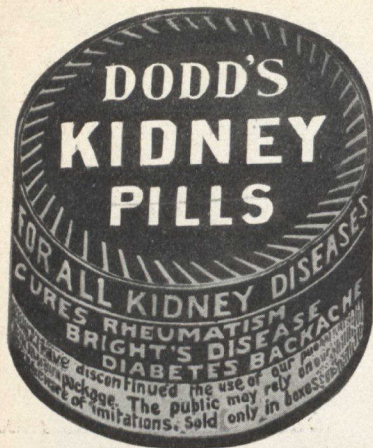




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in a strange tongue, and bowing his white head until it touched an object that lay within the box.

"What are you doing, Jeeki?" she asked.

"Make bow to Little Bonsa, Miss Barbara, tell her how glad I am see her come back from town. She like feel welcome. Now you come bow, too, Little Bonsa take that as compliment."

"I won't bow, but I will look, Jeeki, for although I have heard so much about it I have never really examined this Yellow God."

"Very good, you come look, Miss," and Jeeki propped up the case upon the end of the dining-room table. As from its height and position she could not see its contents very well whilst standing above it, Barbara knelt down to get a better view of it.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed; "what a terrible face, beautiful, too, in its way."

Hardly had the words left her lips when for some reason unexplained that probably had to do with the shifting of the centre of gravity, Little Bonsa appeared to glide or fall out of her box with a startling suddenness, and project herself straight at Barbara, who, with a faint scream, fearing lest the precious thing should be injured, caught it in her arms and for a moment hugged it to her breast.

"Saved!" she exclaimed, recovering herself and placing it on the table, whereon Jeeki, to their astonishment, began to execute a kind of war dance.

"Oh! yes," he said, "saved, very much saved. All saved, most magnificent omen. Lady kneel to Little Bonsa and Little Bonsa nip out of box, make bow and jump in lady's arms. That splendid, first class luck, for Miss and everybody. When Little Bonsa do that need fear nothing no more. All come right as rain."

"See," said Jeeki, pointing to the misshapen little gold legs which were yet so designed that it could be stood up upon them, "when anyone wear Little Bonsa, tie her on head behind by these legs; look, here same old leather string. Now I put her on, for she like to be worn again," and with a quick movement he clapped the mask on to his face, manipulating the greasy black leather thongs and made them fast. Thus adorned the great negro looked no less than terrific.

"I see you, Miss," he said, turning the fixed eyes of opal-like stone, blood-shot with little rubies, upon Barbara. "I see you, though you no see me, for these eyes made very cunning. But listen, you hear me," and suddenly from the mask, produced by some contrivance set within it, there proceeded an awful, howling sound that made her shiver.

"Take that thing off, Jeeki," said Alan, "we don't want any banshees here."

"Banshees? Not know him. He poor English fetish, perhaps," said Jeeki, as he removed the mask. "This real African god, howl banshee and all that sort into middle if next week. This Little Bonsa and no mistake, ten thousand years old and more, eat up lives, so many that no one can count them, and go on eating for ever, yet unto the third and fourth generation, as Ten Commandments lay it down for benefit of Christian man, like me. Look at her again, Miss Barbara."

"What is all that writing on the back of it?" asked Barbara, pointing to the long lines of rune-like characters which were inscribed within the mask.

"Not know, Miss, they dead tongue cut in the beginning when black men could write. But Asiki priests remember everyone of them, and that why no one can copy Little Bonsa, for they look inside and see if letters all right. They say they names of those who died for Little Bonsa, and when

they all done, Little Bonsa begin again, for Little Bonsa never die."

"Well," said Barbara, "take Little Bonsa away, for however lucky she may be, she makes me feel sick."

"Where I put her, Major?" asked Jeeki of Alan. "In box in library where she used to live, or in plate-safe with spoons? Or under your bed, where she always keep eye on you?"

"Oh, put her with the spoons," said Alan angrily, and Jeeki departed with his treasure.

"I think, dear," remarked Barbara as the door closed behind him, "that if I come to lunch here any more, I shall bring my own christening present with me, for I can't eat off silver that has been shut up with that thing. Now let us get to business—show me the diary and the map."

"Dearest Alan," wrote Barbara from the Court two days later, "I have been thinking everything over, and since you are so set upon it, I suppose that you had better go. To me the whole adventure seems perfectly mad, but at the same time I believe in your luck, or rather in the Providence which watches over us, and I don't believe that you, or I either, will come to any harm. If you stop here, you will only eat your heart out, and communication between us must become increasingly difficult. My uncle is furious with you, and since he discovered that we were talking over the telephone, to his own great inconvenience he has had the wires cut outside the house. That horrid letter of his to you, saying that you had 'compromised' me in pursuance of 'a mercenary scheme' is all part and parcel of the same thing. How are you to stop here and submit to such insults? I went to see my friend the lawyer, and he tells me that of course we can marry if we like, but in that case my father's will, which he has consulted at Somerset House, is absolutely definite, and if I do so in opposition to my uncle's wishes, I must lose everything except £200 a year. Now I am no money grubber, but I will not give my uncle the satisfaction of robbing me of my fortune, which may be useful to both of us by and by. The lawyer says also that he does not think that the Court of Chancery would interfere, having no power to do so, so far as the will is concerned, and not being able to make a ward of a person like myself, who is over age, and has the protection of the common law of the country."

"Meanwhile, if you can make some money in Africa, so much the better. So go, Alan, go as soon as you like, for I do not wish to prolong this agony, or to see you exposed daily to all you have to bear. Whenever you return you will find me waiting for you, and if you do not return, still I shall wait, as you in like circumstances will wait for me. But I think you will return."

"I am glad to hear that you have succeeded in shifting the mortgage on Yarleys, although the interest is so high. Write to me whenever you get a chance, to the care of the lawyer, for then the letters will reach me, but never to this house, or they may be stopped. I will do the same to the address you give. Good-bye, dearest Alan, my true and only lover. I wonder where and when we shall meet again. God be with us both and enable us to bear our trial."

"P.P.S.—I hear that the Sahara flotation was really a success, notwithstanding the 'Judge' attacks. Sir Robert and my uncle have made millions. I wonder how long they will keep them!"

A week after he received this letter Alan was on the seas, heading for the shores of Western Africa.

(To be continued.)

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