

of chest, and Terhune could see the muscles rippling under his shirt as he toyed with the great weight on the end of the fork.

They waited until he tossed the truss of hay with a contemptuous ease on to a pile of similar trusses, then Staunton called out—

"Hi, Uttley—a minute!"

The man swung round, saw who it was, and advanced to them.

"Hullo, wanting me again? Are we never goin' to be rid of the police from our circus?"

"Not until Chako is found, and a few mysteries have been cleared up."

Uttley scowled.

"There's no mystery about Chako. You people hounded him to his death. He was chivvied an' chased till he hid somewhere in the woods an' died of cold.

"Gorillas can't stand our climate. One day his skeleton will be found, then you'll be satisfied, no doubt."

"Could Chako talk?" interposed Terhune swiftly.

"Eh, what?" The fork slipped from the man's fingers and dropped to the ground. "T-talk! What are you gettin' at?"

"I'm serious. One of the circus men has told us he often used to hear two voices in this tent, near Chako's cage, when you were the only person in there. He says you used to carry on conversations with Chako, and that he could talk like a human being."

Uttley's face went crimson, and the veins began to swell and bulge. He seemed to have some difficulty in getting his breath. His eyes blazed with fury.

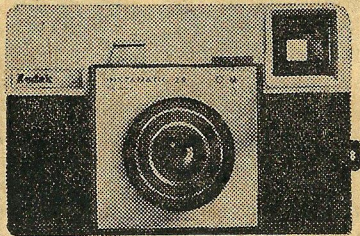
"It's a lie!" roared Uttley.

"Well, if there was nothing unusual about Chako, it means a failure for scientists," drawled Terhune, as though to himself. "I bet Reinland would be disappointed to hear it."

He was pretending to look away, but was carefully watching the man before them. He saw Uttley's hands clench until the knuckles showed white.

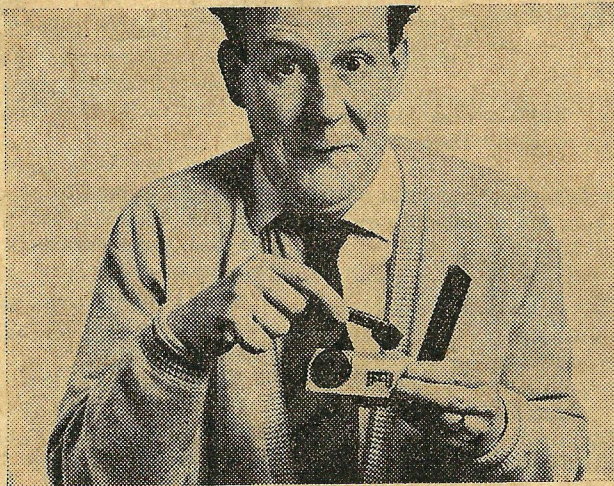
He looked through the open door of the menagerie tent at the cage which contained two big orangutangs. "They look pretty thin and miserable. Doesn't anyone ever feed them?"

Uttley turned and glared, then growled—



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"Of course they get fed. I feed 'em myself. The Red Star supplies 'em with everything necessary. It's the spell of weather that's got 'em down. They won't eat."

Terhune strolled inside and looked at the two listless beasts. Then, from his pocket, he produced a banana. Instantly the two big apes shivered with excitement, and both sprang at the bars as though to tear them down.

Terhune stripped off the peel and threw the banana between the bars. The two orangutangs fought like fiends until it was crushed and swallowed.

"Why not try them with bananas?" he suggested as he turned away.

Dick Staunton glanced back at Uttley in puzzled fashion, and saw on the man's face an expression of the most virulent hatred.

The American detective hesitated, then hurried after his British colleague.

"What was the idea of that banana stunt?" he demanded. "I don't get it. Uttley is as mad as can be. What does it mean?"

"It means he lies when he says they've been fed as usual. Bananas are one of the staple diets of all big apes. Judging by the way these behaved, they've not seen one for weeks. They're not feeling the cold weather. They're just starving."

"Phew, then you think Uttley is drawing the rations from the circus and selling them instead of giving them to the orangutangs and other apes?"

"I shouldn't say he was selling them. He's not that sort. But why shouldn't he be using fifty or sixty pounds of fruit per day to feed something else—say Chako!"

"You mean to say you think he's got Chako hidden somewhere all this time?"

"Yes, or at least knows where the gorilla is. I believe that is his secret. I'll tell you what I want to do, Staunton. I want a chance of watching Uttley myself. I want a job in the circus.

"I'll make myself unrecognisable if you can fix the job. You've got a hold on the new proprietor. Tell him you won't let him make any more moves unless he agrees."

Dick Staunton didn't like the idea of Terhune risking any—