

## A Daring Rescue

C.T. Studd sat on the veranda of his austere home in the heart of Africa having an evening cup of tea with a group of missionaries. Two watchmen, armed with spears, hurriedly approached them with some dreadful news. C.T. stood as they drew near.

‘Bwana Mukubwa<sup>1</sup>, one of the girls from the school has been taken!’ declared a watchman breathlessly.

‘Who has taken her?’ asked C.T. calmly although he was shocked by the announcement. The others on the veranda stood up quickly at the dreadful news. Edith Buxton, C.T.’s daughter, put her hand over her mouth in shock. Her husband Alfred gently took her other hand by her side in solidarity with her.

‘Chief Abiangama. He caught the girl on her way back from school,’ said the other watchman.

‘He has kept her prisoner,’ continued the first watchman.

‘Have you tried to get her back?’ asked Edith sharply.

‘We have already been to the village to demand her back, but the chief will not let her go,’ replied the other watchman.

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1. **Bwana Mukubwa** means “Great White Chief”. It was the name given to C.T. Studd by the local tribespeople.

C.T. knew exactly what to do. ‘Go to the centre of the village and raise the alarm,’ he commanded the watchmen. They left quickly to carry out their instructions. Edith looked at her father who was lit up in the strong moonlight. She knew that expression on his face. She’d seen it before as they were growing up. There was no doubt that her father would step up and do everything he could to get the girl back safely. It was a rescue mission.

Soon the Christians of the village appeared from the thick palm groves. They picked up anything on their way that could be used to defend themselves. Some carried big sticks, others had *pangas*<sup>2</sup>, while the rest had long-handled rakes or hoes that were generally used for weeding.

The crowd gathered at the foot of the steps that led to C.T.’s house. Edith did a quick head count. There were fifty of them. C.T. moved to the top of the steps to address the zealous multitude that stood raucously before him. He raised his hands to beckon for silence. An immediate hush came over them.

‘Thank you for your willingness to join in the rescue,’ he began. ‘It is so deeply encouraging to see your love for your neighbour such that you are willing to risk yourselves for another’s wellbeing. But I want this rescue mission to be conducted in a way that pleases our Lord Jesus Christ. So, I want you all to put your

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2. A **panga** is an African knife which is long, wooden, and used for cultivating crops.

weapons on the ground. We shall rescue the girl as Christians and not as soldiers.'

A murmur of disappointment was heard from the crowd; however, they would obey Bwana Mukubwa. Each rescuer stepped forward and laid their arms in a large pile at the foot of the veranda steps.

'Father's been suffering from fever again, Alfred,' Edith said quietly as the people were disarming themselves. 'He'll need help to get through the jungle.'

'I'll see to it that his hammock is brought out, and I'll pick four strong men to carry it,' replied Alfred.

Hammocks were an important means of transportation for Europeans living in the interior of Africa during the early part of the twentieth century. A travel hammock was a bed of canvas or netting that was attached to a pole at both ends. Travelling by hammock was a status symbol for the wealthy and was often used by African chiefs too.

C.T. never thought of himself as greater than anyone else, except on a cricket field perhaps! He much preferred to travel using his own legs or even his bicycle. But when he was weak with fever, which was a reoccurring problem for him, members of his Christian family in Africa would gladly carry him in his hammock.

The trek through the dense jungle was arduous and sweaty that evening. They heard beating drums and the guttural shouts of dancers long before they got to Chief Abiangama's village. It took the rescue party about an

hour before they reached the edge of the village. On their approach, they saw about two hundred dancing men with feathers in their hair, swaying rhythmically to the beating of the drums. They stopped in their tracks to discuss their next move.

Albert stood beside C.T.'s hammock and bent down. 'What shall we do, Bwana?' he whispered.

'We shall get the child back,' C.T. replied softly. Then in a firm voice, he commanded his men: 'Break through the circle!'

The rescuers emerged from the jungle and marched firmly through the circle of dancing men, walking right up to Chief Abiangama, before stopping. C.T. jumped out of his hammock and squared off in front of the Chief.

Suddenly C.T. grabbed Chief Abiangama by his beard. 'Where is the girl?!' he demanded, yanking the captured beard in his hand. 'You took her!' Another yank. 'I demand you return her to us!' Yank, yank, yank.

Chief Abiangama quickly pulled away from Bwana Mukubwa, declaring, 'I'll fetch her! I'll fetch her!' grasping his tortured beard as he moved. He quickly ran for cover among his village huts. C.T. followed him in hot pursuit, determined not to be taken in by the words of this scoundrel. His merry band of rescuers were firmly on his tail.

The Chief dodged between the huts, and his many wives, trying to get away. C.T. cut him off at every turn.

By now the dancing men were getting involved in the debacle, and armed themselves for an unfair fight. ‘*Bunduki!*’ cried one of the rescuers, which was the *Bangala*<sup>3</sup> word meaning ‘guns!’ They were everywhere! As emotions ran high, the unarmed rescuers decided to strike first before any shots were fired and someone was killed.

*Thud!* The bare fists of the rescuers connected with the bodies of their enemies. Edith shrieked. She had never heard so much thumping and pounding. But she knew that sounds always seemed louder in the darkness. All Edith could see was the warriors’ feathers bobbing up and down in the moonlight and the flying shirttales of the rescuers as the men and women laid into each other. She made her way back to her father. C.T. looked bewildered by it all.

‘How are we going to get out of this, Father?’

‘Our fifty rescuers are no match for two hundred warriors, that’s for sure.’

Edith had a mad but brilliant idea.

‘Father, I’m going to sing.’

Edith had a very high-pitched voice, so there was no way her tune would not be heard. She took a deep breath and began in perfect Bangala:

‘Jesus loves me! this I know,  
For the Bible tells me so;  
Little ones to him belong,  
They are weak but he is strong.’

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3. **Bangala** was the local language of these tribes in the Belgian Congo.

It was the first song that Edith had learned as a child, and the first song that was translated into the Bangala language.

The tune carried loudly through the village. One by one, the voices of the rescuers joined in. Soon it was a beautiful, melodious chorus that replaced the thuds of fear and self-preservation, and the fighting slowly stopped. How wonderful!

As the brawl died down, one of the chief's wives crawled on all fours through the mass of legs until she silently arrived at C.T.'s side. Like a flash she took his little finger in her mouth, biting down hard so that C.T. let out a loud yell. Heads turned in his direction to see what was happening.

Noticing that it was the chief's wife now causing all the trouble, Edith instinctively protected her father. Momentarily forgetting C.T.'s call not to hurt anyone – just like the other members of C.T.'s rescue party it seemed – she pushed the chief's wife hard, sending her flying through the air and landing on the ground.

There was a lull in the fighting, and C.T. seized the opportunity to call a halt to the whole debacle. He drew a line in the dust with his foot and called the rescuers to come to his side, leaving the chief's warriors on the other. Both groups looked rather more ruffled than they did when C.T.'s group arrived. Then the rescuers marched off back to Nala, singing hymns as they went.

‘What about the girl?’ whispered Albert into C.T.’s ear when they were clear of the village.

‘We’ll have to try again tomorrow,’ replied C.T.

An hour later the weary rescuers arrived back in Nala. To everyone’s surprise and joy, the kidnapped girl was sitting on the steps of C.T.’s veranda.

‘You’re here!’ shrieked Edith, running forward to give her a hug. ‘When did you get back? How did you escape?!’ The rest of the rescue party gathered around her, thrilled she was home safely.

The girl smiled. ‘When I heard your voices, and that you had all come for me, I praised God. I knew it was time for me to go home. Then I heard you fight for me.’ Tears of joy and love began to trickle down her cheeks. Edith gently wiped them away with her hand.

C.T. gently chastised his rescuers. ‘Yes! What part of “no fighting” did you not understand?’ They hung their heads, not noticing C.T.’s wink at Edith, who grinned from ear to ear.

A massive cheer of delight rang out in Nala that night. As the men and women drifted homeward through palm trees, their way illuminated by soft moonlight, Alfred, Edith, and C.T. gathered once again on the veranda.

‘When you were growing up in London, did you ever think you’d be chasing down a cannibalistic African Chief to save one of our schoolchildren?’ C.T. asked light-heartedly.

‘Oh, not at all!’ laughed Edith. ‘Can you imagine the look on Granny’s face if she were alive to hear what we got up to tonight?’

They could imagine Granny’s horrified expression rightly, and the three roared with laughter.