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The Dog Star

BY Coralie Stanton AND Heath Hosken

"Who is it?" asked Peter, glancing towards the second hammock. "A chap called Boone—a very good sort indeed. Knows the country inside out. Your father's agent, Morlarty, sent him with me to look after me, and show me the ropes, you know. And he has been showing me about with a vengeance—only now he's fallen sick, and we've lost our way in consequence."

"Well, I'm only too jolly glad," said Peter boyishly; "not that he's fallen sick, of course, but that you've lost your way, Lorion."

They both advanced towards the second hammock. The men bearing it were also dead tired; they were standing stock-still, like animals, half stupefied with sleep as they stood.

Boone lay on a bed as comfortable as Lorion had been able to improvise within the hammock. He was covered to the chin. His face was deathly white, mere skin and bone, merely a wedge of ghastliness in the gathering gloom. His mouth was shut; so were his eyes. He gave no sign of life, except that his head rolled a little on his pillow from time to time.

"Poor devil!" exclaimed Peter, touched to pity, although the man's face, with its tiny eyes and nose and protruding lower part, that was so reminiscent of a Blenheim spaniel even in health, was not at all a sight to provoke sympathy in a stranger. In fact, it was a peculiarly unpleasant countenance. But he was white, and a strong chain bound him to any other white man here in the wilderness.

"Look here," Peter went on, "we must get him properly to bed. Napier's hut is the largest, I think. We'll settle him in there." He pointed to the very moderate-sized cane and mud and leaf dwelling, and the men's weary black masks relaxed into something that might have been a smile, as, with a final effort, they shouldered their living load again and shuffled towards Mark Napier's dwelling.

Peter and Lorion walked after them, Lorion having told the rest of the men to stop awhile and wait for instructions.

In a very short space of time Boone had been undressed, got into a suit of Napier's pyjamas, and made comfortable in Napier's bed. Napier himself arrived just as the operation was completed, and, after a hurried explanation from Peter, he was introduced to Lorion, and then left to examine the patient in the light of his superior medical knowledge.

Lorion, meanwhile, went to have a much needed wash in Peter's hut.

When he came out Peter and Napier were deep in conversation. The parson was shaking his head.

"I'm sorry," he said, as Lorion joined them, "I'm afraid your friend is in a very bad way. To tell you the truth, I can't make out what's the matter with him at all. He hasn't a very high temperature."

"He has had, though," put in Lorion. "He's been raving for days."

"I'm afraid he's sinking," said Napier.

"What—dying?" cried the other, aghast.

"I'm afraid so. Mind you, I don't know much about these diseases of the tropics. It may be just a torpid state he's sunk into after the fever's left him. But it doesn't look to me like that. His vitality is at its very lowest ebb."

The bearers of the party were informed that they must camp out as best they could. The ordinary remedies appeared to be of no use to Boone. Napier gave him brandy. He swallowed a little, and rallied ever so slightly, but he could not speak, or even make known by signs whether he had any communication to make. The others could only await developments.

It was arranged that Napier and Peter were to share the latter's hut, and a tent was fixed up for Lorion, offering as much resistance to sudden storms as was possible under the circumstances.

After dinner Lorion told of the adventures that had brought him to the clearing without his ever having meant to go near the place at all. But first of all, his curiosity about Peter had to be satisfied.

"What are you doing here, Monk? I never got such a shock in all my life."

"You haven't heard about the ruins, then?" asked Peter.

"Ruins?"

Peter and Napier explained between them. Lorion was vastly interested, but obviously more in their human selves than in the archaeological prize.

"But what have you been about, Lorion?"

"Well, we are supposed to be going to the Patala Forest," explained Lorion.

"My dear man!" cried Napier.

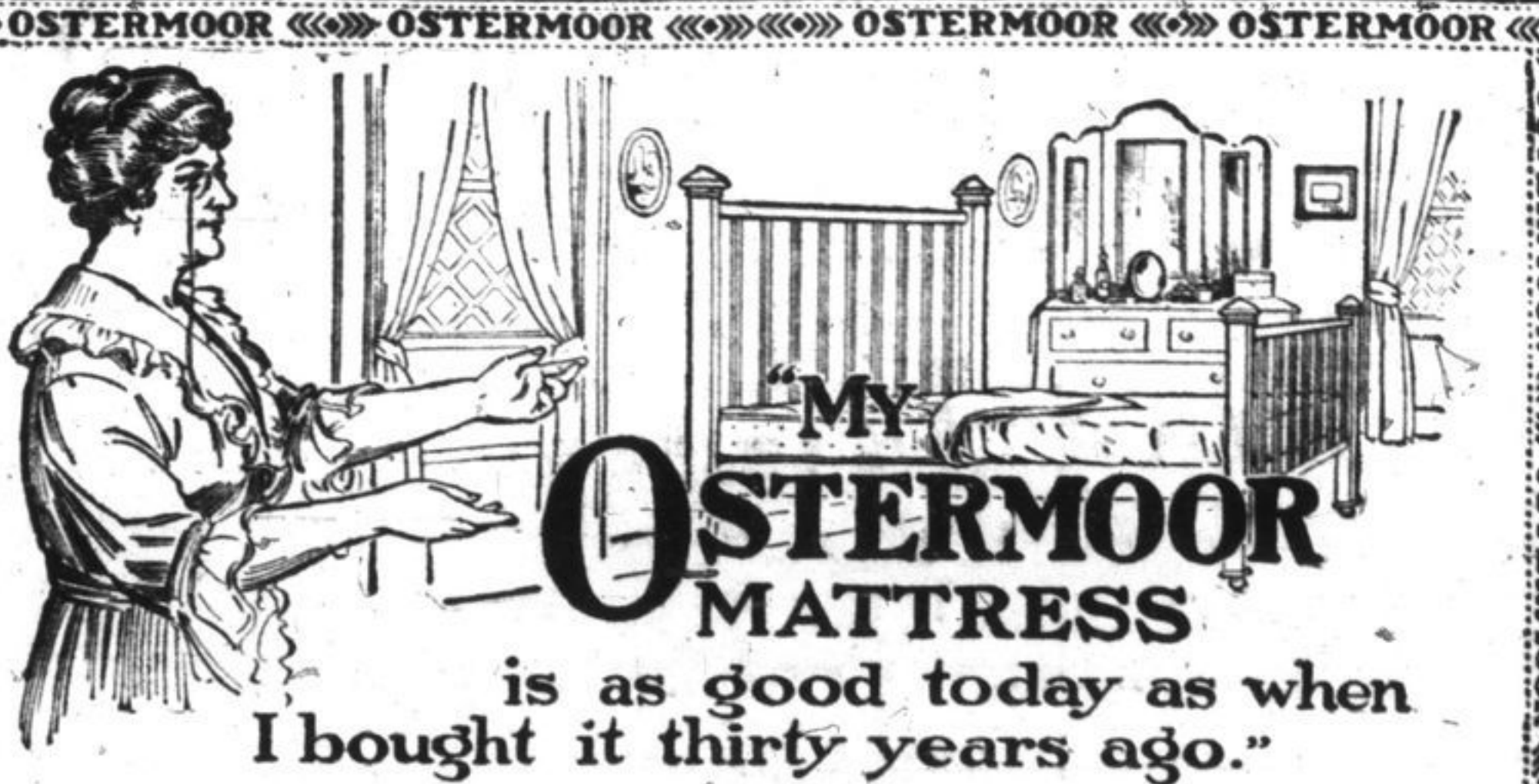
"What on earth have you done?"

"Are we much out of the way?"

"I should say a couple of hundred miles. I've been studying the country rather exhaustively of late. How did you manage it?"

"Well, you see, after we left Barongo we were all right for a day or two. Then Boone got ill. We took directions from him for a day or two; then we found it was no good. We made the mistake of bringing the same men all the way through. They don't know an inch of the country. It was a foolish thing to do. I thought natives could find their way about anywhere, but not these. After a couple of days Boone got worse, and we got hopelessly lost. We've been five days wandering about in this wretched forest, and we've never met a soul. And, according to our itinerary, we're supposed to have been in Tatala and off."

(Continued next Saturday.)



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