

# JUNGLE SHROUDS MYSTERY of NEW YORK GIRL'S FATE



PHOTO SENT BY MRS. WEXELSEN FROM BEIRA TO FRIENDS IN THIS CITY AND INSCRIBED BY HER "MY VERY OWN CAR (Smallest one in Beira) FOOTMAN and COACHMAN"

Mrs. Helen De Heron Wexelsen Crowned Her Life's Romance by Plunging Into the African Jungle Four Years Ago, and Death or Captivity Removed Her from Human Ken.

WHAT is the fate that has befallen Helen De Heron, the New York girl who was lost with her husband four years ago in the African jungle and has not been heard of since? Is the girl dead, a victim of murderous natives, or is she held captive far back in the wilderness out of the path of white hunters and explorers?

Ever since the girl, late in 1910, was reported missing in the wilds around Victoria Falls, friends in this city have been making urgent but vain inquiries of the Portuguese government in Lisbon and the colonial officials in Beira. But no information has been forthcoming, every letter to and from the girl being held up by an evident desire to withhold whatever facts are known as if to cloak one of the saddest of all the many tragedies of the jungle country.

Mrs. De Heron left New York six years ago on the trip of 15,000 miles to Beira, and ten weeks later was married to Jan Wexelsen, a school-day sweetheart, in the parlor of the one little hotel in the Portuguese settlement. This was on the day of her arrival, and the ceremony was performed by an American missionary. For two years the Wexelsens lived in happiness in a bungalow on the shore of the Indian Ocean. Twice in that time they penetrated the jungle together, and it was their success on these trips that led them to venture on the longer one to Victoria Falls, which now appears to have ended in a double tragedy.

### DANGER FROM BLACKS IN FAR INLAND TRAVEL.

In letters to friends here the girl told they had been warned not to travel far inland from the reach of the whites on the coast. But both were confident that no harm could befall them, although they had reason to fear vengeance at the hands of one or more of the thirty blacks taken along as carriers. In a letter to a friend in this city Mrs. Wexelsen detailed the reasons for dread of native hatred.

"We are starting on the big journey to the Falls to-morrow," she wrote in this letter, which was one of the last received from her. "When we come back—if we ever do—we will then leave Africa behind us for all time and soon be off to see you all again in dear old New York. The whites tell us here in Beira we should not start on this expedition, but we're not afraid, although there is one terrible experience that I must tell you about, and which causes us much anxiety.

"The blacks here are very treacherous, but they are also cowardly. This latter is what makes us feel we will come through all right, but what we should like to know is whether or not we are taking along in our band of carriers the two blacks who gave us a terrific fright a week ago.

### CASUAL HAPPENINGS IN AN AFRICAN BUNGALOW.

You know living out here is vastly different from what it is back in New York. Well, our bungalow is a one-story structure, with all sides more or less open. You can walk almost as readily through the windows as through the doors, and there's no telling at any hour what may happen. You're just as likely to see a big snake crawling across the floor as to see a black sneaking around to steal, or even worse.

"On this night Jan and I were up late. We had had a few friends in to supper, and we played cards until after midnight. It was oppressively hot—you can't imagine what the heat here means—and when we went to bed we left all the windows wide open. Along about 2:30, when we were both well asleep, I suddenly became aware of a very gentle pressure on my hand, which was lying

on the coverlet. It all comes back to me now with horrible distinctness, although at the moment I was barely half awake. The thought I got was that Jan had put his hand on mine, and I must have dropped off to sleep again, for I realized nothing more until a short time later when I was again aroused by the same pressure on my hand. I opened my eyes drowsily, and never will I forget what I saw.

"My face was toward the window, and I could see the half moon shining outside, partly screened by a bamboo tree. There at the side of the bed, in a crouching position, was a negro, while just outside the window was another negro, with his



head just showing over the sill. He must have been lying on the ground, for the sills are very low.

"For an instant I thought my heart had stopped beating, and all my breath seemed to leave me. The terrible creature then caught my hand with a firm grip, and muttered 'Hush' very softly. He had his other hand up near my pillow, and I thought I saw a knife in it. Well, it was more than I could endure, and I sat up with a terrified shriek for Jan. The negro didn't wait, but like a shot was out of the window. I saw them both start off, and then Jan was out on the floor beside me and running over to the corner for his rifle. You know, we never go to sleep here without an American repeating rifle loaded in our room.

"Jan emptied the gun at the men, but neither of them fell. The whole town was aroused by the shooting, and search was made at once in the negro quarter. But they couldn't find the men, and I couldn't identify them. If they had been caught they would have been shot down the same hour. They can't trifle with the blacks here, and they rule them with a rod of iron. It's the only way to treat them, or else they would murder all the whites.



HELENE DE HERON WEXELSEN

But what we don't know is whether those two blacks are in our party or not? If I thought we had hired either of them nothing could induce me to leave Beira. Still, the chances are they would not have the courage to hire themselves to us and possibly risk detection. So we are hoping for the best and starting to-morrow.

Wexelsen went on the fateful trip to take photographs for the Portuguese government. He had travelled over most of the colony as government photographer, and had always returned in safety. This was his first extended trip, however, and the first time he had been accompanied by his wife more than a few days' march from Beira. The expedition was fully provisioned for a six months' stay in the wilds. Wexelsen took along two rifles for himself, one of small calibre, and one heavy elephant gun.

"But think of poor me, and of Jan

wonderful and grand here. I think Victoria far surpasses Niagara; surely in all my life I never expected to see anything so beautiful as the vast torrent pouring down hundreds of feet in the tropical sun, and with the wild, virgin forest flanking it on both sides. Our trip promises to be a memorable success. We have had lots of excitement, something happening every day and hour almost; and just now it seems to me that New York is a million miles away. It's almost impossible to think of your big buildings and streets here in the depths of the wilderness, with not a white person within miles and miles save Jan himself.

"You ought to have seen me come up the country from Beira. It took us three months to get here, for we zigzagged in every direction, Jan taking a most wonderful collection of pictures of the forest and of animal life. Only five minutes ago he snap-

comfortable I've been going along without any need for hurry, and with nothing but time to spend.

"We've shot a lot of big game, and when I say 'we' I include myself. I'm quite an expert with a rifle now—and you couldn't get me to touch one of them in New York. But out here every white man and woman knows how to shoot, for they never know when they may have to defend themselves. I shot a leopard two days ago—'tiger cats' we call them. But it wasn't so very risky. The dogs we have along—five wicked looking mongrels—chased the poor thing up a tree, and I heard Jan calling to me to come and bring my rifle. I had it in the hammock with me, and I jumped out and ran over to him. He was close to a big old tree, with immense vine-covered branches running out all around.

"Far out on one of the branches the leopard lay crouched out at full length, looking down at the dogs, mad with excitement, on the ground directly beneath. 'Here's your

hurrying me and my hammock back to a safe distance. I begged him to come also, but he seems to have no fear. He climbed into a tree, and with his big elephant gun he brought down the biggest of the herd. He fired six explosive bullets into it, and to see it lying in the undergrowth you'd wonder how anything could kill it. It was so huge I could not look over it, and it had magnificent tusks. We have these with us, for they are very valuable. We also have two smaller tusks from another elephant which Jan found roaming by itself, a most unusual thing, as the elephants seem to like company and almost always go in herds.

"We've killed lions also—not I; Jan never could make me run the risk of facing one. Every night the lions roar around our camp, and the sound seems to make the very ground shake. There are lots of lions here, and Jan says they seem to be growing more plentiful every year. It seems they have been driven out of the Boer country and are also coming down from the territory in



MRS. WEXELSEN IN HUNTING GARB, TAKEN JUST BEFORE HER PLUNGE INTO THE JUNGLE



MRS. WEXELSEN, AT THE PIANO IN HER HOME AT BEIRA.

British East Africa, where all the big hunters go. By actual count we have killed five. Jan bagging them all, of course. The first one we got in the early morning. He had tried to carry off one of our carriers. The big fire which we kept burning every night hardly kept him off; toward daybreak he charged straight into camp, and if it had not been for the dogs I believe he would have caught one of the negroes. We built up the fire and made a terrific noise. Our camp was in a little open spot in the forest, and just when day was breaking Jan saw the lion prowling across the clearing. He chanced a shot, and instantly there was a great roar. A short time afterward, when the light brought things out, we found the lion stretched out dead. The bullet had hit it squarely in the chest and killed it instantly.

### BRILLIANT PLUMAGE OF BIRDS IN THE FOREST.

"I'd like to tell you of all the birds we see, but I don't know their names. They are around us in flocks, of the most brilliant plumage, far more varied and colorful than anything you see on the hats in Fifth avenue. One bird I do know of, though, and you're going to have proof of that. Marabou! I've got a whole collection of the very finest of marabou plumes. The foolish old things; they don't know enough to get out of the way, and we have shot enough to give me all the hat feathers I ever can need when I get back to civilization.

Continued on fifth page.