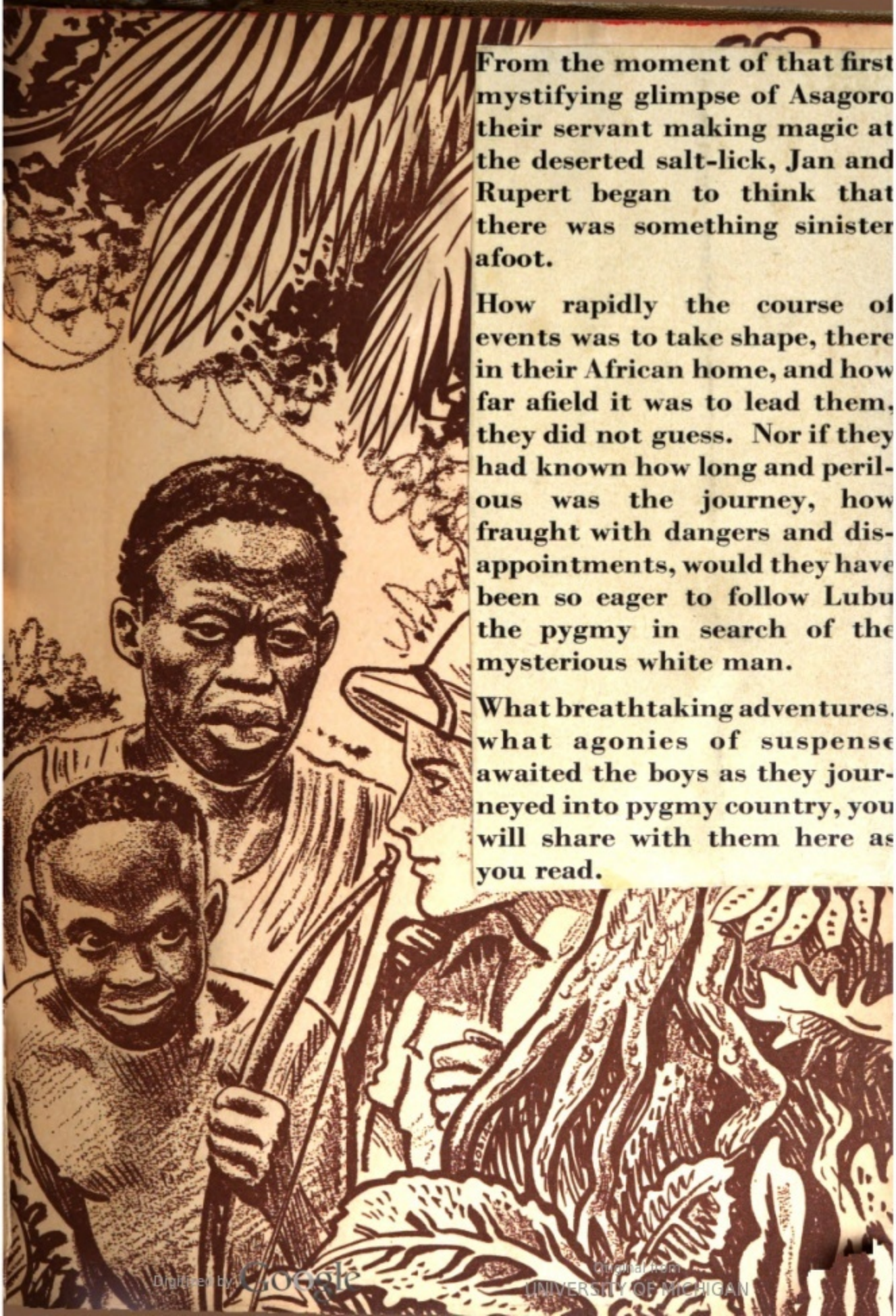
# PYGMY'S ARROW

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



From the moment of that first mystifying glimpse of Asagoro their servant making magic at the deserted salt-lick, Jan and Rupert began to think that there was something sinister afoot.

How rapidly the course of events was to take shape, there in their African home, and how far afield it was to lead them, they did not guess. Nor if they had known how long and perilous was the journey, how fraught with dangers and disappointments, would they have been so eager to follow Lubu the pygmy in search of the mysterious white man.

What breathtaking adventures, what agonies of suspense awaited the boys as they journeyed into pygmy country, you will share with them here as you read.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Donated by the

*Grand Rapids Public Library*
*The May G. Quigley*
*Collection*
*of Children's Literature*

*December 2001*

The University of Michigan-Dearborn
Mardigian Library

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

# The Pygmy's Arrow

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

BOOKS BY

# WALDO FLEMING

THE LOST CARAVAN

TALKING DRUMS

A RIDDLE IN FEZ

THE PYGMY'S ARROW

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

*The hippo upset the pygmies as though they were so many ants on a leaf.*

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

*A Tale of Mystery and Adventure in the Belgian Congo*

# The Pygmy's Arrow

**by**

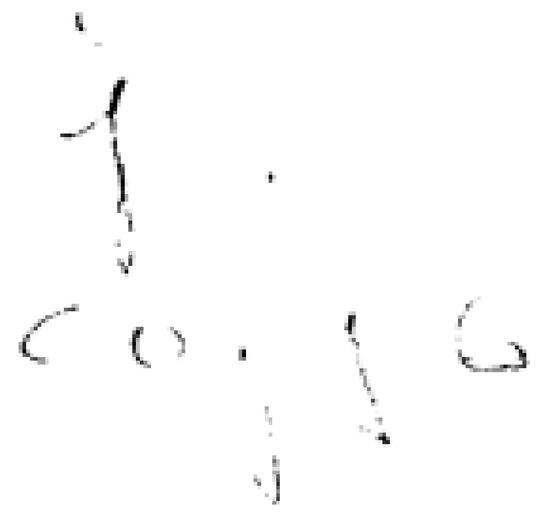
**Waldo Fleming**

***Illustrated by***

**Frank Dobias**

**The Junior Literary Guild**
**Corporation**
**and**
**Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Company**
**New York 1939**

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



CL

*Copyright, 1938*

BY LOTHROP, LEE AND SHEPARD COMPANY

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in magazine or newspaper.



PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

## CONTENTS


| *Chapter* | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I | A Secret Sign | 3 |
| II | Father under a Cloud | 17 |
| III | The Arrow | 32 |
| IV | Presenting Lubu | 47 |
| V | The Pygmy Won't Tell | 63 |
| VI | On the Way to the Boat | 81 |
| VII | "Calamities Go in Pairs" | 96 |
| VIII | Why the Bullets? | 111 |
| IX | Under Cover of the Night | 126 |
| X | The Prowler's Strange Booty | 141 |
| XI | Meet a White Man | 155 |
| XII | Death Has Been Here! | 171 |
| XIII | Little Worm, Big Worm | 187 |
| XIV | A Double Surprise | 202 |
| XV | Flight of the Bantus | 217 |
| XVI | The Thing in the River | 234 |
| XVII | Pattern Taking Shape | 247 |
| XVIII | The Hippo Drive | 262 |
| XIX | Shock | 277 |
| XX | "I, Doorula, Speak" | 292 |
| XXI | When Canoes Turn Home | 307 |


Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

# The Pygmy's Arrow

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

# *Chapter One*

## A SECRET SIGN

JAN, clutching the handle of his butterfly net, prepared to capture the big yellow insect the instant it ventured within range. The lithe, sixteen year old boy was clothed as he believed all white people should be in that part of the Congo, especially if they were to spend hours on end in pursuit of butterflies! High-topped boots protected him against the ticks and snakes which infested the underbrush, and khaki knickers helped to keep thorns out of his legs. A light shirt open at the neck, and a pith helmet, completed his costume. He tossed the helmet aside, for it obscured his view as the butterfly fluttered near.

Suddenly he darted forward, thrust deftly, and had



Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the insect safely in the meshes of the net. Jan laughed gayly and turned to call to his brother.

"My best one to-day! Come see it, Rupert!"

The pith helmet was still on the ground, completely forgotten, and Rupert picked it up as he walked forward. He said nothing. As a matter of fact he was not particularly interested in butterflies, and had come with his brother this afternoon only because the walk had been pleasant and he needed exercise. He smiled at his brother's enthusiasm.

"Look!" exclaimed Jan, holding up the net. "It's *Pseudacraea eurytus*, or I'm a Hollander's wooden shoe. Yellow with cinnamon-brown spots. I never saw this color before, but it's certainly the same species as the specimens I have at home. I think it's simply a matter of color variation within the species, don't you?"

"Perhaps," Rupert answered indifferently. "And now that you have bagged it, Professor, would you care to go home? It's getting late, and we're several miles from the village."

"That's true," nodded Jan. He put the butterfly carefully into a small case which he carried in his pocket, and picked up his net. "All right, my man, lead on."

"I'm your man, certainly," retorted Rupert, as they started on. "Except that most men servants get paid, and I work for nothing. Here's your helmet."

"If the service keeps on improving I'll have to begin to pay you," chuckled Jan. Then he threw out a hand

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and pulled his brother to a halt, his face tensing. "Hold on! What is that?"

Coming toward them from the direction of the village there was what seemed to be a large golden eye, so dazzling that it was visible through a wide stretch of brush and tall grass. Then, as it came closer, the "eye" resolved itself into a shining object which hung on a fiber cord around a black man's neck. Rupert smiled dryly.

"What you see," he observed, "is our chief and most important household servant, Asagoro, we call him. He's our cook, valet, runner, and general handy-man and, unless your memory is failing, you've known him since you were four years old! The bright thing about his neck is an old gold-plated watch case that Father gave him."

"It looked like something else for a split second," said Jan sheepishly. "Come on."

"Wait," exclaimed his brother, and there was no longer any amusement in his voice. "Get out of sight. Don't let Asagoro see us!"

The boys crouched down behind a bush, and Jan whispered in surprise.

"What is the matter with you?"

"Asagoro is acting queerly," Rupert explained. "I think he is up to something. Watch."

The native had paused and was gazing intently into the distance, first in one direction, and then in another. He was a big man, tall and muscular, and very black. It was certain that he had been walking fast for his

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

skin was shiny with perspiration. As he turned to the west, the sunlight was reflected upon the watch case in such rhythmic flashes that the boys knew his chest was heaving. And Asagoro had never been known to hurry!

"You're right," murmured Jan. "He isn't here to admire the scenery. Ah, he's going on!"

Asagoro had left the path, but after perhaps a dozen quick steps to one side of it, he stood still. The boys moved forward a little, in an effort to keep him in sight. Once more he looked about. Then, with nervous abruptness, he took his watch-case ornament and slipped it inside his faded cotton shirt. The "eye" was now out of sight, and the native was more at ease. He drew a knife from his belt and bent toward the ground. His movements were those of a man making marks, or of cutting something. Whatever he was doing, however, did not take long. Before Jan and Rupert could discover what he was doing, Asagoro rose to his feet, and, with a last glance around him, started back toward the village.

"Well," Jan demanded excitedly. "What do you make of it?"

"Let's go see," answered Rupert, scrambling to his feet as soon as Asagoro was out of sight.

It was not hard to find the spot where the native had bent over the ground with his knife. Near the path was a kind of shallow depression devoid of vegetation which seemed to have been worn into the earth by the feet, teeth and tongues of many generations

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

of animals. This barren spot was a salt lick, one of those areas in which saline deposits are so concentrated, and so close to the surface of the soil that wild beasts and even savage tribes search for them and eat the dirt for the salt it contains.

"I see what Asagoro did," said Jan in a puzzled tone. "He made this mark."

Rupert came to look. In the center of the salt lick, Asagoro, using the tip of his knife blade as a tool, had scratched a sign in the smooth, hard ground. The mark was long as a man's hand, and about as broad. The base of it seemed to represent the trunk of a miniature tree, while the upper part separated into three or four branches and to that extent resembled its limbs. Jan studied it for a moment and then he laughed.

"Our Asagoro is trying his hand at magic."

"You think so?" asked Rupert slowly.

"What else could it be! This mark wasn't made in fun."

"Of course not. He came from the village just to make it here, and he did it with care."

"Magic," insisted Jan. "The drawing of a tree signifies growth or increase. This is a salt lick. Asagoro's secret sign is intended to attract game so that he can slip up and kill it."

For a moment Rupert did not answer. He was slower at forming an opinion, although, as a rule, his judgments were less flighty than Jan's.

"This is a *deserted* lick," he said dubiously.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"What!" exclaimed Jan.

"Deserted," Rupert said again. "It has not been used for a long long time, as anyone with half an eye can see. Asagoro would not come here to work his magic; he would go to a salt lick which still attracts game."

"This lick is the nearest to the village," shrugged Jan.

"What of that?"

"A great deal. Mostly Asagoro is busy with you, and me, and Dad, and the house. He doesn't have much time to hunt. What is more reasonable than to suppose he is trying, by using magic, to attract game back to this particular lick, because it is close by?"

"Then why did he act as though he didn't want anyone to see him?"

"Pooh, native magic calls for secrecy."

"Not always."

"I know!" cried Jan, smiling broadly. "He is afraid Dad might hear of it. Now I *am* right! Magic is pagan, superstitious, and a waste of time; and Dad, as a missionary, naturally disapproves of such practices. If Dad saw this Asagoro would never be able to live it down!"

"Yes," said Rupert, frowning in concentration.

"Well, let us get on, or we'll keep Asagoro's game from coming here," laughed Jan. "A white man is certainly a fly in the ointment of a native's magic."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Leisurely they went on, Jan humming a tune, Rupert silent and thoughtful.

Suddenly the elder brother spoke, "It is not magic at all!"

"Ah, so you are still gnawing at your bone, are you!"

"There's meat on that bone," declared Rupert, "I mean there is more to this secret sign of Asagoro's than you realize."

"Good, explain it to me!" Jan urged him blithely.

"I can't," was the answer, "but one thing I do know."

"What?"

"It is this," said Rupert, his face sober, "Asagoro hid his watch case charm in his shirt, which means he was afraid that it might tell on him."

Jan was impressed. He usually scoffed at native magic because he thought so much of it both tiresome and fruitless. He contended that even most blacks, themselves, lacked faith in their spells and charms. Yet it was different with Asagoro, or at least in the matter of the watch case. The boys remembered the day the native first saw the bright thing. Their father, Herman Metlinck, had gone to his native Belgium to study and consult with his board of regents. In his absence, Jan and Rupert had stayed with their mother in the Congo, and Asagoro was the family's general servant. When news finally came that the missionary was arriving on the next steamer, Mrs. Metlinck sent the eager boys and Asagoro to meet

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

him. The first thing that they had seen at the boat landing was the same golden gleam which had startled Jan this afternoon. Herman Metlinck was waiting for them, impatience in his face and a bright new watch in his hand. Asagoro had coveted the watch from that day forward, and when the missionary had eventually ruined it as a time-piece by trying to repair the works, he had given it to the black. The works Asagoro had promptly discarded as puzzling and possibly dangerous, but the case he hung about his neck. He called it his charm, his "all-see eye." It was the native's belief that this eye saw all that he did, and that it also had the power to tell its former owner of these things.

"Asagoro got that notion into his head the Christmas he stole all our sugar cakes," Rupert reminded his brother. "He could not understand how Father knew it, and so he laid it to the 'eye.' Ever since then, you know as well as I do, that he tucks the watch case out of sight when he does something of which he is afraid Father will not approve."

"Granted," said Jan, "but Dad disapproves of magic."

"I shouldn't say that," objected Rupert. "There is very little magic left in our village, and what does remain is almost harmless. Father has grown used to it, just as any experienced missionary must do. I suspect Asagoro of more than magic, though I can't put my finger on what it is."

Jan laughed carelessly. "My friend," he exclaimed,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"who says you have no imagination! You have—except that it is always tied to suspicion, like a balloon to a child's perambulator. Rupert, you will make a perfect Government official some day!"

That was exactly what Rupert intended to make of himself, an official in the colonial service of His Majesty, the King of the Belgians. The elder brother was altogether a different type from Jan. He was physically stockier, and in temperament distinctly less volatile. Jan never knew exactly what he wanted to be. At the moment he planned to become the greatest collector of butterflies in all Africa, but three months hence his passion might be geology, or aviation, or marine engineering. Rupert was not as clever as Jan, yet neither was he so mentally restless, so blown here and there by the winds of emotion. Sober, practical, solid; these words best described Rupert. He was even tempered as well, and he did not resent Jan's comment.

"It is a fine day," Rupert said, hinting that they might better find a new topic of conversation.

And thereat the Great God Chance lent a hand. The path had grown a little muddy, one side of it shelving off toward a marshy stream. The boys began to walk more carefully for the ground was slippery. Just ahead the main branch of a trail fork led toward the village, while the side path crossed the stream and wavered on in the direction of the Ituri forest. As he came to the junction of these two routes Jan saw a boot print in the side path. Someone had jumped

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

across the stream and had landed with sufficient force to leave a deep track.

"H'm," said Jan, and he stopped to show his brother. "Why is Dad going that way?"

The boys assumed that it was their father who had made the track, for the natives did not wear shoes, and there was no other European close by. Mrs. Metlinck had been dead for several years, and the boys had never heard of any other whites in the vicinity. They felt certain that they would have learned such news, for in a remote missionary district in the Belgian Congo white men were too scarce not to be entertained as honored guests for as long as possible.

But the boot print in the mud showed that a white man had come from the village and was heading toward the forest. It must have been their father, Jan and Rupert concluded, for a stranger would never have come and gone within the few hours that they had been away from home.

"A second queer thing," murmured Rupert, staring at the boot print.

"What is queer about Dad's going for a walk?" demanded Jan.

"The secret sign that Asagoro made, that was a first queer thing," said Rupert, in the methodical way which was typical of him. "And this is the second. Why is it queer that Father goes for a walk? Because he starts so late. There is no village within an hour's walk up the side path yonder, and in an hour it will be night. Father would not have time to visit any-

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

one and still get back before dark, and he dislikes being away from home so late."

"Pooh, he probably passed here over an hour ago. That would give him time to get back. Or would it?"

Jan was noticing what his brother had already observed, the freshness of the boot print. It was only a few minutes old, he could tell, for trickles of water were running down into it. Also, the mud boundaries of the imprint were still spongy. In the jargon of an African game trailer, the track had not yet "settled."

"Why, Dad must have turned off just a second before we came along!" exclaimed Jan. "It's strange he didn't see us."

"Or at least hear us," said Rupert. "I am going to call to him."

The elder brother faced up the side path, cupped his hands about his mouth, and shouted.

"Are you there, Father? Are you there?"

No answer. They listened intently, expecting an answering call in Herman Metlinck's deep bass voice. None came. Rupert called again, and then Jan took a turn at it. The winding, brush-bordered path remained silent. There was no reply to the boys' shouts.

"All that throat splitting and not even an echo for a reward," grumbled the disgusted Jan. "Let's go on home."

"I don't understand it," murmured Rupert, starting on.

"I suppose we now have *three* queer things in our bag!" exclaimed the younger boy. "Asagoro's secret

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

sign in the ground, Dad's track, and his failure to answer us!"

"Perhaps so," Rupert answered. "He surely wasn't so far up the path that he couldn't have heard our shouts."

"Dad never hears anything when he's thinking."

"When he's worried, you mean. Yes, but he hasn't been bothered by anything lately. He's been cheerful —actually gay."

The younger brother began to laugh.

"You say that as though it were wrong to be gay!" he jeered. "Dad hasn't the easiest life in the world, and I think it is fine if he can brighten up now and then."

"So do I," Rupert agreed, "except that I see no reason for it."

"Must there be a reason for feeling cheerful!"

"Certainly, and if you weren't as light-headed as a pygmy half the time you'd know it. Nothing has happened that could explain Father's good spirits. It would be more natural for him to be gloomy and depressed."

"How so?"

Rupert was mildly irritated. "Why, because of that bad news from Brussels, for one thing. Didn't the board of regents write him that he'd have to cut down his expenditures for the coming year? They're having hard times in Europe, so less money must be spent on the natives here in the Congo. Father had planned to expand into the Ituri forest, and to send a medical

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

assistant on regular trips to the pygmy villages. Now he can't hire an assistant. He felt badly enough about that, and then on top of it we blocked his plans for us."

"How could we help it?" Jan asked, with regret in his voice. "I don't want to be a missionary, and *you* don't, either. It's too bad to disappoint him, but if we can't reconcile ourselves to 'following in his footsteps,' as he puts it, there's nothing to be done, that I can see."

"Keep to the point."

"What *is* the point?" Jan wanted to know.

"That Father has lately had more reason to feel gloomy than gay. News from Belgium has disappointed him; you and I have disappointed him."

"He's had a notion all along that we didn't care to take up missionary work."

"It would cost very little to make missionaries of his sons," continued Rupert, "but to train them for other careers means long courses of study in Belgium. Where is the money to come from? Why, that problem alone is enough to make a man despondent."

"Stop talking about it," muttered the younger boy.

As they went on along the path, both were wondering about the father who was gay when he had reasons to be gloomy. It was strange, but Herman Metlinck was often a riddle to his sons. He rarely confided in them. Perhaps he thought them too young, or perhaps he believed that a Government missionary had no right to reveal anything which, even remotely,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

might be called official business. At any rate, he was close-mouthed.

"Let him be happy, if he can," Rupert voiced his conclusion. "I shan't pry into the reason for it."

"Nor I," declared Jan, and in a rush of returning cheerfulness he pretended to walk as though his boots were full of lead. "The last forty steps are the hardest!"

"You go too far afield on your miserable butterfly excursions."

"Why, there's a light in our house!" exclaimed the younger boy. "Someone just lit the lamp."

"Asagoro, starting to get supper," said Rupert. "Good thing. I'm famished."

A few more steps brought the brothers into a clearing. It was dotted here and there by wooden buildings of the kind which natives build under the direction of white men long accustomed to the tropics. The first structure was a church, and just beyond stood the comfortable bungalow which was the missionary's home. Light shone from a window. The boys went round to the front of the house and up the steps to the verandah. Jan opened the door, and gasped in astonishment.

"Why, Dad! Where did you come from?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

# *Chapter Two*

## FATHER UNDER A CLOUD

THE missionary was seated at the far side of the living room, his back toward the door. As he bent over the plain board table which served as his desk, the boys could see that he had been writing by the light of a kerosene lamp which stood on the table in front of him. Jan's voice seemed to startle him. He abruptly left off writing, but he did not turn to face his sons.

"Is that you, boys?" he asked.

"Yes," said Rupert, following his brother into the room. "We thought you were out."

"And why did you think that?" inquired Herman Metlinck, in a dull, flat tone.



Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"We saw your footprint up the Ituri path," Jan explained.

The father jerked around in his chair. As the lamp was directly behind him, his face was in a concealing shadow, but the boys knew that he was disturbed. Mr. Metlinck adjusted his spectacles carefully, a certain sign that he had temporarily lost his usual calm manner.

"What did you say?" he demanded.

Jan went to hang his butterfly net on the wall. Turning, he began to tell the tale of the boot print, Rupert filling in details which the younger boy had either forgotten or omitted as non-essential.

"Up the Ituri path?" asked the missionary.

"Yes, right by the stream."

"We called," Rupert added, "but—"

"Called, did you!" interrupted Herman Metlinck. "What did you say?"

"Why, we simply called out to know if you were there. Didn't you hear us?"

The missionary swallowed hard. "No," he said slowly. "I didn't hear you."

"What I can't understand," said Jan, "is how you got back to the house before we did. You didn't go to the Ituri village, after all, did you?"

"No," answered the father, as slowly as before. "I did not go as far as that."

"You must have circled around by another path to get home so quickly," suggested Jan.

The boys waited for their father's reply, but it

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

did not come. Herman Metlinck seemed to be deep in thought, his sons crowded aside by the pressure of some private trouble. Then Jan spoke again, and the missionary aroused himself.

"You are inquisitive," he said sharply. "It is not a good thing, as I have told you many times."

Rupert took the hint and said no more. For some reason their father was displeased to hear they had seen a boot print in the forest path. That surprised and puzzled Rupert, yet he knew that the matter was not to be discussed. Accordingly he suppressed his curiosity, and motioned to Jan to keep still.

That was asking a great deal of Jan. By nature he was spontaneous, and quick to express his feelings and opinions. Just now he was mystified. No doubt it was all a very trivial matter, but at the same time he wanted to know the truth.

"It was warm to-day," he murmured, "especially off toward the forest. There never seems to be a breeze in the vicinity of the Ituri."

The missionary turned back to the desk and took up his pen.

"I'm thirsty from so much walking," Jan continued lamely. "Hunting butterflies always makes me dry."

"Then get a drink of water," said Rupert, and he made violent gestures for silence.

Jan went to the kitchen for a drink. When he returned, the elder brother was unlacing his heavy boots, and Herman Metlinck was writing again. With a

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

sigh of resignation, Jan took his collecting case and sat down at the desk opposite his father with the lamp between them. The boy opened the case, took out the butterflies, and spread them on the table.

The pen at the other side of the desk stopped scratching.

"Perhaps Dad is looking at my butterflies," thought Jan. "If he is, we shall get to talking yet."

No one spoke. Jan was afraid to look up, but he listened. And he heard something. It was not what he had expected, not his father's voice, nor, for that matter, was it a voice at all. What he heard was the regular sound of heavy breathing. Could it be Herman Metlinck? No, it was not near enough for that. Rupert, perhaps. Wrong again. Jan glanced around and saw that his brother was walking into their bedroom in his stocking feet, in search of his rattan house slippers. Stealthily Jan peeped round the lamp.

"It is Dad, of course. There is no one else in the room, and the sound is certainly not coming from *me!*" he reassured himself.

The sight of his father's face startled Jan. The missionary had stopped writing and was staring at the paper in front of him, with his eyes wide and unblinking. There was resolution in the set of his jaw, but the lines about the mouth indicated pain and regret. What was he writing, and to whom? Or perhaps it was of no consequence. Very possibly Herman Metlinck was only writing letters in an effort to put worry away from him.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Suddenly the mysterious sound of breathing again took possession of Jan's mind. He moved his head, wondering what it could be.

"The thing is near me somewhere," murmured the boy. "It is probably a small animal which has crept into the house through a hole."

He looked at the wall. It was within an arm's reach, an expanse of peeled saplings laid horizontally. The cracks between them were chinked up with native mortar, which was clay mixed while still wet and soft, with quantities of chopped straw. At a certain place in the wall there was a hole in it the size of a man's thumb. Jan studied this hole. Somehow it did not appear to have been made by the falling away of a chunk of mortar. It seemed as if someone had picked or rubbed the mortar away for the purpose of seeing into the room. The hole was just above the level of the table. A spy outside could easily watch anyone seated here.

A faint shadow moved on the other side of the hole. Jan saw it and swallowed hard. The silence in the living room had doubtless caused the spy to shift position, in an effort to observe more clearly.

"I'll see about that," thought Jan.

As quietly as possible, he got up from his chair and drew away from the hole. For a moment he stood irresolute. He could do one of two things. He could go out of the door and slip around the house to see who was peeping into the living room, or he could look out of the window. Jan decided on the second

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

course. It would take longer to slip out around the house, and, as he was frank to admit, he did not relish the prospect of tackling an unknown prowler single-handed.

The boy tiptoed toward the window on the south side of the living room, halfway between the desk and the missionary's bedroom. Herman Metlinck was again busy with his writing.

"Have you seen my slippers, Jan?" Rupert's call broke the silence with the abruptness of an explosion, and made Jan's taut nerves quiver. "I always have a particular place for them, but that never bothers *you*. What have you done with them?"

Jan did not answer. Instead, he pulled open the window, a small square one which swung inward like a door. He peered out, and saw just what he had expected. To the right, not more than two and a half or three feet from the house, there was a tree stump. On this stump stood a dark figure, feet braced on what had once been a tall, growing tree, and with the upper part of the body tipped forward against the living-room wall. It was the spy, who, with a hand on either side of the hole and an eye covering it, was looking into the house.

"Will you answer me?" demanded Rupert of Jan, and his voice came nearer. Also it rose sharply, "What are you doing with that window open? Don't you know that you'll fill the house with forty varieties of insects, none of them butterflies! Close it, *please!*"

Again Jan ignored him. Rupert had unwittingly

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

startled the spy. As he jumped down from the tree trunk and started to run, Jan called out.

"Never mind running, Asagoro! Stop where you are!"

The native halted and turned round. He was about to speak when Herman Metlinck came hastily to the window.

"What is all this?" he asked.

"Asagoro," answered Rupert, who had rushed to the window ahead of his father. "Some of Jan's foolishness, I think."

"Some of *my* foolishness!" exclaimed the younger boy indignantly. "Asagoro's, you mean. He was spying from outside, looking through a hole in the wall right by Dad's desk."

The missionary's lips tightened. He leaned out of the window. When he saw that Asagoro was actually there, he said in a stern voice, "Come in here, at once. All right, boys, close the window."

Rupert drew back, a little skeptical of Jan's claims. "You say he was spying?" he demanded, and Jan came into the house. "Your choice of words is rather romantic, it strikes me."

"Eavesdropping, then, if you don't like spying," retorted Jan.

"Where is the hole he was looking through?" asked the father.

"Here," said Jan, and pointed to it. "See, it is placed so that he could watch the table. He was spying on you while you were writing letters, Dad!"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Nonsense," said Herman Metlinck. Nevertheless, as though to conceal it, he put his unfinished letter into the table drawer.

"Where is that rascal of an Asagoro?" Jan demanded impatiently. "Maybe he isn't coming in. Perhaps he has run away!"

"Don't be *too* romantic," retorted Rupert. "He is taking his time. Don't you know Asagoro?"

A series of shuffling footsteps sounded on the verandah, and then halted.

"Come in!" cried the missionary. "I am waiting for you."

Asagoro opened the door and stepped inside. He stood blinking in the lamplight. He seemed reluctant to meet the accusing gaze of Herman Metlinck. The gold watch case was tucked into his shirt.

"I get-em supper," he mumbled.

"You are suddenly conscientious about our meals," replied the missionary. "Were you spying on us just now?"

"No, sir, boss, I not do that," said Asagoro.

"I saw him," put in Jan. "He needn't lie out of it."

"What *were* you doing out there, if you were not spying?" asked Herman Metlinck.

"Do nothing," was the answer.

"Just standing there, eh?"

"Yes, me stand there."

"On the tree trunk, with his eye to the hole in the wall," said Jan.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"No, sir, boss."

"I tell you I saw you," retorted Jan.

"Who made the hole, Asagoro?" asked the missionary.

"I not know-em hole. What hole you mean?"

"I have an idea you know," said Herman Metlinck. He went to the wall and bent down to feel of the hole. "Did you make it?" he asked.

"No."

"Who did?"

"How I know that?" demanded the black, and he hunched his shoulders as a sign that the questioning had gone far enough. He was growing sullen.

"You are the only servant living in the house," said Rupert quietly. "The others only come in from the village to do special tasks, while you are here day and night. If anyone else had made the hole, you would have seen him."

"Many times me go to spring, catch-em water," said the native. "When I gone like that, some fella make-em hole."

"And you know nothing about it?" asked the missionary.

"No."

"You've seen the hole before this evening?"

"I see-em, yes."

"Why didn't you plug it up?"

"Plug-em up? What for?"

"To keep out insects, for one thing. You know I am particular about such matters."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Jan did not like the way the talk was going. "Dad," he burst out, "you surely don't believe Asagoro's cock-and-bull story, do you!"

"Hardly," said the missionary, "but I prefer to question him in my own way, if you don't mind."

"I'm sorry," muttered Jan.

"Asagoro," continued Herman Metlinck, "it is an evil thing to lie, and when you *persist* in lying, it is doubly bad. What good has all my teaching done for you, if you can stand there and say things which I know very well to be false?"

"Everybody got to lie sometime," grumbled the native.

"Then you did make the hole?"

"Yes, I make-em."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"That means any time before to-day," murmured Rupert.

"Have you often used this peep hole," asked the missionary. His face was uneasy.

"Sometimes I use-em."

"Why did you do it?"

"See inside."

"Why did you want to do that? For instance, why did you spy on us to-night?"

Asagoro shifted from one foot to the other. He had admitted certain things, but that did not mean that he was going to complete the job. To judge from the way he scowled, and rolled his eyes, and shuffled about

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the floor, he considered it time to abandon truth-telling.

"Why did you spy on us to-night?" demanded the missionary sternly.

"Me hear voices in here."

"What of that?"

"I think-em two young bosses they out catch-em butterflies," Asagoro explained. "Me get surprise to hear-em talk in here, so I take look."

"You were out there a long time," declared Jan.

"I try-em find out if you hungry, so I know if I better cook-em supper quick," was the answer.

The boys laughed, but there was no trace of amusement in Herman Metlinck's face.

"This is a serious affair," he told the native. "I advise you to tell me the whole truth."

"Me tell truth already," said Asagoro. "That all I got to tell."

"He's impudent," frowned Rupert.

"Asagoro," said the missionary, flushing a little, "I do not like unmannerly servants. You realize that I could discharge you for this, don't you?"

"You not do that," said the native calmly.

"Why not?"

"You need-em me."

Jan and Rupert glanced quickly at their father, expecting him to dismiss Asagoro on the spot, but though the missionary's face turned red, and his eyes snapped behind their spectacles, he did not speak. Asagoro had spoken sullenly and he was openly defiant.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Calmly, and without fear, he met the white man's gaze. An unspoken message passed between them. Then, abruptly, Herman Metlinck ignored the servant's insolence.

"One more thing," he said, "did anyone ask you to spy on us like this?"

"No, sir, boss," said Asagoro, and he seemed surprised.

"You are sure no one told you to do such a thing?"

"Me sure, you bet," the native answered earnestly. "What you mean, boss?"

"Nothing," said the missionary, obviously relieved. "Get supper, Asagoro. We have wasted time in useless talk. Say no more about it."

Asagoro grinned. "I catch-em supper," he said, in his most agreeable tone. "What you want eat, boss?"

"It does not matter," was the answer. "Go on. I want to be alone. All this chatter is enough to make a man's head ache."

The black shambled into the kitchen. A silence fell upon the living room. Herman Metlinck crossed over and sat down in the far corner of the room, so deep in shadow that only his outline was visible. The boys did not speak. Even Jan was subdued. Their father's references to chatter and headache meant that he would resent any further talk from his sons. Jan looked at Rupert, and murmured, "Would you like to help me mount the specimens we caught to-day?"

"No, I'm tired."

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

That was all the conversation until Asagoro brought in the supper. The main dish was curried chicken, but though ordinarily Herman Metlinck was fond of it, he scarcely tasted it to-night. He had no appetite. He was under a cloud, and his eyes were heavy and dull. At the end of the meal, he rose.

"I am going to bed," he said. "Good-night."

"Good-night," said Rupert, but Jan was speechless. What? His father was going to bed without first reading a passage from the Scriptures? It was impossible! It had never happened before, not in all the days of Jan's memory.

"Speak up," muttered the elder brother. "Tell him good-night."

"Good-night, Dad," Jan managed to stammer.

The missionary had closed the door between his sleeping room and the living room. Rupert and Jan stared at each other.

"There is something terribly wrong," said Jan.

"Perhaps not," declared Rupert cautiously. "It may be only that he is worried about things, his smaller budget, you and me and the careers we want."

"Don't be stupid," said the younger boy. "This morning he was cheerful and bright; this evening he is gloomy as a *mautu* bird. Something happened while we were gone to-day. Or was it Asagoro's spying that changed him?"

"Not that," objected Rupert. "He was depressed before he knew about Asagoro. I could see that Father was in low spirits the moment I came in the door. Well,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

I am going to bed. Your butterfly excursion has worn me out."

"Oh, let's stay up and talk about things!" exclaimed Jan.

"About *Father*, you mean. No, I am not going to indulge in what he calls silly chatter. I want to think things over before I venture any opinions."

"Go to bed, then," grumbled Jan. "I'm staying up."

Rupert went off, yet Jan was dissatisfied at being all alone in the living room. Presently he joined his brother in their room. Jan crawled in between the sheets of his bed, turned on his side and peered at Rupert's bed opposite him.

"Psst!" he said. "Have you thought it over?"

"Did you come to bed just to bother me with your talk?" demanded Rupert.

"Yes! Between you and me, we ran into more than *three* queer things to-day."

"Go to sleep."

"I won't! You've got to tell me what you think, or I'll talk all night. This is my idea. Asagoro is trying to bring about some injury to Dad. His spying proves it, and so does that magical sign he scratched into the old salt lick."

"Keep still," said Rupert, "or I'll get up and—oh, Father, I'm sorry! Did we disturb you?"

The bedroom occupied by the boys adjoined the missionary's, and, for the sake of better ventilation, the connecting door was customarily left open. Now

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Herman Metlinck stood in the doorway, white and ghostly in his night clothes.

"I could not help hearing something of what you were talking about," he said, in a grave, slow voice. "You were disturbing me, and I got up to close the door. Then Jan spoke of—of a magical sign—something that has to do with Asagoro. What did you mean by that, son?"

Jan promptly sat up in bed. "We saw Asagoro go to the deserted salt lick and make a mark in the ground with his knife," he said, and then described the mark.

"Did Asagoro see you?" asked the missionary.

"No."

The boys waited for their father to say something else, but he stood silently in the doorway, as if struggling with the solution of a difficult problem. Then Rupert spoke.

"How would you explain the mark that Asagoro made, Father?"

The missionary aroused himself. "I shouldn't dignify it by explaining it," he said bluntly. "It is just some of his foolishness. Put it out of mind and get to sleep, both of you. To-morrow is Sunday and you boys will have to go off to the forest early to help gather in the pygmies."

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

# *Chapter Three*

## THE ARROW

"It is time you were starting, boys," said the missionary the next morning as they finished breakfast, and Jan and Rupert got up from the table. It was Sunday, the busiest day of the week for all the Metlincks. Between now and sunset the mission settlement of Nulatabo would be the scene of a church service, a native feast, and an amateur clinic for all visitors in need of medicine or surgical treatment.

First the pygmies must be collected.

Herman Metlinck did not like to think of it as collecting, nevertheless that was the word for it. In the beginning, when he was new here at Nulatabo, he had hoped that his "parishioners" would eagerly flock to



Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Sunday services of their own free will, but it had not turned out that way. After the first two or three weekly services, the novelty had worn off. The natives had complained that it was tiresome, and even painful, to sit a long time on wooden benches listening to the white man tell of his wonderful, but faraway, God. Little by little the attendance dropped off, except for Asagoro and his tribesmen. Asagoro's people were Bantus, big husky blacks who dwelt in their own village at the northern edge of the mission settlement. These Bantus continued to come to church because of Asagoro's influence, and also because the meeting house was near and they liked to listen to the singing of the hymns.

But the pygmies were more difficult to lure to Sunday services. The "little people" had their home in the damp, gloomy, immense jungle, the Ituri forest which reached to within a few kilometers of the mission settlement. They did not like the bright sunlight at Nulatabo, for they were timid little folk, and they were neither very intelligent nor very imaginative. As a result they had soon decided that the white man's church was not worth bothering about. Thus it was that they no longer came of their own accord. They had to be gathered in, coaxed and jollied and reminded that Herman Metlinck was waiting for them, and that after church was over there would be good things to eat. The gathering-in process—the collecting, as Jan expressed it—was the weekly task of the two brothers, assisted by Asagoro. Both boys, of

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

course, could speak the native dialects fluently because of their many years in the Congo.

"Where is Asagoro now?" said Rupert, taking up his pith helmet.

"Outside, oiling his hair," answered the missionary. "Run along, and while you're gone I'll put the church to rights."

"I did that yesterday morning," said Rupert. "Come on, Jan."

Jan had sidled over to the wall where he kept his butterfly net. He took it down, wishing that it was small enough to conceal in his shirt, but Herman Metlinck saw him.

"Not on Sunday!" exclaimed the missionary. "Must I remind you that this is the Sabbath, Jan! Please leave your net behind."

"All right," Jan agreed reluctantly, and he followed his brother out of the house.

There was as yet no sunshine, but already a dozen Bantus had gathered in the clearing. They were shivering and chattering, as they waited for the sun to break through the morning mist and warm them. Asagoro stood in the center of the little crowd, oiling his kinky hair, and enjoying the envy of his tribesmen.

"We're ready," Rupert called to him.

Asagoro came along, silent and morose. He was putting the finishing touches to his toilet, feet moving sluggishly, nimble fingers rubbing oil into his scalp. The boys strode ahead, their eyes upon the path. A blanket of fog lay upon the world, hiding everything

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

beyond a radius of a few yards. It was chilly and raw. Occasionally there was a cough from Asagoro.

The path led across a stretch of park-like woods, and the sun loomed gray and indefinite behind the mist. Jan and Rupert watched closely. They were about to see one of the most impressive sights in all the Congo, a majestic spectacle of which they never wearied. The morning mist was rising, thinning, lifting up in strange unearthly shapes, revealing glimpses of trees which, though real, were so tall that they seemed fantastic. Silently, more and more rapidly, the curtain of white fog was drawn back. Finally a vast expanse of jungle was visible, enormously high and wide, so thick that it seemed a monstrous wall. Primeval and seemingly untouched by man, the forest resembled another world, a vision of lonely and mysterious jungle life on another planet. This was the Ituri forest, home and refuge of the pygmies.

"I take-em path, you take-em path," said Asagoro.

The boys halted. They had arrived at a fork in the trail and Asagoro was suggesting that he take the right branch, and the brothers the left.

"What for?" demanded Rupert. "I don't remember that we ever did that before. We have always gone on to the pygmy village together, the three of us."

"Sunday good for pygmy hunt," said Asagoro, with a mirthless grin. "All fella at Nulatabo he go church, so that leave pygmy fella go where he want, and have all game to self. Maybe little people they out hunting, not in village. We go village we not find. Better we

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

scatter, me go one way, you white fella other way. Boss he get mad if we not fetch-em back pygmies."

"Go on, then," said Rupert.

Asagoro went off by himself, and the boys continued along the left-hand path.

"The real reason behind this," said Jan, with a sniff of contempt, "is that Asagoro resents our catching him at eavesdropping last night. He goes off alone to show that he despises us."

"Perhaps, but to give the devil his due Asagoro has always done his best to bring the pygmies in for Sunday services. It's the one thing he seems to consider a duty."

Jan nodded. He was thinking about Asagoro, the secret sign at the deserted salt lick, the peep-hole in the wall of the Metlinck bungalow, the assured attitude which the black servant had finally assumed toward the boys' father. Also there were other things to think about, things to puzzle over, and untangle, and try to blow away, as the wind even then was blowing away the morning fog.

"I hate to think that Father would let Asagoro bully him," said Rupert.

"So do I," Jan agreed heartily. "And why did Dad ask him if anyone had suggested that he spy on us?"

"I wish I knew," murmured the elder brother. "What is wrong with you, jumping like that?"

"Do you see it?" exclaimed Jan, pointing to the right of the path. "Right there on the lower branch of that tree."

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"I see leaves, but nothing else."

"It's a butterfly," said Jan, triumphantly. "It's mottled green and yellow, and it's pretending to be a leaf."

"Very interesting," scoffed Rupert.

"Don't you understand?" said the younger boy impatiently. "It's the Leaf Butterfly, probably a very rare one. I ought to have it."

"This is Sunday, and your net is home," Rupert reminded him.

"With good luck I might catch it without a net," answered Jan. "I'm going to try."

It was Rupert's turn to be impatient, yet he only shrugged his shoulders and stood watching. Jan advanced on tiptoe. The butterfly let him come within ten feet. Then it swooped into the air, fluttered lazily to a bush still farther from the path, and alighted. Instantly Jan was off in pursuit, his frowning brother following at a slower pace.

"Where is it?" demanded Jan, halting at the bush.

"Maybe it didn't come down here," said Rupert.

"Yes, it did. It's right here in front of my nose, only it's too much like a leaf in appearance for me to see it. I'll frighten it into motion."

He jerked the bush violently, whereupon a "leaf" turned into a butterfly and darted off.

"There it goes!" cried Jan. "What a beauty!"

"Yes, there *it* goes, and here *we* go," said Rupert, starting back toward the path. "It would be nonsense to chase it into that jungle without a net. There aren't even any paths to follow."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Jan turned to follow his brother. They walked a few steps and halted. Silently they looked at each other, then as silently they gazed off into the forest, due south.

"Did you hear what I heard?" murmured Rupert.

"What did *you* hear?"

"A thumping sound."

"So did I," nodded Jan. "Dull and heavy. Like a drum."

"Impossible. There are only pygmies living in the forest, and pygmies have no drums that could make that sound. I imagine it is some woman pounding seeds in a wooden mortar."

"The sound was too soft for that," objected the younger boy. "It was more as though someone were pounding on the earth. Maybe we ought to go see."

Rupert looked at him suspiciously. "Why do you say that?" he asked. "Is it because your Leaf Butterfly went off in that same general direction, and you plan to kill two birds with one stone?"

"That may be," laughed Jan, "but also the thumping is in the same general direction as the pygmy village. Perhaps the little people are out hunting, as Asagoro said, and we can track them down by the pounding they're doing off there in the jungle. Come on, it's the sensible thing to do."

The throbbing sound began again, then stopped. But by this time the boys had discovered the direction from which the sound was coming. Probably the thumping would come again, and meanwhile they

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

were making progress. Slow progress, of course. They were in the thick forest now, where the trees were tall and close enough together to shut out the sun. The ground was moist, and in place of grass there were thickets of thorny underbrush. Everywhere the dominant color was green, yet green in such infinite variety that the eye found it refreshing. Now and then, a red or purple creeper lent a bit of contrasting color, but mostly the forest was a symphony of green.

"I shouldn't like to get lost in here," observed Rupert.

"We couldn't do that," said Jan. "There is a path off on our left and another on our right. Ah ha, there goes the thumping again! We must bear off to the southwest a little."

Jan was watching the trees for bits of moving color. The Leaf Butterfly was doubtless lost to him, but there might be other varieties about. You never could tell about the Congo.

"Wait, Rupert," said the younger boy, suddenly. "Don't move."

"Now what is it?" demanded Rupert. "A snake?"

"No, an arrow."

"An arrow!"

"Two of them," said Jan, and went slowly toward a gray tree with smooth bark known locally as a *karaya*. "Look!"

The arrows were hanging from the trunk of the tree, heads imbedded in the bark, and with the broken

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

shafts pointing down toward the ground. The shaft of each arrow consisted of the mid-rib of a raffia palm, and was approximately the length of a man's fore-arm. Between the head and the shaft proper, there was a notch which so nearly divided the arrow in two that the impact of striking its mark was enough to snap the wood at the notch. The purpose of this was to make certain that the arrowhead remained in the object hit, while the, then unimportant, shaft broke off. If an animal were shot, the shaft would probably fall away as the creature fled. Otherwise it might catch on the brush in the forest and perhaps pull the arrowhead free of the wound. The head of the arrow alone was enough to cause death. It was poisoned.

"No doubt of that," muttered Rupert, and dug his jackknife into the bark which surrounded one of the arrowheads. "Do you see that reddish brown stain?"

"Yes," said Jan soberly. He shivered a little. The poison was a vegetable compound, an age-old native concoction of horrifying power. It brought about death by getting into the bloodstream and causing paralysis of the nerves. The end was painless—so the natives claimed—but it was also swift and certain. Monkeys succumbed in a few minutes. Larger animals held out against the poison for a longer period, yet never for more than a day's time.

"Elephant shot with poisoned arrow sees only one sunset," the pygmies were accustomed to say.

The arrows were of pygmy origin, Jan and Rupert knew at first sight. Only the little people used poisoned

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

arrows in this section of the Congo, for all of the other natives were afraid of them. Jan pulled loose a broken shaft, and showed Rupert the tiny leaf fastened to the notched end by means of a fiber thread. The leaf was to help the arrow fly true, taking the place of the feather used by other types of savages.

"This leaf is what I saw first," said the younger boy. "I saw it moving in the breeze, and it didn't look natural. I thought it might be a butterfly."

"Never mind butterflies," said Rupert crisply. "How did these arrows come here? That is what we want to know!"

"*I* didn't shoot them," Jan assured him, with a comical face. "You can't arrest me for the crime, *Monsieur* Government Official!"

"Will you stop clowning?" demanded Rupert. "These arrows were shot at a man."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Jan in astonishment.

"I suppose you think they were meant for a marsh deer," jeered the elder brother. "Well, a marsh deer would scarcely reach to our knees, and both these arrows are on a level with our armpits."

"You are a detective!" said Jan admiringly.

"No sarcasm," laughed Rupert. "It's true. When a native shoots game he aims at either the heart or the throat, generally the heart. Pygmies are good marksmen. Both of the arrows are at the same level. If the heart were aimed at, the height of the arrows shows that the animal was as tall, or taller, than *we* are. What kind of an animal would that be!"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Buffalo, maybe."

"Pooh, there aren't any buffalo in this neighborhood, and the ones that range farther on in the forest are a dwarfed species."

"What about an elephant?"

"There are no elephants around here, either. Look at the ground at the base of the tree."

Jan was annoyed. He looked at the ground, saw nothing remarkable, and burst out, "See here, are you cross-examining me, or telling me something?"

"In order to be as tall as these arrows indicate," said Rupert, "an animal would be heavy—heavy enough to leave definite tracks at the base of the tree. There are no such tracks, even though the ground is soft and moist. So the pygmies were shooting at a man!"

"Where are the man's tracks?" smiled Jan.

"A man could be the necessary height and still not be heavy enough to leave a track," countered the elder brother.

"Maybe he was standing *behind* the tree!" exclaimed Jan, catching the spirit of his brother's idea. "Let's see."

They looked behind the tree, but there was no definite sign of footprints. To be sure, the scrub brush seemed to have been disturbed, even bruised, yet even this was not certain.

Suddenly they heard the pounding again.

"It's quite close," said Jan, jerking to his feet. "Do you suppose the pygmies are moving this way?"

"No, *we* have been moving toward *them*, since we

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

last heard the pounding," said Rupert. "We'd better get on. This arrow business will have to rest."

The boys trudged off to the south, going slowly because of the thickets they had to skirt, and talking in low tones.

"It would be serious if the pygmies were killing big people," observed Rupert.

"The only big people around here are Bantus," said Jan, "and Bantus and pygmies have always been on good terms."

"As far as we know."

"That's true," admitted the younger boy. "There might be some private feud between them. Anyhow it would seem that pygmies did actually shoot at *one* of the big people—unless it might have been a squirrel."

Rupert made a face. "Don't spoil my theory," he said. "It couldn't have been a squirrel."

"Why not?"

"Oh, well, because," said Rupert uncertainly, then he remembered something. "No, a squirrel is impossible, and for two reasons."

"I'd be satisfied with *one!*"

"Listen to me," said Rupert earnestly. "A squirrel is too trivial an animal for pygmies to waste two arrows on. Besides, if it had been a squirrel the pygmies would have retrieved their arrowheads. The shafts are easily made, but the heads are made of heavy tin or galvanized iron, and that's valuable material to them. The pygmies shot at their man, missed him,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and ran away, afraid to try to get the arrowheads back."

Jan nodded. "You may be right," he said, "but speaking of pygmies, we'd better make less noise. We're close to the pounding, and they may hear us and run away, thinking us enemies."

"Or they may take a shot at us," said Rupert grimly. "You're right about making less noise."

They advanced with greater and greater caution. It was not much farther. The boys saw a smallish brown figure ahead, and then two of them.

"Pygmies," murmured Jan, and he got down on his hands and knees.

"We must be careful," whispered Rupert.

"That goes without saying," retorted the younger boy. "And while we are telling each other things we already know, look out that you don't break a dead twig and make a noise that will frighten them off."

The boys crawled forward. The sound of the thumping, by this time distinct, was the noise made by dancing feet! The boys could even distinguish the rhythmic thuddings made by individual pygmies.

"No farther now," signalled Rupert.

Jan agreed. They could see well enough. Just beyond the thicket which concealed them, the boys saw fifteen or twenty pygmies dancing round and round in a circle. The massive forest towered above this little glade on all sides. By contrast, the crowded leafiness characteristic of the Ituri was intensified. The glade was a kind of breathing place, a tiny treeless meadow

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

made radiant by a shaft of sunlight filtering down from the almost hidden sky.

"No women, only men," murmured Jan. "It is a ceremonial dance. Look at the wizard. That's old Mai-Mai, all dressed up for the occasion."

The wizard was a chubby little fellow, a strip of chimpanzee hide tied on top of his head as a kind of wig, and a few strings of vegetable beads dangling from his waist. Otherwise he was clad chiefly, like his companions, in a breechclout of bark and string. Each of the dancers clutched a bow in his left hand, and the wizard held a slender stick out before him. The ceremony appeared to center upon this. Again and again Mai-Mai jabbed the point of the stick into a shallow hole in the ground, as he danced and turned and capered.

When, without warning, the wizard came to a halt, the rest of the pygmies promptly following his example. Mai-Mai held the stick aloft, and a second man stepped out of the circle and advanced toward him.

"The second pygmy is Doorula," Rupert commented.

"And the stick is an arrow," added Jan. "Thrusting it into the hole was a symbol of bringing game to earth."

Doorula stood in front of the wizard. There was an interval of silence. Then Mai-Mai said in a loud and solemn tone, "The arrow is black, and it is red. It is poisoned, it is magical, and it is prepared for a great purpose. Black is for death, and red is for the life that

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

blood has. Red is for us, the little people; black is for our enemy."

"Our enemy," murmured the circle of pygmies.

"Enemy, and great enemy," said the wizard.

"Great enemy," repeated the others.

"We are threatened by a wicked one," continued Mai-Mai. "He is bad like a crazed elephant, and cruel like a leopard. He is crafty as a monkey in a tree-top. This one would bring evil upon us; he would oppress us. We begged him for peace, and when he would not give it we shot two arrows at him. But evil spirits helped him to escape."

"The two arrows we found!" whispered Jan.

"Doorula, listen!" exclaimed the wizard. "It may be that you are eldest and most experienced of our tribe, therefore take this arrow and put it into your quiver. But shoot it at no game, not even though your vitals burn and ache with hunger. The arrow that I now give you, the red-and-black arrow, this one is sacred. It is to be used only against the man who is our great enemy."

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

# *Chapter Four*

## PRESENTING LUBU

THE ceremony was over, and the band of pygmies started off toward the south.

"Going back to their village," said Jan. "We'd better stop them. There's no sense in our following them all that way, only to come back again."

As Rupert rose to his feet he shouted, and at once the little people seized their bows and whirled around, alarmed and at the same time ready to defend themselves. The boys walked forward, making friendly gestures. Excited comment broke forth from the pygmies.

"It is Sunday," smiled Rupert, as he approached the wizard.



Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Sunday?" frowned the little man. "What is that?"

"Why, it is the day on which Father expects you to visit him at Nulatabo. There will be a service in the church."

"With singing," put in Jan. "You people like singing, don't you?"

Ah, of course they did! But did they like it enough to go all the way to the mission settlement, where the singing was awaiting them? The pygmies argued the question, most of them in favor of going, Mai-Mai violently opposed. Jan and Rupert joined in the talk, Rupert reminding the little people that their wizard was merely jealous of the missionary's skill in curing their ailments, and Jan playing his trump card—food.

"When church is over," he said, "you will be given free food, plantains and yams I think it is to-day."

That settled it. Singing was a good thing, food was even better. The combination was irresistible, except to Mai-Mai.

"Let foolish ones go," muttered the wizard. "I stay away."

As Mai-Mai stamped off toward the south, the rest of the party set out for the path which would eventually bring them to Nulatabo. In the lead, strode Doorula; behind him straggled his tribesmen and the two white boys. Jan and Rupert walked together, pleased to have collected so many listeners for their father. Then too, they were enjoying, as always, the company of the tiny people of the forest. None of the pygmies was more than four foot in height, unless it

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

were by so little as an inch. Since Rupert was five foot seven, and Jan five foot six, the boys towered over their companions. The pygmies were so dwarfed, so naive and childlike, so comical in their ways, that it was difficult to think of them as evil or dangerous.

"Yet they are," murmured Rupert. "They *must* be!"

"To fit your theory, you mean?" asked Jan slyly.

"Certainly not. I'd be happy to discard my suspicions, if I could. But we did see two arrows in a *karaya* tree, and we did hear the wizard charge Doorula to shoot the person he called their 'great enemy.' "

Jan glanced ahead. He could just see the top of Doorula's head, as the short little warrior threaded his way in and out of the brush.

"That's true," said the boy. "I wonder who their 'great enemy' can be. Maybe it is Asagoro."

"Why Asagoro? You're guessing."

"No, I'm not," said Jan, getting an idea. "Asagoro and Mai-Mai had a quarrel one day. It was the Sunday that it rained so hard, and Dad invited everyone into the hospital. The wizard was growling about our medicines, and when he started to pour out a bottle of liniment Dad told Asagoro to stop him. The two of them glared at each other like a pair of fighting cocks. Our beetle-browed little Mai-Mai is not the man to forget anything he considers an injury."

"No, he isn't," said Rupert, looking over his shoulder to make sure the pygmies were not listening. "Mai-Mai is the only one in the tribe who is inclined to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

hold a grudge. It's possible that he worked up this great enemy myth by himself, and is delegating the dirty work to Doorula."

"Exactly," said Jan, growing more and more enthusiastic. "And another thing, see how Asagoro went alone this morning. Probably he was afraid to meet the wizard, and if he were with us he couldn't very well avoid it. Asagoro *knew* that the pygmies would be out hunting, and he meant to keep away from them."

"H'm," murmured the elder brother. "That's possible, but is it probable?"

"Don't split hairs," objected Jan. "Everything fits."

"Except the secret sign that Asagoro made at the salt lick."

"Why not that, too! It was a magical sign. Undoubtedly Asagoro made it for the sake of defending himself against pygmy vengeance."

"How?"

"Why ask *me?*" demanded Jan. "If I knew that much about magic I'd write a book on the subject, and you could read that, instead of asking me questions!"

Rupert laughed. "You'd give it up before you'd finished the first chapter. But maybe you're right, although I don't care for the word 'vengeance.' It's too lurid."

A pygmy just in front of the boys suddenly turned and spoke to them. "Where is Asagoro?" he asked.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"I—I don't quite know," stammered Rupert. "He's —somewhere. Never mind Asagoro. We must get to the path and go on to Nulatabo, or we'll be late."

Doorula was already in the path waiting for his companions. When they joined him, he resumed his trot in the direction of the mission settlement. As the boys trailed along with the pygmies, Jan whispered excitedly, "That question about Asagoro proved I was right."

"No, it doesn't," answered Rupert. "Be still. I'm doing something."

Jan saw that his brother was studying the path, either the ground itself or the tracks left upon it by the pygmies ahead. Finally Jan could restrain his curiosity no longer.

"What is it, Sherlock?" he demanded.

"I have observed," said Rupert with a serious face, "that Doorula has had an accident."

"Accident? When?"

"Earlier in life. Notice the impression of his right foot. What do you think of it?"

Jan watched Doorula a moment, and then kept his eyes upon the tracks the pygmy was leaving behind him.

"I think he has a big foot for such a small man," he said. "It's big, and it's broad, especially across the toes. He'd never be able to wear shoes."

"Why should he want to!" retorted Rupert. "That isn't what I meant. The print of his left foot is normal, while the print of the right shows a badly

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

damaged toe. It's been pulled out of line. That is a consequence of his crooked toe, of course."

"So there was at least one time in his life when he said *ouch!*" grinned Jan. "What else does his crooked toe prove?"

"It proves that he could easily be trailed."

"Followed, you mean?"

"Yes, in case he attacks Asagoro and has to be tracked down."

"Caution is your middle name," jeered the younger boy. "You'll have Doorula in prison before he commits his crime."

"Perhaps that would be better than to catch him *after* he has committed it!" declared Rupert. "Anyhow I—"

A shout interrupted him. It came from behind them, from far off by the sound of it. The pygmies stopped and turned round to listen. The shout came again.

"That is Asagoro," said someone. "He find-em our tracks."

"He has the women and children with him," said a second pygmy.

"Asagoro wants us to wait for him," said a third.

"No," broke in Rupert. "We cannot wait. Let him come after us. We are already late. Go on, Doorula."

As Doorula shrugged and started on, Rupert was nervously satisfied, and Jan was disappointed.

"Now why did you do that?" he demanded.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"To keep out of mischief, naturally," said Rupert. "If we had waited for Asagoro there might have been serious trouble between him and Doorula."

"I know, but how are we to discover if it's Asagoro who is the 'great enemy,' unless we see the two of them together! If you had let Doorula and the others wait for him, we could have perhaps seen from their faces whether they—"

"Too risky. Doorula might have shot him with his poisoned arrow."

"In front of *us?* He wouldn't dare."

"I wasn't going to take a chance. Come on, walk a little faster, and perhaps we can hurry these pygmies."

The boys increased their pace, gradually drawing up toward the head of the column, if the disorderly procession could be called a column. They came abreast of Doorula, Jan on one side of him, Rupert on the other.

"We might go a little faster," suggested Rupert.

"Faster?" grunted the pygmy, looking up at him with restless, shrewd little eyes. "Why go faster?"

"To get to the settlement in time for church."

"Good if we miss church," was the answer. "We get there in time for food. That all we want."

Jan chuckled. "At any rate you're no hypocrite!"

"Will you please walk faster?" Rupert asked firmly.

"No," said Doorula. "Only time good to go fast, is when we chase-em game in the forest. No game ahead now. Maybe behind is some game, but none ahead, that sure."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Rupert and his brother dropped back a pace. They did not like this reference to the possibility of game behind them. Did the pygmy mean Asagoro, or was he referring to animals? There was no way to tell.

"This is beginning to look serious," murmured Rupert.

"How many queer things does it take to make a mystery?" asked Jan.

"What do you mean?"

"Yesterday we tumbled onto several queer things," the younger boy went on, "and last night we added to the list. This morning there are still more queer things. I think we have enough to make a real mystery out of this. Asagoro, pygmies, Dad, there you have three cornerstones of the puzzle. It might help to have a fourth, but perhaps this is a triangular, not a quadrilateral, riddle."

"Don't try to be funny," said Rupert. "I can't see anything to joke about, especially if Father is concerned in this."

"He *is* concerned in it," said Jan, sobering. "Didn't he make a trip up this way yesterday, and then refuse to discuss it with us?"

"Father doesn't often discuss things with us," Rupert reminded him. "Yesterday's trip needn't be connected with all this other."

"Maybe not," said Jan. "It's odd, though, where he could have gone, to have got back so soon. Let's look for his tracks!"

"Here in the path?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Where else! He came this way, and if we see his tracks we'll have an idea how far he went, and that may give us a clew."

They tried it, but there were no tracks to be seen. And there should have been, if Herman Metlinck had passed here as recently as yesterday afternoon. The path was damp, and a white man's shoe or boot should have made a recognizable impression. Only Doorula walked ahead of the boys now, and obviously he, by himself, could not be wiping out the missionary's trail.

"You think game been here?" asked a little brown man walking just behind Jan and Rupert.

"No. Why do you say that?"

"You look for tracks," answered the pygmy.

Jan smiled at him. This particular pygmy was a good-natured little fellow that the boys had nicknamed 'Pfui,' because of his habit of commenting upon the wonders of the mission settlement with nothing more than an explosive and incredulous snort.

"Listen, Pfui," said Jan, dropping back to walk with him. "If somebody walks in the path, he leaves a track, yes?"

"Maybe, maybe not," replied Pfui.

"Why maybe not? Name something that could travel without leaving footprints behind."

"Dead man."

"What? A dead man?"

"Sure," said Pfui. "Man die, his spirit get out of him as anybody crawl out of a house. The spirit try to catch-em people and hurt them, and so nobody know

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

if the spirit comes. He travel without leaving track. Very bad. That why pygmies always burn down houses after somebody die. That scorch the spirit and make him stay back, while pygmy people go find other place to live."

"I know," said Jan. "I've heard of that custom, but leave dead travelers out of it. If any live person travels in a path, it's sure to make a trail, yes?"

"That so," nodded Pfui.

"Now, you pygmies are much more clever at tracking than we white people are, suppose you tell us if Dad was along here yesterday."

"God-talker white man, you mean?"

"Yes."

"He not along here," said Pfui.

"Are you sure?" asked Rupert. "How can you tell, when you haven't studied the trail?"

Pfui let out a shrill giggle. "You foolish white-man fella," he said. "I been look at the path ever since we hit-em. Pygmies always do that. Missionary fella he not come along here."

"He *started* this way," declared Jan.

"When?"

"Yesterday afternoon, rather late."

"Not here," said Pfui decisively. "I see *your* tracks, brother-fella tracks, no more."

Doorula turned round. "You talk about missionary man?" he asked.

"Yes."

"He come little time this way and turn off trail."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Oh. This far?"

"Not so far as this. More on toward mission place. I show you where, if you want."

"Never mind," said Rupert slowly, and turned to his brother. "That's strange. Then Father did leave the path and circle back home. I can't understand it. A hunter might do that, but Father never hunts. He doesn't even carry his pistol when he goes out."

"It's the queerest thing I ever heard of," answered Jan. "Look, we're leaving the Ituri behind. This is park country, not a village or even a hut between here and Nulatabo. What could Dad have been after?"

The tree was too high to climb, as they say in the Congo, and accordingly the boys stopped trying to find an immediate solution to their questions, and walked on in silence. Soon they would come to the fork in the path, and after that it was only a short walk to Nulatabo. Then Rupert suddenly exclaimed, "By the way, Doorula!"

"What you want?" said the pygmy, without turning.

"You told us that Father was along here, but turned off the path? Well, how do you know that he did?"

"See him."

"You were this close to the village?"

"Pygmy go everywhere," was the evasive answer. "This path for little people, same as big people. Why not I come here!"

"No reason at all, Doorula! Were you—did you come this way to hunt?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"What else come for!" shrugged the little brown man. "Make you eyes sharp now, we come to stream and have to jump. Sometimes white fella he slip and fall in, make big splash."

The pygmy laughed at his own joke, and immediately a wave of laughter passed along the column of little brown men. None of them save Doorula knew what was supposed to be so funny, yet they giggled and chortled and snickered, certain that something very amusing had happened. Or else Doorula would not have laughed in the first place!

"Who said that pygmies were childlike!" exclaimed Rupert. "They're worse than that."

"Or better," said Jan. "They get more fun out of life than children ever do."

Doorula leaped across the stream when they came to it, agile as a monkey, but even before he landed on the other side he glanced back over his shoulder, as if he had glimpsed something he wished he had stopped to examine. It was something on the ground, near the water, but neither Jan nor Rupert could imagine what. The boys got across the stream, and the rest of the procession followed. By this time Doorula had started on, slowly, and with evident unwillingness. Then he turned, and called, "Lubu."

A pygmy boy ran forward, to walk beside Doorula and listen to his whispered instructions. The young pygmy nodded, stepped out of the path, and waited for the others to pass.

"What's up?" murmured Jan.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Doorula saw something back there," said Rupert. "Whatever it is, he doesn't want us to know about it. Otherwise he'd not have whispered to Lubu."

"Drop behind on some pretext," suggested Jan. "We'll find out what's going on."

Rupert stopped and moved aside, and Jan did likewise.

"What matter?" asked Pfui.

"Stone in my boot," said Rupert, and he knelt down and began to unlace it.

The pygmies did not seem to be suspicious of the ruse. One of them laughed and said that white man's shoes were foolish anyhow, but there was no other comment. The little people trailed on, and Jan and Rupert were left behind with Lubu.

"You fix shoe?" inquired the pygmy boy.

"Why, yes," said Rupert, still unlacing his boot.

Lubu gestured toward his tribesmen, now vanishing around a bend in the path.

"You get behind," he said.

"We know the way home," smiled Jan.

Rupert pretended to give all his attention to his boot, while Jan and Lubu gazed at each other, curious and uncertain. They were acquainted, and friendly, even though it was impossible for a European to be on really intimate terms with anyone as primitive and "different" as Lubu. And yet, superficially, the pygmy boy was very attractive. He was three feet and ten inches tall Jan knew, because he had once measured him, but despite his shortness he was not clumsy. Lubu's body

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

was in perfect proportion. His limbs were round and muscular, with the chest surprisingly deep, and his head was well placed on a firm straight neck. In color he was a warm brown, instead of black like the Bantus. Warm also, but a deeper brown, were his sparkling bright eyes, though now he was frowning a little.

"You go on," he suggested.

"Why don't *you* go on?" asked Jan. "I am waiting for my brother and he has something in his boot. But there is nothing to keep *you* here. Don't feel that you have to wait for us."

"I come soon," murmured the pygmy. "You go."

It was an impasse, but since Lubu was too guileless to try to outwit them, Jan and Rupert were determined to find out what Doorula had ordered him to do.

"All food, he get eat up at Nulatabo," said Lubu, with the air of playing his trump card. "Yams, he good."

"So are plantains roasted on coals," smiled Jan. "You'd better hurry."

"I got stay here."

"What for? To get a drink of water, I suppose!"

"Yes," said Lubu. "That what I have to do."

He walked a little way toward the stream and stopped. A faint and far off babble of voices came to his ears, a chorus of chatter and gossip and laughter which Lubu knew to be coming from the women and children of his tribe.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN