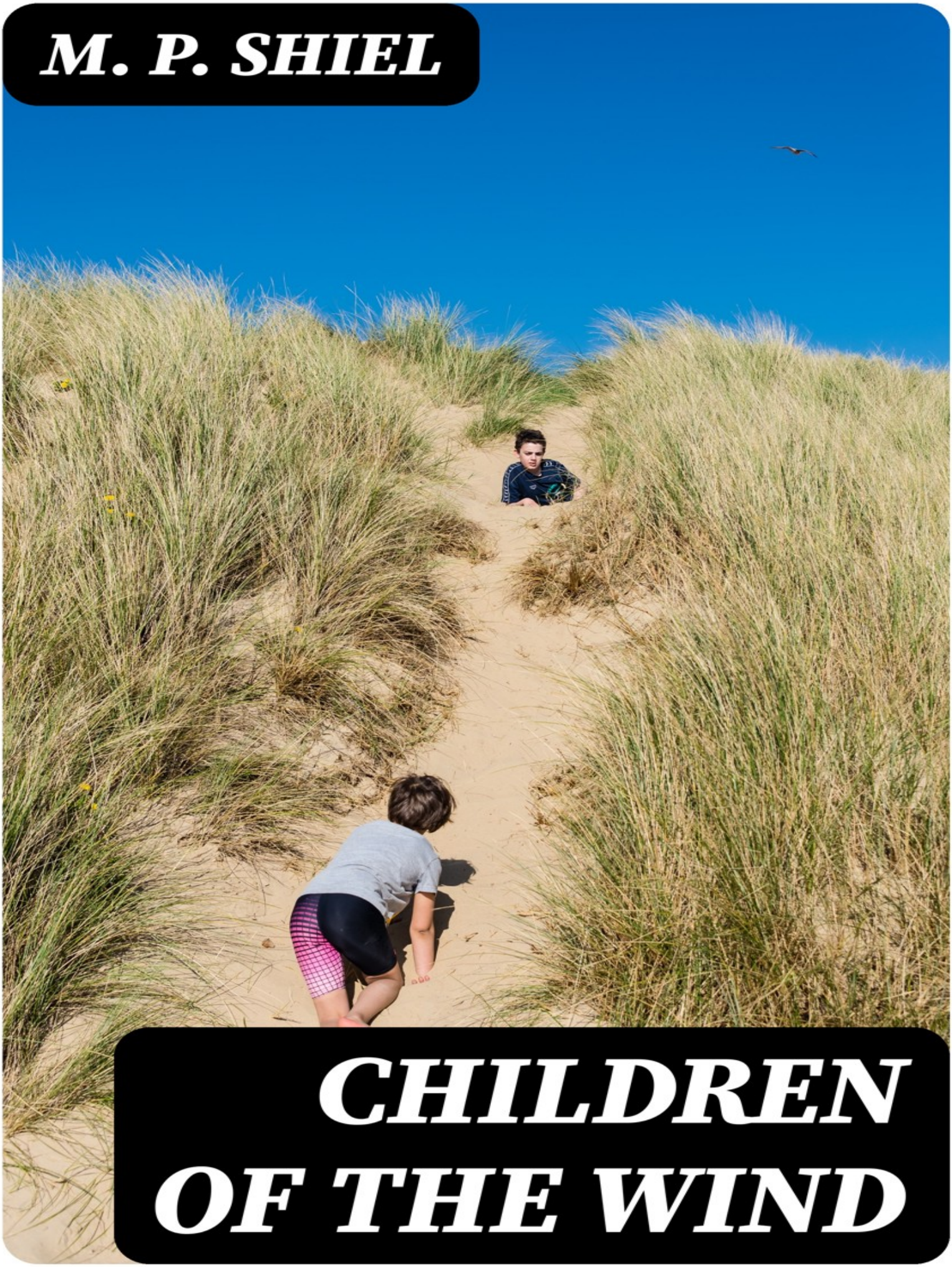
M. P. SHIEL
CHILDREN OF THE WIND

M. P. Shiel

Children of the Wind

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I

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ROLLS

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Mr. R. Warren Cobby writes in his diary (June 8th):

"Tea in the Carlton tea-room with Jeffson of the F. Office, when in walks Stead of the Bank, with a man of Greater-British type —"flash" hat, rather handsome person, black-bearded, blue-eyed, brown-baked—forty-five, fifty. Stead, on seeing me, throws up a finger, as who should say 'the very man,' and, coming to my table, introduced the colonial as 'Mr. R. K. Rolls,' adding: 'By special request, Cobby.'

"'Mr. Rolls knew of me,' I remarked.

"'That's so, Mr. Cobby: happy to make your acquaintance,' Rolls said, and we four had tea and talked, or three of us, for the tongue of my Rolls was still: not so the man's eyes though, I noticed, for I think that nobody entered, went out, or moved in the place, that he did not see it—apprehensive, haunted perhaps I might say; and though one gets a general impression from his air and gait of a laggard and languid swagger, some of his motions and glances are as sharp as a panther's—middle-sized man, straight in the legs, his blue eyes broody, sleepy—sleep of the spinning-top, perhaps—and written all over him '*Experience*.'

"He interested me—apart from my curiosity as to what the man wanted to know me for.

"'You know Australia, I think, Mr. Rolls?' I said to him.

"'Oh, yes,' he answered absently, eyeing under his brows a man who stood up some way off; adding: 'African mainly, Mr. Cobby.'

"Stead put in: 'Explorer, I think we may say, Mr. Rolls?'

"'Well, not quite,' Rolls said, twisting now quickly away to peer at someone coming in, then adding with a twinkle in his eye: 'never mind, "explorer" is near enough.'

"Then Jeffson invited the trio of us to Jermyn Street, and thither the journey was—stupid waste of time and life! Inane people these super-clerks, and all their kind 'about town.' When they have forgotten Greek, there is nothing left in them, and before they forget there is nothing. Then, why associate with them? I won't; not good enough: they waste life. Fifty of 'em aren't worth one Rolls, I think. Dinner with them at 'The Troc'; then 'The Empire,' to show girls in tights to Rolls, who has been in England only two weeks; but Rolls said that he was accustomed to see 'more elegant' legs than those without any tights on. Oh, the 'Empire'! What's Empire to me, or I to Empire? No, I was not amused. Then, walking up Regent Street, Rolls with me, the other two ahead, says Rolls: 'Do me the honour to dine at my expense to-morrow?'

"'The honour'—'at my expense.' If he had not said 'at my expense,' I should no doubt have said no, but this naïf, and so true, way of putting it won me, so that I answered: 'Since you wish, Mr. Rolls. Why do you?'

"He looked about and behind before he answered: 'You see, I know you better than you know me. Quite five years ago I did business with you, but you've forgotten; seen you several times before to-day. Then I'm a bit of a thought-

reader in my way—"psychometrist," they call it here—seen enough of that out there'—throwing his hand toward the Equator: 'I could tell you quite a lot about yourself.'

"'Tell me something,' I said.

"'For one thing,' he began, and then, quick as a wink, he span on his pins, calling out sharply to a man now close upon us: 'Well, sir! How can I be of service to *you*?'

"I saw a big man in a cloak, whose collar covered his ears, he standing now with shoulders shrugged up high, his innocent palms expanded, a picture of French astonishment, and says he to Rolls: 'Mister addresses himself to me by chance?'

"Rolls made no answer, peered into his face, looked him up and down, then said to me: 'Come on'; on which the other laughed, with some effort, I fancied, and crossed the street, as we moved on.

"And presently Rolls remarked: 'You see, we are of interest to others'; and when I asked him if he really believed that that man had been eavesdropping upon us, he answered: 'I know.'

"'What for, though?' I asked him.

"This he did not answer, but said: 'I was to tell you something about yourself: check me, if I go wrong. Age thirty-two. Residence, Tillington, Sussex. Living alone with a sister. Man of means—no need to swot at work. Yet you do. Hard worker, energetic, always glancing at the clock. If I didn't know it otherwise, I could spot it from the roan red of that hair of yours, from the style it grows upward and backward in a thicket of wires that curl, or from that fresh flush of your colour, or from the style your elbows work up

and down when you walk, like an engine on the jig. Stern worker. Proud of your head-piece. Proud of your Age and Continent. "Nourishing a youth sublime with the fairy-tales of Science"—quotation from a poet. Now engaged for the Government at Teddington in discovering the best camber for aeroplane-wings. Fond of flight, of rush, of getting things over and done. *I* know you. For wealth you care nothing——'

"'Don't I, though, by Jove,' I said: 'love wealth—any form of Energy. Wealth is stored Force, Power, that is, God, and is well named *goods*; is potential Energy—Power to do good to oneself and others.'

"'Well said,' Rolls muttered: 'yet you have two or three rich relatives, one of them'—he flung a flying glance behind—'an emperor of wealth—a cousin—and little you bother about him, because he's not of the intellectual set. And you have another cousin—female cousin'—now he put his lips to my ear—'a *Queen*, this one——'

"I could not help laughing out at the earnestness with which he imparted this absurdity; and I said to him: 'No, there the "thought-reading" is miscarrying: no female cousin—certainly no queens in the family.'

"He did not answer at once, but then suddenly patted my arm, saying: 'I may see fit to tell you more when we are better acquainted.'

"Soon after which, having arranged to meet to-morrow at the Hotel Cecil, we parted; and I walked back home by the Embankment under a black sky bright with Sirius and the three present planets."

II

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ROLLS STABBED

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The next night Cobby and Rolls duly dined together; and Cobby writes of it:

"Such a care about the selection of the table! for Rolls must have one in a corner, whence to survey all the *salle à manger*.

"When this had been obtained, I showed him the note that had come to me by the morning's post, on which Rolls produced spectacles, saying, as in apology: 'I have the best of eyesight in sunlight, Mr. Cobby, but artificial light bowls me over for reading purposes.' Then he muttered over the note 'type-written,' and read it half-aloud drawingly: 'The man, R. K. Rolls, is nothing else than a common jail-bird, well-known in the Rand as an assassin, a slave-trader, a swindler and thief, a scoundrel of the deepest dye. To be connected in any shape or form with this dirty rascal spells certain disaster. Be warned in time, Cobby. A well-wisher.'

"Looking at Rolls, as he read, I saw his eyes twinkle. 'Oh, well,' he said, taking off the spectacles, 'you evidently don't reckon me up to be as black as I'm painted, or you'd not be here.'

"I told him no, that such a communication is without weight for me.

"'Then, we need say no more about it,' he said, and: 'May I keep this pleasant missive?' and, on my saying yes, put it

inside his watch.

"Then I had quite a pleasant evening with him. Though not exquisite in culture outside, he exhibits considerable shrewdness of wit on things in general, a sound sense, a trained intelligence, and such a storehouse of memories and world-lore as render him really an entertaining person, his lips once unsealed. I found myself liking, admiring, him—so much, that when he expressed a wish to feel what flight is like, I immediately offered to take him into the air, he to come to-morrow to the aerodrome. It is not true that he is a rogue: I know better. Of the anonymous note he said nothing more until the dinner was over, we then smoking 'long Toms,' as he called them, cigar-sticks which he produced out of a tube of leopard-skin, his dress-clothes being constructed with quite a number of pockets apparently; and now he said to me: 'I suppose you couldn't reckon up who it was sent you that pleasant missive?'

"I said no, how could I without data? on which he, his voice dropping to secrecy: 'That comes from a cousin of yours.'

"This had the effect of tickling me, and I said, 'Really! You people the world with my cousins, Rolls?'

"'I have only mentioned two all told,' he answered—'a male and a female.'

"'I think I have only one cousin,' I told him—'a Yankee—millionaire—man named Douglas Macray——'

"'Let's talk low,' he muttered; and added: '*he* is our man, sir.'

"'Well, but,' I said, 'the man does not know me'; but then, remembering something, I mentioned that he knew *of* me,

since, some years ago, I got from him an invitation to a ball, but didn't go; on which Rolls said: 'Aye, always giving big parties, fond of fal-lals and high jinks, especially in Paris. You've called him "a Yankee," but he's only half that, since, as you know, his mother and yours were English sisters, and he has mostly lived in France. Curious you never chanced to drop across him. I'll introduce him now to you."

"On this Rolls picked something from a pocket, and, holding it within his fist, brought his fist into contact with my palm, on which he left a disc of cardboard, and I saw the photograph of a man of thirty or so—bearded—something hard-headed, cynical, self-seeking (I fancied)—man of some draught and horse-power, tearing toward his own ends—or that was my impression—something flat and flabby about the upper lip, as though he lacked upper teeth....

"Rolls, taking back the photograph as clandestinely as he had handed it, said: 'That's Douglas Macray—that's the gentleman. Never saw him in the flesh myself: but that's he.'

"'Well, what about him?' I asked. 'Why are you and he bad friends?'

"'Because'—he tossed down his 'long Tom' with emphasis—'I refuse to be bribed by his dirty hand; and because he drops to it why I am in England, and wants to bottle me up.'

"'Why are you in England?'

"'Mainly to get *you*.'

"'How do you mean "get" me, Rolls,' I demanded.

"'Get you out yonder,—he nodded away toward one of the continents.

"'Get me to go to Africa?' I asked.

"'That's about it.'

"'You won't do that, Rolls,' I told him.

"On which he muttered, with his eyes cast down: 'Leave it at that for the present. Maybe when I see my way to put my cards down, you won't be off it. A Red Kaffir *inyanga*—that's a doctoress—predicted that what I am now on would come off all right, though I might die in the attempt, said she. Well, you don't believe in *inyangas*, and yet I could tell you a tale or two——'

"'That's right,' I said, 'tell me tales ... though, of course, *I* am trained to believe in white people, not in black.'

"But this as little influenced his conviction as it unfixed the sculpture of those tough and weather-beaten wrinkles of his face. 'Well, no doubt,' he answered: 'but it appears, Mr. Cobby, that we are made with *two* minds—the conscious mind has talent, and finds things out, but the subconscious, that's really the cleverer fellow of the two, has genius, and *knows*, without swotting to find out: this being true, not only of humans, but of horses, dogs, elephants. I know a little Basuto pony that foreknew the date of his master's death—he now proceeded to relate several tales of African occultism, but without presenting any proof of their truth, while we each smoked another 'long Tom,' he finishing up with the advice, 'Don't despise the negro, Mr. Cobby,' and with the statement: 'After all, the savage is ahead of the civilized.'

"This dictum disappointed me in him, as I had thought better of his intelligence; but even here it turned out that he had a meaning, and he can be very convincing when he sets himself to prove. He said: 'That, to you, is all-out nonsense,

no doubt. But reflect a bit: what is it that all are after—all dogs, men, Martians, angels? "Happiness," you'll say, since nothing else can possibly be of any interest to any life for one instant. Yonder hangs a Christ on his Cross: what's he there for? The good of others? Sure thing: but that's what makes *him* happy, look; and he bears the nails, that "he may see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied," or happy. Or look at that man yonder flying from a prairie-fire—staring he is, crazy for life; then look yonder at that other holding a revolver at his forehead: both flying from sorrow, both after happiness. Same with you brooding in your laboratory: for *you* the discovery of truth spells happiness, and your interest in truth is an interest in happiness: for why should you care more for truth than for untruth, for pudding more than for putty, for any one thing more than for any other thing, but that truth and pudding make for happiness? Happiness is the aim of the race of life; and, of course, those nearer the aim are ahead of those not so near.'

"To this I readily agreed, since really it is an axiom; but asked him if he considered savages happier than I; to which he answered: 'No, not than you; but such as you aren't Civilized Man: you're an accident of civilization. Like you are half a million, say, in England—foreigners looking on at the forty million real English inspanned to the buck-waggon of England, dragging at the trek-tow, sweating great drops. Well, of course, that's not practical politics; that's no chop any road: Unhappy is the name of it. Hence, when the crew of the *Endeavour* made acquaintance with Otahito, some of 'em did a bunk, thinking: "No more England for *us*." But when I say that the savage is "*ahead*," don't take me for a

fool. Here is a river, the river of life'—he drew it in pencil on the table-cloth—'and here is the sea to the East. Let the sea represent Happiness, Bliss and no end. Well, the river runs East to A, and at A is the savage; but then it winds back West toward B, and between A and B is the civilized: evidently A is nearer the sea, and so ahead of B, but B is further on nearer bliss, and so ahead of A. At B, as I pan it out, the river breaks into cataracts and rapids—revolution there—civilized man grabbing the planet's crust out of the grasp of the foreign onlookers who now hold it, and thence the course toward Happiness may be rapid, and the savage soon be nowhere in comparison. The same may be true of the two minds—the conscious, and the subconscious. As life in becoming civilized, has lost something for a time, so, in becoming intelligent, it has lost something: dogs and horses are more psychic, or "sensitive," as they say, than men, and will see an apparition quicker, and black men more than white men. But maybe when the river of Mind turns again toward the sea, men may be more psychic than any dog for being more intelligent, just as they will be all the more happy for being civilized. So I pan it out. Don't look round suddenly: one of the enemy has entered—the man at the table behind that lady with the diamond spray.'

"I glanced, and saw a young man, who might have been a Neapolitan count—handsome, but for his loutish, foul mouth. He was in talk with a garçon, and seemed to be thinking of anything but Rolls.

"'One of the enemy,' I said: 'who are they? and—how do you know?'

"'Agents of Macray,' he answered, 'who is out to get me, and it's no chop when a rascal has power. How I know? By the movement of an eyelid. Besides, I live here, and so does yonder carrion-crow.'

"All this I found difficult to realize; and, reverting to the previous question, asked him if he was sure that the savage is the happier.

"'Down to the ground sure!' was his answer: 'your savage is likelier to die sudden, I admit: but you come with me to Basutoland, that belongs to the nation like the air, and for every rag and groan in Glasgow or Bethnal Green you will see a grin of gladsomeness, and a toe that dances. "Here," the Barotse say, "hunger is not known." Or come with me —— Yes, I think I may tell you now of another country: Wo-Ingwanya—but don't pronounce the "I," Ngwanya say; the people are Wa-Ngwanya; one of them is a Mo-Ngwanya; their language is Se-Ngwanya. Far up country—South-Central Africa—not far from the Indian Ocean—"Children of the Elephant," they call themselves, either because they are Zulu in origin, or because of an enormous rock, bigger than London, that stands on four low legs; but I in my own mind always call them "Children of the Wind," because in those uplands the breezes of heaven don't cease from streaming through their feathery head-dress, breathing upon their faces health and freshness—at least, they didn't during the weeks I was there—and sometimes terrific tempests visit them. It is sixteen years since I first heard of that country, and then I heard one and another assert that no such country is on earth; ey, but there *is* that country, for not nineteen months gone I was in it with a caravan of negroid

Arabs, and saw the men inlay metals—noblest lot of blacks I've dropped upon. They trekked north, like Umzilikaze; but long before Chaka's day—before any Zulu King whose name is known to us; yet are so conservative, that I could still drop to much of their lingo. Well, those darkies are in Paradise in comparison with St. Pancras—scream with laughter of heart in the face of sun and moon, their moochas of ox-tails and plumes of ostrich and saccaboola feathers, that stream on the breezes, seeming to scream with laughter, too—so long as they don't get killed, look, by enemies, or by "our mother"—that's their ruler: for *she's* a devil of a despot. "Our mother" owns each inch of Wo-Ngwanya for her people, and is paid rent for it; no man may say "this acre is *mine*"; and that's where the laughter comes from, if I am a man that knows anything. Eh, but she's a hot un, is "our mother"; *I* ought to know: the beggar sentenced me to death—ugliest bit of road I've yet got over. If a Mo-Ngwanya girl slips, without "our mother's" consent, that's a sure case of "off with her head"—harsh, bloody. And who do you think "our mother" is?'—here Rolls laid his hand on mine, hard, with the knuckles whitened—'You'd never guess; hear it *now*: girl of seventeen—eighteen by this time. *White* girl. Hear her name: *Spiciewegiehotiu*.'

"His voice had risen and risen, his eyes had brightened, and he uttered this procession of a name, 'Spiciewegiehotiu,' in such a crescendo of loudness, that most of the diners glanced our way. It seemed to be uttered in defiance and challenge, the defiance of one breaking through long restraint, for at the same time fire shot out of his eyes toward the Neapolitan-looking man seven yards

away. Immediately afterwards he smiled on me, nodded, rose, and saying: 'Back in two minutes,' walked away out.

"A minute afterwards I saw the foreigner also saunter out.

"Well, Rolls did not return in 'two minutes'—I wished that he would, for just then I felt sick at my second 'long Tom'—horridly strong and raw—and presently I became aware of some commotion in the entrance-hall west of me—running feet, calls—so, among others, I hurried out to see, and there by the Office stood a mob, craning to see something in their midst, the hotel-people fussing about, begging them to stand back.

"I, being taller than most, soon caught sight of a form—'the enemy,' the Neapolitan—lying unconscious, and one of the diners, probably a doctor, kneeling near, whom I heard say: 'Only a faint—right arm broken'; and I understood that the injured must have been on the way to seek aid for his arm, but had fainted before reaching the portal.

"Some moments afterwards my left eye caught sight of Rolls strolling in from the inner, south, *salle*, and saw him throw himself upon a lounge at the inner side of the entrance-hall.

"When I went to him, I saw him rather pallid under his tan, rather scant of breath, and, showing me a dagger, he told me, 'I went to the lavatory—thought myself alone—he stabbed me in the back with this—I cracked his arm.' He showed me some blood on his fingers.

"'Come,' I said, and led him toward the front, where a crowd and two constables were now watching the foreigner being carried into a cab for hospital; and Rolls I soon had in

a cab for Essex Court, where, after 'phoning Dr. Hammond to come, I undressed Rolls; but the wound, an island in an ocean of tattooing, I at once saw to be of no importance, so 'phoned Hammond not to bother, and dressed it myself.

"'But what about the legal aspect?' I then said to Rolls: 'this is London in Europe.'

"'Oh, the incident is ended,' Rolls said, putting on his vest: 'it's no chop my charging him, and he, you may bet, won't charge me. May the stink-cats all catch it as hot, and may the devil get their master, his son.'

"I gave him to drink, and he stayed with me, telling tale after tale of venture and escape, funds of lore, till eleven, then went back to the hotel, saying he'd be at the aerodrome at two, I soon to hear more of his Spiciewegiehotiu, or 'Hot Spice,' I called that lady, 'our mother.' Rolls is a man, and not at all a bad sort."

III

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ROLLS LAID LOW

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The next day Cobby duly flew Rolls over London; after which the relation between the two became more established. Rolls spending several evenings at Cobby's chambers, bringing along his own peach-brandy—for himself to sip, alcohol being not often good enough for Cobby; and it was when Cobby was one evening expecting Rolls for the fifth of these visits, that he heard his door-handle wrenched, his door slammed, and on rushing out to his hall, found Rolls there standing with his back on the door, short of breath, and blanched.

"Hurt, Rolls?" Cobby cried out.

"Don't think so," Rolls answered on a pant. "They got me on the stair—rushed me from No. 7 door.... Two I treated with the naked mauleys—the third chased me up—fired twice—air-gun—tore my sleeve, see—they wear silent shoes—I hadn't time to draw...."

Indignant blood rushed to Cobby's forehead. "*We*'ll do the attacking!" he cried, running in, to return with a small Colt's.

"You keep out of it"—Rolls held his sleeve.

"This is intolerable!" Cobby said, with a florid forehead—"come on—rout 'em out."

But Rolls held him. "*They* are under cover—it's no chop fighting on ground chosen by the enemy. Wait—wary's the word. I reckon they'll be getting me in the end, but let that

cost them something.... How would they have got into No. 7?"

Cobby explained that No. 7 had been unoccupied, and must now have been taken by, or for, one of the gang; but complaint at the Inn-office the next day would rid the Temple of them. Meantime the police ...

But these, bespoken over the telephone, failed to find anyone at No. 7; and Cobby, nervous for Rolls' life, would not let him go; so Rolls, for the first time, slept that night in the chambers.

That was the night of the 2nd August.

On the night of the 7th, Rolls was "got," as he would have said.

Near nine he was walking up Essex Street—his usual route for Cobby's—lonely at that hour, obscure at some points—when he was stabbed in the abdomen—mysteriously, for not a living thing did he see near him. Any nerve less trained in alertness than he, any adventurer less veteran in the trick and luck of escape, would doubtless have been laid dead at once; but something or other caused him suddenly to spring upward, and, instead of in the breast, he was hit below.

He contrived to rise, to stagger and drag himself to the Temple not far, to knock at Cobby's "oak," as formally as if nothing had happened. But as he knocked, he fell; and some moments afterwards, before the door was opened, Cobby, who had been out, darted up the stair, and there before the door saw the poor man prostrate in sorry case. Rolls sighed: "I think I'm done for."

The effect of this upon Cobby, who was hot-headed and full-blooded, was to cause him to dash into a passion at outrages of this sort done in his own London; and he vowed vengeance. But for days Rolls could give no lucid account of what had taken place, the police appeared to be beaten, and no vengeance was taken. Indeed, during two whole days Rolls was delirious, the doctors anxious; but he was too tough a catgut to snap at one tug, and the days of danger passed.

Soon after which he breathed feebly to Cobby: "I've brought no end of a bobbery upon you, haven't I?—coming here. You were so much nearer—and I reckoned you'd want me to."

"Good Rolls," Cobby answered, pressing his hand, "that's right: there's no bobbery."

Cobby, busy as he was by nature, would stay an hour by the bedside, and himself help in Rolls' nursing, till the evening when Rolls was wheeled out to the work-room, when he said to Cobby: "Aye, I think I can drop now to it how they got me. From a motor-car. A rod running in sockets to push out, and a spike or two on the rod to stab with ... I think I remember a car passing, and I distinctly remember making a spring: I must have caught half a glimpse of something in the half-dark—I can't swear. Well, in the end they'll do me in, no doubt, since they're so down on it."

"Miscreants!" Cobby muttered, running his fingers through the backwoods of his hair: "if *we* could do *them* in ... But, as we seem unable to, you cut and run, Rolls. That will be horrible, if, when you get well, you are again——"

"I have always stood up to my man so far," Rolls said, "and am not for turning tail now. The worst of my trouble is that I've brought you, too, into it. Promise me now that you'll not go out unarmed."

"That is foreign to me, Rolls," Cobby answered, looking not unlike the boy in "Bubbles," robed in a camel-hair dressing-gown, and launching into the air a bubble bigger than a trunk, a great globe of glories and glamours, gas-blown, he then experimenting on the surface-tension of bubbles at a lengthy table littered with a tangle of apparatus under bright lamplight: "I don't want to go armed in God's good Fleet Street, nor do I yet understand why these clowns should wish to meddle with me."

Reclined under a rug in a lounge-chair on the other side of the table, Rolls answered: "You see, they pan it out that I'll never play it a lone hand, undertaking a trek to that country so far in the interior without one white companion; and if Douglas Macray once reckons that you are wiring in with me, his cutthroats will sure be after you, too."

"But am I wiring in with you?" Cobby demanded. "You see that I have interests here."

With eyes trained sidewards upon him, Rolls watched a little that dainty handicraft before replying: "The thing's worth doing. Seven millions sterling: of which I reckon upon one for me, and one for you, if we put it over."

"How? Tell me now," said Cobby, pausing in the work to stand with his arms akimbo.

And Rolls, after some hesitancy, remarked: "Nurse will be still asleep ... Very well, we'll talk of that country.... You know that your mother's two sisters married two brothers. Jane

marrying James Macray, and Ismene marrying Rob Macray. Rob being considerably the elder, his rascal of a son, Douglas Macray, was nine or ten before James married your aunt Jane—I know the whole jimbang of it, for about then I was well in with James in the Witwatersrand, where he laid the foundations of his fortune. Rob, he never had much wealth—once went bankrupt in Chicago—and our swell Douglas Macray would be a nobody to-day, if he wasn't in possession of somebody else's money. Aye, somebody else's, look—not his own—the money of Spiciewegiehotiu."

"Ah! Hot Spice," went Cobby.

"Hot spice—that's pepper—is what she *is*. Eh, she'd have that rascal's head off as sweet and clean——"

"But how was it? Tell me."

"You remember the loss of the *Florida*?"

"Let me see—Yes, yes, of course—I was eighteen—she vanished—my aunt Jane was lost——"

"*And* your uncle-in-law, James Macray, *and* his daughter, your cousin, Flora Macray: the *Florida* being James Macray's 5,000-ton yacht, in which, with a party, he was globe-trotting, going to Japan; but after touching at Somaliland they were caught in one of those easterly Indian Ocean storms, to which they had to turn tail; and to this day the timbers of the wreck of that craft remain on the African coast, for I've seen them."

Cobby lowered himself to sit, saying: "I gather, then, that this Hot Spice is Flora Macray?"

"That's so. James Macray's dollars, inherited by his brother Rob, and then by Rob's son, Douglas, whose name, too, should be Rob, for 'tis his nature too—those dollars now

being spent to murder me for knowing too much—are dollars of Spiciewegiehotiu, every cent, by her father's will ——"

"*He* was drowned, then—and my aunt?" Cobby asked eagerly.

"No, not drowned, I think. The *Florida* grounded inside a half-harbour, and probably all hands were saved. They were received, and not badly treated for some weeks, by Daisy, King of M'Niami, a man still alive, for I've done *Konza* to him, and given the beggar ivory—this Daisy being the neighbour to the north-east of Spiciewegiehotiu, and now lives in terror of her sceptre and butting horns, though twelve years ago she was a kid of six in his hands, and with a wink he could have sent her to the kingdom of heaven.... Well, sir, after the *Florida* lot had been with Daisy some weeks, Daisy suddenly receives a request from the King of Wo-Ngwanya to hand over to him the white child then in Daisy's great-place, in exchange for five hundred Wo-Ngwanya cattle. Now, this was an all-out rum request; and, as at that time Daisy's M'Niami were considered a more powerful crowd than the Wa-Ngwanya, Daisy scratched his wool and demurred—couldn't drop to what the bobbery was about! the real reason being, that a certain woman of the Wa-Ngwanya, named Mandaganya, had months before had some sort of premonition that a 'lamb coming up out of the water' would make Wo-Ngwanya great—that being what 'Spiciewegiehotiu' *means*, 'Lamb come up out of water.' This Mandaganya, too, I know, by the way—a remarkable woman, I assure you—big, grand being—highly intelligent—and if ever there was a medium, or 'sensitive,' or 'psychic,'

as you call 'em here, it is that woman. That woman has outraged the moral sense of all Wo-Ngwanya, all her fifteen children, except two, having different fathers—a capital offence there—yet her influence in the State remains immense, she being the chief of the College of Doctors—a triumph of personality. Her two children by one father are Sueela and a little brisk beast, sharp as a needle with two points, who is the executioner—a little ink-black beast whose limbs seem oiled, whose close acquaintance I almost made, by George. The flash of that falchion of his will have a head pitching away in one swift swish, and then, his right leg bent before him, his left leg stiff behind him, he'll glance up sharp, as if asking everybody 'how's that for a wonner?' and then the next, and the next—brisk as a flea! and his sister Sueela is Spiciewegiehotiu's pet and weakness; sprig of seventeen, Sueela—ah! you must see Sueela—Venus, my boy—Venus is the thing's name, not Sueela. Spiciewegiehotiu's fondness for her is a scandal in Wo-Ngwanya, by the way, for Sueela's mother, the *inyanga*, comes from the dregs of the people, so——"

"But about the *Florida* people," Cobby interrupted, glancing at the clock.

"Aye, that's the point," Rolls said: "pull me up when I get long-winded. I have a soft spot for that country, and no doubt am apt to gas about my memories of it—'Children of the Wind' I name 'em, dwelling there in this twentieth century among the wrecks of a civilization ancient as Abraham, maybe—relics of pyramid, temple—and, the sweet winds that sweep them—I might do worse than sleep eternally under the turf of those uplands, if those that sleep

can be hearing the breezes breathe through the trees at midday and at midnight. But I was telling you—the King of Wo-Ngwanya, panning it out that the white child at Daisy's great-place was the 'lamb come up washed out of the water,' demands her of Daisy; Daisy, for his part——"

But at this point a nurse looked in to claim Rolls, and would not be disobeyed. "Here's another Spicey," muttered Rolls, moving out with her, while another moon covered over with Constantinoples of topaz and opal floated aloft from Cobby's bubble-blower.

IV

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THE "CASTLE" LINER

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But during the two following nights, Cobby had from Rolls the whole story—how Daisy, King of M'Niami, refused to send the white child to Wo-Ngwanya, having been warned by the whites of the *Florida* that, if he separated the child from her parents, the white Knulu-knulu (great-great God) would be down upon him, whereas, if he refused to send her, all would go well with him. By this advice he was guided: whereupon, war—Wo-Ngwanya warning Daisy that, if one hair of the white lamb was harmed, then, the Wo-Ngwanya army, if victorious, would not fail to raze Daisy's great-place to the ground. And Wo-Ngwanya *was* victorious: whereupon Daisy, in a passion of anger against the *Florida* unfortunates for their false prophecy, and for all the disaster it had brought upon his head, turned round and put them all to death, except the little one, whom, on capitulating, he handed over to Wo-Ngwanya.

"Eh," said Rolls to Cobby, "but that King of Wo-Ngwanya was cutting a stick for the back of his own royal house, look. Spiciewegiehotiu was no lamb come up out of any water—dragon more like—Machiavelli—Napoleon—and proved one too many for that royal house. The prophecy of the *inganya* Mandaganya that 'the lamb' would make Wo-Ngwanya 'great' has proved abundantly true, for when Spicie entered it, that country was no bigger than Bucks; now she can put

into the field 180,000 of the bravest warriors—can and does put, for like a butting goat she has pushed and butted, north and east, and west, till that country may now make a map broader than Wales. But her idea was to make Wo-Ngwanya great for herself and her 'children,' the Wa-Ngwanya, not for the reigning house; and she was not much over sixteen when her scheming and intriguing broke out in the deuce of a bobbery. She got round the King, who now had cancer, to proclaim her his President of the Council at a new-moon ceremony; upon which two of the King's three brothers, and his only son—a lad of nineteen—took flight by night with a troop of followers from Eshowe—that's the royal kraal, or capital—in order to bring three regiments from the North upon Eshowe, seize the power, and get hold of Spiciewegiehotiu and Mandaganya, whose designs they were quite up to. Well, your troop of indunas gallop full bat through a night and day, they reach the regiments, they hold an *indaba*—that's a debate—of officers in a forest at midnight, decide what to do, and to do it quick; and, as the *indaba* is about over, one of the assembly stands up, points at the princes, and commands, 'arrest the traitors'—Spiciewegiehotiu, wrapped in an officer's kaross, her face blackened; and with her her Sueela. She rode back to Eshowe at the head of one of the regiments, the three princes prisoners in its midst."

Cobby over his work murmured "efficient," and Rolls dodged one of the bubble-worlds which Cobby constantly created and launched.

"Aye," Rolls said—"has a sense of the value of seconds, and will always be a minute ahead of her enemy. She had

reached the three regiments only one half-hour before the princes, within which interval she had done a world of work and winning. The third of the King's brothers, Dzinikulu, who related to me all this, told me that Sueela on her knees entreated Spiciewegiehotiu to kill the three princes there and then, but that Spicie, who always knows just how far she dares go at any juncture, and goes to the limit of that, but no farther, would not kill—bided her time. But she suffered for this: for soon afterwards she was poisoned—only scraped through by the skill of the doctoress, Mandaganya—and for two months it was as much as the sick King could do to keep Spiciewegiehotiu living—plot after plot. Then one midnight the King dies; Spicie still sick from poison; and quick the four princes rush, silently invest the sigodhlo—that's the royal enclosure—with troops that they have waiting ready, so to make sure of Spiciewegiehotiu. And now they look through the sigodhlo for Spicie, they ransack it: no Spicie. Spicie has fled, Sueela fled, Mandaganya fled—gone by a little back-way in the very nick of time. The princes give chase; scour the country; they cannot drop upon Spiciewegiehotiu. A rumour comes to them that Spicie has fled north-east to the garrison brigades on the M'Niami frontier, and is marching against them, with a force of 12,000 assegais; on which, with overwhelming numbers, they rush to encounter and crush these regiments. But while butting about, looking for this force, they come to know that it has given them the slip, and is now with Spiciewegiehotiu at the great-place, Eshowe, together with other forces. Back to Eshowe they rush, to crush her there. When they arrive in sight of Eshowe, at ten