter Twenty-six

Boxed In

"Winston, I don't much care for that jumped-up jungle Kaiser," said Col. Wilson, who had remained quiet for some time.

"Nor do I, Uncle," Churchill agreed, "Herr von Shutter pursues only the lights of perverted science."

The three Englishmen gave a complete briefing to Capt. and Mrs. Stewart about their tour of the camp. "Bugger the bastard!" growled the captain. "He's the Butcher Cumberland of the Bush."

"Now what happens, Winston?" asked Wilson.

"He means to kill us and claim that we were found trying to blow up something on the German side of the river." Churchill delivered the sobering news.

"Did he say when?" asked Wilson. But at that moment the latch on the door could be heard lifting. The guards passed in five tin trays of food consisting of nothing more than sausages and boiled mush that they would have to eat with their hands. "I hope this is not the German version of a last supper," commented Wilson. Marsh seemed more appalled by the absence of eating utensils.

"Evidently von Shutter intends to keep us alive at least until the morning," said Churchill morosely. He started to pick at his food, but his mind could only concentrate on trying to find some way of escape.

As they ate, Capt. Stewart told the Englishmen that he also had news to report. He explained that, while he and his wife had been left alone, they heard the arrival of some natives in canoes. "We could stand on these powder kegs and see out the window. The men were fishermen from upriver. They come down here regularly to barter with the Germans. It seems that steamer we saw only comes here once a week to deliver supplies from Will-go-to-Hell-mina. The men in the camp like to have more fresh food than that. They trade schnapps to the natives for fish and fruit."

"And you know all this how?" asked Churchill.

"We spoke to them briefly before they left. Their language is much the same as the other Bantu talk in this area. The Germans dinnae ken it at all. They have to use hand gestures to do their trading." Stewart spat this out with contempt. "After the Germans made off with their fish, we called the men over and had a rrright proper talk."

"*Ils n'étaient pas contents, Monsieur Churchill*," interjected Mrs. Stewart.

"No, they were not happy," agreed her husband. "They dinnae care to see people who speak their language locked up. They fear they could be next."

"Do they know what the Germans are doing here?" asked Churchill.

"They ken some idea. They've found villages with everyone dead and seen some of those poor beasts that have been released. As far as I can make out, they live on the German side of the river and have not seen any trouble there. The river is no border to them, however: they move about both sides all the time."

"If the steamer only comes up once a week and it left this morning," Churchill started to think out loud, "it must have stayed the night here after

reaching the camp ahead of us. That means it will not be back for six days."

"What are you thinking, sir?" asked Marsh.

"We did not see any telegraph lines here," Churchill started to explain, "which means the steamer is von Shutter's only way of communicating with the outside world. Theoretically he could send the Zeppelin, but from what Captain Manger [Churchill pronounced it 'MANG-er'] told us that would take several days as well. Von Shutter might just kill us tomorrow or he might wait to send a message to Berlin explaining what has happened and what he proposes to do. In which case he would have to wait for a response. That would take at least one more day. In any event, we should have time to think of an escape plan. I've done it before." Marsh did not feel this was the time to remind Churchill that his escape from the Boers in South Africa had been planned by two other men.

"So we get out of here," asked Wilson, "then what?"

"We've got to get back to the boat," said Churchill. He got up on a powder keg and looked out the window facing the river. "They haven't brought the *Dundee* up to the pier yet, which means it is probably still where we left it."

"We can't go back all the way to Entebbe on the *Dundee*," interrupted Wilson. "Capt. Stewart has seen to that, remember?"

"We're not going to go back on the *Dundee*," countered Churchill. "We're only going to need it for one short voyage." Turning from the colonel to the captain, he said, "Did you see the Germans bringing back any of our belongings from the boat?"

"None that I could tell," answered Stewart. "Why?"

"Von Shutter has had the boat inventoried. He knows about the dynamite. If they retrieved that, presumably they would put it in here with the rest of their high explosive."

"What are you getting at Winston?" Wilson wished his nephew would explain his idea plainly, which is what Churchill finally started to do, outlining the beginnings of a plan.

"That would certainly knock the Germans for six," said Wilson when Churchill had finished, "but you omit one important detail."

"Which is?" asked Churchill.

"We are all of us still locked inside this shed. And not even Mrs. Stewart is small enough to crawl out through those windows."

"I am of the opinion, Uncle," said Churchill sententiously, "that before that steamer returns, we will have devised a successful means of overcoming that obstacle."

"Dinnae frrret yourself, Mr. Churchill," laughed Capt. Stewart. "That has already been arrranged." Churchill looked at him quizzically. "We are to be freed tonight by the Legion of St. George."

Chapter Twenty-seven

Breakout

The canoes came up softly just short of the pier and moored on the back side of the makeshift prison shack. Two men got out, each grasping a knobkerrie. One quietly went around the left side of the shack and the other went to the right. Coming up behind the two guards posted at the front came a pair of decisive thuds. The guards collapsed and were immediately relieved of their weapons. No other sentries could be seen by the dim moonlight that illuminated the camp.

The door latch lifted, and one of the liberators whispered something to Capt. Stewart. "We're free lads," he said, "let's go."

As the prisoners came out of confinement, the rescuers handed over the rifles to Stewart. He passed these over to the colonel and then removed from the inside of his trouser waistline two gold sovereigns. He handed one to each of the rescuers with a word of thanks. Observing the transaction, Churchill remarked as loud as he dared, "Cry, 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!'" The natives took their leave and disappeared into the night as swiftly as they had arrived.

"Winston," said Col. Wilson, "I do believe this is your rifle." He held the weapon up close to Churchill, who could just make out in the dark the plate on the stock—if not its wording—that read, "Manufactured for Mr. Winston Churchill, James Woodward & Co., London." Still holding the other rifle, Wilson added, "And this is undoubtedly mine."

"Swine," said Churchill. "No gentleman would do such a thing."

"I fear we have not been dealing with gentlemen, sir," said Marsh. "But for one exception," he added.

"The Germans have started this game of ungentlemanly warfare," Churchill snapped, "but we will now finish it. Does everyone understand what to do?" The other four nodded. "Then we shall begin." Churchill handed his rifle back to Col. Wilson, went into the shack and emerged with a powder keg in each arm. Capt. Stewart did the same.

After coming out with the high explosive, Stewart set the kegs down and surveyed the riverbank from the pier. He turned to the rest of the group and said, "I ken we can get the boat as far as there." He gestured to a point just a short way down the river. "If you and Victoria could meet us close to that point with the bicycles, Mr. Marsh, I'll thank you." Marsh nodded. Mrs. Stewart relieved Col. Wilson of Churchill's rifle and went off with Marsh.

Capt. Stewart dragged the unconscious guards into the shack, shut the door and dropped the latch. He picked up his two powder kegs and addressed Churchill and Wilson, "Gentlemen, if you will please follow me." With that the three men set off down the riverbank.

They found the *Bonnie Dundee*, where they had left her earlier that same day but which now seemed a very long time ago. Churchill went aboard with Capt. Stewart while Col. Wilson stood lookout on shore. After depositing his two kegs in the bow of the boat where Stewart had set his, Churchill looked for and found the remaining dynamite where it had always been stowed under the tarpaulin. "It's here," he said to Stewart, who had gone aft to start the boiler. "I suppose they meant to bring us back to the boat, tie us up, tow it downriver into German territory, and then blow us all to smithereens with our own equipment."

"That would have all the appearance of a failed sabotage operation," agreed Stewart.

"We shall turn their own game upon them," exulted Churchill, gleefully dancing a makeshift hornpipe and almost falling backwards into the river.

"Carrreful, Mr. Churchill," I still need to collect the rest of my legionnaires from you back in Entebbe."

"Why, fear not, man, I will not forfeit it!" said Churchill recovering. "Nay, you should expect thrice three times the value of this bond."

"That would make 225 sovereigns, Mr. Churchill."

"Leave it to a bloody Scot to reckon his purse accurately at a time like this," thought Churchill. With that he picked up a canvas bag and began to fill it with some of the ship's stores. He took this ashore and left it with his uncle and then rejoined Stewart on the boat.

"We're ready to shove off," said the captain. "Do you ken you can keep up with us on the shore, Colonel?"

"You two are handling the dangerous business," replied Wilson. "Don't worry about me." With that, he pulled up the stake to which the boat was tethered and tossed it across to Churchill.

As Stewart piloted the boat upriver, Churchill removed the dynamite from its crate and piled it in the bow with the powder kegs. He picked up one of the kegs and carefully knocked in the side against the bow cleat. He walked back down the port side of the boat as close as he dared to the boiler and then started laying a makeshift fuse out of the barrel as he walked it back up to the bow and set it down with the rest of the explosive. This would be the final voyage of the *Bonnie Dundee*.

"Are you ready to get wet, Mr. Churchill?" asked the captain with a wide grin. Churchill nodded, and Stewart lashed the tiller into place using one of the lines he had pulled from the lazarette. Churchill picked up a cloth, opened the door of the furnace, lit the cloth, and then used it to light the fuse. Immediately both Stewart and Churchill dove in the water and began swimming as fast for the shore as adrenaline could take them.

Stewart, being much the stronger man, made good headway. Churchill trailed him only slightly, however, but then heard a loud splash coming from the other side of the river. A crocodile had joined the party.

"Don't wait for me!" yelled Churchill to Stewart.

"I'm not!!" Stewart bellowed back just as he reached the riverbank safely.

Churchill was only a few yards behind, but a crocodile's tail makes for a mighty propulsion

system. Churchill could not see, but he sensed that he was losing the race. "That croc will have me any moment," he thought. His father had died at the age of forty-five. "It now seems I will not even make it to thirty-three. Pity, I was so close."

These were Churchill's final thoughts, when, with a sharp blast, the crocodile's head coughed out a ball of blood, bone, and flesh.

"Come along now, Winston," said Col. Wilson phlegmatically. "We have an appointment, you know. This is not the time to be unpunctual."

Churchill had no chance to respond. Two massive explosions lit up the night. The moment his arms reached those that Capt. Stewart held out for him in the river, the fuse on the *Bonnie Dundee* met its target. The boat had reached near enough to the cabin where the rest of the high explosive was stored that all hell broke loose. Windows blew out. Tents collapsed. The shock of the twin blasts even forced apart the cages housing von Stüder's wild animals. Enraged baboons and one extremely disagreeable lion shrieked and roared amid the pandemonium.

The camp workers started to appear. Dazed, confused, and wondering what in the name of Kaiser Wilhelm had just happened, the Germans did not know at first how to respond. Before they could gather their senses, some of them felt savage baboons jumping onto their backs, screaming, scratching their faces, and trying to gouge their eyes. Those not distracted by this new nightmare found themselves confronted by the lion, snarling in pain and out for blood.

As the Germans scattered this way and that amid the confusion, Churchill, Stewart, and Wilson made for their rendezvous with Marsh and Mrs. Stewart. Arriving at the designated point, however they found only Victoria—and no bicycles. "Where is Eddie?" demanded Churchill, "and where are the bicycles?"

"*Ils ne sont pas nécessaires, Monsieur Churchill,*" she smiled back calmly still holding Churchill's heavy rifle.

"Not necessary?"

"*Suivez-moi, s'il vous plait,*" she said turning around and moving off. She then called back "*Allez*!"

"I believe we should follow the lady, Winston," said the colonel.

"Aye, me Victoria kens what she is doing," agreed Capt. Stewart.

The three men set off behind Mrs. Stewart, with Col. Wilson keeping his rifle at the ready in case they should encounter any foul-tempered Germans. They moved quickly through the mayhem without challenge and passed beyond the main camp to the airfield, where the Zeppelin gleamed in the moonlight. And there stood Marsh waiting for them—side by side with Pilot Kapitän Manger.

"I was hoping I would have the opportunity of giving you a practical demonstration of my airship, Mr. Churchill," said the smiling aviator. "You did seem so very interested."

Churchill did a double take. He looked at Marsh, then back at Manger, recovered himself and said, "How very kind of you, Herr MANG-er."

The Pilot Kapitän turned and went over to the forward gondola. He reached inside and pulled out a long-handled axe. "Gentlemen, as we are in some haste, we shall dispense with normal procedure for departure. May I ask one of you to begin cutting the mooring lines?"

"I'll take that," said Capt. Stewart immediately reaching for the instrument.

"Thank you, Mr. Stewart, I presume," replied Manger. "Please start with the forward lines. After you have cut those in the aft, could you join with your wife and Col. Wilson in the rear gondola? Mr. Churchill, you will join Mr. Marsh and myself in the forward gondola. This will balance our weight and enable you to observe how I operate this beautiful *Luftschiff*."

While Capt. Stewart moved off to the forward mooring lines, Churchill turned to Mrs. Stewart and said, "I will take my rifle back from you, Madame. This way we shall have one sentry in each gondola."

As soon as Victoria passed the rifle over to Churchill, von Stüder suddenly emerged from the darkness, seized the young lady, and held a Mauser C96 pistol to her head. "You will kindly remain here, gentlemen, if you please."

Churchill, Marsh, Wilson, and Manger froze and looked on helpless. From a distance, Capt. Stewart saw the hopelessness of the situation. Churchill broke the silence, "Now let us not do anything rash, Herr von Shutter."

"VON STÜDER!!" Commandant of a camp no longer and beside himself with anger at the idiot of an Englishman who could never pronounce his name, the unflappable von Stüder finally snapped.

Suddenly, the freed lion, in agony from his wounds, excited by explosions, and terrified by fire, leapt from nowhere onto the back of von Stüder. The commandant yelled with pain and immediately lost his grip on Victoria, who rushed forward into the arms of Churchill, who passed her to his uncle.

Wilson did not need instructions. He quickly led Mrs. Stewart to the rear gondola, while Churchill and Marsh followed Manger to the forward position. Capt. Stewart furiously chopped away at the mooring lines. When he had cut the last one, he dashed across the field and jumped into the rear gondola to join his wife and the colonel.

The Zeppelin began to ascend into the night accompanied by the final agonizing screams of von Stüder being mauled to death by the lion.

"We shall have to navigate by dead reckoning," said Manger as he glanced at his chart table, "but we have a good bearing, and it will be dawn soon enough." Turning to his illustrious passenger, Manger proudly announced, "You will find, Mr. Churchill, that the range of this airship is just sufficient to reach Prince Albertville."

Chapter Twenty-eight

Two Meetings

At the Colonial Office, Churchill sat once again in the presence of Lord Elgin. The under secretary had thought it best not to cable his report ahead of him, even in cypher, but wait and submit it in person following his return to London on January 8th. The Colonial Secretary now sat reviewing yet again the typewritten pages in his hands.

"Well, Churchill," the Earl said at last, "you must be very pleased with yourself—and that is all the congratulations you are ever going to get for this affair!"

Churchill struggled to look unabashed. Winston the pug frustrated his namesake's effort to remain stoic. The dog sniffed around Churchill's feet, shedding noticeably and leaving traces of its fawn-colored fur on the cuffs of Churchill's dark trousers. "Couldn't the old fool keep a wee black pug?" thought Churchill.

"The Prime Minister, I am sad to say, remains dangerously ill," continued Elgin. "You received my message last month about his coronary seizure?"

"Yes," said Churchill. He had been travelling by steamer down the Nile through the Soudan and Egypt when a telegram arrived to inform him that the Prime Minister had suffered a heart attack. After the adventure along the Alexandra Nile, the journey on the main body of the river had been uneventful except for the sudden and unexpected death of Scrivings at Khartoum. Churchill had to oversee the burial arrangements in the same city where he had once supervised the interment of the fallen nine years earlier following the Battle of Omdurman.

"I shall not trouble the Prime Minister with your report," Elgin resumed. "The shock of learning what you did on your own authority...the damn fool risks you took...to think you almost singlehandedly provoked a war with Germany." Elgin could not organize his phrasing to fit his temper. "Were the Prime Minister to learn of your activities, the King would have to ask Mr. Asquith to form a new government, for it would finish CB for certain."

Churchill tried to look suitably serious while Winston deposited drool on his trouser leg.

"And then you had the temerity to be completely successful!" The Colonial Secretary left no doubt he believed this to be Churchill's worst offense. "Hesketh Bell reports his soldiers found no evidence of the former German camp—except for the mine."

"Yes, now the mine...," Churchill began, only to be quickly cut off.

"The mine you will forget about along with everything else that you got up to during your feigned illness," barked Elgin. It irritated him all the more to have learned, after taking discreet soundings from the government's scientific advisers, that they felt it most important for the nation to find its own proven radium source. Was there no end to Churchill's achievements?

"I have personally informed both the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for War about all they need to know of this business. I did that tête-à-tête, understood? Strictly in camera." Elgin seemed to be pulling back from a full attack of apoplexy. "And this is the only copy of your report, yes?" He said this waving the papers with such controlled fury that they crumpled in his hands.

"Yes, sir," replied Churchill. "I dictated it to Marsh, and he typed it up himself. No one else has seen it, except you."

"Good," Elgin calmed slightly. "And there the full knowledge of this affair ends. We have established a *cordon sanitaire* around your escapade. Your uncle will keep quiet if he wants to keep his commission, and this native couple....Did you really have to promise them 225 gold sovereigns?!"

"They have been of some service to the Crown, sir," Churchill said, as calmly as a man could when fearing at any moment he might be urinated on by a pug.

"And paid very handsomely for it!" Elgin had worked himself up again.

"They will continue as an important source of information about German activity on Lake Victoria," Churchill spoke encouragingly, "once they have built a new steamer with their reward. You must acknowledge they give good value for money."

To this Elgin simply harrumphed. Must Churchill have thought of everything? "Then we have all of our own people with knowledge of the affair safely under control," he concluded, "but there remains this German pilot chappie. What of him?"

"I believe the Royal Navy will be delighted to have Herr MANGer as an adviser in an official capacity. The Germans will think their vessel destroyed, and where better to test it secretly ourselves than right where it is?" Churchill had thought of everything, even more than von Stüder. "Airship reconnaissance must be a paramount concern for our future defence, sir. I fear that this new technology means that Britain is no longer an island."

Elgin ignored this last point. "Then that's everyone accounted for, except," Elgin paused almost choking on his next words, "except, I cannot conceal your report from His Majesty. You know how much the King dislikes his nephew the Kaiser. Your report satisfied him to no end. He would like to speak with you personally about it. But put NOTHING in writing!"

* * *

A few weeks later, Churchill sat in the Royal Presence at Buckingham Palace. He had been filling in King Edward VII with the many details that did not appear in the official report. "And so that, Your Majesty, is the whole story," Churchill concluded, pleased to have had such an enraptured audience of one.

"Very good, Winston, very good indeed," replied the King, who coughed and then continued, "But we fear you will not be able to serialize this adventure of yours in the press or publish it as a book."

"No, Sir, but I have been writing for the *Strand* about the less sensational aspects of the tour," Churchill replied. "I intend to collect the articles into a book that I shall call *My African Journey*."

On the wall behind the King hung a portrait of the sovereign along with his wife, the stone deaf, cuckquean-empress whose name had been given to an African river of mud. "The poor woman suffers enough," thought Churchill, "fortunately Her Majesty will never have to travel on the Alexandra Nile."

"Very sad about the late prime minister," said the King, now changing the subject. "I understand that Mr. Asquith is considering raising you to the Cabinet."

"He has spoken to me, Sir, about the Board of Trade or possibly the Home Office," Churchill replied, secretly hoping that it would be the more senior position of the two.

"In either case, you would become my youngest minister," said the King, "and either office would also have the effect of keeping you more at home. Marriage would do the same. Perhaps that is in your future as well? We are very fond of you, Winston, and not at all displeased by the discomfiting of our nephew, but it would be best for now if we kept you more at home."

The End

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