



A Thrilling Complete Story of Adventure in Africa
By M. WYNNE

THE FIRST CHAPTER
A Perilous Quest

"It is Cedric!" shouted Rex to Tom, waving his arm, whilst at the same time he stood there on the fringe of the veldt, backed by the massed trees of an African forest.

It was a lonely spot, this Ten-Tree Farm, but neither the young Gostolds nor their father had ever regretted paying no heed to the warnings of more cautious friends. There were no womenfolk to grow anxious for, since the lads' sisters were in England and their mother was dead. Ten-Tree Farm was a bachelor stronghold, where work kept the men—barring only the Kaffirs—busy from dawn to dark.

As Rex reached the cactus hedge, a boy of about fifteen reined up his sturdy Cape pony on the opposite side.

No need to ask what sort of a message this visitor brought. Both Rex and Tom recognised a summons for help, and were round in a trice.

Cedric Walden was the only child of a zealous missionary who had been living in a native kraal some ten miles' journey through the forest. A dangerous dwelling-place, in spite of the fact that the natives had seemed devoted to their teacher.

Perspiration poured down young Cedric's face; he looked dazed.

"It's my dad," he muttered. "I was away with two of the natives at the time. A tribe of the Wazari fell on the kraal. They—they took no prisoners excepting my father. We heard from Lomboli, the herdsman, who had hidden in a tree. Oh, it is terrible, terrible! Lomboli says they cried aloud that they

would take the white wizard and prove his skill. My father did all he could for his people. It was his courage which made the Wazari call him 'wizard.' And now they have taken him away. No one knows where the kraal of the Wazari lies. I came here to ask your father to help me. We must find my dad. We must!"

Rex and Tom had gone pale under their tan. It was a ghastly story, and how could they echo the warning which Mr. Walden had so constantly turned a deaf ear to?

"Dad is away," said Rex; "but come right in and get food. Then we'll saddle up and ride out to the kraal. We must find some trace. Sure, Cedric, we'll do all we can."

The younger lad nodded.

"I knew you would," he replied. "And, oh, we shall find him! He's so splendid, so brave. He can't be taken away to be killed and tortured. He knew something of these Wazari. He had helped a party of them once long ago. I remember he told me they were fine fellows."

Ching Li, the Chinese cook, was not long in preparing a meal, but he raised his hands in horror when he heard his young masters were riding into the forest.

"My baas very much disturbed, think no good his sons leave trust," he declared with wily significance.

Rex shook his head.

"There are dangers which your master would say were rightly faced," he retorted. "You give him this note, Ching, and he will understand. Now, Tom—"

But Tom had already gone out to help saddle up. Young Walden did not say much, but his eyes were grateful.

Through a weird tangle of forest paths they rode in silence, each mile stretching out to the length of two. The howling of wild beasts, the chatter of apes, even the hiss of some unseen serpent, made strange music for them; but after all they had become accustomed to such sounds, and were well armed.

"To the right," said Cedric hoarsely. "The kraal is burned, but—but most of the natives have fled. There will be plenty who have come back to tell us all they know, but—"

"Look!" said Tom, reining back his pony

and pointing to the left where the path branched.

The others leaned forward. The undergrowth had parted, and a hideously be-daubed face peered out. A native warrior crept out into the open.

Cedric gave a gasp of horror.

"Wazari," he muttered. "Are they returning?"

"The man is badly wounded," replied Rex. "See, he has fallen. Seems to be dying. We can't leave him without a drink of water."

And, dismounting, he hurried back to the prostrate native's side.

Pity took the place of fear as the lads gathered round, but it was at Cedric the savage looked.

"Yoh, mena—wali?" he whispered.

Cedric bent low, the man evidently wished to speak, but his words came spasmodically with long pauses. But Cedric seemed to understand, and his lean, boyish face grew grim and tense as he bent lower.

"Give him water," he called to Tom, "he cannot speak, and he must, he must, he must."

They raised the warrior's head and he drank feverishly, then again spoke, groping now about his neck. A queer "amulet" of twisted hair and ivory hung there.

"Zakila," Rex and Tom heard him repeat. "Zakila."

With an effort he snapped the thin chain and dropped the amulet into Cedric's hand, then with a long sigh sank limp.

"He is dead," said Cedric, "but he has done his best. He is Mungo the warrior. My father knew him. He converted him to Christianity, but Mungo feared Akolo the witch-doctor, and dared say nothing except to his wife Zakila. They hoped one day to go away alone into the forest. Then the word came for the impi to go out against the kraal of the Kubosi, and Mungo came. He knew my father lived there. He wished to save him. Akolo called him the white wizard. It was Akolo who killed Mungo, who tried to save my father. Now—now he—my father—has been taken to the stronghold of the Wazari."

Rex mopped the sweat from his brow. "I thought no one knew where their stronghold was?" he replied.

"That's right, no one knows. But Mungo has told me. The entrance is *under the falls*."

"Under the falls? What in the world

Cedric looked excitedly from one to the other of his companions.

"Do you know the Galiki Falls?" he asked. "They are some twenty miles away, through the forest. The Wazari came in canoes down the river. Mungo says we shall find his canoe amongst some trees. He has told me where. The falls rush down over a sandstone cliff more than a hundred feet high. Behind the waters there is a cave leading into a series of caves which run underground for miles. That is where my father is. And I am going to rescue him from that fiend Akolo."

"Say!" urged Tom in his slow way. "But it's not possible. Even if we got under the falls, it would be going into a nest of hornets. An army couldn't carry on against the odds."

"That's true," agreed Cedric, "*but we can*. I've got this amulet, and if we find Zakila, she will help us."

"If we find Zakila," echoed Rex.

Cedric was studying the amulet.

"She waits in the cave of the falls at the hour of sunset," he replied. "That is where she and her husband stood to pray. They went secretly in fear of Akolo, who is the cleverest of witch doctors, and is terrified of his power being usurped."

"And so we shall find Zakila," said Tom. "And she will help us. It's good enough. We'll come."

"Sure!" agreed Rex—but he was equally sure that quest would be the last they ever went on. Yet he did not flinch, but set his jaw squarely. You reckon he and Tom, as well as Cedric, had been learning the Scout motto for years past. And now they were putting it into practice. "Be prepared!"

It needed some tussle, however, with those queer thrills which spell fear, but need never spell coward, when the next day they stood together, looking across to where Galiki Falls came roaring down like the bellowing of a

monster herd of elephants. They had found Mungo's canoe and left it moored in calm water lower down. Around the falls the river raced and whirled like mad.

It wasn't going to be a very pleasant dive through the white sheet of spume. And if there were no sheltering cave beyond—if they fell short by half a foot from their goal, it meant swift and certain death.

Leisurely, Tom stripped to his shirt.

Rex smiled grimly. Tom, old slow coach as he was, generally managed to be there first with his joke.

Cedric was heaving a great stone over their wardrobes.

"I guess we'd better take off from that rock," he remarked, and tried gallantly but vainly to speak as if they were taking a header from the Cape Town school diving-board.

Rex ran along the bank and took his leap on to a rock near. The eddies swirled around.

"Not likely to be any crocs about," he chaffed. "It's a bit like Ali Baba, eh? 'Open, sesame!'"

And, curving his lean arms high, he dived into the white wall of water.

Gone! Swallowed up completely. The mighty curtain swept over the place where the figure had disappeared.

Tom snapped his lips. He had instinctively prepared to follow his brother, but stood back. Cedric was the younger, and it wouldn't have been cricket to leave him till the last. But it was not a matter of five minutes before the three had joined each other again.

As Tom staggered, dazed, to his feet he felt Rex's strong grip on his shoulder. It would have been useless to speak; the thunder of falling water must have deafened the keenest ears, and, as the lads grouped together, the curious stunned feeling they had first experienced gradually left them. Less expert divers might easily have been dashed unconscious against the rocky wall and flung out into the whirlpools beyond. But they were safe—so far—and the Wazari stronghold lay before them.

The outer cave was not entirely dark, and it was Rex who first spied the crouching figure of a native woman kneeling near an inner entrance.



"Look!" said Tom, reining back his pony and pointing to where the path branched. The undergrowth had parted, and a hideously bedaubed face peered out! (See page 247.)

Zakila! Cedric had seen the figure, too, and evidently felt no need to question. In such an adventure may be it is better not to search too closely for ambushes or traps, lest the moment for action passes.

The woman remained stationary, after rising to her feet. From what they could see of her face in that dim place she seemed petrified with fear. Those shirt-clad figures must be ghosts. And, without exception, ghosts are most fervently believed in by the African natives.

Cedric stretched out his hand. In the palm lay the amulet.

"Mungo—Zakila," he said, placing his

mouth close to the other's ear. She heard, and her rigid limbs relaxed. Light leapt into her dark eyes.

"E—u—h," she breathed. "Mungo—Zakih—nigla weena—Mungo."

Cedric seemed to understand. He replied in what seemed to the other lads a babble of words. Presently the younger boy came back to them. His face looked grey with dread.

"Zakila will do all she can," he said, "but it does not amount to much. She is heart-broken about her husband. Her prayer is to join him, and yet, as she puts it, she does not want Akolo the witch-doctor to send her by some terrible road to the land of ghosts."



"Baas," said Zakila, pointing along a sloping path. "That is the way leading to the place of Kandoli!" (See this page)

"And so," queried Tom slowly, "what's the first move? Is your father here?"

"Yes," said Cedric as the three gathered close as far as they could get from the roar of waters, "Zakila has told me enough. He is here. It is Akolo's fiendish plot to maintain his authority with the tribe which led him to capture my poor old dad. He is a bound and helpless prisoner in 'the place of Kandoli.' Kandoli, I gather, is a monster of some sort, worshipped as fetish and 'luck' by the tribe. It is, so the woman says, to be proven whether the White Wizard or Kandoli is the greater. The White Wizard is my father. I—I do not know what or who Kandoli may be. The woman fears to speak."

"Say," urged Rex, "where is the place of Kandoli?"

"That's it," said Cedric. "Zakila promises to lead us as far as the gate—but not beyond. She will, if possible, wait for our return. I do not quite understand her last words, but she seemed to want to explain that there was a second exit from the 'place,' but Kandoli guarded it, and only Akolo knew its secret."

Tom drew a deep breath.

"We'd better get a move on," said he.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Found!

ZAKILA was waiting for the three "messengers from the land of ghosts," as she regarded them. Poor soul! It must have seemed to her that these white-shirted heroes belonged to another race of mortals than those she knew. Ghost-warriors from a land where fear did not dwell. And yet the old good man who had told her the story of a wonderful faith had been capable of suffering and suffering. Euh! It was true.

Yet, because of the confusion of her mind and the sorrow of her loss she obeyed blindly enough. Holding a small native lamp in her hand, she crept back along many passages—passages which twisted and zigzagged like the snakes which most probably lived in them; passages which led over chasms and low tunnels, till they came to wider places, where piled boulders and rough sculpture told of the work performed by dead hands in bygone ages.

"Baas," said Zakila, laying her hand on Cedric's and pointing with the other along a sloping path, "that is the way leading to the place of Kandoli. None but the priests and their victims pass along it; none but the priests return."

She shuddered, trembling. But Tom already advanced. They were Britishers bound on a rescue; you guess there was no indecision in striking that trail. And as they went, each

in turn put his hand in that of the woman and blessed her quietly. To Zakila the words were as a charm, keeping her from fear.

Yet when they had disappeared, fear rose grinning from behind a rough, hewn stone.

It was Akolo. For a moment he glared at Zakila, his teeth bared in a snarl.

Then the lean figure of the witch-doctor stole swiftly away down the path, following those who had dared to enter the secret stronghold of the Wazari.

In the meantime, Tom again led the way up a zigzag path which was no longer a mere passage. The dim light around might have been the reflection of daylight from far away and above, yet they were climbing together.

It was Tom who halted as he turned a corner of the sandstone cliff, crying aloud. To the utter bewilderment of the searchers, they stood on the ledge of a precipice rising sheer above and below. The ledge ran back, showing an arched entrance to an inner place, but the lads hardly noticed this, for there before them, bound standing to a post, was the drooping figure of John Humphrey Walden, the heroic missionary to the Kabosi tribe.

And now it was Cedric's turn to spring forward. Tears ran down the boy's face, he gave one cry, faintly echoed by the elder man. Then Cedric had his knife out and was cutting the bonds whilst Rex helped him.

"My boy," whispered the missionary. "Heaven pity us! How did you get here? Are you prisoners and not bound? Tell me?"

And, whilst Cedric and Rex told him, Tom had gone to the ledge, looking down and around in wonder. For there was space—vast space in this deep, half-subterranean stronghold; space where thousands of warriors could gather to hold festival or meeting.

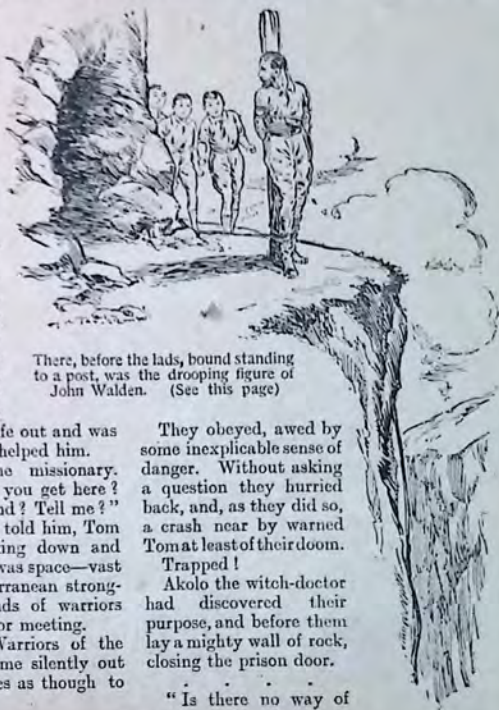
Warriors? Surely yes. Warriors of the Wazari tribe who already came silently out from dark, mysterious passages as though to witness some great fête.

Tom felt his blood run chill. Those silent warriors gathering in their hosts must be aware of their presence here. They were looking, watching, yet making no outcry.

A cold sweat broke over the boy. If only those dark-visaged men would have shouted aloud he would not have minded; it would have aroused his fighting blood. As it was, he turned and went back to where Cedric and Rex chafed Mr. Walden's cramped limbs.

"Let us go quickly," urged the latter, "for there is no moment to lose."

And he looked towards the entrance in the cliff.



There, before the lads, bound standing to a post, was the drooping figure of John Walden. (See this page)

They obeyed, awed by some inexplicable sense of danger. Without asking a question they hurried back, and, as they did so, a crash near by warned Tom at least of their doom.

Trapped!

Akolo the witch-doctor had discovered their purpose, and before them lay a mighty wall of rock, closing the prison door.

"Is there no way of

escape?" asked Cedric "Can't we find a way through that hole in the cliff, or is that—is that——"

Tears rose to his father's eyes.

"There is no way," he said, "or, at least, I am told there is one, but we cannot pass it. That cave is the lair of the sacred serpent Kandoli which these poor savages worship. Akolo is its priest and mouthpiece. That is to say, Akolo is an hereditary cheat who rules the tribe by a wild superstition. When the Wazari first heard my teaching, many warriors would have listened had it not been for Akolo. He threatened the people with the vengeance of Kandoli. Having trapped me, he has summoned all his tribe to witness the struggle between Kandoli and myself. The monster, which I have never seen, has been satiated, gorged, allowed to sleep. The hour of his waking is due. Already you can see how the warriors gather to watch the struggle between—as they believed—a bound man and the great snake. Now—ah, heavens, now——"

He clasped his hands, trembling. Want of food had weakened him. Hero though he was, he feared. And there was reason for his fear. From the spaces below and around a shout went up.

"Hau! Kandoli, great one, eater of enemies, wise thinker. Hau! Kandoli—do you wake hungry, ready to devour the false one? Hau!"

Echoing and re-echoing through caves and passages the last word rolled, and, as the echo died away, a peculiar sound of rustling and slithering movement came from within the cave.

"Steady," said Tom. "Out revolvers! Keep back, Mr. Walden, you are unarmed. Now!" He shouted the last word in a cry, sharp with excitement, as an enormous snake of the python tribe, but swollen and grown to gigantic size, thrust itself out, hissing furiously as it rose in a curling column of green and yellow, its forked tongue darting in and out as it stiffened for the first deadly dart.

Ping—ping—and if—they missed the creature's waving head they were lost. Ping—ping—and the sharp little shrieks of sound were echoed by a howl from the spectators, whilst the waving column of sinuous grace

collapsed, flinging itself out along the ledge—its head shattered, but the great body still wreathing and unwreathing itself.

Again the warriors shouted, but they had not quite grasped the fact of what had happened. For the first time Mr. Walden took the initiative.

"The den," he cried: "there is an exit at the back of the den. Akolo mocked me in telling me of it. He is the only one who dare use it. Quick!"

Stepping carefully aside to avoid contact with the dying monster, the four ran towards the den. Rex took out his electric torch and flashed it round. Luckily, Cedric's sharp eyes detected the outline of a door, half concealed by dry leaves.

Making towards it, he managed to push it open. Steps lead downwards. Whither?

Anywhere, anywhere was better than the place in which they now stood. Close on his heels the others followed. In single file they crept down the rock-hewn stairs till they reached another passage.

It was Rex who unceremoniously pushed the younger boy aside.

"I'll go first, Ced," said he. "I have my torch."

The passage was pitchy dark and very narrow. Yet they could not hesitate. Distant sounds told that the maddened Wazari were flocking round the edge of the ledge. The avengers of Kandoli would be at their heels.

"Shall we—have to get out—under—the falls?" shouted Cedric.

"No," replied Rex. "I reckon—we've reached Mister Akolo's—side—door."

As he spoke he laid his shoulder against the rock blocking the end of the passage.

Crash! Over it went, rolling down evidently amongst thick grasses and undergrowth. Rex, unprepared for the speedy release of the "door," fell with it, and as he did so, felt a pair of lean arms wrap him round. It was Akolo.

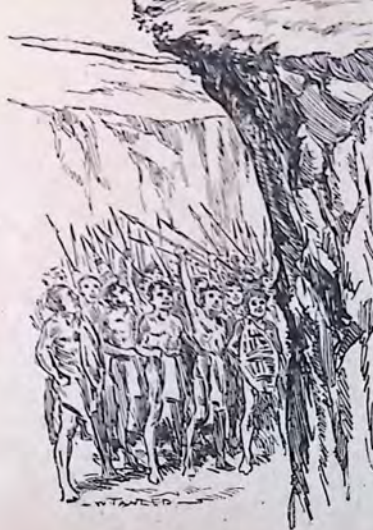
Rolling over with the stone, the two reached the ground in a breathless state.

Akolo did not speak. He had too much to do. Writhing and wriggling, he just managed to become upper dog, but he reckoned without sturdy youth and well-trained muscles.

Rex heaved up and toppled the native back just as Tom shouted. Akolo, with the agility of a wild cat, had doubled himself ready for attack, but, at Tom's shout, he twisted about and dived amongst the tall reeds to the left of the path.

"Stop him!" cried Mr. Walden breathlessly. He knew what Akolo's purpose was. Tom dived too, followed by Cedric, but though they pushed their way gallantly through the snapping canes, no trace could

"Steady! Out revolvers!" said Tom. An enormous snake of the python tribe thrust itself out of the cave, stiffening for the first deadly dart. (See opposite page.)



they see of the witch-doctor. Only one course lay open.

"The canoe!" cried Rex. "If we reach that first we may escape down the river."

Shouts answered him—but not from the lips of his companions. From under the falls, taking some way undiscovered by the lads, the Wazari were pouring out upon the bank of the stream. Yet so far their prey was hidden.

A thin, shrill voice shrieked its directions. They were coming—led by Akolo.

Cedric thrust his hand into his pocket, bringing out a box of matches. He did not wait to ask advice. Up, up ran a thin ribbon of flame. Up, up, spreading to right and left amongst the dry bamboos till a sheet of flame blazed between them and the Wazari.

Then, turning, the four raced back down the path. How the fire roared and crackled, drowning the cries of the natives.



Half-carried, half-dragged forward, the missionary was brought to where, still hidden by the tangle of grasses, lay the canoe. (See this page.)

Mr. Walden stumbled and nearly fell. "Go on, lads," he panted. "I'm done!"

But they paid no heed. Tom and Rex each took one of his arms, each drawing the limb round his neck; thus, half carried, half dragged forward, the good man was brought to where still hidden by the tangle of grasses, lay the canoe.

Would the shallow craft take the four?

Cedric drew back.

"Go on," he called. "Take dad. I'll—follow."

"Seat!" mocked Rex. "We'll sink or swim together, kid." And he toppled the half indignant boy into the little craft.

The canoe swayed and swung about, but Rex and Tom had the paddles.

The Wazari were still fighting the fire, which threatened their stronghold.

Out into mid-stream floated the canoe. She was a stout little craft after all, and though low in the water, carried the heavy burden well enough. It was a grim journey, though. White moonbeams showed the horny heads of alligators, and each of the four knew what would happen should the canoe capsize.

Nearer, nearer now came the shouts of the Wazari, but the pursuers were too late.

When, five minutes later, Akolo, in a frenzy of rage, reached the spot to which he had tracked his foes, the canoe had vanished.

Nor was his rage decreased by the words of a warrior spoken in his ear.

"Hau, old one, is it not proven that Kandoli is dead, defeated by the priest of the white man's god? What is that to thee, Akolo? Is it the word that Mungo spoke in our ears? If so—"

Akolo shrieked, clawing the air. He would prove that Kandoli still lived—he only slept. Hau! he only slept.

And meantime, four fugitives were paddling down the broad stream in safety. Pursuit they had expected, but it had not come.

Why?

Neither Rex nor Tom troubled to answer that question as they tramped back across the veldt towards Ten-Tree Farm to be welcomed by a father who had been crazed with anxiety on their behalf.

But—John Walden asked it as he and his son sat amongst the friendly Kabosi who had rejoiced ecstatically at receiving them back.

"One day," said Walden, "I shall take the Great Message to the Wazari. They will listen. One day I shall return and find welcome from our enemies. I am sure of it!"

But Cedric was silent.

Just then it seemed to him that never, never again did he wish on any errand to enter the stronghold—under the falls.

THE END