GOALS OF FATE

by EDGAR WALLACE

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AFTER A BRIEF INTERLUDE OF SENTIMENT, BONES TIBBETTS TURNED HIS ATTENTION AGAIN TO THE SERIOUS MATTER OF CENTRAL WEST AFRICAN GOVERNMENT—AND FOOTBALL. IT WAS WONDERFUL HOW WELL THE TWO THINGS WENT TOGETHER.

DORAN CAMPBELL-CAIRNS, the only daughter of His Excellency the Administrator, had come out to Central West Africa to visit him for three months, up at the Administrative Headquarters of the British Civil Service, in the healthiest part of the year, before settling in Paris at a finishing school. In due time, with His Excellency her father, she came down for a few days stay at Mr. Commissioner Sanders' Residency on the big river.

"Bones," had announced Sanders one fine morning to Lieutenant Tibbetts, who, with Captain Hamilton, served as military aide to Sanders at the Residency, "the Administrator is arriving at the end of the week, and he's bringing his daughter with him."

"Bless her jolly old heart!" murmured Bones, immersed for the moment in his mail. "Anything I can do to make the dear old lady comfortable—"

"So far as I can remember," broke in Hamilton, "she's quite a kid. My sister wrote me about her the other day. She's just left school."

"A few native dolls, I think," said Bones, looking up. "Leave it to me, dear old sir. I'll amuse the child. It's a funny thing, dear old Ham, but children take to me. I'm rather like the Pied Piper bagpipe fellow from where-is-it. The moment he tuned up his jolly old pipes—but you've read the novel, dear old Ham; why bother me with questions."

"What you can do," said Sanders firmly, for, if not curbed, Lieutenant "Bones" Tibbetts was capable of being as great a trial and tribulation in times of peace as he was of being a very big help in times of real trouble, "is to get the tennis net put up, and ask your men to mend the ice plant."

Bones went down to meet the Administrator and his daughter with a light heart and a whistle. He came back dazed, and, for once in his life, silent. Bones was naturally susceptible. And Miss Doran Campbell-Cairns was tall, gloriously slim, with one of those pale, clear complexions that some find so adorable, eyes as clear and blue as a morning sky, and with lips calculated to set any young man wishing.

Miss Doran had naturally attached herself to Bones because he was the only young man in the party. She thought Mr. Commissioner Sanders looked horribly stern, and confided to the awestricken Bones that his brother officer Captain Hamilton had a cruel mouth.

"Perfectly horrible, young miss," said Bones, hoarse with emotion. "The things that jolly old Hamilton man says to me—"

"I mean, he looks as if he would—well, hurt!"

Bones nodded his head solemnly.

"Simply horrible, dear old young lady," he agreed.

Four days of seeing her at breakfast, at tiffin, at dinner! Forty-eight hours of intoxication with her on the Residency boat, the *Zaire*, when she went with her father on a little tour of inspection! And the evenings in the dark of the veranda, when she sat in shimmering white, her cool hand so close to his that he could have touched it, and did, in fact, touch it once, explaining hastily that he had brushed off a mosquito. On the fourth morning, in a delirium of misery for her boat sailed that afternoon, he made a statement.

"The point is, young Miss Doran," he said, in so strange a voice that he did not recognize himself speaking, "I'm simply awfully nutty about you. I am really, dear old miss. I've got an uncle with pots of money—he's an awful big pot—what I mean to say is that he can't live forever. Few people do, dear old miss. I know you're very young and I'm simply fearfully old, and your jolly old father's a perfect terror—though we shouldn't see much of him—"

"What on earth are you talking about?" Her starry eyes were fixed on his.

Bones cleared his throat, wiped the perspiration from his damp forehead with a small silk Union Jack, one of his most prized possessions, which he intended donating before her departure; coughed again, looked everywhere except at her, and then, in a moment of extreme desperation, asked hoarsely, "The point is, dear old lady, what about it?"

"What about what?"

"Jolly old matrimony," croaked Bones.

"Are you proposing to me?"

Bones nodded.

"How perfectly ridiculous!" said this young lady, who would not tread on a harmless and necessary worm, or cruelly swat a fly, or do any such thing as pin purple emperor butterflies to a bit of cork. "How perfectly horribly stupid! I couldn't *possibly* marry you! You're so awfully old. How old are you?"

"A hundred and five," said Bones dismally.

"I'm sure you're twenty-four if you're a day," she said severely, "and you're awfully plain. Look at your nose!"

"What's the matter with my nose?" demanded Bones hotly. "And if it comes to that you've got no nose worth speaking about."

"How dare you speak about my nose! I shall tell my father."

"And you jolly well ought to," said Bones bitterly, "because he's partly responsible."

"Let us walk back to the Residency," said Miss Doran with ominous calm. And with tightly pressed lips they did so.

The Administrator was on the point of departure.

"Where on earth have you been, Doran?" he asked, though very mildly, for he was in some awe of his beautiful daughter.

"I have been seeing"—her tone was very deliberate—"a strange insect, and watching its curious antics," said Doran, glancing sideways at Bones.

Watching the pair walk away, Bones performed a wonderful grimace in which scorn, indifference, disgusted amusement and superiority to womankind at once fought for expression and suffered defeat. Nevertheless, when he saw the white ship go slowly over the horizon, there was a dull pain in the place where his heart had been. He almost wished he could take to drink, but unfortunately whisky made him sick and he invariably fell asleep after his second glass of port.

That night he retired early; refused pointedly Hamilton's invitation to cards, and spent the greater part of the night writing a poem, in the tragic style, which he mailed to the subject of it. It ran:

You came into my life
And I asked you to be my wife.
But you went and threw my nose into my face.
But heaven made us all
And it made your nose too small
But I do not consider that a very great disgrace.
Oh, my heart is sick and empty,
And soon I'll find a soldier's fate upon a battlefield.
For when I think of thee,
Thy lovely figure I'll see,
And I don't suppose you'll care if I am killed!
So let this be a warning
What happened the other morning,
Don't break a heart that beats for thee, my dear.
You will never see me again.
I may be very plain,
But I'm not such a nut as I appear.
P.S. I withdraw all remarks about your nose.

To this poetic epistle Miss Doran Campbell, at the time, evidently hadn't the heart to reply. Bones

grew cynical about women and began to read the sporting newspapers and his interest in Rugby football revived.

And then there occurred the incident in the village of Ugundi which caused him to take an even greater and personal interest in that game, which he had not played since he was at school.

Near the village of Ugundi is a place which is called the Ten Leopards. It is a spot innocent of shade or herbage, and is surrounded by piles of rotting, fungus-covered tree trunks which the great elephants, generations ago, tore up for their sport and threw to one side. Even at the river's edge lie these reminders of the big ones' strength and fancy, for blackened boles reach down layer on layer through the sand and mud, and the river has cemented them with silt until they are immovable.

For hundreds of years elephants came to play on the stark earth, to bellow and trumpet their mock defiance and to wrestle harmlessly at that season of the year when even the oldest and most irritable of bulls could fight head to head and never be tempted to employ their sharp tusks. Here came the calves in herds, to engage in mimic warfare under the eyes of sleepy cows, and here, on one memorable day, were found the mangled remains of ten leopards. Perhaps they had stalked a calf, for it was in a period of famine.

There was a palaver in the nearby village of Ugundi, where Mr. Commissioner Sanders sat on judgment of the domestic value of Katabeli, the wife of M'laba the Akasava chief and the fourteenth known daughter of the Isisi king.

M'laba, the chief, had purchased this woman, paying three sacks of salt, two rare and precious dogs and four thousand brass rods, which was a very great price for one who was an indifferent dancer. And now M'laba desired the return of the treasure he had paid, for the woman had betaken herself to the land of her fathers.

Sanders listened with patience to the arguments, dropping, at long intervals, a pungent word or two of comment, and at dusk on the third day gave to the husband what was equivalent to a decree of divorce with the custody of the salt.

Ordinarily such a palaver might have been settled in a day. Unfortunately, there were more than the usual tribal complications, for Katabeli was the daughter of a "three-mark" chief, and M'laba was a "two-mark-cross-ways" man. In other words, their faces were, in the one case, decorated with three lateral scars, and in the other with two scars, crisscrossed. The exact complication may not be clear to the casual observer, but, reduced to practical politics, the marriage had represented first the union between rival races; and secondly it had united, temporarily, the conflicting interests so to speak, of the League of Saloon Keepers with the Good Templars. The Isisi and the Akasava were, in fact, incompatible in customs and concrete practice. And the divorce meant ancient trouble renewed.

"Lord," said the father of the woman, "this is not justice, for my daughter has given this man a son, and that alone entitles her to keep the salt. Also these two-mark-cross-ways men will mock me, and my young men will be hard to hold against these haughty Akasava."

"Whoever mocks you mocks me," said Sanders. "And as for the salt and the child, you shall have back as much salt as this child weighs."

And solemnly the little brown faced imp of a baby was weighed on the big wooden balance against as much salt as turned the scale, after Sanders had removed from the child's little body a belt from which were suspended certain heavy pieces of iron.

"Lord, if these are taken away," said the disgruntled grandfather, "he will have bad luck all his life."

"And if I do not take them away," said Sanders, "you will get too much salt, and that would be bad luck for M'laba."

He left two strong, virile and homicidal people, by no means satisfied with his judgment. And it happened that these two were what he called "key tribes," and had for generations past been prominent factors in the making of war. Between the bloodthirsty Akasava folk and the truculent murderers of the Isisi had started the beginning of many sanguinary conflicts which had involved whole nations. And Sanders went back to Headquarters feeling more than a little uneasy.

The crops had been very good that year, and good crops are the foundation of war. Also the fish had been abundant in that part of the river; and men had grown wealthy between rain and rain. Sanders was so apprehensive that, halfway back to Headquarters, he stopped the *Zaire* and swung the vessel round, intending to return and reopen the palaver, and devise on the spot some system of permanent conciliation. He thought better of this

and resumed his journey. In the first place, his return would be a weakness, and incidentally would add to the importance of the possible contestants.

Bones, about this time, had wearied of life in general—he did, regularly, from time to time—and had grown bored to such an extent that he had even spoken slightingly of the newspaper, published in his hometown, which invariably printed his contributions, no matter upon what subject. And Bones without a hobby was rather like a sick cow: he brooded and moped, and made low, clucking noises, intended to express his disgust with life and all that life brought to him. But Sanders was too occupied with the menace of war to worry about Bones.

In moments like these Sanders was wont to call a council of himself and his two officers, with Ahmet, his chief spy, in attendance. But since he had left Ahmet behind to gain intelligence, no decision was reached until that incomparable news-gleaner came down the river with his canoe and his hired paddlers, and laid before the Commissioner a direful review of the situation.

"Lord, there will be war," he said; "for the woman and her Isisi kinsman are very hurt against the Okasava, M'laba, and in the eyes of her people she is right. This is the way of the Isisi folk, as you know, Sandi: that if a woman goes here or there, there is no talk about it, because the Isisi think such ways are permissible. And as your lordship knows, the Isisi men do not put away their women unless they are lazy or cook food so that it hurts a man's inside. I have seen new spears in both villages, and M'laba has sent his headman to the N'gombi country with fish and salt to buy more."

"This war must be stopped," said Sanders, "and stopped without gunplay."

He looked at Bones with a thoughtful eye.

"I have a mind to send you to sit down in the country, Bones," he said. "I think your presence might do a whole lot to stop any trouble. If you can hold them tight till the rains come, there will be no fighting."

Bones had a readymade scheme, and, to Hamilton's surprise, Sanders accepted it without question and was even mildly enthusiastic.

"It doesn't seem possible that you could get these devils to play football—but they're children. You can try, Bones. But to be on the safe side you had better send for Bosambo. I'll feel happier if you have at your back a few score of Ochori spears."

So Bones went up in the *Zaire* and was deposited near the place of the Ten Leopards, which is a sort of neutral ground between the Okasava and the Isisi.

He came none too soon, he learned after his tents had been pitched; for whilst his men were making a rough thorn fence to enclose his little camp, Bones strolled into the village of Ugundi and found the young men engaged in warlike exercises, under the admiring eyes of their womenfolk.

The appearance of Bones was unexpected. M'laba, the chief (he was a great chief, for there were two thousand souls in his village) had not overlooked his coming, for the place of the Ten Leopards was seldom visited.

"This comes about, Lord Tibbetti," said M'laba, "because of the pride of my wife and her father. We are also proud people, and it is said that the Akasava once ruled the land from the mountains to the great waters."

Bones sat on a carved stool before the chief's hut, and the young men who had been leaping and dancing stood stock still and looked foolish.

"I like you too well, M'laba, to see you hanging on a high tree because of such madness," said Bones. "And I have a great thought in my stomach that soon I will hold a palaver in the place of the leopards and will tell you what I think."

He went from there to the Isisi village, which was five miles distant, but here his arrival in the country had already been noted. The *Zaire* had passed the village on its way upstream, and there were no signs of warlike preparations. The women were pounding their corn, and the young men were innocently telling one another stories to while away the time. There were, however, certain signs significant to Bones. Katabeli, the divorced wife of the Akasava chief, held an honorable place in the family circle, which is not usual in divorced women.

"We do not think of war," said her old father, the chief, "for that would be an evil against Sandi. But if these dogs of Akasava attack us, we must defend our village because of the women and the children. Now, Tibbetti, it is said that once the Isisi ruled this country from the—"

Bones listened patiently, and in the end made a date for a palaver.

Bosambo, summoned by carrier pigeon message, brought three canoes, each controlled by

twenty paddlers, who became warriors by the simple process of exchanging their paddles for spears and shields the moment they touched land. After the first greetings Bones explained his high intention, and the two villages were called to a palaver and ordered to leave their spears behind them.

They sat, the Akasava to his left, the Isisi on his right, and between them the solid phalanx of Ochori spearmen, Bosambo squatting at their head, half-a-dozen yards from Bones.

As a native orator Lieutenant Tibbetts had few equals.

"Listen, all people," said Bones. "I will tell you of a magic which has made my country great. For my people do not fight in anger; they strive against one another with a good heart, and whosoever wins in this striving receives a high reward. Now I want from you, chiefs of the Akasava, and you, chiefs of the Isisi, fifteen strong men, very supple and wonderfully fleet of foot. And thus we shall do—"

To translate the theory and practice of English Rugby football into Bomongo was something of an accomplishment, and Bones succeeded so well that men who had come with murder in their hearts went away with no other thought than this magic of bloodless fighting.

It was a great day for Bones, for toward evening came a paddler from Headquarters, bringing a letter from Sanders, and, miracle of miracles; a large square envelope inscribed in huge letters: "Lieutenant Tibbetts, King's Houssas." Instinct would have told him the sender was Miss Doran Campbell-Cairns, even if he had not her signature in his autograph book. The letter said:

Dear Mr. Tibbetts:-

I am simply Fearfully Thrilled with your Poem! How wonderfully clever you must be! I feel I have been a perfect Pig to you! Will you ever forgive me? I think your Nose is very handsome! It reminds me so much of dear Napoleon Boneypart's! Do please write! I shall be here for another month.

Bones wrote to her. He gave in outline the scheme he had in his mind. He hinted darkly of the terrible danger in which he stood.

THE work of coaching the rival teams went on week after week. At first there were certain difficulties, but they were difficulties of enthusiasm rather than of technique; for both Isisi and Akasava took most kindly to the game.

"Yesterday," said an Akasava forward, "when we put our heads together for the little oval ball to be put under our feet, an Isisi dog pinched me behind. Now, today, I am taking a little knife, and—"

Fortunately Bones discovered the "little knife" before the next scrum was formed, and kicked the enthusiastic player round the plain of the Ten Leopards, which was their practice ground.

The matter of tackling led to a little unpleasantness.

"Oh, man," the exasperated Bones felt compelled to announce, in connection with this, "if, when you catch the runner with the ball, you bite him on the leg, I will beat you till you are sore!"

"Lord," pleaded the delinquent, "when I threw this man down I fell upon him, and he was so easy to bite."

Bosambo of the Ochori was a fascinated observer of these strange happenings.

"Lord, this game is like war without spears," he said. "Now what will be the end of it?"

Bones explained his scheme. He would have a match before the spectators of both villages, who were now rigorously excluded from viewing the preparatory proceedings; and it would be agreed that whichsoever tribe was vanquished should accept defeat without question. The season was progressing; the rains were near at hand, and the murmur of war had sunk down.

Sanders' approval was a great asset to the young man. But the greatest joy was the scrawled letter and the little wooden box which came up with the Commissioner. Doran Campbell-Cairns was just on the point of departure from the coast, and she wrote, without giving her own future address:

I think you are simply wonderful. Do write me in Paris. Papa thinks your skeme of football is simply wonderful! I am sending you a cup which I bought out of my own pocket money. It isn't really gold, but daddy says the gold will not wear off for years. Do please forgive me all I said about your Nose.

Bones would have forgiven her anything, and when she became engaged to the son of a lordly house he forgave her that.

The cup was a magnificent one—in appearance,

at least.

On the morning of the match Sanders presided at the great palaver.

"You really are a remarkable fellow, Bones," he said to that young man. "And thank God the weather glass is going down!" he added inconsequently.

All the Akasava people within fifty miles, all the Isisi within eighty, were assembled on that great plain. They covered the branches of trees; they were massed on the gentle slope that goes up to the Isisi woods.

"Too many for my liking, and mostly men," said Sanders, glancing round.

He sat before a little tent in a space apart from the people, and before him, on a table, was the cup of gold.

He sent his soldiers amongst the people to look for arms, but apparently they carried nothing more lethal than their long walking poles. The match began in tropical heat, and when Bones blew his whistle and the Isisi pack leaped forward, there was such a roar, such a quiver of excitement amongst the sightseers, that the thrill of it communicated itself to Sanders.

To his amazement he found he was watching a very good second-rate football game. The forward work was extraordinarily skillful; the scrimmages expeditiously formed and dispersed.

It was when L'mo, a tall Akasava man, tackled an Isisi forward and brought him smashing to the ground and knelt on his shoulders that the trouble really started. Two grave spectators leaped out of the press and smote L'mo on the head. But even this incident was adjusted and the game went on.

The first penalty goal was kicked against the Isisi, amidst roars of approval from the unthinking Isisi onlookers.

It was L'mo who caused the second awkward incident. Again he tackled, again he brought down his man, but, not content with wrenching the ball from his grip, he took the unfortunate forward by the ears and was dragging him into the middle of the field when Bones interfered.

Play went on for two minutes, possibly less. And then an Akasava back leapt upon an unfortunate rival who was carrying the ball by his teeth, and slowly and scientifically began to strangle him.

The crowd broke!

"Back!" roared Sanders.

Bones flew to the thin line of Houssas and the solid square of Bosambo's warriors.

"No spears, thank God!" said Sanders.

Before him was a multitude of waving sticks. Little fights were going on all over the ground.

"Fix bayonets!" said Bones breathlessly, and into the battling throng the bright bayonets made their way, until the howling, fighting multitude were divided into two unequal portions.

And at that moment the blessed rain began to fall, not in dainty showers, but in a torrential waterspout that burst suddenly from the gray heavens. Bosambo's men were clearing the ground left and right, but there was no necessity. The villagers were streaming homeward, nursing their wounds and howling their tribal songs.

"That lets us out," said Sanders.

He looked round to where the table had been that held the magnificent prize, but the table was a mass of splintered wood and the cup had disappeared.

"I hope the winner got it," said Sanders, with a grim smile. "By the way, who won?"

Bones was unable to supply the information. But had he been in the waterlogged canoe of Bosambo as it made its way through the slack waters toward the Ochori country, he would not have been at a loss. Bosambo brought to Fatima, the sunshine of his soul and his one wife, a lovely gold cup.

"This Sandi gave me," he announced to his lady, "because of my strength and cleverness in a game which Tibbetti has taught the nations, and in which I alone excel. From this I will drink the beer you brew for me, oh dove and light of my eyes!"