

# SPEED ADVENTURE STORIES



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## CONTENTS

### *Novelettes and Short Stories*

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>COCONUT CARGO</b> .....                        | <b>4</b>  |
| Clive Trent                                       |           |
| <b>NEVER THUMB YOUR NOSE AT THE FOREMAN</b> ..... | <b>12</b> |
| Camford Sheaveley                                 |           |
| <b>THE DAWN TIDE</b> .....                        | <b>20</b> |
| Lew Merrill                                       |           |
| <b>SO LONG, SISTER</b> .....                      | <b>30</b> |
| Justin Case                                       |           |
| <b>PEACE COMES TO BONGO</b> .....                 | <b>38</b> |
| Hugh Speer  |           |
| <b>OUT OF THE DEEP</b> .....                      | <b>48</b> |
| Felix Webb  |           |
| <b>FOOL OF FLORENCE</b> .....                     | <b>58</b> |
| Arthur Cutler                                     |           |

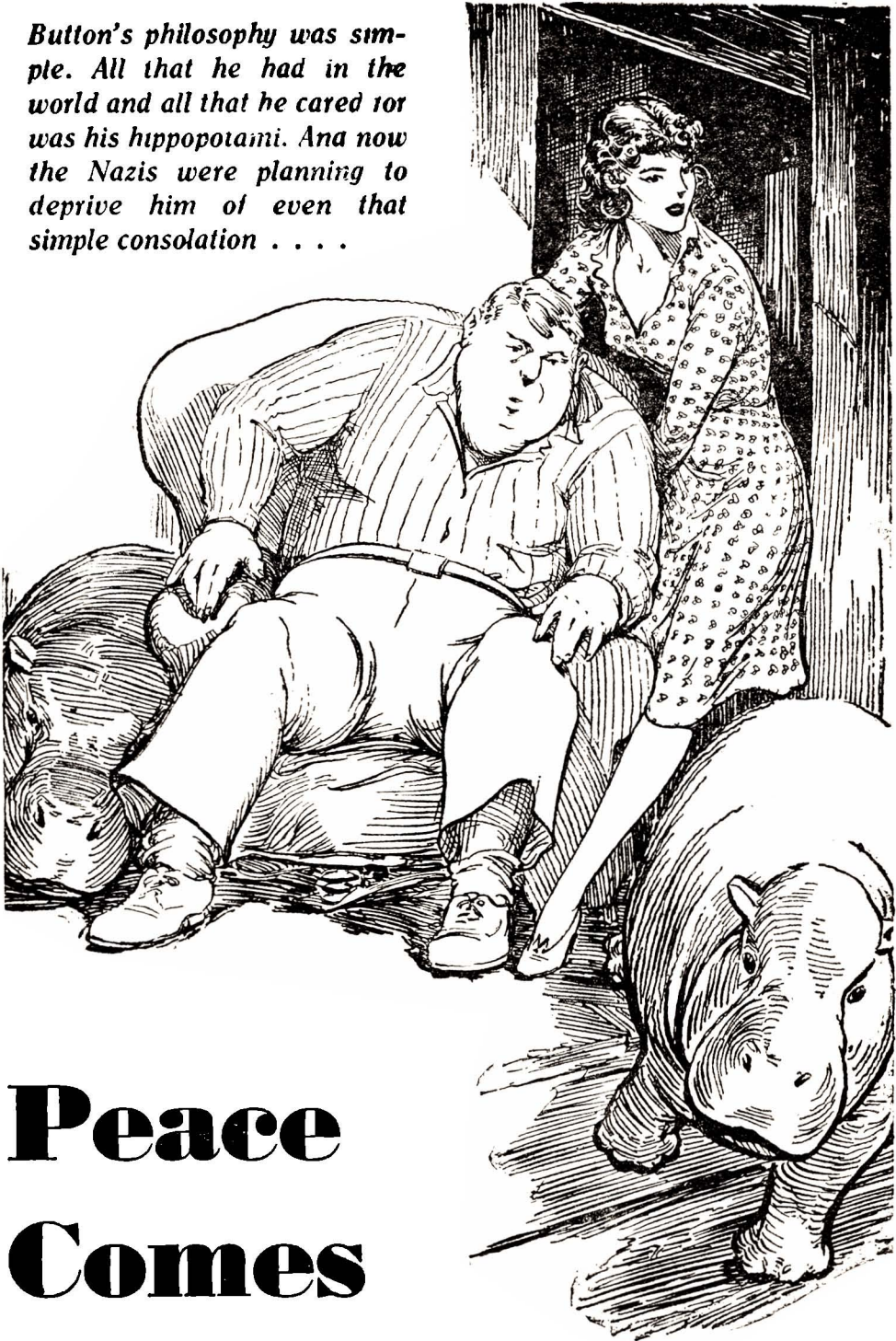
### *Special Articles*

|                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>SEA-GOING SMOKE-EATERS</b> ..... | <b>94</b> |
| <b>TO DIE IS DIVINE</b> .....       | <b>96</b> |

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*Button's philosophy was simple. All that he had in the world and all that he cared for was his hippopotami. And now the Nazis were planning to deprive him of even that simple consolation . . . .*



# **Peace Comes to Bongo . . .**

## By HUGH SPEER

"Fall to, boys," Vorstmann called.  
"Take what you want. Everything's  
yours."



**T**HE first signs anyone had of the presence of enemy invasion forces in that part of West Africa were the dull detonations that denoted the destruction of the small British post, forty-seven miles away. It wasn't until fifteen days later that *Herr Kapitan Vorstmann* arrived at Bongo, with his crew of a dozen submarine men, his radio equipment and enough explosives to wreak havoc among the isolated British garrisons that

dotted that vast country.

It was a daring raid, for which Captain Vorstmann should be given full credit. From this point in the jungle, conveniently near the sea, he expected to control and direct certain submarine operations in the South Atlantic.

Of course his radio direction would be spotted quickly enough. But forty-seven miles separated him from the nearest landing point—forty-seven miles of jungle bush that made his radio outfit like a needle in a haystack of wood. And this was the rainy season.

The only approach to Bongo was along the tortuous creeks. That was the way Vorstmann had come, after submerging his boat conveniently off the coast. He had found his way to Bongo, thanks to some excellent maps made by the German Hydrographic Department years before the first World War. He didn't believe the English had those maps. Anyway, he was secure for long enough to direct important operations in the Atlantic, which would result in the paralyzing of all seaborne Atlantic commerce south of the Equator. After that, he meant to move leisurely inland, and demolish certain posts along the Allied route of communications.

In blowing up the nearest British station, Vorstmann had secured a valuable period during which he would be immune against attack. He had brought a number of prisoners with him to Bongo—the English captain of the demolished fort, a gentleman named Spry; a young lieutenant, Winters; and fifteen members of the West African Police, coal-black Fantis, who wore British khaki with nothing under it, and fezzes, and went bare-footed, because shoes hurt their feet.

Captain Vorstmann's first act on reaching Bongo, which he had selected as his headquarters, was to call on Papa Button, who was the only white inhabitant. All the rest of the population was watching from the jungle, but Papa Button was sitting on the verandah of his guest-house and trading-store, an enormous hulk of a man, reclining in an enormous chair. On either side of him was a vast bulk of animal flesh, lolling, mouth open, in the sunlight.

"What are those things?" shouted the captain, surprised out of the good manners he had intended to assume.

"Pygmy hippopotami," responded Papa Button.

"Pygmy? *Mein Gott!*" cried Captain Vorstmann.

PAPA BUTTON'S philosophy of life was a simple and sincere one. Something over fifty years before, an American sailor, who rejoiced in the name of Button, had been stranded on those shores, and had won the heart of the daughter of a local official who was definitely and unmistakably French. Since the marriage had not lasted long, the net result was, that, a few months later, young Button found himself staring at an unfamiliar world from a crib in the home of a foundling orphanage.

He grew up with the simple philosophy of taking life easy. There had been one crisis in his life, and that was when he confronted his French grandfather—now returned, as Governor of the Colony—with the demand for money enough to set up a trading-store. Inasmuch as the Governor's daughter was present, with an aristocratic husband, and several cousins of Button's, Button carried his point without much difficulty, and settled at Bongo, where he had lived for about thirty years.

Life just rolled on at Bongo. Sometimes there were tribal wars, but nobody ever disturbed Papa Button, who was more or less a legend in West Africa. If you wanted anything—go to Papa Button. If the English Government was contemplating a punitive expedition, ten to one Papa Button could bring the recalcitrant chief to terms after a palaver. But Captain Vorstmann hadn't heard of Button, because he had never been in West Africa before.

He stared at the mound of human flesh, lying between the two great mounds of hippopotamus flesh, and then introduced himself, and explained his mission.

"You speak the native language?" he inquired.

"I cut my teeth on it," said Button, with a toothless grin.

"Fine! I'll need you for my interpreter. I expect to be here some time. By the way, you're a British subject?"

"I dunno," said Button, grinning. There was a slight French accent to his speech, due to his upbringing. "Nobody ever told me what I am, but I ain't got any black blood in me."

"And what are you doing with these?" Vorstmann indicated the hippopotami. "Fattening them for the table?"

"For the table?" Button looked his horror. "A native speared the mother when they was tiny tots, no bigger than pigs. I bring them home for pets. They are the pygmy hippo, they do not grow much larger."

"And what do they eat?"

"Anything — everything," answered Button, leaning over to scratch a tiny ear. "This one is Churchill and this one is Stalin. Haw, haw."

Button's vast bulk undulated in his chair.

**L**E DINER est servi, monsieur!" Vorstmann stared at the pretty, demure young girl who, after sizing him up, had decided to appear from within the house. Suzette couldn't have been more than seventeen, and was as slim as Button was gross. There was no mistaking the colored blood in her, and yet she might have passed for a southern French girl.

Vorstmann emitted a horse laugh and stalked inside. But Suzette ran past him and assisted Button out of his chair. With a surprising exhibition of strength, she hoisted the great body onto its feet. The hippos yawned, ambled to their feet, too, and moved away along a trail into the jungle.

Inside was a dinner fit for a king, in Vorstmann's estimation. It was true everything had come out of cans, of which Button had a considerable stock, lining his shelves, but Vorstmann and his sailors had had a hard time negotiating those creeks on their inland journey, and had arrived in a famished condition.

A bottle of chartreuse—the yellow kind—completed the meal. Vorstmann leaned back in his chair with an expression of

immense satisfaction. He beckoned to Suzette, and drew her upon his knee.

There was something so gross in the act that only a clod like Button could have taken it without protest. The act was not so much interest in Suzette as the desire to show dominance. There was a cruel streak in Vorstmann, as in most of his kind.

Button, breathing heavily after his meal, watched through half-closed eyelids, apparently uninterested. Vorstmann presently thrust the girl away and got up.

"I'm requisitioning your stock of supplies, Button," he announced. "My men are hungry. You will be paid in paper marks, of which I have a good supply—a very large supply. Where are the inhabitants of this place?"

Button lurched to the door, and whistled twice. In a moment the natives of Bongo began to emerge from the jungle, men, women and children, staring at Vorstmann and his sailors.

"Fall to, boys," Vorstmann called to his men in German. "Take what you want. Everything's yours."

**L**AST to be fed were the two English prisoners and the Fanti soldiers. The afternoon was spent in preparing quarters for the invaders and their captives. Some of the native huts were requisitioned for Vorstmann and his sailors; about others, which were for the prisoners, bales of barbed wire, which had lain for years in Button's store, were stretched, to form a corral.

Periodically—that is to say, at intervals of three-quarters of an hour—a drenching storm of rain drove the workers into the huts. At such times Vorstmann would seek shelter in Button's store.

Button, extended in his enormous chair, with a hippo mouthing grass on either side of him, watched the world sleepily, while Vorstmann amused himself in conversation with Suzette.

Vorstmann was getting drunk. He had sampled Button's store of liquors, his choice brandy, thirty years old, and once the property of his French grandfather, the Governor. He was swaying slightly

as he came back from his last interview with Suzette. It had been unsuccessful—in fact, the girl had slapped his face.

He booted Churchill in his fat stomach. It would have been difficult to boot him anywhere else, for both the hippos were little more than stomach—huge, cavernous bellies which they distended with grass and bark and reeds all day.

The hippo rolled over a little further, and blinked two tiny, furtive eyes at Vorstmann.

"Those fellows will make good eating. Just like pork," said Vorstmann.

"No, no," protested Button, straightening his great bulk in his chair. "They are my pets. You see—all I have in the world, Captain Vorstmann."

Tears rolled down his cheeks, for Button, too, had been sampling his grandfather's precious brandy, knowing that it was almost his last chance to take a swig at it.

Vorstmann grabbed the fat man by the shoulder. "Don't you talk back to me!" he roared. "I'm in command here, and what I say goes! From now on, you do as I say. And it's 'Yes, Captain Vorstmann,' when I give you an order. Understand?"

**B**ECAUSE there were no means of escape from Bongo, in the rainy season, the prisoners were not too scrupulously guarded. Vorstmann had set up his wireless outfit in one of the huts, and was busy at certain hours of the day. Meanwhile Button was free to roam about the camp and exchange greetings with Captain Spry and Lieutenant Winters, although the strands of barbed wire separated them.

Button's stock of liquors, although acquired over twenty years, was the greatest part of his stock in trade. The Nazis drank prodigiously, but the supply was still good for some time, and Vorstmann, whose brutal streak didn't altogether conceal a certain good nature, even permitted his prisoners to partake of it.

"Button," said Captain Spry, through the barbed wire, "you say you don't know what nationality you are. If your father was an American, that makes you an American, and America's in this war. I

don't mind telling you that we're in a fix, and the British Government has got a very liberal way of repaying those who have been of service to it.

"Button, it's up to you—it's very strictly up to you to help us out of this mess. You see, it's not just Winters and me, and those poor devils of Fantis. That Nazi fiend is playing hob with our shipping in the South Pacific. And he's got to be stopped."

"What you want me to do?" asked Button.

"It's this way," said Captain Spry through the wire. "I know they've looted your store, and taken almost everything. But you must have a lot of junk stuff left. You must have knives, or pieces of steel that can be made into knives. You get the point, old man? Being an American, I'm sure you get the point.

"We want seventeen good strong knives, for Winters and me and our Fantis. That's all we want. Anything that will stab or slash. We'll clean up that dirty Nazi devil, and all his crew. Will you do it, Button?"

"I ain't got seventeen knives," said Button. "You're talking crazy, captain. Suppose he is troubling your shipping—you're not on any ship, are you? I'd say let well alone, and everything will be peaceful. That's what a fellow wants out of life—peacefulness."

"You're no help, Button—no help at all," said Captain Spry crossly.

**V**ORSTMANN kicked Churchill in the belly again. "We're going to eat that fellow," he said. "And very tasty, if I'm any judge. Look at the fat on him!"

Button straightened himself in his chair. "You can't do that," he babbled. "He is my pet. Nobody ever heard of eating a hippopotamus."

"We're going to have fresh meat!" shouted Vorstmann. "And that fellow is going to go." He kicked Churchill again. "I'll turn him over to the slaughterer in the morning," he said.

Suzette came out, to see the fat man blubbering softly as he scratched Churchill's ear. "*Qu'est-ce que c'est?*" she demanded.



*Too sluggish to continue the unequal struggle, Button subsided by the murdered Churchill.*

"Vorstmann is going to kill Churchill and eat him," said Button.

"Well, and good riddance to him! You are a fool, Button, to make pets of those hippopotami. Great useless pigs, always stuffing themselves. They are nothing but big bellies, Button. Let Vorstmann eat both of them. Good riddance, say I!"

"You have no heart, *amie*," sobbed the flabby fat man.

"No heart? *Mon dieu*, and is it not for love of you that I serve you all these years, and wait on you, and lift you out of the chair because you are too fat to raise yourself? Do you see in yourself the hero for Suzette? I leave you now, Button. I am tired of you. I hate you."

"Where you going Suzette?"

"To a man who is a man, and knows how to take care of a woman," Suzette responded. "*Ah mon dieu*, your store is empty. You have nothing—nothing at all, not even a drink. You have to go to Captain Vorstmann when you want to eat or drink. No more for me, Button."

Button, sprawled in his gigantic chair, in which his carcass flowed and found its level, watched Suzette step smartly across the rain-soaked terrain toward Vorstmann's hut. He watched her through his half-closed eyelids. Button's theory of life was working. Nothing mattered, not even Suzette. Not even the loss of his store.

Yes, one thing mattered. If Vorstmann really meant to kill Churchill, that would be too much for Button's philosophy. Those hippopotami were the only things he had ever loved. They had been motherless waifs that he had befriended. They were not responsive creatures, but they liked to squat, one on either side of him, and have their tiny ears tickled.

Perhaps there was some recognition of kinship between the gross man who sat all day in the chair, and the gross bodies of the hippopotami, which were mere cylinders charged with the job of digesting grass and other succulent commodities. Nothing came amiss to the hippopotami.

**T**HE fat man's gifts of liquor to the sailors had made him their friend. Despite Vorstmann's confiscation of his stock, Button had managed to secrete a

few cases of choice liquors. Vorstmann, of course, suspected this, but he took it amiably enough. His cruelty chiefly vented itself in kicking the hippopotami. He seemed to find some pleasure in the contact of his toe with those gross bellies, which always elicited grunts of pain, and a shifting of the huge bodies.

Whatever work Vorstmann was engaged on, it appeared to be going on quite successfully. A radio system had been established in one of the huts, and antennae had been erected overhead.

Captain Spry, who had been cool toward Button after his refusal to supply him with steel for making knives, soon became friendly again.

"You know," he said, "Vorstmann has enough of that new explosive, torpex, to blow up every British post in West Africa. It's deadly stuff, and, as soon as he's finished his preliminaries here, he's going on the rampage inland. If you could sneak out enough of it to blow this blasted post to hell, with Vorstmann and the rest of them—

"Look, old man. Winters and I have got hold of a pair of wire-cutters. We'll liberate the Fantis and sneak out of here some dark and squally night, and then touch off a keg of that explosive. Only we've got to have co-ordination. You're on the inside with Vorstmann. You can get hold of some of it. It's perfectly harmless, unless it's jarred or detonated. He keeps it loose, like a grocer's sugar."

Button shrugged his shoulders. "You want to make another mess around here, like Vorstmann made at Hlawenui?" he asked. "I believe in peacefulness. You're happy, ain't you? And I'm happy, and everybody's happy. What's the use of starting trouble you don't have to start?"

"The man's a fool," said Winters. "It's no use parleying with him, Spry. We'll have to look out for ourselves. I should think you'd have cause enough to come in with us, Button," he added viciously. "Vorstmann's taken your store and taken your girl, and made you a laughing-stock among the natives."

That wasn't of course, news to Button. Suzette showed him all the animosity of





*Under the tick, the hippo grunted and rolled on its side, while Buston chewed his bitter out of contemplation.*

which a woman is capable, when she transfers her allegiance from one master to the next. She would stand in the entrance of Vorstmann's hut and stick out her tongue at Button. She would indulge in the pantomimicry in which all Africans are proficient, indicating, with expressive gestures, how glad she was to have transferred her allegiance from Button to the Nazi.

As for the inhabitants of Bongo, their contempt for Button was now limitless. They had all come back out of the forest, and built themselves new shelters of daub and wattle. They were working for the invaders, and getting paid in food and paper marks. They were also getting occasional drinks from Button's confiscated supplies.

Button brooded sometimes. Vorstmann had taken his store and his woman, and he was living on Kaffir corn and ground maize. Fortunately he had the little quantity of liquor that he had secreted, and it was this that made life bearable—this and Stalin and Churchill.

The two pygmy hippopotami had reached almost their full growth. They were about as big as very large pigs, great cylinders into which they tucked the profuse herbage of the rainy season. Although they were herbivorous, no kind of diet seemed to come amiss to them. Those gross paunches had to be stuffed, and kept stuffed.

Lolling in his chair, with Stalin on one side of him and Churchill on the other, Button still kept up his affectation of taking life easily. But the remarks of the English officers about the torpex had given Button food for reflection.

If it were really possible to touch off a pound or two of the explosive, and make an end of Vorstmann and his captives at once, Button would have been perfectly willing to do so.

But, with his chair to loll in, and his two animal companions, and his little hidden stock of liquor, Button was reasonably content with life. Some day Vorstmann and his men would vanish, the prisoners would disappear, and Suzette would come crawling back to him.

THE compound that housed the prisoners was lush with grass. The incredible fertility of the tropics put half a foot of growth on it after each daily deluge. The natives had been hacking at it with their knives, or grubbing it up with their hands. Vorstmann had an idea. He slapped his thigh and roared:

"Turn your great pigs inside the wire, Button! They'll do the work of twenty men!"

Before the rains came, the hippopotami had made lengthening trails into the bush in search of provender. After the rains converted the sandy bed of the river into a torrent, they would meander down to it, and lie all day, submerged, save for eyes, ears and snouts, pasturing on the rank vegetation. Now Vorstmann's sailors prodded them inside the wire, where the lush growth was flourishing over about an acre.

That acre supplied a daily ration for the two sleek pigs, and each day it was renewed. Vorstmann was again becoming interested in the gross creatures. He would kick them, to see them squirm, and run his hand over their sleek hides.

"This Churchill we shall eat for Christmas," he declared to Button. Christmas had no significance at Bongo. Button hadn't thought about Christmas for years. He didn't even know the day of the calendar.

The hippos, nosing into everything, were the delight of the sailors, who kicked them freely, but also flung all the refuse of the camp to them. With their great incisors, they would rip flour sacks to ribbons, and tear away the staves of kegs.

Hearing an outcry, Button, who had just awakened from a drunken slumber, ambled into the compound. The two beasts were greedily devouring a quantity of grayish powder that was piled up in front of a heap of matchwood that had once been a keg.

"Himmel!" shouted a sailor, "don't put a match near them, or they blow up. They have eaten enough to destroy a whole English fort!"

They drove the beasts out of the compound with kicks and curses. But in a day or two they were back again.

**B**UTTON awoke to discover that it was noon. It was Suzette who had awakened him. She was standing in front of him, mincing and mouthing, and she held a plate, on which were two enormous chops.

"Wake up, old drunken fool!" she bawled. "Vorstmann sends you these."

"What's this?" Button mumbled.

"It's Christmas Day, and this is all that's left of your pretty boy, Churchill," the girl sniggered.

Button heaved his gross bulk to his feet. There was Stalin on his left, but there was no Churchill at his right. He ambled into the compound, past the two grinning sentries, past Captain Spry and Winters, who shouted "Merry Christmas."

Button returned no answer. There was an uproar in the large hut occupied by the sailors. Inside, Button saw all the men assembled, squatting on the floor, with palm leaf dishes on their knees. At the head of this festive board was Vorstmann. And, occupying the center of the hut was an enormous and unstable carcass, recognizable only by the head—by the huge, gaping jaws, that were propped open with a stick, by the tiny ears and hairless cranium.

Vorstmann roared at the sight of Button: "Haw, haw, so we have eaten your Churchill, and he tastes very good. Just like roast suckling-pig. For New Year's we shall have your Stalin!"

Whatever of love and unselfishness there had been in Button had been wrapped up in the two ungainly monsters. Too stupid for companionship, at least they had come to recognize him. They had stretched out their ungainly heads to have him tickle their ears. And Button had felt a sort of intimate relationship to the two creatures. He, too, was huge, ungainly, sluggish; he had understood just what motives actuated them, how they rejoiced in the cool water against their gross bodies at nightfall, how their enormous bellies had to be filled and kept filled.

And he stood looking down into the glassy eyes of the murdered Churchill.

A cry broke from his lips. He rushed at Vorstmann. The sailors caught him and

flung him down. For a few moments Button struggled wildly, and then subsided, too sluggish to keep up the struggle.

Vorstmann, who was drunk, was laughing. "Haw, haw, a good joke on you, Button!" he shouted. "We eat Stalin for New Year!"

"**L**ISTEN, old man," said Captain Spry. "There's no moon on New Year's Eve, and those damn' Nazis will be drunk. That's the time to make our break. Ye get us a keg of that explosive, torpex. We'll do the rest."

"And why do you suppose I care if you escape?" demanded Button, with unusual warmth. "What do I care? I am a citizen of no country. I want peace. I live here, and I have peace. And now those Nazis kill my Churchill and they say they will kill my Stalin. What do I care for anything?"

"You're a fool, Button," said Captain Spry. "He's robbed you of all you had, and he's taken that girl of yours, and, if you had the guts of a man, you'd get even with him. You get us a keg of that explosive, and I'll guarantee the British Government won't be ungrateful."

"You go to hell!" said Button.

The Fantis, in the compound, were not having too bad a time. Vorstmann was a Nazi and a brute, but in Africa, in that vast continent where all nature seems to be in a conspiracy against the human race, political animosities are relaxed. One senses the humanity of one's enemy. The Fantis had had their share of the hippopotamus, and had enjoyed it hugely, for, under the two inches of hide and the several inches of fat, there is delectable meat on a hippo.

Big Button lolled in his chair. That great chair, which just accommodated his enormous body, had once been the property of a chief, who was almost as gross as he was. It had been a present from some Commissioner. The stuffing was bursting from the seams of it, but it would be good for some time yet. And, lolling in that chair, Button reviewed his situation.

He thought of his French grandfather,

(Continued on page 79)

## Peace Comes to Bongo

*(Continued from page 47)*

the Governor, who had long since left for France, and of his mother, who had never acknowledged him. He thought of his father, Button, the mythical American sailor, who had won the French girl's heart. He thought of him with complete detachment, and with a kind of hostility, as the man who was responsible for his appearance upon the uneasy scene of life.

If it hadn't been for the American, Button, he could have slumbered peacefully, unconscious of incarnation. He wouldn't have had to be bothered with all the

things that brought him waddling out of his chair.

He thought of Vorstmann, and a dull animal rage ran through him. Button was not capable of resentment; when he was angered, it was like a physical thing, like a blow that required an automatic response. Vorstmann, to Button, was merely a disturbing element in the great void of peacefulness. But he had killed Churchill, and he was going to kill Stalin.

Here was Stalin, squatting beside him, half on his belly, half on his side, a great

black and pink mound of flesh, with the tiny ears that Button loved to scratch. And the tiny eyes that looked back into Button's innocent and unresponsive. There was no return of the love that Button lavished on the hippo. There was only the recognition of comfort that a cat might have shown.

Seven days from Christmas to New Year's! The greater part of those days had passed. Button must have been lolling, drunk in his chair, day after day. His stock of liquor was getting perilously low.

Vorstmann had robbed him of his store, and taken Suzette, and killed Churchill; and now he was going to kill Stalin, and Button would have nothing left but his chair.

Button had to get rid of Vorstmann if he was to find that peace he wanted.

Stalin was roaming the compound daily. Without his companion, he found that there was a very good square meal in the daily growth of grass within the compound.

He rooted there, bearing the kicks of the sailors with equanimity. He received a certain respect, however, as one who was destined to die to make a festival for the invaders within a day or two.

Stalin was to be sacrificed on the last day of December. The rainy season was now at its height; the water dropped in torrents several times a day. Sometimes Button, caught in the downfall, sought refuge in the Nazi storehouse.

The tusks of the hippopotami had made a mess of the contents. Vorstmann had brought a considerable quantity of staples from the submarine, but the damp had played havoc with much of it, and the torpex was oozing in piles all over the floor. The tusks of the hippos had spared very little of the containers.

**SUZETTE** stood before Button in his chair. "Hey, great fat pig, what are you doing there?" she bawled. "Tomorrow they kill Stalin, and then you will be all alone; you will have nobody. Me, what a fool I was to put up with you for so long!"

Button opened an eye. "Get me a drink, Suzette, there's a good girl," he said.

"Me? And why should I get you a drink? I am not your servant any more. I am Vorstmann's."

"Vorstmann's moving on. He's going to blow up all the posts between here and the Niger. You don't think he'll take you with him, do you?"

"For what do I care?" Suzette snapped her fingers. "He is a man, not a great pig sleeping all day in a chair, like you!"

Nevertheless, being a woman, Suzette felt the instinctive urge to wait upon a man. She went into the store, and brought back a bottle of brandy from the almost depleted secret cache, together with two glasses. She poured out two drinks.

"*Puis*, I drink with you, Button. You are not so bad," said Suzette. "So you think Vorstmann will not take me with him when he goes?"

"He ain't that kind of a fool," said Button, opening the other eye, and squinting at his brandy. He raised the glass to his lips, and drank. He smacked his lips. Vitality raced back through the old man's etiolated body.

Suzette drank reflectively. "So you think Vorstmann will not take me with him?" she asked again. "All men are the same. Some are fat pigs, and some are thin ones, but they are all pigs. I am sick of them."

"Listen, Suzette, can't you stop Vorstmann killing Stalin? If he wants meat, he can shoot pigs in the bush. He's only doing it because he's my pet."

"You old fool," said Suzette. "If you had not loved those big pigs so much, maybe I might have loved you more." She poured out two more drinks. This time Button sipped his instead of draining it at a gulp. An idea was creeping through his brain, and, because all his physical processes were slow, Button was mentally ruminating, like a cow.

Through the wire of the compound, Button saw the hippo rooting in the heap of garbage that had collected during Vorstmann's occupancy. Vorstmann, who was passing, turned and kicked it in the belly. The hippo grunted and rolled on its side. Vorstmann kicked it again.

And now the ruminative cud of Button's contemplations swelled into a men-

tal bolus. Button knew what he was going to do.

Suzette planted a kiss on Button's forehead, and ran away. Button, accustomed to the vagaries of women, hardly noticed it. He was forcing his slow brain into action.

**T**HE rains were increasing; every hour the heavens discharged their load in pailsful, followed by a brief break of sun and tropic heat. All that afternoon Button lolled in his chair, and watched the deluge hammering on the tin roof of his store, and on the huts, and sending rivers of water gushing down into the bush.

Toward nightfall, which occurs instantaneously in the tropics, he hoisted himself with difficulty to his feet, and went into his store. He looked at his looted shelves, at the piles of debris that had accumulated since Vorstmann's arrival. Then he went down into his cache and looked at his supply of liquor.

There were still half a dozen bottles of brandy left, and Button gathered them up in his arms. He proceeded toward the compound. By now it was utterly dark. There was not a visible star in the overcast sky, but it was an intermission of the rains; the next downpour was due in about half an hour.

Button handed one of the bottles to the sentry at the entrance to the wire. "For New Year," he said, and passed through. There were no guards in the enclosure, because no prisoner in his senses would attempt to make a break into that rain-drenched jungle. Button stopped at the hut of the two British officers, and called.

"Hello, who's that?" came back the voice of Captain Spry.

"A New Year's present," said Button, handing out two more of the bottles.

"I say, old man, this is kind of you," said Spry, lounging forward in the darkness.

"Yes, and I have something to say to you. You have that pair of wire-cutters. You fellows cut the wire and walk into the jungle. Walk as far and as fast as you can."

"What, now?" asked Winters.

"Quite, quick, yes," answered Button.

"But, I say, it's going to rain in a few minutes," Spry protested.

"You do what I say," answered Button. "I have lived here nearly all my life. I was peaceable before Vorstmann came. Now I think that Vorstmann is going away. Soon—very soon. You do what I say."

"We might as well take the old blighter's tip, Spry," said Lieutenant Winters. "All right—much obliged to you for your advice, Mr. Button."

**B**UTTON ambled on across the compound. The sound of laughing came from Vorstmann's hut. Vorstmann was celebrating with his officers. Button passed on to the storehouse. The sentry challenged him, then recognized the gross bulk of the man, and gave him a polite good-evening. Button produced his three remaining bottles.

"For you and your friends," he said. "And a happy New Year's Eve."

"*Danke schoen*, Herr Button," said the soldier, greatly gratified. "Tomorrow we kill that other big pig of yours for New Year's dinner. Come, I will show you."

Button accompanied the man out into the middle of the compound. In the faint light that was reflected from the huts he could see two posts. He put up his hand and felt a rope hanging between them.

"The last pig," said the soldier, "we did not bleed him proper, as should have been done. This pig, we cut his throat and hang him up to bleed, like the proper way to bleed the pig."

A surge of rage raced through Button's body. And then he heard Suzette's tinkling laugh coming from Vorstmann's hut.

"You have a good time with the brandy," he said to the soldier, and moved aside into the darkness. He stood there for a long time, listening to all the noises of the night. He heard the faint clang of the wire as the prisoners, cut it, and seemed to see the procession of them, the two Englishmen and the Fanti soldiers, filing away into the forest. He heard the voices of the sailors, thick and guttural,

and guessed that they were getting outside his bottles of brandy.

And, standing there, the fat man summed up his philosophy of life. Peace at all cost, and no more of this foolishness. He had been disturbed too long. He had lost his goods, he had lost Suzette, he had lost Churchill, and now Stalin was to be hung from a rope between two posts. It wasn't peaceable, and when Stalin was dead, he'd have no friend left in the world.

He whistled softly. He waited and whistled again. He heard an exclamation from the sentry at the compound entrance, and then a heavy shape lumbered through the dark and brushed against him.

Button threw his arms about the hippo's head, and the tears rolled down his cheeks. The cavernous mouth was already busy on the grass inside the compound. There was the sound of crunching. Button urged the creature forward, by prodding it in the abdomen with his knee. He urged it toward the storehouse.

The sentry was not there. He was getting outside the brandy with his comrades in a nearby hut. Between the dump and the storehouse was a trail of garbage. The hippo began rooting in it greedily. Unexpected gustatory treasures often came to light for hippopotami in those trails of discarded human food.

**B**UTTON went into the storehouse. The hippos had smashed several of the kegs of explosive, and their contents had oozed out in little heaps of gray powder. Button felt about him in the darkness and tore out the staves of two more of the containers. Now he was standing calf-deep in the flood of powder, so innocuous when handled, so terrific if compressed and jarred. He heard Stalin rooting near him; then the omnivorous beast had found the explosive, and was greedily devouring it.

Sensing everything in the darkness, presently Button felt the flood receding from his calves to his ankles. He groped along the storehouse, and came to another keg. The hippos had staved this in, too, with their glancing canines, and Button pulled it apart, and let another flood of

powder ooze out onto the floor. The hippo snorted past him, and Button sat down, listening to the suction of the mandibles.

He heard Suzette laugh again, and then a roar of laughter from Vorstmann's hut. He heard the drunken shouts of the sailors. After a while one of them came stumbling toward the storehouse.

"Himmel!" he ejaculated, as he fell over the bulk of the monster. "What you do with him here, Mr. Button?"

"He came in," said Button. "I guess he suspects that he'll be wanted in the morning."

The sailor roared with laughter. "You said something there," he chuckled. "Me, I am the butcher. We string him up with the pulley, and then I slice his throat."

"Good eating," said Button, and the sailor drifted back toward the hut. The hippo had ceased munching, though Button could still feel the soft powder about his ankles. It was lying on its side, and Button ran his hand around the inside of the wide-open chops. For almost the first time in its life, the hippo had had as much to eat as it wanted.

Button ran his fingers around the little ears, and the hippo grunted. He laid his head against the folds of hide about the neck, and pursed his clumsy lips in a kiss.

Then he stepped carefully over the massive body, and crossed the compound in the direction of his store. At the gap in the wire the sentry was seated, fast asleep, his head against a post, the empty brandy-bottle beside him.

Suzette was curled up in Button's chair. She started up. "Vorstmann wants some more brandy," she said. "Where have you been, fool?"

"There is no more brandy," answered Button, "and you stay here tonight."

"Let me go. Are you going to beat me? Are you going to be a man at last, fat pig?"

Button cuffed her soundly, and kicked her inside the store. He camped outside, listening to her noisy sniffing. It was very difficult, not being peaceable, but one had to pay for the right to have peace. . . .

IT was Vorstmann who discovered all his sentries snoring drunk. Discipline had certainly been relaxed since he had come to Bongo, but he had fulfilled his mission; he had directed the activities of the wolf-pack in the South Atlantic, and now it was getting time to move on and blow up the rest of the British posts in that section of Africa.

Besides, this was New Year's Day, and one couldn't be too hard on the men on such a day.

He was in a fairly good temper when he awoke at dawn, but he had consumed a vast quantity of liquor the night before, and then he had sent Suzette for more, and she hadn't come back. That began to irritate him. And then he saw the great bulk of Stalin lying in the middle of the compound, and remembered that the hippo was to be slaughtered for the New Year's dinner.

The creature was lying on its belly almost directly below the line on which the carcass was to be suspended. It had evidently been rooting in the garbage heap, started for home and decided to lie down. There were evidences of distress about the hippo. It was breathing in short pants, and only the whites of the little eyes were visible. But Vorstmann didn't notice that.

The cavernous red mouth was distend-

ed as usual. Vorstmann thrust his foot into it and kicked the inside of the upper jaw. The hippo showed evidence of pain.

"You—!" said Vorstmann, and kicked the creature in the ribs with all his force. The hippo shifted its posture slightly.

With an outburst of sudden anger, Vorstmann kicked it in the belly, twice—three—four times—

And all those explosives are so tricky. A jar will send them off when least expected. . . .

SUZETTE came stumbling out of the store as it collapsed about her ears. Button was lying across the threshold, trying to be peaceable. He dragged the girl down beside him, and stifled her screams.

Lengths of wattle from the demolished huts were raining down on them, and a great column of smoke, interspersed with fire, occupied the place where the compound had been.

"What is it?" screamed Suzette.

"Help me into my chair. And then make breakfast. Shut up, or I'll beat you again. I'm going to be peaceable once more."

And, lolling in his big chair, Button closed his eyes upon the red, eruptive world.

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