**AI-Generated Graded Readers**
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Publication webpage:
https://www1.gifu-u.ac.jp/~masaru/a1/ai-generated_graded_readers.html

Publication date: March 2, 2026

**About This Edition**

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

**Source Text**

Original work: King Solomon's Mines
Author: H. Rider Haggard

Source: Project Gutenberg
https://www.gutenberg.org/

Full text available at:
https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2166/pg2166.txt

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H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

I am Allan Quatermain. I am fifty-five years old, and at my age it feels strange to begin writing a long story. I have spent most of my life hunting, trading, and traveling across wild land, not sitting with pen and paper. Still, I write now because two friends asked me to do so, because I am resting with an injured leg in Durban, and because I want my son Harry, who studies medicine in London, to read something that may amuse him. I also write because the story I must tell is the strangest adventure I remember, though I have seen many dangerous things in my life.

I began work young. While other boys went to school, I earned money as a trader in the Colony. Since then I have hunted elephants, fought in wars, searched for minerals, and traveled far into unknown country. Adventure has followed me whether I wanted it or not. I am not a brave man by nature. I dislike violence and danger, yet danger has often found me. Even now my left leg pains me where a lion once caught me. I have killed many lions, but the sixty-sixth nearly finished me. The wound healed long ago, yet each year it aches again, as if the lion still holds me.

I do not pretend to be a great writer. I prefer simple words and plain truth. A sharp spear needs no polish, and a true story needs no fine language. So I will tell events as they happened, in clear order, without decoration.

About eighteen months before I began writing, I met Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good. I had returned from an unlucky elephant hunt beyond Bamangwato. Fever struck me badly, and when I recovered I sold my ivory and wagon, dismissed my hunters, and traveled to Cape Town. After staying there a week, I boarded the ship *Dunkeld* to return to Natal.

Among the passengers were two men who caught my attention at once. One was tall and powerful, perhaps the strongest man I had ever seen. He had yellow

hair and beard, deep grey eyes, and a calm, noble face. He reminded me of old pictures of northern warriors. Later I learned his name was Sir Henry Curtis. The other man was shorter, dark, neat in dress, and clearly a naval officer. His name was Captain John Good. He wore a single eye-glass that never seemed to leave his eye except when he slept.

That evening bad weather drove most passengers below deck. I stood near the engine room watching a pendulum swing with the rolling ship. Captain Good joined me and complained sharply that the instrument was badly balanced. He spoke with confidence and irritation, as naval officers often do when discussing ships. Soon afterward we went to dinner together, where Sir Henry sat opposite us.

We spoke about hunting. Someone mentioned my name and said I was known for elephant hunting. At this Sir Henry suddenly leaned forward.

“Excuse me,” he said quietly. “Is your name Allan Quatermain?”

I answered that it was. He seemed pleased but said little more until after dinner, when he invited me to his cabin to smoke. Captain Good joined us. The cabin was large and comfortable, and soon we sat together with pipes and whisky.

Sir Henry began asking about my travels near Bamangwato the year before. He knew surprising details of my movements. Then he asked whether I had met a man named Neville. I remembered him well—a traveler heading north with a wagon and a native hunter.

“Yes,” I said. “I met him. Later I saw his wagon again, sold to another trader.”

Sir Henry listened closely. At last he spoke with emotion.

“Mr. Neville was my brother.”

Now I understood why Sir Henry’s face had seemed familiar. The brothers shared the same eyes. Sir Henry explained that after a bitter quarrel years earlier, his younger brother had left England with little money, hoping to make his fortune in Africa. Regret followed, and Sir Henry began searching for him. My letter describing Neville’s journey was one of the few clues he had found.

“I have come to Africa to find him,” Sir Henry said. “Alive or dead, I must know his fate.”

Captain Good added that he had joined the journey because he had left naval service and had nothing better to do. Both men then asked what I knew about Neville's purpose in traveling north.

I hesitated. The matter was strange, and I had never spoken of it before. At last I said quietly, "I heard he was searching for Solomon's Mines."

Both men stared at me.

"Where are they?" Captain Good asked.

"I do not know," I answered. "But I know the legend."

So I told them what I had learned many years earlier from another hunter named Evans. Evans believed that ancient people once mined gold and diamonds deep in Africa. He spoke of distant mountains called the Suliman Mountains, said to hide vast treasure. At the time I treated the story as fantasy.

Years later, however, I met a Portuguese traveler named José Silvestre near Sitanda's Kraal. He was educated and polite, unlike most traders I knew. He planned to cross a deadly desert searching for those same mountains. Soon after leaving, he returned dying from fever and thirst. I gave him water and cared for him as best I could.

Before dying, he gave me a small pouch containing a written message and a rough map. The message, written centuries earlier by an ancestor, claimed that beyond the mountains lay King Solomon's treasure chamber filled with diamonds beyond counting. The writer described a road across snowy peaks called Sheba's Breasts and warned of danger and betrayal.

Silvestre died soon after giving me the document. I buried him in the desert and kept the writing.

When I finished telling this story, silence filled the cabin. Captain Good finally laughed in amazement, while Sir Henry studied me carefully.

"You are not joking with us?" he asked.

I felt offended and began to leave, but he apologized sincerely. I then told them one more detail: Neville's hunter Jim had once hinted that they were searching not for ivory or gold, but for diamonds in the direction of the Suliman Mountains. Before Neville departed, I secretly sent him a note repeating part of the ancient

directions from the map.

When I finished, Sir Henry spoke firmly.

“I will search for my brother wherever he has gone,” he said. “Will you come with us?”

The idea frightened me. I had a son to support and no wish to die crossing deserts. I refused at first. But Sir Henry offered generous payment and promised financial support for my son if anything happened to me. He asked me to think carefully before answering.

That night I slept badly and dreamed of deserts, mountains, and shining stones hidden far beyond human reach.

## Part 2

The next morning I woke early, but my mind was still troubled. Sir Henry’s offer weighed heavily on me. I am by nature cautious, and I knew well that journeys into unknown country often end in death. Yet the thought of the adventure would not leave me. During the following days aboard the *Dunkeld*, we spoke of many things—hunting, travel, and Africa—but not again of Solomon’s Mines. Still, I saw that both Sir Henry and Captain Good waited for my answer.

One evening, as we neared the coast of Natal, the sea lay calm under the red light of sunset. The green land rose gently from the shore, broken by deep valleys where rivers ran toward the ocean. Smoke rose from distant native huts, and white surf shone along the coast like a long ribbon. The sight of home should have comforted me, yet my thoughts were fixed on the dangerous road ahead.

After dinner the three of us sat quietly near the wheel. The moon rose bright above the water, and the air smelled warm and sweet from the land.

At last Sir Henry spoke. “Mr. Quatermain, have you decided?”

Captain Good leaned forward eagerly. “Yes, what do you say? Will you come?”

I stood and knocked the ashes from my pipe into the sea. While I watched the sparks vanish in the dark water, my decision came suddenly and clearly.

“Yes,” I said at last. “I will go.”

Both men showed great pleasure, though Sir Henry remained calm as always.

"But," I continued, "I go only on certain conditions."

I explained them carefully. First, Sir Henry must pay all expenses, and any ivory or valuables we obtained would be shared between Captain Good and myself. Second, I would receive five hundred pounds before the journey began, payment for my service. Third, Sir Henry must sign a legal agreement promising that if I died or became unable to work, my son Harry would receive two hundred pounds a year for five years while finishing his studies.

Sir Henry agreed at once.

"I accept gladly," he said. "Your knowledge is worth far more."

Then I explained my reasons for accepting. I told them plainly that I believed the journey might end in disaster. Men before us had tried to reach those mountains and died. Neville himself might already be dead. Still, I believed that a man's fate comes at its appointed time, whether he hides or travels forward. Also, I was poor, and the money would secure my son's future. If I must risk my life, at least it would not be for nothing.

Sir Henry listened seriously. "Whether we live or die," he said, "I will see this through."

Captain Good raised his glass. "Then we go together."

The next day we landed at Durban. I brought my companions to my small home on the Berea hill. It was a simple house of three rooms with a tin roof, surrounded by fruit trees and a garden. An old hunter named Jack cared for the place. Sir Henry and Captain Good slept in a tent among the orange trees, where the scent of blossoms filled the warm night air.

Once my decision was made, I began preparations immediately. First came the legal work securing Harry's future. A lawyer arranged the documents, though he charged an outrageous fee. After that I accepted Sir Henry's cheque for five hundred pounds and turned my attention to equipment.

I purchased a strong wagon built of seasoned wood, long and sturdy, with space for supplies and a covered sleeping area. A good wagon is the heart of any African journey. If it fails, everything fails. Next I bought twenty Zulu oxen—more than

usual—to allow for sickness or death along the road. They were smaller than many transport oxen but tough and fast, able to survive where larger cattle would perish.

Provisioning required careful thought. We needed enough food, medicine, and tools to survive far from settlements, yet we could not overload the wagon. Captain Good proved extremely useful here. Though not a qualified doctor, he possessed strong medical knowledge and carried a well-equipped medicine chest. While in Durban he even performed a small operation on a native man, showing steady hands and confidence.

After that we chose our weapons. Proper arms are essential in wild country, where danger may come from animals or men. We selected heavy elephant rifles, express rifles for medium game, a shotgun for birds and small animals, repeating rifles, and revolvers. All were chosen so that ammunition could be shared between guns—a vital detail during long travel.

The final question concerned servants. We needed reliable men, brave and loyal. I hired two Zulus as driver and leader, named Goza and Tom. I also engaged a skilled tracker called Ventvögel, a Hottentot famous for following spoor across hard ground. Though he liked drink too much, that weakness mattered little where no alcohol could be found. Another servant, Khiva, spoke excellent English and proved useful in communication.

We still lacked one more man when, on the evening before departure, Khiva told me a stranger waited outside wishing to speak with me.

I told him to bring the man in.

A tall Zulu entered, proud in bearing, about thirty years old, lighter in color than most, with calm eyes and strong features. He saluted and sat quietly without speaking. I ignored him at first, as is proper, allowing silence to test his patience.

At last I asked, “What is your name?”

“Umbopa,” he replied in a deep voice.

His face seemed familiar. Then I remembered meeting him during the Zulu War near Isandlwana, where he had warned that the camp was unsafe. His warning had proved true.

“What do you want?” I asked.

“I hear you travel far north with white chiefs,” he said. “I wish to go with you.”

His manner was dignified, almost commanding, unusual for a servant. I questioned him carefully about his past. He said he had wandered many years, served in wars, and now wished to return north, where he believed his true home lay.

“I ask no pay,” he said quietly. “Only to travel with you. I am strong and brave.”

There was something in his voice that impressed me deeply, though I could not explain why. After a moment’s thought, I agreed to take him.

Thus Umbopa entered our service, though none of us yet guessed how important he would become to our fate.

Part 3

Umbopa remained seated after speaking, calm and patient, as though he knew that time would bring him what he wanted. I studied him carefully. His body was strong but not heavy, and his movements were slow and controlled. His eyes were steady and thoughtful, unlike those of most men who came seeking work. There was pride in him, though he tried to hide it.

“You say you want no pay,” I told him. “That is strange. Men do not travel far into danger for nothing.”

“I ask food and the road,” he answered. “That is enough.”

Captain Good looked amused, but Sir Henry watched Umbopa with interest. After a moment Sir Henry said quietly, “He seems a good man. I think we should take him.”

I nodded. “Very well. You may come. But understand this: the journey will be long and dangerous. We may never return.”

Umbopa bowed his head slightly. “A man must walk the road that waits for him,” he said.

His words struck me as curious, but I said nothing more. The matter was settled, and with that our party was complete.

During the next days we worked hard preparing for departure. Supplies filled

the wagon—meal, dried meat, coffee, sugar, medicine, tools, spare parts, and ammunition. Every item had to be weighed in the mind. Too little meant starvation; too much meant slow travel and tired oxen. I checked each piece myself, for experience had taught me that small mistakes grow deadly in wild country.

Sir Henry proved tireless in work, lifting crates and helping wherever needed. Though a gentleman by birth, he never complained or avoided labor. Captain Good also worked well, though he sometimes stopped to clean his eye-glass or arrange his clothing with great care, even while covered in dust. I began to feel confident that we would manage well together.

At last the morning of departure arrived. The sun rose clear and hot above Durban. Friends and curious townspeople gathered to watch us leave, for wagons setting out toward the interior always draw attention. The oxen were inspanned, their bells ringing softly as they moved into position. The wagon stood ready, loaded high beneath its canvas covering.

I walked once through my small house before leaving. Everything seemed quiet and familiar—the garden, the trees, the tools hanging on the wall. I wondered if I would ever see it again. Then I locked the door and handed the key to old Jack.

“Look after the place,” I told him.

“Yes, Baas,” he said. “You will come back rich.”

I smiled but did not answer.

Soon we climbed onto the wagon. Goza cracked his long whip, shouting to the oxen. Slowly the team pulled forward, wheels creaking as they turned onto the dusty road. Durban faded behind us while the green hills opened ahead.

For several days we traveled peacefully through settled country. Farms and villages appeared along the road, and we bought fresh food when possible. At night we camped beneath open sky. Sir Henry and Captain Good learned quickly the habits of wagon travel—how to sleep lightly, how to pack equipment, and how to watch for danger even in calm places.

Umbopa worked quietly but efficiently. He needed little instruction and carried himself more like a leader than a servant. Often I noticed him standing apart,

gazing northward with deep thought. Once I asked what he watched.

"The road," he replied simply.

As we moved farther inland, the land grew wilder. Farms became rare, and wide grass plains stretched toward distant hills. Herds of antelope crossed our path, and birds rose in clouds from the grass. Captain Good enjoyed shooting birds for the pot, while Sir Henry showed skill with the rifle, proving himself an excellent shot.

One evening, after a long march, we sat around the fire eating supper. The sky shone with countless stars. Conversation turned again to Solomon's Mines.

"Mr. Quatermain," said Captain Good, "do you truly believe these mines exist?"

I poked the fire before answering. "I believe men have died searching for them. That much is certain. Whether treasure waits there or only death, I cannot say."

Sir Henry spoke firmly. "Treasure does not matter to me. I seek my brother."

Umbopa, sitting nearby, listened silently. Firelight shone across his face, and for a moment I thought I saw sadness in his eyes.

As days passed, travel became harder. Heat increased, and water grew scarce. We rose before sunrise to trek while the air remained cool. At midday we rested beneath whatever shade we could find. Flies troubled the oxen, and dust covered everything—clothes, guns, food, even our sleep.

Yet spirits remained good. Captain Good entertained us with stories from his naval life, often describing storms and strange ports around the world. Sir Henry spoke little but listened carefully, always watching the road ahead. I guided the wagon by memory and experience, choosing paths where water and grazing could be found.

One afternoon we reached a trading station at the edge of more dangerous territory. Here we stopped to gather news. Traders warned us against traveling farther north, speaking of deserts, hostile tribes, and men who vanished without trace. Their words did not surprise me, but I saw Captain Good grow thoughtful.

That night he spoke privately to me. "Tell me honestly," he said, "what are our chances?"

I answered truthfully. "Not good. But we have come too far to turn back now."

He nodded slowly. "Yes. I suppose we have."

The next morning we left the last sign of settled country behind. Ahead lay only open land, unknown paths, and the long road toward the distant mountains spoken of in legend.

As the wagon rolled forward into the wilderness, I felt both fear and excitement. Adventure once again had taken hold of my life, and there was no turning back.

## Part 4

After leaving the trading station, the country changed quickly. The road faded into faint tracks made by animals and old wagons long gone. Grass grew taller, and the land rolled in wide waves toward the horizon. We now depended entirely on our own skill and judgment. Each morning I studied the ground, the wind, and the distant hills before choosing our direction.

Travel settled into a steady rhythm. Before dawn Goza and Tom inspanned the oxen while Khiva lit the fire for coffee. We ate quickly, loaded the last items, and moved forward with the first light. By midday the heat forced us to halt. The oxen rested while we slept or repaired equipment. In the afternoon we trekked again until sunset, when the wagon formed the center of our small camp.

Sir Henry adapted well to this life. Though unused to hardship, he never complained. He walked beside the wagon for hours to ease the oxen's burden and helped gather firewood at night. Captain Good tried equally hard, though he sometimes struggled with the rough ground and joked often about missing the smooth decks of ships.

Umbopa continued to interest me. He worked without being told, handled weapons skillfully, and spoke little unless addressed. When danger threatened the oxen or when strangers appeared in the distance, he watched with sharp attention. More than once I felt he understood our surroundings better than he admitted.

Several weeks passed without serious trouble. We hunted antelope for fresh meat, and the land provided enough water to continue safely. Yet the farther north we moved, the quieter the country became. Villages disappeared. Even animal tracks grew fewer. The silence of wide empty land settled around us.

One evening we camped near a dry riverbed. The sky turned deep red as the sun set, and long shadows stretched across the sand. After supper Captain Good cleaned his revolver carefully while Sir Henry examined a map by firelight.

“Mr. Quatermain,” Sir Henry said, “how far now to the desert you spoke of?”

“Not many days,” I answered. “Beyond it lie the mountains—if the stories are true.”

Captain Good looked uneasy. “And this desert killed the Portuguese traveler?”

“Yes,” I said quietly. “And many others, no doubt.”

Umbopa, who sat nearby sharpening a knife, spoke suddenly. “A strong heart may cross dry land if the path is known.”

I looked at him sharply. “You speak as though you know such country.”

He met my gaze calmly. “I have walked far places.”

He said no more, and again I felt there was much about him he did not reveal.

The next days grew harder. Waterholes became rare, forcing us to travel longer between stops. Once we marched nearly two days before finding a muddy pool barely fit for animals. The oxen drank greedily while we filled every container we possessed.

Heat pressed upon us like a weight. The air shimmered above the ground, and even the wind felt hot. Dust entered eyes and mouth until speaking became unpleasant. Captain Good wrapped cloth around his face, declaring that he now understood why sailors preferred the sea.

Despite hardship, morale held. Each night we shared stories beside the fire. Sir Henry sometimes spoke of his brother George—memories of childhood, laughter, and regret. I saw then how deeply he blamed himself for their quarrel. The journey was not driven by adventure or treasure for him, but by love and guilt.

One afternoon we sighted distant mountains faint against the sky. They rose like blue shadows far away.

“Are those the Suliman Mountains?” Captain Good asked eagerly.

I shook my head. “No. Only the outer hills. The true mountains lie beyond the desert.”

Still, the sight filled us with renewed energy. Our goal no longer felt like a story

but a real place waiting somewhere ahead.

Soon afterward we encountered a small group of wandering hunters. They approached cautiously but peacefully. Through Khiva we exchanged greetings and traded tobacco for information. When they learned our direction, their faces showed fear.

“No men go that way,” one said. “The land eats travelers.”

I asked what lay ahead.

He pointed north. “Dry earth. No water. Spirits walk there.”

After they left, Captain Good laughed nervously. “Spirits, eh? I would rather meet lions.”

I did not laugh. Native warnings often hold truth beneath superstition.

That night I checked our supplies again. Water would decide our fate in the coming days. I calculated distances carefully, remembering Silvestre’s death and the stories he had told while dying. The desert must be crossed quickly and without mistake.

Before sleeping I walked a short distance from camp. The stars burned bright above the silent land. Ahead somewhere waited the mountains, the lost mines, and perhaps Sir Henry’s brother—or his grave.

I felt fear then, stronger than before. Yet beneath it lay a strange excitement. A man does not often stand at the edge of a legend.

When I returned to the fire, Umbopa looked up at me.

“You do not sleep,” he said.

“Too much thinking,” I answered.

He nodded slowly. “The road grows close now.”

I wondered again what he truly knew, but I asked no questions. Soon enough the land itself would give us answers.

At dawn we inspanned once more and moved forward, leaving behind the last signs of familiar Africa. Ahead stretched the long desert—the true beginning of our trial.

Part 5

The land before us slowly changed from grass country into dry, open ground. Trees became smaller and farther apart, and the soil turned pale and hard beneath the wagon wheels. Each day the air grew hotter and the wind drier. Even the birds seemed fewer, as though living creatures avoided the place toward which we traveled.

I knew we were nearing the desert.

Before entering it, I called the party together beside the wagon. “Listen carefully,” I said. “From now on every drop of water matters. No man drinks except at set times. No waste, no carelessness. If we lose water, we lose our lives.”

Captain Good nodded seriously. Sir Henry agreed without question. Umbopa simply said, “It shall be so.”

We filled every barrel, skin, and bottle at the last reliable stream we found. The oxen drank deeply, and we allowed them longer rest than usual. I wished to begin the crossing with both men and animals strong.

The following morning we entered the desert.

At first it did not look deadly. The ground stretched wide and flat, covered with low bushes and scattered stones. But the sun rose quickly, and by midday the heat struck like fire. The air trembled, and distant shapes shimmered like water though none existed. Captain Good stared more than once at these false lakes.

“Water ahead!” he cried once.

“No,” I told him. “Only the desert playing tricks.”

Travel became slow. The oxen strained heavily, tongues hanging from their mouths. We rested often, moving mostly in early morning and late evening. During the hottest hours we sheltered beneath the wagon’s narrow shade, speaking little to save strength.

By the third day the land grew worse. Sand replaced hard ground, and wheels sank deeply at every turn. Goza and Tom shouted constantly at the oxen, urging them forward. Sweat covered the animals, and their pace weakened.

That evening Captain Good spoke quietly to me. “If this continues, the oxen cannot last.”

“I know,” I answered. “We must reach water soon.”

I checked our map and memories of Silvestre’s account. According to his description, a small spring should lie somewhere ahead near scattered rocks. But desert distances deceive the eye, and finding it would depend on luck as much as skill.

On the fourth day our water supply began to run low. Each man received only a small portion morning and evening. Lips cracked, and speech grew slow. Even Sir Henry, strong as he was, showed signs of exhaustion.

Umbopa, however, seemed less affected. He walked beside the wagon for long stretches, scanning the horizon carefully. Once he knelt and studied the ground as though reading a hidden message.

“What do you see?” I asked.

“Old tracks,” he said. “Very old. Men passed here long ago.”

My heart stirred at this. Perhaps we followed the same path described in the ancient writing.

Late that afternoon one of the oxen stumbled and fell. Despite our efforts it could not rise again. We were forced to leave it behind, a hard decision but necessary. The loss troubled me deeply, for each animal meant survival.

That night no one slept well. Thirst burned in our throats, and the desert remained warm even after sunset. I lay awake thinking of Silvestre crawling through this same land toward death.

At dawn we moved again, slower than before. The sun climbed higher, and hope began to fade. Captain Good’s cheerful talk disappeared, replaced by silence. Sir Henry walked steadily, driven by determination alone.

Near midday Umbopa suddenly raised his hand.

“Stop.”

His voice carried authority that surprised us all. He walked ahead toward a group of low rocks half buried in sand. We followed weakly.

There, hidden in shadow between stones, lay a small hollow where damp earth showed dark against the sand. Umbopa knelt and dug quickly with his hands. Moments later water seeped upward.

“Water!” Captain Good shouted.

We enlarged the hole carefully, allowing it to fill before drinking. The water tasted warm and muddy, yet it was life itself. The oxen drank first, then each of us in turn. Strength slowly returned to our bodies.

I looked at Umbopa with new respect. “How did you know?”

He answered simply, “The ground speaks.”

We rested there the remainder of the day, allowing both men and animals to recover. That evening spirits rose again around the fire. Captain Good declared Umbopa the savior of the expedition, while Sir Henry thanked him with deep sincerity.

The next morning we continued with renewed hope. The desert still stretched ahead, but now we believed it could be crossed.

Two days later the land began to rise gently. Stones appeared more frequently, and small patches of grass returned. Then, at sunset on the seventh day, we saw them.

Far ahead against the sky stood two great peaks shaped like rounded hills, their tops pale and shining in distant light.

I stopped the wagon and stared.

“There,” I said quietly. “Sheba’s Breasts.”

Sir Henry stepped beside me, eyes fixed on the mountains. Captain Good removed his eye-glass and wiped it slowly, as though unsure he trusted his own sight.

Umbopa stood silent, watching the peaks with an expression I could not read—part longing, part recognition.

The legend was no longer a story. The mountains truly existed, rising beyond the desert like guardians of a hidden world.

And somewhere beyond them waited the fate that had drawn us across half a continent.

Part 6

The sight of the mountains changed everything. Until that moment our journey had felt like a search guided by rumor and old stories. Now the peaks stood before us, real and immense, rising above the desert sky. Their shapes matched the description in the ancient writing so closely that doubt almost vanished.

We camped early that evening, for both men and oxen were tired from the desert crossing. Yet none of us rested easily. Sir Henry walked apart from the fire again and again, staring toward the mountains as though hoping to see his brother waiting there. Captain Good spoke more than usual, excitement fighting with unease.

Umbopa remained quiet. I noticed that he watched the peaks not with surprise but with deep attention, as if greeting something long known to him.

The following morning we continued forward. The ground grew firmer, dotted with stones and short grass. Small animals reappeared, and birds circled overhead. The return of life lifted our spirits greatly after the empty desert.

By afternoon we reached the foothills. Streams of clear water ran between rocks, and we allowed the oxen to drink freely. We ourselves washed dust from our faces and clothes. The cool water felt like a blessing after days of heat.

As we climbed higher, the air became fresher. Trees appeared again, twisted by wind but welcome to the eye. Paths narrowed, forcing us to guide the wagon carefully between stones. More than once we unloaded supplies to help the oxen pull the heavy vehicle uphill.

“If Solomon built a road here,” Captain Good said while pushing beside a wheel, “I hope he made it wider than this.”

I smiled faintly. “If the writing speaks truth, we shall soon know.”

Late that day we discovered something remarkable. While rounding a rocky slope, the wagon reached a flat stretch of ground where stones lay arranged in straight lines unlike anything made by nature. I climbed down and examined them closely.

The stones had been cut.

“Look here,” I called.

Sir Henry and Captain Good joined me. Beneath sand and grass appeared the

remains of an ancient road, paved long ago by human hands. Though broken by time, its direction remained clear, leading upward toward the mountains.

Captain Good whistled softly. “Then the story was true.”

I nodded slowly. “Yes. This must be Solomon’s Road.”

We followed it carefully. The path climbed steadily, winding between steep slopes. In places snow could be seen high above us, shining white against dark rock. The air grew colder as evening approached.

That night we camped beside the old road itself. The fire burned brightly while wind moved through the mountains with a low sound like distant voices. None of us spoke much. Each man felt the weight of standing in a place untouched by modern travelers.

During the night I woke suddenly. The fire had burned low, and moonlight covered the ground in pale silver. Umbopa stood alone a short distance away, facing the mountains.

“You do not sleep,” I said quietly as I approached.

“Sleep comes later,” he replied without turning.

“You know this place,” I said carefully.

He was silent for a moment. “My heart knows it.”

I waited, but he added nothing more. Though curiosity troubled me, I sensed he would speak only when ready.

The next day proved the hardest yet. The road climbed steeply toward the snowy peaks described in the ancient message. Cold wind replaced desert heat, and clouds gathered around the mountain tops. The oxen struggled greatly, and several times we feared the wagon would slide backward.

At one narrow pass we were forced to unload nearly everything and carry supplies by hand while the wagon was dragged upward with ropes. Sir Henry worked like a giant, lifting heavy crates without complaint. Captain Good slipped often but laughed at his own falls, though his face showed exhaustion.

By afternoon we reached a high plateau. Before us rose the left peak—the one named in the writing as Sheba’s left breast. Snow lay along its upper slopes.

I felt a strange chill unrelated to the cold. According to the document,

somewhere near the “nipple” of this mountain began the path toward the hidden kingdom.

We camped early to prepare for the climb. That evening clouds cleared, revealing stars brighter than any I had seen. The air was thin and silent.

Sir Henry spoke softly beside the fire. “If George came this way, he must have suffered greatly.”

“Yes,” I said. “But he may also have succeeded.”

Captain Good added, “And tomorrow we follow him.”

Umbopa looked into the flames, eyes reflecting firelight. “Tomorrow,” he repeated.

None of us knew what waited beyond the mountain—treasure, death, or something stranger still. Yet we had crossed desert and legend alike. Turning back was no longer possible.

At dawn we would climb into the snow and follow the ancient road toward the unknown land hidden beyond the peaks.

## Part 7

Morning came cold and clear. Frost lay upon the ground around our camp, and our breath showed white in the air. After weeks of heat and dust, the chill felt strange to us. The oxen stamped their feet uneasily, unused to such cold, while we prepared for the climb.

I divided the loads carefully. Only the most necessary supplies would go upward at first—food, rifles, ammunition, blankets, and medicine. The wagon and oxen would remain below under the care of Goza, Tom, and Ventvögel until we returned or sent word. It was a risk, but no wagon could pass the steep slopes ahead.

Sir Henry agreed at once. “We travel lighter and faster,” he said.

Captain Good adjusted his coat tightly. “I never expected snow in Africa,” he muttered.

Umbopa stood ready, carrying his load without complaint.

We began the ascent shortly after sunrise. The ancient road, though broken, remained visible, cut directly into the mountainside. Whoever built it possessed great skill and strength. In places the stone surface still showed smooth beneath centuries of wind and ice.

The climb grew harder with every step. Loose stones slipped underfoot, and thin air made breathing difficult. Snow appeared first in patches, then in wide fields that reflected sunlight painfully into our eyes. Captain Good wrapped cloth across his face, declaring that snow was worse than desert sand.

Around midday we reached a narrow ledge where the road curved sharply around the mountain. From there we could see far across the desert we had crossed—a vast yellow sea stretching endlessly southward.

“We truly came through that,” Captain Good said in wonder.

Sir Henry did not look back. His eyes remained fixed upward.

By afternoon clouds gathered, and wind rose sharply. Snow began to fall, light at first, then thicker. Progress slowed as our boots sank deeper into white drifts. More than once we slipped and nearly fell down the steep slope.

At last we reached a rocky shelter partly hidden beneath an overhang—the very place described in the ancient message: a cave where snow did not lie on the northern side of the peak.

“This must be it,” I said quietly.

Inside we found dry ground protected from wind. Signs of long-ago fire blackened the stone ceiling. Though centuries had passed, the place felt touched by human presence.

Captain Good shivered. “So this is where the Portuguese died.”

We searched carefully and soon discovered faint markings scratched into the rock—lines and symbols worn almost away by time. Though unreadable, they proved that travelers had indeed reached this place long before us.

Night forced us to remain there. We built a small fire using wood carried from below and wrapped ourselves tightly in blankets. Outside, wind howled across the mountain like a living thing.

Sleep came slowly. The cold bit through clothing, and strange dreams troubled

me—visions of men walking ancient roads, carrying treasure beneath a dark sky.

Before dawn I woke and saw Umbopa sitting upright, watching the cave entrance.

“You rest little,” I said.

“A man who returns home does not sleep much,” he replied softly.

His words struck me again as strange. “Home?” I asked.

He turned slightly toward me. “Beyond these mountains lies my people.”

I stared at him. “You never told us this.”

“The time to speak had not yet come.”

I felt both surprise and relief. If Umbopa truly knew the land beyond, our chances improved greatly. Yet questions filled my mind. Who exactly was this man?

Morning arrived clear but bitterly cold. Snow covered the road above us, shining under bright sunlight. According to the ancient directions, we must climb higher to reach the “nipple” of the mountain, from which Solomon’s Road descended northward.

The final climb proved exhausting. Snow reached our knees, and every step required effort. Captain Good slipped repeatedly but refused help. Sir Henry moved steadily, driven by determination stronger than fatigue.

At last we reached a rounded summit where rock broke through the snow. From there the land fell away sharply on the northern side.

I stepped forward and looked down.

Before us stretched an immense valley unlike anything we had seen—green, fertile, and filled with distant forests and rivers. Far away smoke rose from settlements, clear proof of human life.

“Good heavens,” Captain Good whispered.

Sir Henry breathed deeply. “A hidden country.”

Umbopa stood beside us, eyes shining. “Kukuanaland,” he said.

The name echoed in the cold air.

The legend had led us not only to mountains but to a living kingdom unknown to the outside world.

And somewhere within that valley, perhaps, waited the answer to Sir Henry's search—and the secret of Solomon's Mines.

Part 8

For several minutes none of us spoke. The sight below held us silent. After weeks of desert and mountain hardship, the valley seemed almost unreal. Green fields spread between shining rivers, and dark forests covered the lower hills. Smoke rose in thin lines, showing villages scattered across the land. It was clear that many people lived there, though no European maps marked the place.

Captain Good finally broke the silence. "Well," he said slowly, "if this is not discovery, I do not know what is."

Sir Henry nodded. "And George may have reached it."

I studied the valley carefully. "If he followed the same road, then yes. But we must be cautious. A hidden kingdom may not welcome strangers."

Umbopa stood tall beside us, looking down with deep emotion. "These are the lands of the Kukuanas," he said. "They are strong people and brave in war."

"You know them well?" I asked.

He paused before answering. "I know their ways."

His words again felt incomplete, but this was not the moment to question him further.

The ancient road continued downward from the summit, carved into the northern slope. Compared to the climb, the descent proved easier, though still dangerous. Snow gradually disappeared as we moved lower, replaced by grass and scattered trees. Warmer air rose from the valley, carrying the smell of earth and growing things.

By evening we reached lower ground where streams flowed freely. There we camped and rested after the long crossing. Spirits were high, though caution remained in every mind.

"Tomorrow," said Captain Good, "we meet the owners of this country."

"Yes," I replied. "And we must make a good first impression."

That night we discussed our plan. We agreed to approach peacefully, carrying rifles but keeping them lowered. Khiva would assist with language, though Umbopa claimed he could speak the local dialect well.

At dawn we continued along the road. Soon we saw movement ahead—figures standing upon a ridge watching our approach. As we drew nearer, they became clear: tall warriors holding long spears and large shields.

They waited without moving.

“Well,” Captain Good whispered, “here comes trouble.”

I raised my hand to signal a halt. We left the path and walked forward slowly while Umbopa moved slightly ahead of us. The warriors watched closely but did not attack.

When we stopped a short distance away, Umbopa spoke loudly in their language. His voice sounded strong and commanding. The warriors listened carefully, then murmured among themselves.

One stepped forward, taller than the others, wearing a feathered headpiece. He answered Umbopa at length. Though I understood little, the tone held surprise rather than anger.

After a moment Umbopa turned to us. “They ask who you are and why you come.”

I stepped forward. “Tell them we are travelers seeking friendship and knowledge. We come in peace.”

Umbopa translated. The leader listened and nodded slowly. Then he spoke again, pointing toward the valley.

Umbopa translated once more. “They say strangers are rare here. They will take us to their king, who will decide our fate.”

Captain Good muttered, “That sounds promising—or dangerous.”

“Both,” I answered.

The warriors surrounded us, not threatening but watchful. Their discipline impressed me greatly. They moved together like trained soldiers, silent and alert. Clearly this was no weak tribe.

As we walked deeper into the valley, more people appeared—men, women, and

children staring openly at us. Some laughed at Captain Good's clothing and eye-glass; others touched Sir Henry's yellow beard in amazement. No white men had likely been seen here before.

By afternoon we reached a large settlement surrounded by wooden fences. Huts stood arranged in careful order, and warriors guarded the entrances. At the center rose a wide open space where many people gathered to watch our arrival.

Umbopa walked calmly among them, though I noticed several warriors staring at him with unusual attention, as if something about him seemed familiar.

We were led to a shaded area and given water and food—milk and cooked grain. The gesture eased my worries slightly. Hospitality often means peace, at least for the moment.

Soon a messenger arrived announcing that the king would receive us.

Sir Henry straightened his coat. Captain Good cleaned his eye-glass nervously. I checked my rifle quietly, hoping we would not need it.

Umbopa's face had grown serious, almost solemn.

"What is it?" I asked him softly.

He answered in a low voice. "The path of fate opens now."

With that we followed the warriors toward the royal enclosure, unaware that our arrival would soon change not only our own lives but the fate of the entire kingdom before us.

Part 9

We were led through the settlement toward a large open space surrounded by tall wooden fences. Warriors stood at every entrance, their shields bright in the sunlight and their spears held upright. The people gathered quietly behind us, watching with intense curiosity. It was clear that strangers rarely entered this land.

At the far end of the enclosure stood a raised platform covered with skins. Upon it sat a man of great size and strength, wearing ornaments of metal and feathers. His face was hard and proud, and his eyes watched us with cold attention. Around him stood armed guards and several older men who appeared to be counselors.

Umbopa stopped and bowed slightly. We followed his example.

“This is Twala, king of the Kukuanas,” Umbopa said quietly to us.

The king spoke, his voice deep and commanding. Umbopa translated.

“He asks who you are and why white men come into his country without permission.”

I stepped forward carefully. “Tell the king that we come as travelers and friends. We crossed desert and mountain seeking knowledge and trade. We wish no harm.”

Umbopa repeated my words. Twala listened without expression. After a long pause he spoke again, asking many questions—where we came from, how we crossed the mountains, and whether more white men would follow.

Captain Good shifted nervously under the king’s steady gaze, but Sir Henry remained calm and dignified.

When the questioning ended, Twala spoke at length. Umbopa translated slowly.

“The king says that strangers who reach this land do not leave unless he allows it. But he is curious about us and will not kill us now. We may remain as guests until he decides our fate.”

Captain Good whispered, “That is comforting in a very uncomfortable way.”

I nodded slightly, keeping my face calm.

Servants brought stools for us, and we sat before the king while dancers performed and warriors demonstrated their skill with spears. The display showed both hospitality and power. These people were disciplined fighters, perhaps stronger than any tribe I had seen.

During the ceremony an old woman entered the enclosure. She moved slowly but with strange energy, supported by a staff carved with symbols. Her face was thin and deeply lined, her eyes sharp and unsettling. The crowd grew silent as she approached.

Umbopa spoke softly. “That is Gagool, the king’s witch-finder.”

The name sent a chill through me. It matched the warning written in the ancient message.

Gagool circled us one by one, studying our faces closely. When she reached Sir Henry, she laughed softly, a sound without warmth. Then she stopped before

Umbopa.

For a long moment she stared at him. Her eyes widened slightly, and her expression changed from curiosity to something like fear. She spoke rapidly to the king.

Twala frowned and answered sharply. Gagool continued speaking, pointing toward Umbopa again and again.

“What is she saying?” I whispered.

Umbopa hesitated before translating. “She says… she has seen my face before. She says I carry the look of old kings.”

The king laughed loudly, dismissing her words, and the crowd joined him. Yet Gagool did not laugh. She watched Umbopa carefully, suspicion clear in her eyes.

At last Twala raised his hand, ending the gathering. We were assigned huts near the center of the settlement and given guards—not openly as prisoners, but close enough to remind us of our position.

That evening we sat together inside our hut.

Captain Good wiped sweat from his face. “Well, Mr. Quatermain, we have found a kingdom, a king, and a witch who does not like us. A successful day, I suppose.”

Sir Henry remained thoughtful. “If George came here, he must have stood before this same man.”

I agreed. “And if so, we must learn what became of him.”

Umbopa sat quietly near the doorway. Firelight moved across his face, revealing deep emotion he tried to hide.

“You are troubled,” I said.

He looked at me steadily. “The time comes soon when truth must be spoken.”

Before I could ask more, voices sounded outside. A young warrior entered carrying food and a message.

Umbopa translated. “The king commands that tomorrow we witness a great judgment. A witch-finding.”

I felt unease immediately. Witch-finding among such tribes often meant death for many innocent people.

Captain Good sighed. “It seems we arrive just in time for unpleasant customs.”

That night sleep came poorly. Drums sounded in the distance, and the strange cries of the people echoed through the darkness. Somewhere beyond the huts, Gagool’s thin voice could be heard chanting.

As I lay awake, I realized that reaching Kukuanaland was only the beginning. We had entered a land ruled by fear, prophecy, and hidden power—and our presence had already begun to disturb forces far older than ourselves.

## Part 10

The next morning the whole settlement stirred before sunrise. Drums sounded slowly, calling people toward the great open space near the king’s enclosure. Warriors gathered in long lines, shields shining and spears upright. Men, women, and children crowded behind them, speaking in low voices filled with expectation and fear.

Umbopa explained quietly, “Today the witch-finder names those who bring evil to the land.”

I knew enough of such customs to feel uneasy. Witch-finding rarely sought truth; it served power and fear. Captain Good looked disturbed, while Sir Henry watched silently, his face serious.

We were led to seats near the king so that we might witness the ceremony. Twala sat upon his platform, surrounded by guards. Beside him stood Gagool, bent but alert, her sharp eyes moving constantly across the crowd.

Soon silence fell. Drums stopped. Only wind could be heard moving through the settlement.

Gagool began to dance.

Though old, she moved with strange energy, stamping and turning while chanting in a thin, rising voice. The people watched with terror. Suddenly she stopped before a man in the crowd and pointed her staff at him.

Warriors rushed forward and seized him immediately.

Umbopa translated softly. “She says he has bewitched the king’s cattle.”

The man cried out in fear, protesting innocence, but no one listened. He was dragged aside to await judgment. The dance continued. Again and again Gagool stopped before another person—sometimes a man, sometimes a woman—and each time warriors seized the accused.

Captain Good whispered angrily, “This is murder dressed as ceremony.”

I nodded grimly. We could do nothing without risking our own lives.

The accusations continued until many prisoners stood bound before the king. Some wept; others stared silently, already resigned to death.

At last Gagool approached the place where we sat. The crowd grew tense. She circled us slowly, studying each face. When she reached Umbopa, she stopped again.

Her eyes burned with recognition.

She spoke loudly, her voice cutting through the air. The crowd murmured in surprise.

Umbopa translated slowly, though his voice remained calm. “She says I hide my true name. She says I am not what I claim.”

Twala leaned forward, interested. He questioned Gagool sharply. She answered with excitement, pointing toward Umbopa and then toward the mountains behind us.

Sir Henry whispered, “What does she mean?”

Umbopa remained silent for a moment. Then he stepped forward before the king.

He spoke loudly in the Kukuana language. His voice carried across the entire enclosure, strong and commanding. Though I could not understand every word, the reaction of the crowd told me something extraordinary was happening. Murmurs spread rapidly. Warriors stared in shock.

Umbopa turned briefly toward us and spoke in English.

“Now you shall know who walks with you.”

He faced the king again and continued speaking. His posture changed completely. No longer a servant, he stood like a ruler addressing his people.

When he finished, silence filled the enclosure.

Then Umbopa translated his own words for us.

“I have told them that I am Ignosi, son of the former king. My father was murdered by Twala, who took the throne. I was saved as a child and hidden far away. Now I have returned.”

Captain Good nearly dropped his eye-glass. “Good heavens.”

Sir Henry stared at Umbopa—Ignosi—with deep amazement.

Twala rose slowly, fury growing on his face. He shouted orders, and warriors lifted their spears uncertainly. Some looked toward the king; others looked toward Ignosi, clearly divided.

Gagool screamed accusations, calling Ignosi an impostor. But doubt had already entered the crowd. Many warriors studied Ignosi carefully, comparing his features with memory and legend.

Ignosi stood perfectly still.

“I do not ask you to believe words,” he declared through Umbopa’s translation. “Look upon my face. Look upon the mark of kings.”

He removed part of his clothing, revealing a distinctive scar upon his chest. A loud cry rose from many in the crowd. The older men began speaking excitedly among themselves.

Twala shouted angrily, ordering silence. Guards moved closer to us, and for a moment I feared we would all be killed where we stood.

I quietly checked my rifle. Captain Good did the same. Sir Henry remained calm but ready.

The tension lasted long seconds that felt like hours.

At last one of the elder counselors stepped forward and addressed the king respectfully but firmly. A long argument followed. Voices rose and fell while the crowd waited breathlessly.

Finally Twala sat again, though anger still burned in his eyes. He spoke coldly.

Ignosi translated: “The king says the matter will be decided by battle according to the ancient law. If I win, I rule. If I lose, I die.”

Captain Good whispered, “A civil war, then.”

I answered quietly, “Yes. And we stand in the middle of it.”

Ignosi turned toward us. “White friends,” he said softly, “you came seeking one man and a hidden mine. Now fate has bound you to a kingdom. Will you stand with me?”

Sir Henry answered first. “If you are the rightful king, we will help you.”

Captain Good nodded. “We have come too far to refuse now.”

I sighed inwardly, knowing danger had multiplied beyond anything I expected. Yet I also knew that turning away was impossible.

“Very well,” I said. “We stand with you.”

Ignosi bowed his head slightly. “Then the future of Kukuanaland will be written in blood.”

And so our search for a lost traveler had become part of a struggle for a throne—one that would soon lead us into battle beneath the shadow of Solomon’s Mines.

## Part 11

After the judgment ended, the crowd slowly dispersed, though excitement filled the entire settlement. Everywhere people argued in low voices about Ignosi’s claim. Some clearly believed him the true king, while others feared Twala’s power too greatly to speak openly. The air felt heavy with coming conflict.

We returned to our hut under guard, but the guards themselves seemed uncertain. Several looked at Ignosi with respect rather than suspicion. It was clear that his revelation had shaken the kingdom.

Inside, Captain Good let out a long breath. “Well, Mr. Quatermain,” he said, “I expected diamonds and adventure, but not revolution.”

Sir Henry smiled faintly. “We appear committed now.”

I turned to Ignosi. “You should have told us earlier.”

He met my gaze calmly. “A king without a people is only a man with a story. I needed to know whether you were friends before I spoke.”

His answer satisfied me more than I expected.

That evening several warriors secretly visited our hut. They knelt before Ignosi and spoke urgently. Umbopa—now clearly Ignosi—translated for us afterward.

“Many chiefs hate Twala,” he explained. “They fear him because of Gagool and the witch-hunts. They will support me if I prove strength.”

“And how do you prove it?” asked Captain Good.

Ignosi answered simply. “By battle.”

Over the next days plans formed quietly. Loyal warriors gathered in hidden groups outside the main settlement. Messages passed from village to village. Though Twala remained king, his authority weakened as doubt spread among the people.

During this time we learned more about Kukuanaland. The nation was highly organized, with regiments trained from youth, much like the Zulu armies. Warriors lived by strict rules of discipline and loyalty. Such organization explained how the kingdom had remained strong and hidden for generations.

Yet fear ruled as much as order. Gagool’s witch-finding allowed Twala to remove enemies easily. Many innocent people had died under accusation, creating silent resentment throughout the land.

One afternoon Ignosi brought us news that deeply affected Sir Henry.

“A white man came here some time ago,” Ignosi said.

Sir Henry stood instantly. “My brother?”

Ignosi nodded slowly. “Yes. A man with grey eyes like yours. He came with a servant and strange weapons.”

Sir Henry’s voice shook slightly. “What became of him?”

Ignosi hesitated. “He lived for a time as guest of the king. He spoke often of mountains and treasure. But he later disappeared during an expedition toward the sacred caves.”

“Alive or dead?” Sir Henry asked.

“No one knows,” Ignosi replied. “Only Gagool may know the truth.”

The answer troubled us all. If Neville had reached the mines, he might still live—or he might already be lost forever.

Meanwhile preparations for war advanced. Ignosi gathered supporters openly now, for Twala himself had accepted the ancient law of challenge. According to custom, the kingdom would decide its ruler through battle between rival forces.

Captain Good examined weapons constantly, ensuring our rifles were ready. “If this becomes serious,” he said, “our guns may decide matters quickly.”

I agreed but warned caution. “We must use them wisely. Too much power may turn fear against us.”

Sir Henry trained with Ignosi’s warriors, showing them new ways to aim and move together. His strength and fairness quickly earned respect among them.

On the night before battle, fires burned across the valley as regiments gathered. The sound of singing warriors carried through the darkness—deep rhythmic chants that rose and fell like waves.

We sat together outside our hut.

“Tomorrow decides everything,” Captain Good said quietly.

Sir Henry looked toward the distant fires. “And perhaps brings me closer to George.”

I cleaned my rifle slowly. “Remember,” I said, “our goal remains the mines and your brother. This war is only a step along that road.”

Ignosi joined us then. He wore the ornaments of a chief now, no longer hiding his identity. Yet his expression showed seriousness rather than pride.

“My friends,” he said, “tomorrow many will die. I do not seek war, but I must end fear in this land.”

“We understand,” Sir Henry replied.

Ignosi looked at each of us in turn. “If I fall, you must leave quickly. Twala will not spare you.”

Captain Good forced a smile. “Let us hope it does not come to that.”

Later, as drums began beating across the valley, sleep became impossible. I lay awake listening to the sound, knowing that dawn would bring battle unlike any we had yet faced.

Somewhere beyond the coming fight waited the hidden caves of Solomon’s Mines—and perhaps the truth about the missing man we had crossed half a world to find.

Part 12

Dawn broke slowly over Kukuanaland, pale light spreading across the valley while mist rose from the rivers below. The sound of drums had not ceased during the night, and as the sun climbed higher, warriors began assembling in great numbers upon the open plain chosen for battle.

We climbed a ridge beside Ignosi to observe the field. Below us thousands of men formed into regiments, each group marked by different shields and ornaments. Their discipline impressed me deeply. Lines moved and adjusted with order equal to trained armies I had seen in civilized lands.

On the opposite side stood Twala's forces, equally strong. At their center rose the king himself, surrounded by chosen guards. Beside him stood Gagool, small and bent yet watching everything with burning eyes.

Captain Good swallowed hard. "That is more fighting men than I ever wished to see at once."

"And every one carries a spear," I replied.

Ignosi's commanders approached to receive final instructions. The plan relied upon traditional Kukuana tactics—strong center lines supported by swift flanking movements. Our role would be limited but important. We would remain near Ignosi, using our rifles only when necessary to protect him or break a critical moment.

"Remember," I told Sir Henry and Captain Good, "we must fire carefully. Each shot must count."

Both nodded.

Soon the war songs began. Thousands of voices rose together, deep and powerful, echoing across the valley. The sound stirred even my old hunter's blood. Warriors stamped their feet and struck shields rhythmically, building courage before combat.

Then silence fell.

Twala stepped forward and shouted across the field, declaring his right to rule. Ignosi answered with equal strength, proclaiming justice and freedom from fear. Though I understood little of the language, the meaning was clear enough.

A horn sounded.

The battle began.

Twala's warriors advanced first, shields locked, spears raised. Ignosi's regiments moved to meet them, and soon the two forces crashed together with a roar that shook the ground. The sound of shields striking and men shouting filled the air.

Captain Good stared wide-eyed. "It is like the sea in a storm."

I watched carefully, searching for danger around Ignosi. The fighting was fierce but organized. Lines pushed forward and fell back like living waves. Dust rose thickly, half hiding the struggle.

At a critical moment Twala's strongest regiment charged toward Ignosi's position, threatening to break his center. I raised my rifle.

"Now," I said.

Sir Henry and Captain Good fired with me. The loud reports of our guns echoed sharply across the battlefield, startling both sides. Several attacking warriors fell instantly. The sudden power of firearms caused confusion among Twala's men, slowing their advance long enough for Ignosi's warriors to regroup.

"Again," Sir Henry said calmly.

We fired carefully, never wasting a shot. Each report created fear among enemies unfamiliar with such weapons. Soon the attacking regiment hesitated, then began to fall back under renewed assault from Ignosi's forces.

The tide of battle slowly turned.

Hours passed in fierce struggle. The sun climbed high, and heat returned despite morning coolness. Many warriors fell on both sides, yet neither army retreated fully.

At last Ignosi gave an order. A hidden regiment moved swiftly along the flank, striking Twala's forces from the side. The maneuver broke their formation. Confusion spread rapidly, and soon entire groups began retreating.

A great shout rose from Ignosi's army.

Twala's guards fought fiercely to protect their king, but defeat had begun. Warriors threw down shields and fled across the plain.

“It is ending,” Captain Good said breathlessly.

Ignosi advanced steadily, calling for surrender rather than slaughter. Many of Twala’s men knelt, accepting the new ruler.

Twala himself attempted to rally his remaining guards, but they were too few. Surrounded and defeated, he faced Ignosi before the watching armies.

A final challenge was spoken according to custom. The two leaders fought briefly, spear against spear. Twala, though strong, was weary and wounded. Ignosi struck decisively, ending the struggle.

Silence followed.

Then thousands of voices shouted Ignosi’s name. Shields beat together in thunderous rhythm as the warriors proclaimed their new king.

Captain Good lowered his rifle slowly. “Well,” he said, “we have helped change history.”

Sir Henry watched quietly. “And perhaps cleared the path to my brother.”

I nodded. “Yes. Now the kingdom belongs to Ignosi—and he owes us friendship.”

As celebrations began across the valley, I noticed Gagool watching from a distance. Her eyes rested on us with cold hatred before she disappeared among the crowd.

I felt uneasy.

The battle had ended, but danger had not. The old witch still lived—and somewhere beyond her secrets lay the entrance to Solomon’s Mines.

## Part 13

Victory celebrations lasted long into the night. Fires burned across the valley while warriors sang and danced, praising Ignosi as their rightful king. The mood among the people had changed completely. Fear seemed lifted, replaced by relief and hope. Many came to thank us, touching our hands or bowing respectfully, for our strange weapons had helped decide the battle.

Ignosi himself remained calm despite triumph. He accepted the loyalty of his

warriors with dignity, but I noticed sadness in his expression as he watched the wounded carried from the field.

"A king gains a throne," he said quietly to us, "but he also gains the sorrow of many deaths."

Sir Henry nodded. "That is the burden of command."

The following day Twala was buried according to the customs of the Kukuanas. The ceremony was solemn and without cruelty. Ignosi ordered that no revenge be taken against former enemies, declaring that the kingdom must now become one people again. This decision won him even greater loyalty.

Soon afterward he summoned us privately.

"My friends," Ignosi said, "you helped me regain my father's throne. Now I will help you in your search. You seek the white man who came before you and the treasure caves of the ancient kings."

Sir Henry leaned forward eagerly. "You know where they are?"

Ignosi nodded. "Yes. The place is feared by my people. It is called the Place of Death. Only a few know the path, and Gagool is one of them."

At the mention of her name I felt immediate concern. "Can she be trusted?"

Ignosi's expression hardened. "No. But she fears me now. She will guide us because she must."

That afternoon Gagool was brought before us. She bowed to Ignosi but avoided looking directly at him. Her thin hands trembled slightly, though her eyes still burned with cunning.

Ignosi spoke firmly, commanding her to lead us to the ancient caves where the white man had gone.

She resisted at first, muttering warnings about spirits and death. But Ignosi reminded her that refusal meant punishment. At last she agreed, though her smile held something unpleasant.

"You may go," she said slowly. "But none who enter the Place of Death return unchanged."

Captain Good whispered to me, "Comforting woman."

Preparations began quickly. We would travel with a small escort only, leaving

the main army behind. The path to the caves passed through narrow valleys unsuitable for large groups. Ignosi himself insisted on joining us.

“The kings of old lie there,” he said. “I must see the place with my own eyes.”

Two days later we departed the capital. The landscape grew wilder as we moved westward. Forest gave way to rocky hills and deep ravines. Few people lived in this region, and those we passed watched us with fear when they learned our destination.

Gagool led the way, moving surprisingly quickly for one so old. She rarely spoke, and when she did her words carried strange meanings I did not fully trust. More than once I caught her watching us with quiet calculation.

On the third day we reached a narrow gorge where steep cliffs rose on both sides. A cold wind flowed from within, though the sun shone brightly outside.

Gagool stopped and pointed ahead. “Beyond lies the Place of Death.”

The entrance appeared as a dark opening in the rock, partly hidden by hanging stone formations. The air felt colder there, and even birds avoided flying near it.

Captain Good hesitated. “It looks exactly like the sort of place sensible men avoid.”

Sir Henry stepped forward without hesitation. “George may have entered here.”

I checked my rifle and lantern. “Then we follow.”

Inside, darkness swallowed us quickly. Torches and lamps revealed walls covered with ancient carvings—figures of warriors, animals, and symbols unknown to me. The passage sloped downward, growing colder and narrower.

After some distance the tunnel opened into a vast chamber. Stone pillars rose like frozen trees, and strange statues stood along the walls—silent figures carved from pale rock.

“The Silent Ones,” I murmured, remembering the legend.

Gagool nodded slowly. “They watch all who come.”

The chamber felt heavy with age, as though untouched for centuries. Our footsteps echoed loudly, disturbing deep silence.

Then Gagool pointed toward a smaller passage leading deeper underground.

“There,” she said. “The treasure chamber of Solomon.”

Sir Henry’s face showed both hope and dread. Captain Good adjusted his lantern nervously.

I felt a tightening in my chest. We had crossed desert, mountains, and war to reach this place. Now the final secret waited only a short distance ahead.

And somewhere within those ancient depths, perhaps, lay the answer to our greatest question—the fate of Sir Henry’s lost brother.

## Part 14

We followed Gagool into the narrow passage leading from the great chamber of statues. The air grew colder and stiller with every step. Our lamps cast long shadows that moved strangely across the walls, making the carved figures seem almost alive. None of us spoke loudly. Even Captain Good, who usually found words in every situation, walked in silence.

The passage twisted downward for some distance before opening into another cavern, smaller but far more astonishing. The walls glittered faintly where our light touched them. At first I thought moisture caused the shine, but when I stepped closer I saw stones set into the rock itself—hard, clear stones that reflected light sharply.

Diamonds.

Captain Good gave a low whistle. “Good heavens… the walls themselves are filled with them.”

Sir Henry barely glanced at the treasure. His thoughts remained fixed on one question. “Is there any sign of George?” he asked urgently.

Gagool pointed toward a stone doorway partly hidden behind fallen rocks. “Beyond lies the king’s chamber,” she said.

We forced our way through the opening and entered a vast hall unlike anything I had imagined. Stone seats lined the sides, and at the far end stood raised platforms upon which lay shapes covered in dust.

As we approached, our lamps revealed them clearly.

Bodies.

Ancient kings sat upright upon stone thrones, preserved by the dry air, wearing crowns and ornaments long untouched. Their faces had hardened into pale masks, watching silently across centuries.

Captain Good stepped back quickly. “I do not like this place at all.”

I felt the same unease. The stillness seemed unnatural, as though time itself had stopped.

Ignosi bowed his head respectfully. “These are my ancestors,” he said softly.

We moved carefully through the chamber, searching for any sign of a more recent visitor. At last Sir Henry cried out.

Near one wall lay a skeleton dressed in torn European clothing. Beside it rested a rusted rifle.

Sir Henry knelt immediately. His hands trembled as he examined the remains.

“George…” he whispered.

For a moment none of us spoke. The truth had been found at last. Neville had reached Solomon’s Mines but had never escaped them.

Sir Henry remained silent for a long time, grief clear upon his face. At last he stood slowly.

“He came farther than any man,” he said quietly. “He died searching for hope.”

We buried the remains as well as we could within the chamber, marking the place with stones. It felt the only respectful act possible in such a place.

Afterward Gagool approached us again.

“You have seen what you came to see,” she said. “Now take treasure and go.”

She led us toward another room filled with heaps of diamonds piled upon the floor like sand. The sight stunned even me, though I had expected wealth. Stones lay everywhere—small ones, great ones, enough to make kings rich beyond imagination.

Captain Good laughed softly in disbelief. “We could fill the wagon ten times over.”

I turned to Sir Henry. “What do you say?”

He shook his head. “I came for my brother, not riches. Take only what we can carry easily.”

We filled small bags with selected stones, choosing carefully rather than greedily. Even a handful represented enormous wealth.

While we worked, Gagool watched closely. Something in her expression troubled me. Her eyes moved constantly between us and the entrance.

Suddenly she stepped backward toward a narrow passage behind her.

“Time to leave,” she said sharply.

At that moment a deep rumbling sound echoed through the cavern. Stones shifted above us. Dust fell from the ceiling.

“What is happening?” Captain Good shouted.

I turned just in time to see Gagool pulling a hidden lever carved into the wall.

“Trap!” I cried.

Massive stone blocks slid downward at the entrance through which we had come, sealing the chamber with a thunderous crash. Darkness and silence followed.

We rushed forward, but the passage was completely blocked. No light showed beyond the fallen stone.

Captain Good stared in horror. “She has buried us alive.”

Sir Henry struck the rock with his hands, but it did not move.

Ignosi spoke grimly. “Gagool feared we would take the treasure. She has sealed the kings’ chamber.”

I felt cold realization settle upon me. The legend had warned of treachery, and we had walked directly into it.

We were trapped deep beneath the mountain, surrounded by ancient dead and endless treasure—yet without escape.

Captain Good sat heavily upon a stone. “So this,” he said weakly, “is Solomon’s reward.”

I forced myself to think calmly. Panic would only hasten death.

“There must be another way out,” I said. “These mines were built by men. Men always make more than one passage.”

Sir Henry nodded firmly. “Then we search until we find it.”

With lamps burning low and hope uncertain, we began exploring the silent

chamber, knowing that somewhere beyond the stone walls lay either freedom—or our graves beside the forgotten kings.

Part 15

For some time after the stone door closed, none of us spoke. The sound of the falling rock still echoed in our minds. The lamps burned steadily, but their light seemed small against the vast darkness surrounding us. We understood clearly that unless another exit existed, we would die slowly in that hidden chamber.

Captain Good broke the silence first. “Well,” he said faintly, attempting courage, “we must behave like sensible men and not panic. Panic never improved a situation at sea, and I suppose the same applies underground.”

I nodded, though the dryness in my throat reminded me how little water we carried. “First we must count supplies,” I said. “Then we search carefully.”

We gathered what food and water we possessed. The amount was discouraging—enough for only a few days if rationed strictly. Our lamps also contained limited oil.

Sir Henry remained calm, though grief still shadowed his face from finding his brother’s remains. “We will not waste time,” he said. “Let us examine every wall.”

Ignosi agreed. “The builders of this place were wise. There must be hidden paths.”

We began a slow search of the chamber. The ancient kings sat silently upon their thrones while we moved among them, tapping stones, examining carvings, and testing every crack. Hours passed without success. The walls appeared solid rock on all sides.

Captain Good wiped sweat from his forehead despite the cold air. “If there is a way out,” he muttered, “it hides itself very well.”

At last exhaustion forced us to rest. We extinguished one lamp to save oil and sat together near the treasure piles. The diamonds glittered faintly in the remaining light, useless now compared to a single cup of fresh water.

“Strange,” I said quietly, “that men cross deserts seeking wealth and then find

life itself more valuable than all treasure."

Sir Henry gave a faint smile. "George would have understood that at the end."

Sleep came uneasily. The silence of the chamber pressed heavily upon us. More than once I woke thinking I heard movement, only to realize it was imagination.

When we resumed searching the next day, hope had begun to weaken. We examined the statues closely, suspecting hidden mechanisms, but discovered nothing. Captain Good even attempted to climb partway up one wall, though loose stone forced him down again.

Hours later Ignosi called out suddenly.

"Here!"

We hurried toward him. He stood beside one of the stone thrones, examining the floor beneath it. A faint line ran across the rock—so fine it was nearly invisible.

Together we pushed against the throne. At first nothing happened. Then, slowly, the heavy stone shifted. Beneath it appeared a narrow opening descending into darkness.

Fresh air rose faintly from below.

Captain Good laughed aloud with relief. "A secret passage!"

We widened the opening carefully and lowered a lamp. Rough steps carved into rock led downward.

"We have little choice," I said. "We follow."

Leaving behind most of the treasure, we took only what we could carry easily. Diamonds meant nothing if we failed to escape alive.

The passage proved steep and narrow. We descended slowly, often forced to crawl. The air grew warmer, and at times water dripped from the ceiling—welcome signs of a path leading outward.

After what felt like hours, the tunnel leveled and began rising again. Our lamps burned low, and fear returned that darkness might overtake us before freedom.

At last a faint glow appeared ahead.

"Light!" Captain Good cried.

We hurried forward as quickly as exhaustion allowed. The tunnel opened suddenly onto a rocky hillside outside the mountain. Sunlight flooded our eyes,

forcing us to shield our faces.

Fresh air filled our lungs.

For several moments we simply stood there, overwhelmed by relief. Behind us lay the deadly chamber; before us stretched open sky and living earth.

Sir Henry removed his hat silently. “We have escaped,” he said.

Ignosi looked back toward the mountain entrance. “The kings keep their secrets,” he murmured.

I sat upon a rock, laughing softly from pure exhaustion. “Well, gentlemen,” I said at last, “we have visited Solomon’s Mines and lived to tell the tale. That alone is treasure enough.”

Captain Good stretched his arms toward the sun. “I never expected daylight to appear so beautiful.”

After resting, we began the journey back toward the valley. Though weak and tired, our spirits were stronger than ever. We carried proof of the mines and knowledge of Sir Henry’s brother’s fate.

The adventure that had begun with a story told aboard a ship had brought us through desert, war, and near death. Now only one task remained—to return safely from the hidden kingdom to the world beyond.

Yet as we descended the mountain, I could not help feeling that Solomon’s Mines would never truly release those who had once entered them.

## Part 16

The journey back to Ignosi’s capital took several days. Though we were weak from hunger and strain, the open air restored our strength quickly. Each step away from the mountain felt like a return to life itself. Birds sang in the trees, and streams ran clear beside our path—simple things that now seemed precious beyond measure.

When we reached the first villages, people greeted Ignosi with joy. News of his victory had already spread across the land, and the kingdom welcomed its new ruler with celebration. Many stared at us with renewed respect, for stories of the

battle and our strange weapons had grown larger with each retelling.

At the capital we were received with great honor. Feasts were prepared, and warriors performed dances celebrating peace after conflict. Ignosi publicly thanked us before his people, declaring that without our help he might never have reclaimed his throne.

“These men,” he said, pointing toward us, “came from beyond the mountains as strangers. They leave as friends of the Kukuanas forever.”

The crowd answered with loud approval.

During the days that followed we rested and recovered fully. Captain Good enjoyed the comfort greatly, declaring that solid food and warm sun were better than all naval victories. Sir Henry spent long hours speaking with Ignosi about his brother’s final journey, finding some peace in knowing George had reached his goal before dying.

One evening Ignosi met with us privately.

“You wish to return to your own land,” he said. “I will send guides and supplies to help you cross the mountains safely.”

“We are grateful,” I replied. “And we will not forget your friendship.”

Ignosi then presented us with gifts—ivory, cattle, and carefully selected diamonds taken lawfully from the mines according to royal right. The wealth was considerable even though we had carried little from the chamber itself.

Captain Good examined one stone closely and shook his head in amazement. “Enough to make us respectable gentlemen,” he said.

Sir Henry smiled faintly. “More than enough.”

Before leaving, we visited once more the place where Sir Henry’s brother had lived during his stay. Though little remained, Sir Henry stood quietly there for a long time.

“I think he found peace here,” he said at last.

The morning of departure arrived clear and warm. Many warriors gathered to watch us leave, and Ignosi himself walked with us to the edge of the settlement.

“My brothers,” he said, “you will always be welcome in Kukuanaland.”

We clasped hands in farewell. I felt genuine sadness at parting, for we had

shared dangers that bind men closely together.

The return journey across the mountains proved difficult but far safer than before. Guided by experienced Kukuanas, we avoided the worst paths and crossed the snowy heights without serious trouble. When at last we reached our wagon and servants waiting faithfully below, relief filled us all.

Ventvögel greeted us with wide eyes. “I thought the mountain spirits had taken you,” he said.

“They tried,” Captain Good answered, laughing.

We loaded supplies and began the long trek southward. The desert crossing still demanded care, but knowledge gained earlier allowed us to travel more confidently. Water was found where expected, and no lives were lost.

Weeks later green country returned, followed by farms and familiar settlements. Civilization, with all its noise and comfort, slowly replaced the wild silence of our adventure.

At last we reached Durban once more.

Standing again before my small house on the Berea hill felt almost unreal after everything we had experienced. The garden remained as I left it, peaceful and unchanged.

Sir Henry prepared to return to England, carrying news of his brother and wealth enough to secure his future. Captain Good planned to accompany him, eager to astonish friends with tales no one would fully believe.

As for me, I remained in Natal, content to rest and write this account while my injured leg healed. Adventure had once again found me and nearly ended my life, yet I felt grateful rather than regretful.

One evening we sat together for the last time before their departure.

“Mr. Quatermain,” Captain Good said, raising his glass, “to Solomon’s Mines—the most uncomfortable success I have ever known.”

Sir Henry added quietly, “And to friendship.”

I smiled. “And to survival.”

Soon afterward they sailed for home, leaving me alone with memories of desert suns, snowy mountains, hidden kingdoms, and silent treasure chambers deep

beneath the earth.

I have written this story exactly as events occurred, neither adding nor taking away from truth. Many may doubt it, but I know what we saw and lived through.

Such was our journey to the lost mines of Solomon—a journey of danger, loyalty, and fate, ending not with treasure alone but with the knowledge that courage and friendship are worth more than all the diamonds buried beneath the mountains.