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SONDOO

A LIBERIAN BOY



BY
ALFRED WARD JOSEPH
PICTURED BY BERNICE MAGNIE



SIERRA LEONE

FREETOWN

SHERBRO ISLAND

RICE

PALM OIL

MORRA RIVER

CAPE MOUNT

VAIS

MONROVIA

GRAND BASSA

G'BANDE

GOLAS

RUBBER



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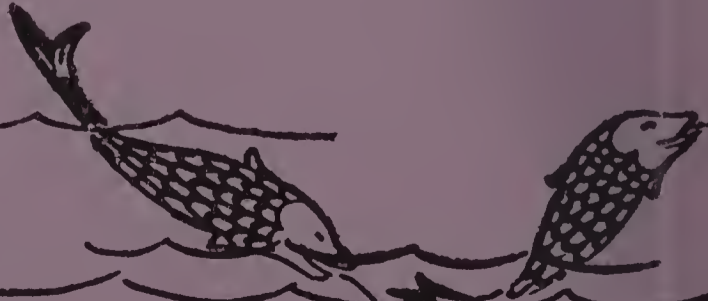
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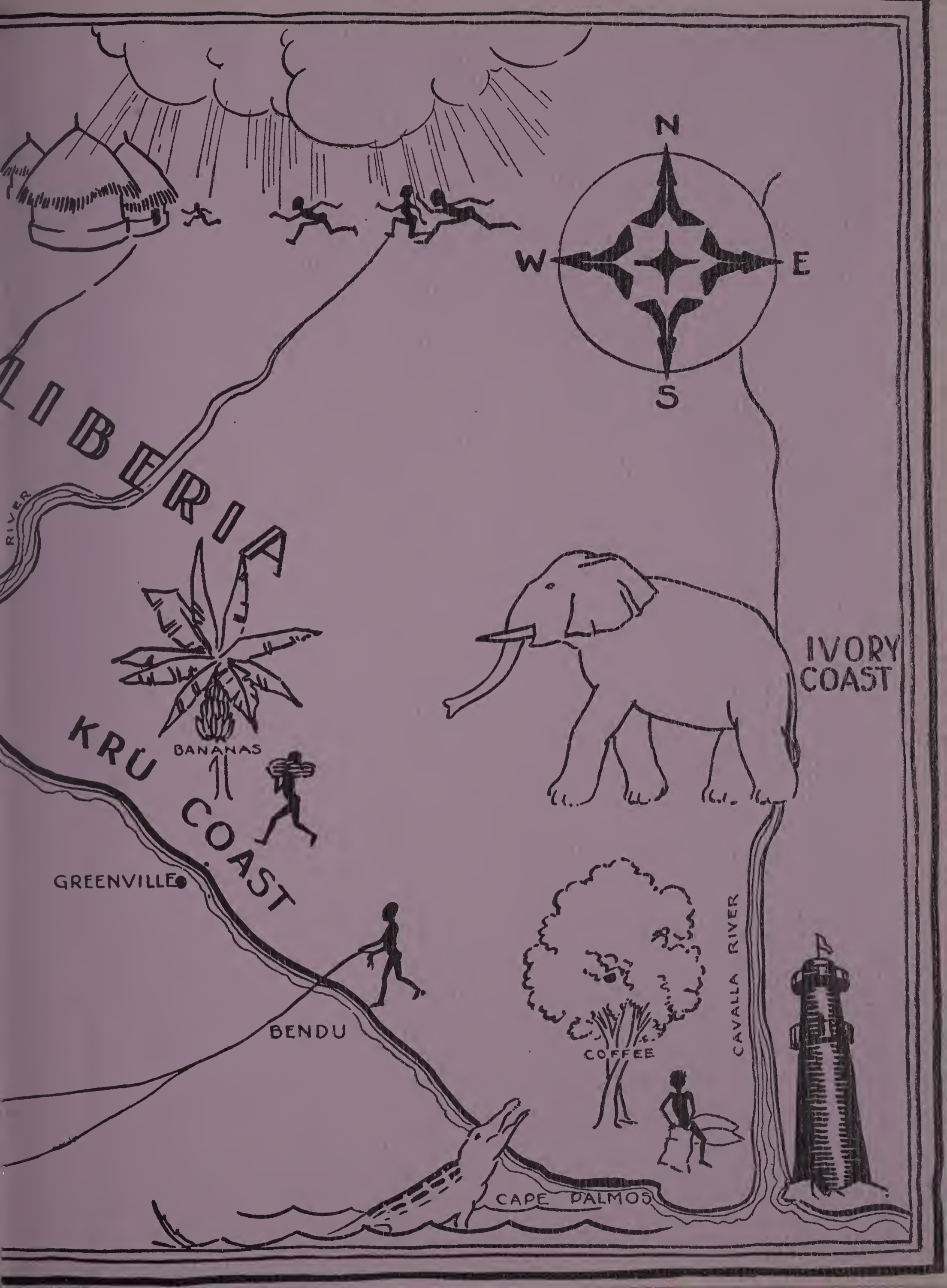
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THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

RIVER BOATS





LIBERIA



IVORY COAST

KRU COAST

BANANAS

GREENVILLE

BENDU

COFFEE

CAPELLA RIVER

CAPE PALMOS

SONDO

A

LIBERIAN

BOY





"We want to dance tonight"

SONDO

A LIBERIAN BOY

BY

ALFRED WARD JOSEPH



PICTURED BY
BERNICE MAGNIE

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A VAI BOY
OF
BENDU LIBERIA**

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JUL 13 1936



SONDO

WO TA (go away)!”

Sondo yelled at the rice birds that came to eat the rice. This was a big day for Sondo. For the first time in his life he was allowed to tend the rice field by himself.

There was just one rice field for Sondo's whole town. If the birds ate the rice his people would starve during the dry season.

Someone had to guard the field all the time. The one man in the town who could do this best was named Kondekai, or Bird Man. No rice birds ate the rice when Kondekai was there.

Today Kondekai had taken his canoe and paddled up the river to the next town to see his father. Chief Boima, Sondo's father, had sent Sondo out to care for the rice.

Sondo sat in a little hut that was raised off the ground. It was in the center of the field. There were vines stretched out in all directions across the field from the hut. Whenever birds came Sondo shook the vines and yelled.

As the morning passed Sondo never let his eyes wander from the rice. He was very proud and very happy, for today he was doing a man's work. It would not be long before he took his place with the men of the town.

The next dry season he was going to join the men's secret society. Then as soon as the bush devil had taught him how to be a good member of the Vai tribe he would be a man.

Sondo, like all other people in the Vai tribe, did not eat his breakfast until noon. Now the sun was high in the African sky and Sondo's stomach was beginning to be empty.

"I wonder why Kondekai doesn't come," thought Sondo as he shook the vines and frightened away some small gray rice birds. "He said he would be back in time for me to eat my breakfast." He shook the vines again and sat back in the shade of the little hut, for the sun was very hot.

After a short time Sondo heard a man coming. He peeped around the edge of the hut and saw Kondekai



He peeped around the side of the hut

coming into the rice field. Sondo climbed down the ladder to the ground and greeted Kondekai.

“Kondekai, good morning,” said Sondo.

“*Eee*, Sondo, good morning,” answered Kondekai.

“What news is there in Mbaloma?” said Sondo.

“Nothing strange. What news here?” answered Kondekai.

“Big news, Kondekai. I have kept every rice bird from the rice all morning so that our people will have plenty of rice next dry season. Now my stomach says that I must eat my breakfast,” said Sondo.

So telling Kondekai *Gemo-way* or Good-bye, Sondo set off down the trail toward the town. At the edge of the jungle was the “half town,” the place where the men who had charge of the rice field stayed.

As Sondo went by, Sietta, Kondekai’s wife, gave him a bunch of bananas. Sondo was glad because he was so hungry. He walked down the trail eating bananas as fast as he could. Soon he had only one banana left.

He was just about to eat this last one when he heard a noise. It sounded like a little baby crying, only much louder. Sondo stopped to listen. “*Yeeeeeeeeeee, yeeeeeeeeeee,*” came the sound.

“I had better find out what that is,” thought Sondo, “maybe it is an animal that has been hurt.”

He stepped off the trail and entered the thick jungle. He heard the leaves rustle and then he saw what had made the noise. It was something that he had wanted



He saw what had made the noise

to have for a pet all his life, a baby baboon, about twice as large as a big cat.

“*Ayah!*” said Sondo, “the poor baby baboon is lost from his mother and he is crying. I will give him my banana.”

The little baboon wasn't at all afraid of him, so Sondo walked up to him and offered him his banana. The baboon took the banana and sat back on his haunches and ate it. All the time he looked at Sondo. He never seemed to blink his eyes.

He looked just like a little old man, so Sondo decided to call him “*Maada,*” or grandfather. Already Sondo had decided to take the baboon home with him for a pet.

As soon as *Maada* had finished the banana Sondo





held out his hand and the baboon took hold of Sondo's first finger and held on. Sondo went back to the trail and walked toward the town with Maada hanging on to his finger. He talked to the baboon and they became very good friends.

When Sondo got near the town some of his friends saw him and came running to meet him. There were Tonie, Sotii, Seku, Jalla, Konkai and Dodo, all about the same age as Sondo.

They were all terribly excited when they saw Maada. "*A boina mie?*" ("Where did he come from?") they all asked at once.

"Be quiet," said Sondo, "and I will tell you where he came from. I found him down the trail, and he was lost. So I brought him home."

“Kooooooooo,” said all the boys. This is what they always said when they were very happy. And now they were very happy because they had a new playmate.

But Sondo was still hungry. He and Maada went on into the town and stopped at his father’s house. Since his father was chief of the town he had the finest house. It was big and square and had mud walls and a palm thatch roof. All the rest of the houses were smaller and were round.

Sondo went in and found his mother. She had breakfast all ready and soon Sondo was eating boiled rice and chicken cooked in palm oil.

He poured the oil on the rice and ate big handfuls at a time. He ate and ate, but he saved enough out of his food so that he could give some to the baboon.

Sondo laughed and laughed at Maada. Maada had a hard time getting the handfuls of rice in his mouth, because he could not use his thumb as Sondo could.

Just as Sondo was going out to play with his friends his father came in. Sondo did not want him to see Maada. He was afraid that his father would not let him keep his new pet. He quickly shoved Maada back of him and tried to get out of the house before his father noticed the baboon.

But—what luck! He stepped on Maada’s toe and Maada yelped so loudly that Sondo jumped out to one side of him.

“What is that?” said Chief Boima.

“*Ayah!*” thought Sondo, “bad luck has jumped be-



Soon Sondo was eating boiled rice and chicken

hind me.” And then to his father he said, “My Father, this is a baboon that I found this morning. He was lost and hungry. I brought him to the town with me. And I want so much to keep him. Can’t I, Father? I have named him Maada. See, he looks like an old man. I will take care of him, Father.”

But Chief Boima said, “No, Sondo. Last season we had poor crops. Only very little rice and *cassava* (a tropical fruit) were we able to put away for the long dry season.

“There is hardly enough for the people in the town. It will be two moons before the new rice is ready to harvest. We cannot give the baboon any of our food, for then there would not be enough for our people.

“Sondo, you must send him back to the jungle. As you know, the baboon clans travel in big circles. In a week they will be near this town again. One week from today you must take Maada back where you found him. Then the other baboons will find him and take care of him. Finish palaver.”

Sondo was broken-hearted. He knew that it was no use to argue further with the chief even if he was his father.

The chief must always look after and take care of the people of the town. And when his father had said “Finish palaver” Sondo knew that that was an end of the matter.

The chief had given his decision. The only thing Sondo could do now would be to go to the Exalted



"Sondo, you must send him back to the jungle"

Chief who was the only man in the whole tribe above his father.

But little boys didn't go to the Exalted Chief and ask to be allowed to keep baboons. The Exalted Chief was far too busy to be bothered by anything except business that concerned the whole tribe.

Sondo and Maada walked to the palaver house, which was just a big roof held up by posts. Here his father held court, or palaver, and listened to and decided on the troubles between the people of the town.

In it were several stools for the people to sit on. In one end was a hammock that was woven of twine made from the twisted veins of palm leaves. This was the hammock that his father lay in when he was listening to palaver.

How grand his father always looked in his fine chief's gown and black and gold cap. He would be in the hammock while everyone else had to either sit on the little stools, or stand.

Since no one was using the palaver house at the time, Sondo and Maada went inside. Sondo lay down in the hammock and Maada sat on the floor and chased a flea from his stomach around to his back, up his back across his head to his left ear.

The flea seemed to hide in his ear. After Maada had felt around his ear for a while he gave up the chase and put both hands on the floor between his feet.

Sondo looked at Maada and smiled. What a nice pet he was. If he could only think of some way to



B.E
MAGNIE

Sondo looked at Maada and smiled

keep him. But try as he would he could think of no way by which he might be able to change his father's decision.

Anyway he was going to keep Maada seven days, and that was something. He rolled over in the hammock and reached out his arm to pet the little baboon.

Soon Sotii, Sondo's best friend, saw Sondo. He called the other boys and they all went in the palaver house. They were all sorry to hear about Maada, but they soon forgot when they began to play "chief."

Sondo was the chief and the baboon was charged with stealing rice. All the boys were witnesses, half for and half against the baboon. Sondo lay down in the hammock and tried to look like his father when he was holding court.

"What palaver is there?" said Sondo, just as his father did.

"There is a bad shame palaver," said Sotii. "Maada has stolen rice at a time when there is very little food."

"Maada, does Sotii speak the truth?" asked Sondo.

Maada slowly winked his eyes and scratched his stomach. Then he looked at them all as much as to say, "You know I wouldn't steal anything."

Sondo called witnesses, some for and some against Maada. In the end they finally proved the baboon guilty. Then Sondo had to sentence him to two months of special work fixing the monkey bridges across the rivers.

Soon they got tired of playing "chief" and decided to play "hunter."

"I want to be the hunter," said Sondo.

"No, I want to be the hunter," said Sotii. "Besides, you were chief." And since Sondo was very fair-minded, he agreed.

They decided they would hunt elephants. Dodo and Konkai were chosen to be the elephants, Sotii was the head hunter and Sondo and the rest of the boys were to help Sotii.

They ran out of the palaver house toward the jungle, yelling at the top of their voices. Maada swung along on his hands after them, looking for all the world like a little old man on crutches. He was just as excited as any of the boys.

The elephants were given time to hide somewhere in the edge of the jungle. Then the hunters started to look for them. Maada climbed into the jungle and swung along from branch to branch, screaming with excitement.

The hunters tried to get him to keep still since it was very dangerous to hunt elephants and must be done quietly. Otherwise the elephants would stampede before the hunters got close enough to them. But Maada was having a good time and would not stop screaming.

Soon the hunters spied the elephants and started to chase them. They chased them out of the jungle and across the town. The elephants turned back



Momo, the weaver



through the town. Just as the hunters were about to catch them the whole bunch of boys ran into the loom of Momo, the weaver.

All the boys fell head over heels. Maada, however, didn't fall. He was jumping along and happened to jump right, so that he went over the threads.

Momo was angry. He said, "Here I get my loom all ready to weave a piece of cloth and you boys run into the threads and break most of them. I have a good notion to beat all of you. Now I will have to fix it all again."

The boys were really sorry, for they liked Momo very much. He told them the nicest animal stories of anyone else in the town.

“Never mind. We are sorry. We won’t do it again,” Sondo said.

But Momo was still just a little bit angry, even after what Sondo said. Just then Chief Boima came by. He asked Momo what the palaver was all about.

Momo told him what the boys had done. Then he felt sorry for the boys, and said, “But I don’t think they could help it. I know they won’t do it again.”

All the boys felt better when Momo said this. Then Chief Boima looked at them and frowned and they all felt badly again. If they had looked right at Chief Boima’s face they would have seen a little smile in each corner of his mouth. But they were all looking at the ground expecting that the chief would break a switch and use it on their legs.

Chief Boima, in a very stern voice, said, “You boys are guilty in this palaver. Not so?”

“Yes, chief,” said all the boys.

“Then,” said Boima, “I will pass sentence on you. Each one of you must get a bucket and bring water from the river for all the cooking for the town for supper.”

The boys felt better. This was their job every day, so it wasn’t such a bad punishment. The chief wasn’t very angry at them, or he would have given them something worse.

So all the boys took buckets and started for the river, followed by Maada. They soon forgot their troubles and began to run and frisk again. They got



to the river and filled their buckets with nice, clean water.

Then they helped each other put the buckets on their heads and they started for the town. Each head had a bucket on it. They didn't spill a single drop of water, although they never touched the buckets with their hands.

They made four trips to the river for water, and then they went back again to take their evening baths. They had all taken a bath that morning but as usual they bathed again after their work was finished.

Maada didn't like the water a bit. Sondo pulled him in but he soon scrambled out on to the dry shore and climbed a tree so that he wouldn't have to go into the water again.

The boys, with a final round of ducking each other,

left the river and raced for the town. It was supper time. Maada couldn't run as fast as the boys, but the boys beat him by only a few seconds.

Each boy was given his supper in a little half gourd. The supper was boiled rice mixed with collard greens, and fish cooked in palm oil. The Vai people called this food "palaver sauce."

The boys all met by Sondo's house and sat on the edge of the floor of the palaver house to eat their meal. Maada sat in front of them looking first at one and then at the other for a piece of food.

"I like palaver sauce better than anything else," said Dodo.

"I don't," said Seku, "I like rice and elephant meat. When I get big I am going to be a hunter, and kill elephants so that I can have elephant meat whenever I want it."

"Elephant meat is good," agreed Sondo. "But then everything is good. How about *cassava* beaten up and then cooked? Or how about deer meat?"

"I like deer meat, too," said Sotii. "But the trouble is that deer are so small that only a few people get meat from them. Everyone in the town can get meat from an elephant and there will be enough to last the town many months."

"Did you ever taste monkey meat?" said Konkai. He had been eating so fast that this was the first time that his mouth had been empty enough to say anything.



He began to tease the crocodile

“What!” said Sondo, “you don’t know that people of the Vai tribe don’t eat monkey meat? You ought to be ashamed. Don’t you know that if we ate monkey meat we would forget our language?”

“*Ayah!* I forgot,” said Konkai.

Soon the boys heard drums in the distance. “Some chief must be coming,” said Sondo. By this time the boys had finished their meal, so they ran out to the trail to see who was coming.

In the distance they could see a band of about six men. As they drew nearer they could tell that the man in front was a chief. He was dressed like a chief. The other men were his servants. The two drummers came last.

Finally the group of men arrived at the town. They went straight to the palaver house and the chief went inside and sat down. His men stood around outside the palaver house.

Very soon Chief Boima came to greet the visitor. He shook hands and then snapped fingers with him. The boys liked to see two such fine men. Both were so tall and so straight and graceful.

After the chiefs had talked for a few minutes the boys found out that the visitor’s name was Bokai. He came from Mombu in the Tewa Section. That was a long day’s walk from Sondo’s town. Bokai was on his way to Cape Mount on business and he wished to stay the night in Jondu.

Boima said, “Never has a Vai man, or any friend

of the Vai tribe, been refused food and a house for as long as he wanted to stay. You are welcome. Thank you for coming.”

Then Boima happened to see Sondo and he said, “Sondo, you and Sotii take buckets and go to the river and bring water for Chief Bokai’s bath.” The boys scampered off so fast that they did not hear Bokai’s answer to the speech of welcome.

Of course Maada wanted to go along. At first he tried to get in the bucket so that he could ride, but Sondo put him out, and he had to run along on his hands the best he could.

Sotii reached the river first. He thought he saw an old log floating near the edge of the river, but he couldn’t see very well because it was getting dark.

He was just wading out into the water to fill his bucket when WHOOSH! One end of the log moved around towards Sotii as quick as lightning. Just the very tip end hit him on the chest so hard that he was knocked unconscious.

It was a crocodile! He started towards Sotii, opening his big mouth as he swam.

Sondo called for help as loudly as he could. He tried to go out to Sotii but the crocodile was getting too close. What could he do? He must do something or Sotii would be eaten!

Just then Sondo saw Maada swinging through a tree out over the river. He swung down until he was directly over the crocodile’s head.

Then he began to tease the crocodile by swinging down close to his head and then away again so quickly that the crocodile could neither hit him with his deadly tail, nor bite him with his sharp teeth.

Maada teased the crocodile until he became mad and began to chase him up the river bank. This gave Sondo a chance to dash in and pull Sotii up the bank to safety.

Sondo then lifted him to his shoulders and began to carry him to the town. Of course Maada came along.

When they got to the palaver house there was much excitement. Sotii was laid in a hammock. Much to Sondo's joy, he soon blinked his eyes and sat up.

Sondo told the story. Bokai said, "Here is a brave boy. Some day he will be a fine man." And he pulled a bracelet from his wrist. It was made from the bottom of an elephant's foot and it was worked with silver. Bokai put the bracelet on Sondo's wrist.

"*Ayah!* Was there ever such a lucky boy," thought Sondo. He was the only boy in the whole town who had an elephant bracelet.

"But," said Sondo, "Maada, my baboon, really saved Sotii's life. He swung out over the river and teased the crocodile so that I was able to rescue Sotii."

After he had heard Sondo, Chief Boima stood up and said, "Today I said that the baboon must go. I say now that since Maada has saved Sotii's life he can



live in Jondu as long as he wants and we will be glad to have him.”

Sondo was indeed happy. He was so happy that he forgot to thank his father, but everyone was so excited that they did not notice it.

After a while the moon came up. It was a full moon and it made the town nearly as light as day. All the people gathered around the edge of the town. A bush devil was to come out of the jungle to dance. To watch a bush devil dance was more fun than anything else in the world.

The drums began to beat. There were three little drums. They were held between the knees of the three drummers, who beat on them with their hands, very fast.

Sometimes they would get very loud and then they would die down until they made hardly any noise, then they would get loud all at once. This was fine. Sondo and his friends could not keep their feet still.

Then there was the big drum that sat on the ground. It went “BOOM, BOOM!”

There was also the tiny little drum about as big around as a man's arm. The man beat on it with two sticks. This drum was made of hollow bamboo and had three slits in it so that the drummer could make different notes.

Ayah! When the man played on that drum the boys just couldn't stop jumping up and down. And when all five drums played together, this was almost too much for any little boy.

The drums stopped. Everyone became quiet. Then the little drum started to play. In a minute the other drums had picked up the time and all five were going as loudly as they could.

Suddenly there was a shout from the crowd. "Kooooo," said everyone. Sondo looked towards the jungle and there was the bush devil just coming out. "Kooooo," said Sondo.

The bush devil came out into the moonlight. He had a wooden mask over his head. Grass that reached clear to his feet, was fastened to the mask so that you could never see who the bush devil was.

How fast he could move! He moved just as if he were sliding. He didn't bounce up and down a bit.

He moved this way and that way and the other way so fast that the people became very excited and said "Kooooo," again. Sondo thought that this was the finest thing that he had ever seen.

Then the bush devil began to turn around and around so fast that the grass stood off in waves. This



Suddenly there was a shout from the crowd

was pretty. The drums got louder than ever and everybody said "Kooooooo," all over again.

Sondo was certainly sorry when the bush devil went into the jungle and didn't come out again. But soon the people began to dance around and around the town in time to the drums.

Chief Boima and Chief Bokai led them. Sondo and Sotii, each holding one of Maada's hands, danced too. Right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot.

Then they began to sing. One man would sing by himself, "*Anu wola tomoke wele,*" or "We want to dance tonight," and then everybody would sing it after him. It was fun! More fun than Sondo had had since last moon when he had gone to see the man whose skin was white all over.

But since everything must stop some time, the dancing and singing finally stopped even though everyone was having a good time. Soon all the people returned to their houses and went to sleep.

And so Sondo went to his father's house with Maada. Sondo unrolled his grass mat and put it on the floor. He unrolled another mat for Maada. Then he wrapped himself in his cover cloth and curled up on the mat to go to sleep.

But Maada didn't want to sleep on a mat as Sondo did. He turned and twisted until finally Sondo took him outside where he climbed a tree and slept all night hanging from the tree by one arm.

SIERRA LEONE

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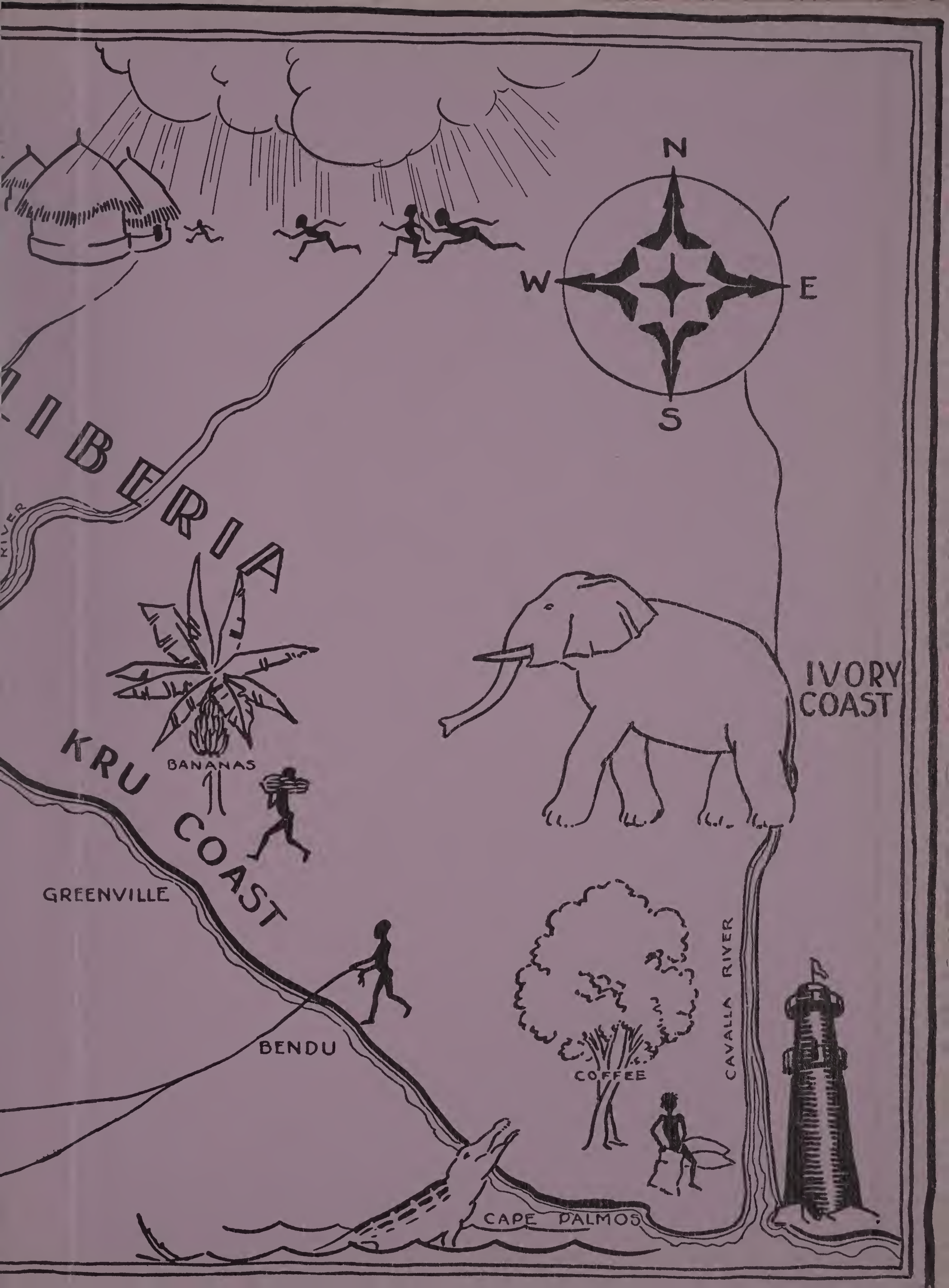
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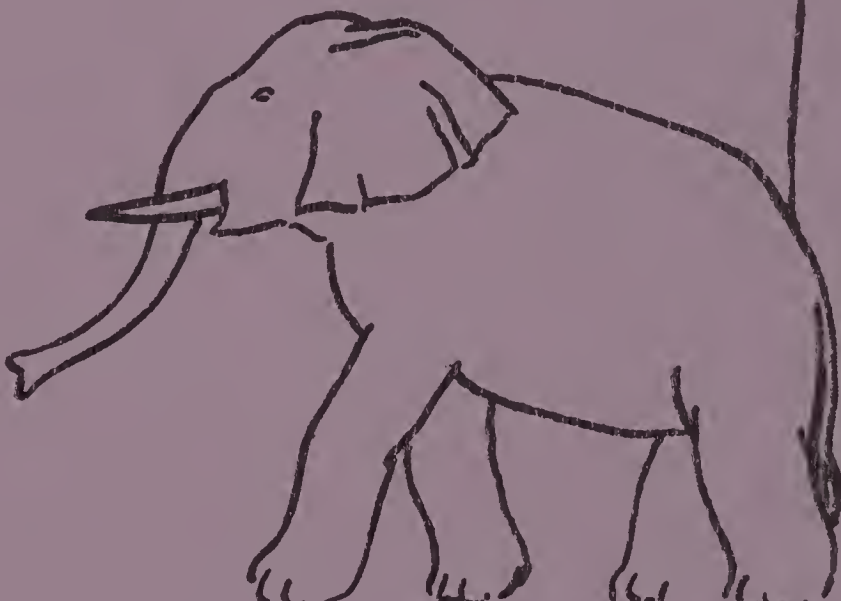
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